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## Class Lecture: Antecedents to The TRC

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## Antecedents to the TRC

If you had asked most people before 1990 what they expected would happen in South Africa to rescue the crisis caused by the policy of racist injustice oppression called apartheid, then they would have been making dire predictions. Most people expected that beautiful land to be overwhelmed by the most ghastly bloodbath. That our motherland would be overrun by the most horrendous racial war between the minorities's hugely privileged whites and the vast majority desperately deprived and downtrodden blacks and in a way those were not preposterous unreasonable expectations given what had gone before. The antecedents of our misery made it immensely reasonable to expect a bloody denouncement to the tragedy that was playing itself out on the stage of that land. What was that history? I think one can presume that most of you here have at least a reasonable acquaintance with one broad outline of our history. What I want to do here is to give those bare bones some flesh and blood so that we can have a known awareness as a preamble to our consideration of the South African Truth and Reconciliation process which will be the main focus of this minicourse.

### Apartheid

P2     Apartheid (pronounced as 'apart hate', hating apart) was obsessed with race, power, control, exclusion, privilege, superiority, and inferiority. It asserted that what invested anyone with worth was an arbitrary biological attribute skin colour ethnicity. By definition, could this not be a universal phenomenon possessed by all human beings. Those who were lucky through the accident of birth to possess it automatically had access to a plentitude of privileges and advantages to power, status and everything that could

belong to an elite. Some people came to call it a “pigmentocracy”. All those others who did not have this attribute, well tough luck they belonged on the outside in the outer darkness where there was always wailing and gnashing of teeth. If you were as in this case white, then automatically you were superior of any person of another colour, no matter what your IQ was. You were a baas (boss) and a white women was automatically missus (madam). My father, who was at the time headmaster of an elementary school, could be and was addressed as “boy” by a slip of a girl because she was white and he was that inferior thing, black boy who just made it to being considered to be a human being. Well they had public notices that read “natives or dogs not allowed”. Perhaps they did not notice the horrendous give away on that sign of what they really thought of us.

And since these others were relatively inferior, you the master race had to keep contacts between yourselves and these others, to the barest possible minimum and hence the topic of apartheid. You made a fetish of separation of aparthesus, of segregation.

P3 Since everything hinged so much on racial purity, you won’t be surprised that a key legislation would give this obsession prime legal status and so it was. We had something called the Race Classification Act. Anthropologists have great difficulty giving a scientific definition of race buy that did not deter our race supremacists. What was a white person? A white person is someone who appears white and has been accepted as such. We had Asians often called Asiaties (Chinese, Indians, Malays). There were Cape Coloureds-people of mixed descent (as if most of us are not mixed descent), then Malays and other Coloureds. Can you beat it? Then there were the blacks (variously called) Natives, Bantu, Plurals, non-white, non-Europeans). Did they come from non-

Europe? They had crude tests of whether one was Bantu or Coloured- Comb test, shocking pain and judging by the yelp of pain?

It was a social pyramid of power. At the bottom was the vast majority, Blacks, not the Coloureds, then the Asians, and at the top of the pile the whites. There was considerable anguish and misery caused by those who wanted to improve their lot by playing at being member of a race group higher on the scale. Families were shattered because someone was playing white and would not associate with members of his biological family, lest he jeopardize his precious white status. Brothers crossed streets so as not to fraternize with family members they had espied coming along the p4. street. It would have been funny bid it not so many tragic consequences. Sometimes through the vagaries of the unscientific classification methods, siblings were sometimes assigned to different race groups. Most of the family being white and one child being declared coloured because of a somewhat darker hue. Some children committed suicide in such circumstances. Such distressing occurrences were shrugged off as accidents. The system was supreme and such the consequences.

It has seemed that racists also have a fixation about sex. Those who claim to belong to a superior race seem to have a fascination with the imaginary sexual prowess of those regarded as inferior. This sexual potency is ambivalently envied by the apparently less endowed superior and at the same time ridiculed educated as prior that inferior is more like an animal than a human being. And so it was not surprising that the South African whites had a thing about Miscegenation. You wondered how the coloured people ever came to be born and so we had laws such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (mixed marriages of course only pertaining to whites and people of other races not

between those who were classified as non-whites) and the Immorality act, which despite its name was out to prohibit promiscuity, pre or extra-marital sex. The immorality happened only when sexual relations occurred between whites and people of other races. Anything happening between people of races other than white well was not immorality in terms of this act. Quite a few persons were apprehended contravening this law, but given the nature of power it was highly unlikely that a black person would have taken the initiative, especially not a black woman given the dire consequences, which leaves us with the likely conclusion that the initiative would almost always have been taken by the member of the “superior” race. Our police spent a great deal of time trying to catch likely offenders. They climbed trees to peep through windows and would dash into a room where they suspected this offence was being committed and feel the temperature of the sheets. Again it is bizarre, comical, except that it often turned something beautiful, a love relationship, into something sordid. Quite a few white men committed suicide when they were accused of contravening this law.

Apartheid had to do with exclusion and monopoly of power. So blacks were disenfranchised and even those who were not white who did have a vote could vote only for white candidates. Political power, which has access to all other kinds of power, was exclusively in the hands of whites. They alone sat at the legislature tables as Members of Parliament and of Provincial (State) legislatures. They made the laws. They talked about what they knew what was good for us. **They decided for us-never with us.** It never struck them as odd or extreme, that I could be an Archbishop and a Nobel Laureate to boot, but in the of my birth I did not have a vote, whereas a white P.6 child of 18 could vote to decide my fate. I had to wait until I was 62 years old and Nelson

Mandela had to wait until he was 76 before he could vote for the very first time. No wonder the white legislators could be so uncaring, so arrogant, when they made laws affecting us. They knew they were not accountable to us. No wonder they mostly coddled the whites as much as they did. If a black and a white person went to Medical School together as contemporaries, when they graduated with the same qualifications and went to work at a Government hospital for the internship, then automatically the white person received a higher salary. There were jobs that were forbidden to blacks through the Job Reservation Act. A black could not be a train driver or could never be in an affirmative action situation, where he could give orders to a white person, so that even a white novice, who had to be told things by his black helper, was in charge. Everything was segregated. Black Medical students could not examine white patients and certainly not white women patients; in fact a black doctor could not attend to a white patient ever. So that in an accident where whites had been injured, even if the black doctor was the only one available, he might not touch a white patient. Ambulances were segregated and if someone was injured and the wrong racial ambulance came it could not convey the injured to the hospital, even if time was of the essence and a person's life could have been saved by getting to a hospital quickly. **The immoral demands of race obsession gone mad took precedence over human life.**

P.7The races as you would expect by now were rigidly segregated in public transport, in the entrances or exits they could use and most importantly, residentially. You did not have to be too smart to know which racial group lived where. The neat well-appointed salubrious suburbs with large homes, standing in huge grounds, with paved streets, that were well lit and which were more than adequately supplied with public

amenities such as arenas, swimming pools, libraries. Why these were almost without expectation the domain of the top-dogs and of course the ghettos of hovels or what we called match box houses repeated row after row after monotonous row, frequently had no street lighting, running water, wrecked by deprivation, and squalor, often enveloped in the smog coal fires, since there was for a long time hardly any electricity available for blacks. Actually at one time a power station was constructed (cheek) by government with a black township ghetto to supply power to the white suburbs some distance away and spewing pollution only for the blacks. Apartheid was smart because the black township ghettos were usually a fair distance from the white suburbs. Whites need never see this eyesore. **It was out of sight and so frequently out of mind.** Most of the time we lived in 2 worlds, a kind of national schizophrenia when I was Bishop of Johannesburg. We retained our Soweto home whilst living also in Bishop's House. The Bishop's official residence is in an affluent white suburb. We experienced these two worlds sharply especially during the states of emergency the government imposed to deal with the prevalent unrest. We would drive from Soweto where a curfew had erupted the streets so that they were quiet except for the rumbling of a troop carrier for the security forces and when we got to town people would be playing tennis under flood lights. Clearly, you seemed stupid if you then asked white congratulations "what about the state of emergency?" They gave you blank stares as if to ask "what state of emergency?" The Group Areas Act, which demarcated the residential areas, was applied strictly. Blacks lived over there and whites here and the train must never meet except mostly as master/mistress and servant. Black movement was also rigidly controlled by the iniquitous pass system. Each black adult had to have this document always on his or her

person to prove that she had the permission not right to be where they were. Otherwise, you were liable for arrest and summery trial.

Excluded from political decision making, we could also be excluded from owning land.