

Apartheid in South Africa

Apartheid, a word that is not so often mentioned these days. To our generation, it's an abstract word, not like what happened in Germany during the second world war. But in fact, the white government in South Africa actually sent students to Nazi Germany to be educated in racial issues. It's kind of strange that we have learned so much about the nazism in school, but very little has been said about apartheid.

Apartheid means to keep races apart, and was said to benefit both white and black people, but in reality, the rich white people only got richer. Apartheid is the same thing as nazism, the only difference is that it was more organized and it happened during a much longer period of time. I think you can see that black people still is considered as inferior to white people in this. It feels like the governments are trying to make people forget that this shameful event even took place. The Holocaust is often mentioned when people are talking about oppression and genocide, but what about apartheid?

Thousands of people were killed in South Africa too and just like in Europe they were sent to concentration camps. The black and coloured people were continually and systematically oppressed, but one difference was that this was not the work of a single mad man, but organized tyranny to keep slaves in a modern world.

The history of apartheid starts with the history of the colonization of Africa, in 1652 the first dutchman arrived. His name was Jan Van Riebeeck, his assignment was to settle a trade station for the merchant ships sailing to Asia. It all worked out fine at first but when more ships began to sail the route the Dutch couldn't supply them and were forced to become farmers themselves to provide the ships with the necessities. The reason for that were because at the beginning their plan was to let the locals sell them the water and provisions the ships required, but once they got there they realized that the black people wasn't too keen on helping them. Because the more cattles an tribe had the more power they had and once they had power they could also get more land. So the Dutch had to start their own farms, they became farmers or boer as they were called in dutch. But instead of hiring locals to help them and pay them salary they imported slaves from Malaysia and Thailand.

The white's farms started to grow, soon they were so big that the black people had almost no land for their cattle. And eventually there was no place left for the aboriginal inhabitants which forced them to start working for the Dutch's as slaves.

In this period of time, another race appeared, coloured people. They were the offspring of black slave women and white slave owners, they were not black, nor white. Most of the farmers didn't have their wives with them to South Africa so the black slave women were sexually utilized at night while they also had to work hard day time out on the field.

In 1760 the first passports for slaves arrived, a way for the slave owners to keep track of their slaves. The slave owner had to sign the passport in order for the slave to travel from the farm to the town or across South Africa. This was the first step to control the black people, but definitely not the last...

In 1795 the Cape province was invaded by England who wanted to improve their connection to India, which was a very important export and import country for them. After the invasion

slavery was prohibited and was punished hard. The englishmen wanted to prove that they were still the greatest empire on earth, and that they didn't need to keep slaves in order to make profit. The Dutch were not so happy with this new order, their whole system was built on keeping slaves instead of paying wages. So between 1836 and 1846 the Dutch moved north, this was called "The Great Trek". They formed two independent states; Transvaal and the Oranjerestate, where slavery still was legal.

When the British had liberated all the slaves, they didn't had to work for them. They could go back to farming and keeping livestock, now there was also a lot of land available for them when the dutchmen had moved north. The Englishmen soon realized that South Africa had more to offer than nice weather and a great location, it was also a perfect place for cotton and sugarplantations.

But soon a new problem arise: they didn't have any workers to the plantations and this forced the British to import from China and India. This worked fine for a while but soon they needed even more manpower as their plantations started to grow. So they had to coerce the aboriginal inhabitants to work for them instead of having self-subsistent households, and to do this they stole their land again just like the dutchmen had done 150 years ago.

In 1867 the British found the first diamond deposits, and a few years later they found gold. This made the request for labour even higher, the Dutch needed the manpower for their farms, the british needed it for their mines. This eventually lead to "the Boer War" in 1899 between the britishmen and the dutch farmers. For three years they fought hard but in 1902 the britishmen conquered.

During the war, the british introduced something that the world would get to know a little bit closer 40 years later: concentration camps where women and children had to work hard around the clock. When the war was over there were only 15000 people left in the concentration camps from the original 50000 women and children who were first sent there. Even after the war the britishmen were still desperate for manpower, but they couldn't force all the africans to work for them. So instead of keeping them as slaves, they imposed taxes on almost everything, hoping that would force them to give up. They also sabotaged their farms and decapitate their livestock.

After the war, the British and the Boers agreed on one thing: the white race was superior the coloured/black. So in 1910 the past enemies formed the South African Union. An union that involved both the boer's land (Transvaal and the Oranjerestate) and also the land controlled by the britishmen; the Cape Provins and Natal. Now there was absolutely nothing who could stop them from subjugate the aboriginal inhabitants. Many laws that were only in favour for the white's and a way to terrorize coloured were established, for example: "a white policeman have always the right to search a black man if he suspect there could be a crime committed" or "if there is only one café/waitingroom or any other public space in a town the owner has the right or sometimes the duty to reserv it only for white people". There were hundreds and again hundreds of laws to control and oppressed everyone that wasn't all white. In 1912 some leaders of the black people had had enough, in South Africa they created the ANC, the African National Congress, in order to protest against that black people had no rights in the new union. They also protested against the reform that gave the white minority 87 percent of the land, but it didn't help at all and this was the foundation of apartheid. Black people couldn't live in the cities, but were forced to live in so called "townships", specially allowed areas outside the city.

The government now started a secret underground almost maffialike organization called "Broederbond", they took great interest in what happened in Nazi Germany and sent students to be taught in racial science. The students who returned were inspired to give birth to what we today call apartheid.

In the 1940's the nationalistic party was the biggest in South Africa, they presented apartheid as something which would favour both black and white people. Races would live separately and develop their own racial characteristics. And evidently their idea sounded good to both black's and white's because in 1948 the party fairly won the election.

This was the start of a whole new level of separation, black and white people could not use the same transportation, ambulances, cemeteries and so on. Millions of people were compulsory transferred over the country, if they refused, they were sent to prison. Black people were forced to take jobs for minimum wages, important jobs were reserved for white people only.

This led to protests all over the country, the youth section of ANC, lead by Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, campaigned against the new laws. Thousands of people burned their passports, and ignored the laws of separation. They used the same busses, and the same toilets. The government answered with arresting leading members of ANC, some were even tortured to death.

After a big scandal involving white policemen shooting down and killing about one hundred of peaceful demonstrators the whole ANC was banned. This of course didn't stop them, they started a new more militar organisation where Nelson Mandela was the leader. The new organisation, MK, sabotaged the white people's houses and factories but their actions were pretty much useless and in 1962 Mandela and some other front figures were arrested and convicted.

Nelson Mandela were sentenced to life in prison for high treason and sabotage, he spent about 35 years at the now famous prison island "Robben Island". Once Mandela and most of the black's freedom fighters had been sent to prison there were actually nothing or nobody who could stop the white peoples oppression. The prime minister, John Vorster, were known to be a nazi who truly believed that the white race were superior any other. Many black people who had the chance fled South Africa, those who were left lived in a constant fear of being arrested, tortured or killed.

The black's demonstrations continued anyway but nothing really happened until June the 16th 1976 when the police once again started killing demonstrators, this time school children. Riots all over the country followed as an answer and many young people were killed when the government allowed the police to stop the turmoil in any way that they could. A young man named Steve Biko who lead an resistant organisation called "Black Consciousness" were arrested and tortured to death in a prison.

After about a year of chaos in South Africa the rest of the world started paying attention to what was going on. Big companies ended their affairs and connections with the South African government, they just didn't want to be associated with this kind of social conflicts. The nationalistic party realized that they had to do something, this was definitely not good for the affairs. They decided that they wouldn't stop with the apartheid idea but they would renew it, and the person to do this would be the newly elected prime minister P W Botha. His goal was to calm down both the rest of the world and South Africa's black people. He had to make it

look like as though the government were doing everything they could to help the black's.

So Botha started making changes, he allowed black people to start trade unions, some laws that had stopped black's to get the good jobs were abolished and they even got a small allowance for their education. The government started building bigger, nicer houses in the black areas and they also put in water and drains in their houses. But everything was of course just for show, this didn't help the black's. What did they need the new nice houses for when they were so poor that they could never afford them? And the allowance for their education only covered about ten percent, where would they get the money to pay for the rest like ninety percent? What they wanted were justice, democracy and the right to vote.

In 1983 the first real step towards democracy in South Africa were made, the foundation of the UDF (the united democratic front). Of course there had been organisations like this one before but what was so unique about UDF was that there were also white people involved here. White's who were tired of all the fighting and who also believed that the black's were entitled to the same rights as them, the day the organisation was founded two million people became members.

Botha was definitely not ready to let go of apartheid so he and his government answered with arresting 50000 members of the UDF. Now the black's of South Africa had really had enough, all black trade unions came together and formed "Congress of South African Trade Unions" or COSATU, the biggest and strongest organisation ever. Because of COSATU's and the rest of the world's pressure Botha eventually were forced to sit down in a meeting with the ANC to discuss the future.

A big step for the black people but perhaps the best thing for them were when Botha suffered an cerebral haemorrhage and were forced to resign. Botha's successor became Frederik de Klerk and the first thing he did as prime minister were to release eight ANC-members from prison and he also made the organisation legal again. In 1990 he also released Nelson Mandela himself, the black's in South Africa screamed out their joy, they had conquered!

Although there still were many opponents against the ANC and black's right to democracy there was not much they could do. In July 1991 Mandela was elected as vice president for the ANC and together with the government they worked out a plan for how South Africa would be a democratic country.

In 1994 the first free election were held, despite a chaotic time just before the election with 500 people killed in fights between the black people and some opponents, Mandela was elected as president. The first black president in South Africa ever and the official end to the apartheid.