When I was little I lived in South Africa for a couple of years. At the age of eight me and my parents returned for a short time. Because of my dad’s job we had to attempt a lot of dinners with all his colleagues. I always wondered why the white South Africans said horrible things about the black people. It sounded like they were inhuman or monsters. The white people treated them horrible. This is an example of how apartheid plays a role in South Africa. But wat exactly is apartheid.

What is Apartheid?

Apartheid was an official political and social system of racial segregation that operated between 1948 and 1990 in South-Africa. The goal of apartheid was to preserve white domination and to separate the local population from this. Because of the new apartheid laws, marriages between whites and non-whites were banned. In addition, black people and white people were separated from each other in public places like bus stations and white people lived in separate protected areas. Before apartheid, racism in South-Africa already had a long history. Apartheid itself finds its origin in and around the colonization period.

South-Africa before Apartheid

South-Africa has been inhabited by many different groups of people. The most prominent and important groups were the Khoihoi and the San. In 1652 the VOC entered South-Africa. They built a trading post at the most southern point of South-Africa. At this point ships from all over the world could be provided with different goods. In 1657 the VOC brought nine farmers from Europe to South-Africa to grow vegetables, fruit and wheat for the VOC. Because European farmers took more and more land from the Khoihoi, various conflicts arose.

The British regime

In 1795, the British came to Cape of Good Hope, to prevent South-Africa from becoming a French colony. The bad treatment of the British who worked in South-Africa ultimately led to the Boer wars. In 1902 the Treaty of United Nations was signed, a peace agreement that says the African people belong to the United Kingdom, but they retained their autonomy. In 1914, politician Barry Hertzog started the National Party. In 1933 the party entered the people’s council and Hertzog became minister. He started tightening racial laws. Land ownership for black Africans was limited and the voting rights of Cape Blacks were taken away. Hertzog’s colleague Daniel Malan became minister after Hertzog’s death.

The beginning of apartheid

In Malan’s government, Hendrik Verwoerd the minister of indigenous affairs, shaped apartheid. Verwoerd created the following apartheid laws:

In 1949

* A marriage between white and black people was forbidden

In 1950

* Sexual acts between white and black people were forbidden
* The home countries were introduced: places chosen by white people where black people could settle

In 1953

* Separate education for black people
* Whites and non-whites received their own public facilities

In 1956

* White people had priority over black people on the job market

After all the races were carefully classified, the black South Africans lost their African nationality.

Republic

Racial segregation led to a lot of criticism from the international community, but it contributed to Verwoerd’s success. Verwoerd took many attempts to get British South Africans on his side, but without success. When Great Britain pleaded for decolonization in 1960, many British South Africans felt let down by their mother country and they had more sympathy for Verwoerd. Verwoerd lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years and gave voting rights to Southwest Africans. Southwest Africa is in particular populated by German descendants who were banned after the second world war, but Verwoerd welcomed them with open arms. Partly because of their support in the referendum, 52 percent of the white voters voted for a republic. In 1961 South Africa official became a Republic.

Opponents of apartheid

The African National Congress was the main opponent of apartheid. By mass protests, boycotts and strikes, supporters of this party hoped to intimidate the white leaders. The number of members joining the ANC grew enormously. A group of civil rights activists who separated from the ANC started the Pan African Congress in 1959. They organized large demonstrations, the most important one was in Sharpeville. Thousands of people went on the streets, causing panic in the military police. As result the police started shooting at random people in random directions. 69 people were killed and 186 badly injured, that is why this event is also called the Sharpeville Massacre. When the biggest leaders of the ANC were banished of imprisoned, a new movement was set up called the Black Consciousness Movement.

The abolition of apartheid

After the president of South Africa, Pieter Willem Botha, had a stroke the cabinet pressured him to step down. His follower is Frederik Willem de Klerk. De Klerk is seen as the abolisher of apartheid. The first thing de Klerk did was legalize the ANC party. In 1990, he released Nelson Mandela. 1990 was officially seen as the year in which apartheid ended. De Klerk and Mandela immediately started negotiating about the future of South-Africa. For this collaboration, they received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. Apartheid laws were gradually abolished. In 1994, the first non-racial elections were held which meant that apartheid also ended politically. The ANC won this election and Mandela became president.

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela was one of the most important anti-apartheid South Africans. During 1944 Mandela was involved in the fight of the African National Congress against the apartheid laws. Because he was the leader of the military branch of the ANC he was arrested in 1963 and sentenced to a lifetime imprisonment. After 27 years, he was released and the ANC was legalized. Together with president Frederik Willem de Klerk, Mandela received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. At the first free, non-racial elections in 1994, at 75-years-old Mandela was elected as president of the Republic South-Africa.

After apartheid

Although apartheid has been abolished, there are still major tensions between the various population groups in South-Africa. The percentage of mixed marriages is still extremely low. Fortunately, in the last couple of years more and more black people have entered the middle class and started their own companies. This ensures that the black population is gradually getting wealthier.

As you can see apartheid is still present in the current society. The story I told at the beginning of my presentation took place in 2008, which is not that long ago. Despite the abolition of apartheid, it never completely vanished. I hope one day it will.