

F Chikane Interview

FC: F Chikane

JS: Jonny Selemani

JS: So basically as I said it relates to the concept of non-racialism, we are basically trying to investigate the concept of non-racialism, does it still hold a similar meaning to the way it did back then? So my first question is what is your understanding on non-racialism today?

FC: Ok, post-1994. Yes, we took many years to arrive at the concept of non-racialism. You will know that, if you grow up in an apartheid society, what you know is racism, you experience racism on a daily basis, from when you are young to when you grow up. So we started opposing racism, and I think that's where it comes from. You oppose racism so you are forced to think about what is the alternative to racism.

When I grew up, we started with a sort of negative concept of anti-racist strategy, so we started with an anti, it's a negative concept. So you will fight a concept like anti-racism, during the black consciousness movement, we grew up during that time, black is beautiful, rediscovering yourself, asserting yourself, resisting any concept of racism or anything that undermines you. Because racism is like being treated less than a human being, it tries to reduce you to an animal, a labour unit, and that was what we were resisting. So the concept of non-racism came in when we were asking, ok, what kind of society do we want? We want a non-racial society where everyone is equal, everyone is treated equally. Equal before the law. So that's where our concept of non-racialism comes in.

There was a debate about it, some people in the black consciousness movement thought that they didn't want to have non-racialism, some were saying that we need to define what this ultimate society we want to look at, so that is where the concept of non-racialism came in. So it was promoted in the ANC, and people died for the concept, you know black people who believed in non-racism. I mean concepts like the land belongs to all who live on it, you know that is a radical concept. If you've got foreigners here who are occupying the land, to talk about the land belongs to all who live in it, it's too radical a concept and it actually broke the ANC, that's why you've got the ANC. We agreed as a nation that we need a non-racial society, and the struggle was to be for that, and most people would say that 94 was about that, to establish this new non-racial society. The question was, did we succeed? I think what I would say is that we killed the concept of racism, because that had to die. We destroyed the philosophy of differentiation between people on the basis of colour and gender, we destroyed that. Nobody can openly treat you as less than a human being.

I mean when I grew up, people forget that, when I was driving down to Durban I went into a shop to buy something, and if you were white you would go into the shop to buy the thing, if you were black you had to buy them through the window. So for people who grew up like that like me, 94 was a huge breakthrough, it was a revolution. And that is why there will always be difference of opinions between the older generation and the younger generation. The younger generation who has not lived through that think that nothing has changed. We need to take them back to 1960, let them drive down to Durban and they will know how much has changed. I mean I couldn't go to Wits, I had the highest symbol of

mathematics in Soweto in my time, in matric, here is Soweto, but I wasn't allowed to do a BSc degree at Wits. I had to apply to the minister to be permitted to study at a white university. And even if Wits wanted to admit me, they had to get permission from the minister, and that minister would say well you're doing BSc, it's there in the black university, so you must go there, you can't be allowed to do it at Wits.

I wanted to be a mathematical physicist, and I couldn't. And when the thing went haywire, being enclosed there every year, and in my last year we celebrated the freedom of Mozambique in 1974, so that degree was gone. I didn't complete it. So I'm just giving you a picture that for those who are younger, they don't understand that. I tried to go to Fort Hare, tried to say I was Xhosa, because if you were doing science, Fort Hare was better than Limpopo, but Fort Hare was also chemistry, not physics. So I tried to go to Fort Hare, and they said I thought my surname could be pronounced, you know they would think it was Xhosa, but they said no, this is not Xhosa, you have to go to Limpopo because you are Sotho. Now my language group defined where I should study, rather than where I want to study. And I'm just giving an example, if you were black and you did physics, in Soweto, I was at the best school which was Orlando High, during those days it was really popular, the principal made it popular. I did physical science, but there was no laboratory at all. We never went to a laboratory for the two years I was there, and when we did winter school you know some guys from Sacred Heart private school came to do winter classes for us and they landed up doing additional math's for us, there was no additional maths for us here in Soweto. But the principal was very effective, if he taught you maths, by the last year, a few of you would be able to register for additional mathematics and pass it. And some of the engineers in this country came from his class. So I did additional maths on my own, we registered, so they agreed to give us classes. So we went on Sundays to take classes at Sacred Heart, and lo and behold this high school was just for whites, and it had a physics laboratory, a chemistry laboratory. And across Soweto, we have got nothing.

So that's why I'm saying for people who don't know what racism is about, will never understand this, and they will always talk iconic nonsense, that nothing has changed since 1994. They don't know what they are talking about. For Soweto, I am sure you will have noticed here, how much has changed since 94. During the apartheid days they didn't think we even needed a pavement you know, you just build houses and facilities. Today you build houses with roads, so I'm just giving examples. So in 1994, it has changed radically, killed the concept of racism and apartheid and differentiation, not that there are no racists, there are still racists, but there are very few who are bold enough to declare that I am a racist. There is only this one dominee in Limpopo who is bold enough to say he is still a racist and he doesn't want blacks in his church. You must google that guy, I mean he's very bold but he's honest. Other people are not honest.

In that sense we have won a major battle, but whether we have created a new society, it will take new, a huge effort. And 17 years later, in my view, we have not achieved it. You see for me it's not just relationships, that's why, it's called a liberal concept. If you are just talking about relationships then it is liberal, but if you are talking about changing racial attitudes and perceptions, you have to change the economy of the country. You have to, change relationships in a more radical way, as long as if I still go to a 5 star hotel, when you are staying at a 2 star hotel, it will be more black, and you won't find a white

there. If you go to a 4 star hotel, it begins to become more white and less blacks, if you go to a 5 star hotel, any black there is an exception. As long as that, and I use a very simple thing like a hotel, as long as it still defines itself like that, then the racist concept will not go, because people think better of people who are white and less of people who are black.

More educated people are white, and less educated people are black. Remember racism was created, I wish I had finished my paper on race, I addressed the history of the state of race, religion, social justice, because I've got this historical side, that racism was created. It did not, the concept did not exist. If English used the word race, it was more about differentiation, rather than prejudice. And when you go to the, the interesting thing is that this concept of racism was built up in the United States in the 1602s, to the end of that century, if you read the literature it is quite amazing. In fact I would advise that if you are dealing with racism, read about that period. I've got it, there are a few papers, you can actually go and read that. There are very few, some of those few writers I can pick up some of the references for you.

Race is created, it is a social construct. And to deconstruct it, I am using a terrible term, to undo it, you have to change the structures that were created by it. The differences that were created by it, so we should, it shouldn't, be that the doctors are white, you know, come to Soweto, or Indian. You must have black doctors here, if you've got professors at a university because we are majority black, the professors must be majority black. If you have not reached that stage yet, you have not won the battle.

JS: So based on that, you have mentioned that you don't believe that we have succeeded completely in our idea of non-racialism. So do you believe that post-1994, this concept of non-racialism still carries as much weight as it did back then?

FC: Look, the struggle is not over. We won the battle to change the society, but it is a project on its own. The game is not over. And I'm saying it will be over the day when poverty is not defined on the basis of color, and there will not be stacking up of people, African, colored, Indian white, in terms of privilege. An African will have the same opportunities as a white, and be able to participate in the economy, be able to get into education.

By the way this project is not easy, my view is that even if you didn't have racism you'd still have class. So for you to win the battle against racism, you have to win against the issue of class, because now it defines itself in the form of color. Class will still be there, and the likelihood is that the poor would still be mainly black, because the majority of the population is black. But it would be proportionate, in a sense. Now there are more black students who pass matric than whites, by sheer numbers. It is not as if we achieve much, but it is just that there are more blacks who go to school, but still proportionally speaking there are still less blacks who pass matric than whites. So once we have won the race battle the next battle is class. I still want to see a classless society, we are talking about socialist concepts, communism, you know what I'm saying.

The good thing about South Africa is that we have been able to work together for the same cause, but I still want to see this classless society, and I argue that the Soviet Union did not achieve it, China is doing it's best but it is not going in that direction, they have to allow capitalist concepts to survive. It is only Cuba to me that got the closest, but it was at a great cost. I mean when you drive in the streets there,

you can see the quality of the houses, but they are equal, every street has got a doctor, you know, you are allocated a doctor. They have achieved something, but they have achieved it a low base, because the world does not want it to achieve.

JS: But 17 years after 1994, we are sitting in a situation where the majority is now in the ruling seat. How much do you think the government has done to foster the idea of non-racism, and dealing with things like class struggles and equality?

FC: well you know I am not one of those idealistic people who think everything is perfect, you know, I've been in government myself, I know how tough it is. I like journalists, because they like critiquing, and I always say, why don't we change roles, and you come be a politician and I will be a journalist. The one thing about the ANC is that there is no debate about whether or not the society should change, the debate is what is the best way to do it. So there may be differences about the approach that should be taken, but there are no differences about that fact that we have to change. Even the ANC where it is like some people would call it a broad church, it accommodates everybody, nobody can say that poverty is ok. The failure would be the doing part, the policies developed were among the best in the world, for any area you want to think of. In fact most radical thinkers in the world tried to use South Africa as an experimental place to test their radical theories. Idealistic concepts are always tried in South Africa, for instance things like let us get a grant for every South African, R100 for every South African to solve poverty, and I asked, where has this been done before? And the answer was that it has never been done, but they want to test it here in South Africa. So in all honesty I think the ANC has done it's best, it has got its own weaknesses, but they have achieved a lot between 94 and now, and between now and the next 10 years, I don't think there is any chance that any other party would take over, so the ANC is the way in which you can cause the change. The point is, there is nobody at the moment who would say that we don't want to end racist attitudes, we don't want to bring to an end the consequences of apartheid.

JS: I think what I was trying to convey, I don't want to dwell on the ANC as a party, but I am trying to bring it back to the idea of non-racialism, does that still apply today? Because there is a quote that says that the idea of non-racialism was brought about to show how us as Africans, as South Africans, can live together after apartheid. So what I wanted to know is that does non-racialism still have a centre stage within our government, within our policies, within our agendas.

FC: I would say yes. Unless somebody can prove me wrong, I would say yes. Because there is no policy that is not about fixing the damage apartheid has done, there is no policy that is not about leveling the playing fields. You could say but there were other policies that did not follow, that would be the critique, but there can't be a critique of saying there is no commitment on the side of the ANC, to do it.

JS: Going back to the idea, the issue of class, within, even during apartheid, there was an issue of an internal class struggle. Post-apartheid, we are finding more and more that there is a growing black middle class. It is often argued that the idea of non-racialism were considered as a forerunner to the liberation, now such ideas have fallen away to personal enrichment, to a new class that is using the current structures to benefit themselves. What is your interpretation of this?

FC: Yes, if you try to do the experience we are trying in a capitalist world you are bound to end up with that, it is not an accident. When some get given an opportunity to succeed, they use that to the best of their ability. Whether it is within our interest to create a class which serves its own interests, I would say no, that was not the objective. I was in the government from 1995, I wouldn't say that. The point is that there is no way of leveling equalizing the economic status of people without getting blacks to make money. So of course you have to make money, to level up. If you are going to bring whites from elsewhere, you have to bring back the playing field, equalize it for black people. And to do that, there are going to be others who arrive there before the rest, and in a capitalist society it is going to be a few and it is not going to be the majority. So in a capitalist society, if you open up, there will not be black capitalists, it's idealistic, it's crazy to even think of it. In fact some people would say why do you want blacks to be poor, why can't they make money? If whites make lots of money, it doesn't make news, but if a black person makes a lot of money then it is headline news. You know it is racist in itself.

I think the struggle for me is not stopping blacks becoming rich, because why should they be stopped? Every society has got rich people, why should blacks not be? I think the key thing is, how do you make sure that you deal with poverty? And change the quality of lives of people. By the way, I don't believe it's sustainable to, there are blacks who want to be like whites, and what they forget is that whites arrived where they are because there was an exploitable commodity, apartheid gave them cheap labor, advantaged them, they became millionaires, billionaires, and you won't produce blacks like that. There are blacks who think that they should be equal to whites in that standard of living, and my view is that it is not possible unless you've got an exploitable commodity.

The struggle is to equalize the playing fields so that there is no exploitable commodity, and to make sure there is no exploitation, is to empower the poor, especially in terms of education, access to resources, in terms of support systems, and that's where concerns like black empowerment came in, it was part of the game. Because even if I've got a good idea, like my son who likes business, good ideas but so what, where is the money to do it? It's not there. I have been able to go around since I left government, identify assets which are productive but I don't have money to turn them into productive assets, and when I go and look for money I have to go and find a white person to give me the money. So it's a reality, so there is a struggle at the top and there is a struggle at the bottom. What the ANC government did was to create policies that will enable black people to climb the ladder, whilst leading with the issue of getting rid of poverty, that was the strategy, and that is why now I am told we are 15 million people on grants. The question was, it is not big, so it's different, so the grants are helping society, but I don't believe in giving grants to people who still have their hands and minds and feet and find ways of surviving, then you create dependence, but the vulnerable in society, the aged, people with disabilities, children, that type of thing. And that is, I am told, 15 million last week. The last time in 2009 were 12 million, so the ANC has tried to create a net, a safety net at the bottom and even shops that were closed in rural areas, if you go and check that, have come back to life after those grants, because the pensioners now can go buy sugar or bread.

But the solution is to create an economic base that can give jobs to everybody, and for that you need training, education, all sorts of things. And where we have failed in my view, is to provide that quality education. We have good ideas, good policies, but we have not succeeded to make the schools work in

the way that they should work, and we have not succeeded to make the facilities available to the majority of children. There are still children who learn under the trees, that is the last thing you should have.

I went to the class where I started school in the mid 50s in Bushbuckridge, and I found a Chikane child in that class because they are still around. But that class is as bad as the one that I was in in the 50s. Now I am just giving you an idea that in a sense there are things we could have done, is it a budget question no? We have reached a stage where we have raised the budget for education so that nobody can critique this country about not spending enough money on education. I think it is a question of management, of how you stretch the resources. Unfortunately the budget on its own will not provide schools, and make the schools look like the school in a white area, and I keep on repeating the story. We will not create schools at the level of those private schools, because it is another unsustainable thing. So there is a level at which you can go to and not beyond. So we have to determine the standard we want to reach, at least there must be quality education, there must be books, you know basic things that you need to produce a child who will participate in the economy. And we must train the children to be creators in the economy, rather than workers. And that's where the differences come in with the, people in the labour world who tend to think that you are revolutionary if you keep people unskilled, you know what I'm saying, you don't want to escape the labour market, you have to be a worker. There is a philosophy like that that wants to keep you as a worker to be a revolutionary, and I say no you don't have to be kept like that, not everyone should remain workers. Black people should own business, should create value, so you create jobs. You can't spend all the time protecting jobs that are diminishing, when in fact you should be creating business to create more jobs.

JS: Just bringing it back to the concept of non-racialism, what would the key features that would contribute to a non-racial society?

FC: In my own view you must change the economic inequalities divide on the basis of race, it is as simple as that, there is no other way. Any non-racial project that does not deal with the economy is a liberal concept. Any non-racial real concept would deal with the economy, and my view is that there's no way of dealing with it otherwise. You have to change the social relations, you need to be proud to be a worker, not because you don't have opportunities, but because that's what you are trained to do. You chose to do that. Then you've got a normalizing society, so that we do the things, people might be teachers, but teaching doesn't pay, you will never be a millionaire as a teacher, but there are people who choose to be a teacher. People who have a calling for being nurses, so you need a society where there is a choice for what you do, not because the social conditions deny you the possibility of being what you should be.

JS: What do you think key features of sort of religion, education, the media, what do you think those elements play, what is their role in the idea of non-racialism? How do they contribute?

FC: I've talked about education, so I won't repeat it. In the media sphere, unless we go into fanaticism, religious fanaticism, people who are just fantasists who are crazy, religion in general would argue to equality of humanity, and that's why religious people easily circle with the classless society concept, that is why it is easy to get churches to support socialist concepts, because for them it is about equality, that's how god sees people. I think the media for me it's, I should have started from the churches, the churches

are a site of struggle as well, even if you've got those concepts. It is a site of struggle, because there are others who want to use the church to defend their own gains and interests. And religion gets used for conflict, for class struggles, all sorts of things. Where there are conflicts you will find some religious concepts, in fact in South Africa towards the end of apartheid all of the dictators and the people who collaborated with apartheid became very religious. There is a way in which people become dictators become religious. So it's a site of struggle.

The media is also a site of struggle, the media in South Africa has changed, there are more black journalists now in the media, some people would even say the media houses are now owned by blacks, there is more black participation. But it is a site of struggle, the media gets used to achieve certain objectives and it tends to go the liberal route. And the liberal route will see a problem in an individual who is black but will not see it if he is white. Again I go back to this thing if you are white and drive a Ferrari, no one worries about you. But if a black person appears with a Ferrari, everyone says no where did he get the money from? But they never ask the white man where he got the money, because it is a racist approach that says that a white has money, so I expect him to have a Ferrari but not a black person, he must be a thief. So I think it is a site of struggle. All the social entities you can talk about, even the schools are sites of struggle. There's a contestation of ideological perspectives, views, and that struggle will go on.

JS: Just relating back to the idea that the Katharada Foundation is based on advancing the idea of non-racialism, what would you recommend the Foundation can do to carry out its vision of non-racism?

FC: Well firstly, I'm impressed that this is the only foundation I know of that talks about language, I know they have done a study. And I suspect it has to do with Katharada himself, you know how the Indian community were more committed to this non-racial concept than others, because for them they were almost in the middle, and they bridged things, and were able to see both sides of the story. But they took sides with the oppressed, and that's why in our struggle, within the UDF, and others, I suspect that is why Katharada took this route. I'm not surprised that he did. It's going to be a big struggle, I'm going to be at a lecture, you know in October, I am going to attend that lecture for the first time, it will be very interesting.

I went to the 80th anniversary event a few weeks ago, and it is good to meet those comrades and see the literature that produced, the commitment to non-racialism. This is a big challenge, even I was happy about the way in which they planned the anniversary, and brought back the history and concept of non-racialism, but when you looked at the audience, there were not reflecting anything close to non-racial society. So the systems work against you in that sense, naturally. When the ANC has a national event, like June 16 or Freedom Day, you find Africans there as if nobody else exists in this country, in those meetings. So we can see we have not reached that stage. If I have an event in my church here, we are bound to be all Africans. Very few colored or Indians. We are defined by history of apartheid, the geography defines you, so this change, even if you want to be non-racial, it is unlikely. If you do it in Lenasia, you are bound to have an Indian community there, because apartheid put them there. If you want a non-racial church you must go to the centre of Johannesburg, but even then whites will go to the northern suburbs. So we have a big battle that is fighting against the times. Because the structures of

apartheid remains intact, the residential areas, the differentiation divisions remain intact. So in a sense I wish them all the luck because it is a hard, gallant effort, but it won't happen without bringing all the communities together.

I mean the people I worked with in the struggle, I'm sure they've worked with black Africans, with colored brothers, with everybody. But somehow after 94 everyone went back home. So if you have an event here you will have to go out of your way to make it look non-racial because it is not going to look non-racial. And I think that's really going to be the struggle. The real hope for me is my 20 year old, he's at UCT, I've got three boys, for me they tell you about South Africa. My first born who is 30 now, missed the struggle, was 10 years when we settled, and he's still a victim of apartheid, because in a sense when we became free he was at school, he was in a private school, but he has a father who is a product of the old, so I can't give him money to go study. So he feels more, he says we need black empowerment, he will talk about nationalization, the Malema language. But the little thing is trying his best to go into business, but he is learning, even with his degree that it is not easy. So he is beginning to ask questions. My last born who missed apartheid completely, who went to a multiracial school, who beat white kids in class, he says to me I don't need black empowerment, because I can do it on my own, that is what he says. But you will also see his friends, they are not defined by color. He's got Indian, white, colored friends, they relate as if the color doesn't matter. But wait until he finishes his degree, and he will be done in 3 years, when they go into the market. When he goes there, he is going to discover that that white child has an inheritance, there's capital, there is a house, an uncle who left something else. He is not going to have much from me, and when that happens, he is going to go back to say now we must deal with what went wrong.

So this thing about Malema, the dramatization of nationalism, it's more at a memory level. It is actually reverting back to the past and saying, I missed it but I feel it. Because Malema wasn't part of the struggle, he missed it. When we negotiated a settlement here, he was still in high school. So in a sense you can see that anger which comes out of, that they are not seeing change and they think nothing has happened. Of course they are wrong, but it's the consequences that even if we have changed the society, what madiba did, we have not dealt effectively with the economic challenge. And that's really the challenge of the day.

And I would say the Katharada Foundation cannot avoid focusing on the economic challenges of the country, you can't deal with racism without it, I'm repeating myself now. I said some things that might be misinterpreted. When I say people think there is something wrong to have rich people, you may be misinterpreted to say rich blacks, to say that you are supporting this culture that is developing about people who just go and make money. That's not what I'm talking about, I'm talking about the racial concept, the way in which race determines how we think. Where you say whites are ok to make money but blacks can't. Even the whites who were with us in the trenches, who dressed up like us and looked poor like us, had assets left by their parents. When we finished the struggle they went back and used their assets to put themselves into the market. So in a sense, the economic thing is for me the defining thing. There are those who talk about reducing the gap between blacks and whites and measure poverty in that sense, I always say like the class struggle. We will never achieve equalization of rich and poor that is the struggle that is always ahead of us, and we don't have that society, if we achieved it in South Africa

it would be extraordinary. There will always be inequalities between the poor and the rich, even in Cuba. Cuba has now opened up a little bit, they have allowed expensive hotels for tourists, but the Cubans who own that hotel become a different class, and you can't avoid that. It is going to happen, and it is a matter of how you reduce the gap. If you can equalize, I wish you all the luck.

Human beings will never be equal in a sense because we simply are not the same, you know. That's why the problem with blacks now is that they won't develop, because they think to be in business is to make millions. But you must go to the middle class whites, because not all whites are millionaires. They do simple things, like a gardening company, you see these guys working there, and ask what is the name of the company, and the next you see it is a white man who owns it, even the gardening. And they are not making millions out of that, but they are able to have a house, buy a car. It's middle class. The sooner blacks understand that, because the first blacks who came out got millions, and we think being business means when we negotiate a deal and it doesn't give you millions it's not business. But you need to do what this lady who started a catering company for events, now she does the party or the lunch for guests, and she makes money to live. And she donated a microwave to the church because the church supports her. But she is not a millionaire, she's not driving a BMW, she's driving a little van that delivers the stuff etc., and we miss that, that most whites were middle class. And we can't strive to be all millionaires, that is where you deplete the resources of the country. It's not sustainable.

JS: Thank you very much.