

PN : P Naidoo

JS: Jonny Simalani (Interviewer)

JS: I just wanted to ask you, what do you think the role of the foundation will be in creating a non-racial society, just to start you off, my first question is what is your understanding of the historic root, pre-1994, or non-racialism. With the understanding that the Freedom Charter, the influence in South Africa, or the ANC.

PN: Well let me start off by saying that the word non-racialism, to me it is a bit of a misnomer. Because the reality in the world, there are people who identify themselves differently, and I am certainly not opposed to that. But obviously I am very strongly opposed to any form of discrimination, against anybody, whether of their sex, gender, language, race, culture. I believe in a society in which nobody should ever be discriminated against, for whatever region. But at the same time I do strongly believe that if a person identifies himself as an Indian, or a German, or Chinese, or anything like that, that I don't have a problem with. So, and particularly, I mean there are many people who look towards having a cultural identity, they want to identify themselves with their religion, their culture and those kind of things, and there's no problem with that. But within that context, I believe very strongly in the principles of non-racialism, but that I may interpret, is to never discriminate against a person, at the same time respecting people's religious, cultural, linguistic background, you know, and appreciating that.

JS: So on that note, the historical understanding of it, can I have your account on the understanding of non-racialism.

PN: I grew up, I am 66 now, and the bulk of my life I grew up in Apartheid South Africa, a society where everything was defined in terms of racism and the differences of people, those kinds of things. We grew up from a very young age, you couldn't, there was no freedom of movement because of people's different races of culture, and I came from a very strong political family that believed in non-racialism and equality for all, and took part in the struggle to try and eradicate racism and the principle to judge people by their colour, religion or cultural beliefs or language that they come from.

JS: So in terms of, I mean as you are part of the congress group, the Transvaal Indian Congress, what was the, in your view, the idea or the, were you striving for a non-racial society, what were you envisaging, pre-1994.

PN: Obviously I was an activist throughout my life in the Transvaal Indian Congress, and so were my parents and grandparents who were also members. And we, throughout history, the Indian Congress believed in non-racialism, and many people asked, well if you believe in non-racialism, why are you mobilizing a particular sector of the community. And our argument was simply that you've got to organise people in, sometimes, as who they are, but then the principle of non-racialism has always been there, and as you know the Transvaal Indian Congress had already in early years, in the 1940s, preached non-racialism. And it was in the forefront of working with other groups of people, it was in the forefront of, you've heard about the Doctor's pact, a pact between the ANC and the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congress to forge a relationship around friendship. In fact, I want to argue that an organisation like the

African National Congress and the Indian Congress had huge success in bringing people of different race groups to the struggle of non-racialism, whereas if you look at movements that supposedly were non-racial, and believed in non-racialism, never had as much success as people from the Congress movement, in mobilizing people around the cause of non-racialism. I don't know if I'm coming out clear.

JS: So I'm just trying to build it up to a sense of what it was before, what was the ideal of a non-racialist society to where we're going to right now. That leads me to my next question, saying your understanding of non-racialism then, and today, do you think that core understanding still applies today? Are there still the same kind of values that were seen pre-1994 in current society?

PN: You know, for me I think currently obviously I still very much support the ideals of non-racialism, and that is why I am active in the Katharada foundation, and I am also very active in the African National Congress. But I think part of the problem in today's society is that we are a bit obsessed with the question of race. In terms that, we've lived the core conflicts of this country, since 1652, right up to 1994, has been an issue of race. And we haven't been able to begin to shed that kind of legacy, we still attract in being obsessed with it. Having said that, I do believe broadly in the transformation of our society. Now it's a society that by and large during apartheid excluded African people in particular from almost every aspect of life. I believe that one has to introduce legislation or whatever to begin to right that wrong. So that is why I will be a supporter of affirmative action, but at the same time, I believe that it's got to be managed, in a way that doesn't alienate other people. And I am afraid that I don't think it's managed too well, and as a result of that, far too many people are being alienated from the process, because it's not managed well. But having said that, I don't think it's an easy process to manage. But yes, we could do better in managing the whole process of transformation.

JS: In relation to things such as African Nationalism, and other ideologies, how do you think that the concept of non-racialism still plays a part in such views?

PN: It depends on how you interpret African Nationalism. African Nationalism can be interpreted in a very progressive way – obviously people are taught to be proud of their identity, to respect their own identity, but at the same time, to hold to understand other cultures. So that is a kind of a broad definition of African nationalism. And I think there's nothing wrong with that definition. But there is also a narrow sense, in terms that you can become narrow, and it can become racism. So for example, an African person who promotes the cultural background of other African people, the language of African people, and actually works towards the advancement of African people, that's fine, as long as it doesn't go to the point of other people's exclusion on the grounds that they are not African. So yes, to answer your question, there is a progressive phase to African nationalism, or any form of nationalism, but there can also be..

JS: Put in context, do you feel that currently, that one agenda is being pushed over the other. Can the two coincide?

PN: yes, I believe it can, it's a very delicate process, it can. And that's what I mean when I said earlier on, the whole issue of non-racialism, cause some people even argue that there is no such thing as non-racialism, that the issue is multi-racialism. Yes, we must, there are all kinds of people in our country,

various backgrounds, we need to respect that, we need to promote that, but at the same time, we need to also find a common identity which we can unite against. And I think I would like to see the Katharada Foundation to do much more work to get people to understand that and respect one another.

JS: If you had to say, if I mentioned that there are key values or elements that need to be present in order to achieve a non-racial society, what do you think those would be?

PN: I think the first element is to get people to never discriminate. Never to discriminate against a person for being a particular colour, particular religion, cultural background. You don't say, in society, I don't want that person because he is so and so, of a certain race. We never need to do that. So what I'm saying is that in order to find balance, the reality is that in our country, the vast majority of our people are African. And if we want African people to take their rightful place in society, we need a form of affirmative action. It's a kind of balance, because if you don't do that, then you perpetuate the old kind of racism that exists. That is, I know, you see, a lot of people see the whole thing of transformation, affirmative action, as a racial kind of step, I don't see it. Because we've lived in a racial society for 300 years, in order to right this wrong, one needs, you've got change society, because if you don't, people who are the majority of the African people that are on the bottom of the ladder, will say you know, What Has Changed? Life hasn't changed for us. So you need to correct that. And the key is to find a way in which to manage that. That at the end, people can live in harmony.

JS: Well you've brought up two very important points, which tie up to my next question. You mention the notion of finding a balance, of managing and redressing inequalities. It's been argued that our current structures are favoring a new small minority, an African minority. Due to policies like BEE or Affirmative Action. How do you think that impacts on the idea of a non-racialist society?

PN: When you talk about BEE, a lot of people will argue well, on the one hand, they say, you need to begin to get African people in particular into positions which were never there before, and other people will argue well you know this is just serving the interests of a handful of people. That might be true, but that's why I say it needs to be managed. And you see, what I'm saying is that the whole issue of transformation, for me, it's actually a long term project. We're not going to begin to do these things overnight. We can't change society overnight, where in every aspect of life in South Africa, African people have come to the fore. That to me is the key, I think there are some people who would like to see it overnight, and I'm saying it can't happen overnight. It's a process that unfolded over 300 years, and it's not going to be done in 20 years. So, but we've got to be working towards it all the time, because one of the problems is that you take, we are, 17 years into our democracy, and a young white person, will say why are you punishing me, I had nothing to do with this apartheid phase. I never discriminated against anybody, why should I be punished? And in a way they've got a valid argument. So that's why I say that where government needs to work at it all the time, but it is going to be a process, and people need to understand that.

JS: In your idea of an ideal non-racialist society, institutions like the media and religion play an important role. What would you say these can do to foster the idea of a non-racist society?

PN: I think that media obviously can play a massive role in trying to build a non-racial society. But it is also needs to be leveled, the media needs to begin to move in a particular direction. The reality is that today, if you look at South Africa, there is a perception that the media is controlled by the affluent. And the affluent so happen to be white. And the media obviously gives freedom of speech, people say things, and they publicise all kinds of things, and I don't think the media does enough. I mean it's difficult to generalize, there are different medias, there are medias that are more right wing than others. But I do believe, look, I believe that everyone has an agenda in life. I mean my agenda is to build a society where we live in harmony, and we're building, we take it to a certain step and people go up from there. And you can't assess the media as one homogenous group, you know. I mean there are media who have a particular right wing view, and there are media who are much more progressive. So I don't want to categorise them as whatever.

JS: And the role of religion, because we are talking about religion in a multi-cultural society, where it identifies as an ideological religious group, how can that be used to advance the cause of non-racialism? How do you think it can be used to contribute to that ideal?

PN: Well I think obviously we need to be tolerant of one's religion, one's culture and those kinds of things. We need to be tolerant. We need to understand. I think the moment anybody who feels my religion or culture is more superior than the next person's, they are treading on dangerous ground. It's a process to begin to educate our society to be tolerant of other religions, other cultures. I mean a simple thing like certain people's cultural practices, you can take the thing about slaughtering animals, in some cultures that is part of the religion, it is acceptable. In other religions it is seen as unacceptable. But even those people might begin to understand people's religious beliefs and their different cultures.

JS: If we were to look at key challenges in regard to socio-economic challenges to non-racialism, what do you think they would be?

PN: Well look, the reality is that the vast majority of poor people, people living trapped in poverty, are African people. I mean, and it is an unnatural situation, you can't have a situation like that. I believe the only way to, is to ease poverty and those kind of things, is to get the economy to grow. Now that's easier said than done. You need to get the economy to grow, and you need to get people to work, and to earn a living. But there are a lot of impediments, now as we speak, there are a lot of impediments to that. For example, one of our major impediments is that there is a huge skill shortage in this country. And as a result of that, many people live in poverty. We've got to improve the skills of people. Now I believe for example, in order to train people and give people skills, in other words the one who is doing the teaching, there must be no affirmative action. It doesn't matter who is giving you a skill, whether its black or white. As long as at the end of the day when you acquire that skill, you then become a productive person in society.

I don't know if you saw the diagnostic report that Trevor Manuel has come out with – he talks about the areas in which we have failed as a state. Education is almost number one. Now I believe that there are lots of failings in education, but if we don't get education right, we'll be in serious trouble. We need to get education right, we need to have good solid education for the next 20 years, no disruption in

education, and I believe that if we get that right, and I believe we have the tools for it, if we can get that right, I believe we will go a long way to achieving the transformation of society that we all want. Because just by sheer numbers, if millions of African people are going to be educated, go to tertiary institutions, by sheer numbers they will become a dominant force in society. Because we are failing in our health system, that has resulted in our health system to be failing, our legal system to be failing, and every other system to be failing.

JS: To argue that we need to, post 1994, we kind of won, it is argued that the political battle was won, and now we are moving towards a socioeconomic battle. Do you think the idea of economic liberation, and non-racialism, can they co-exist, or do you think we need to obtain one before the other?

PN: I don't think it is a question of obtaining one before the other. I think – look, as a young man, I was a member of the communist party, and I believed that, in socialist ideals. Over the years, I've grown to become a bit more mature, and obviously there's still a lot of socialist principles which I agree with, but there are certain socialist principles that I now disagree with. For example, I believe that in a free market economy, but I also believe that free market economy is not absolute, there must be, because in society and especially in our society, there will always be those that are less fortunate, and as a state you need to provide a safety net for those people, whether it's through old age, illness, whatever. So it's a combination of a free market and a welfare state. Like we've got now. I mean, we're a developing country, and we are more than a third of our budget goes towards welfare. I think obviously if it wasn't for that, we would be in serious trouble. But on the other hand, I don't support the view that we should be nationalizing the mines and the banks, I think that as a state, we are not going to run those things effectively and make money. We must give it to the private sector to run it, but yes we need to regulate it, we need to have labour laws and all that so that people are not exploited, and I think that that will create wealth and that will create more jobs.

JS: Second last question – To follow the logic that the youth of tomorrow is what we hope to see non-racial society emerging, in order to have that we need to train our current youth. What do you think our youth leadership is doing to build a non-racial society? What else do you think can be done to foster this idea of non-racialism?

PN: Well look, most certainly there is, this whole thing about non-racialism is very much on the agenda of many progressive movements, like Katharada Foundation and the ANC. But where I think we mustn't be naïve to think, there are other forces at work as well. And obviously we will want to become the dominant force, and it's not going to happen without a lot of hard work, a lot of thinking and the kind of work that you are doing through your research, and that the foundation is doing. We need to continue to do that and to promote it. One thing we've learnt in life, is that if you fail, it's very easy to blame another race, or another group. It's quite easy. I mean we've seen it throughout history, I mean when the German people in the 1930s, Hitler put the blame on the Jews and all kinds of people, we see it all over the world. We've got to guard against those kind of things.

JS: Finally, what more would you recommend for the foundation to do, what more do you think would you like the foundation doing in order to advance its core cause.

PN: I think obviously the foundation has done a tremendous amount of work. But I would like to see the foundation move a gear up, and to begin to take this message of non-racialism out where it matters. To young people, to tertiary institutions, to those kinds of things, in a much bigger way. And it's not going to do it on its own, obviously there are lots of other organisations. There has to be a kind of socialist movement pushing this agenda, we have to interact much more to enforce this. And you know it's a kind of agenda that you have to keep at it, all the time, because I believe in life if you're not doing that, then somebody takes that gap, and that's not necessarily good. So you've got to be there all the time, it has to be the kind of thing that's in people's face all the time. Even the person who's got racist tendencies, must know that there is a very strong movement that he's up against.

JS: Thank you very much. My personal question to you – you've mentioned all the forces at play within the ANC for example. Do you still think that non-racialism, do you think that these forces are kind of suppressing the idea of non-racialism?

PN: Look, you know the ANC, it's a huge organisation. Now the ANC in Gauteng is very, what we called the National question. It's very much, it's leaderships at the provincial and local regional level is very aware of this thing that we need to promote the national question. And they are doing it all the time. But that doesn't mean to say that there aren't other forces. But at the moment, I would say that the forces that believe in the issue around non-racism are quite powerful, quite strong, but there are other forces. I mean if you look in the last couple of weeks, president Jacob Zuma, he addressed the ANC Lakota, and in that speech, he was very strong on non-racialism. He then addressed the ANC celebration and the launch of 100 years, and he was very strong on the non-racial beliefs of the ANC. And this is the president of the organisation. So the ANC is very much pushing that non-racial agenda.

JS: The idea of, implementation versus suggestion, it's one thing to speak about it, it's another thing to implement. So personally, I wanted to find out, how much are we really doing towards implementing? I mean the Katharada foundation is doing a lot, but as the ruling party what are you doing? I mean it's one thing to advocate it, it's another thing to look at implementation process.

PN: if you look for example at the deployment policy, if you look at the national cabinet, for example, now you'll take there are quite a few whites who are cabinet ministers. You must understand that the ANC's support base is almost entirely African, and its opposition is almost entirely non-African. But if you look at the national cabinet, it's got a few whites, it's got quite a few Indians, it's got coloured people. It's very interesting, you take the mayoral committee in Johannesburg, who've got whites who are members who work with the mayor, you've got an Indian person. You take the provincial government, there's a white on the cabinet, an Indian on the cabinet. So these things at the ANC level have always been talked about, it's happening. But there are elements within the ANC, who are not happy with the kind of policy that the ANC is implementing. The ANC, this year, it wants to reach a target of a million members. And almost 98% of its membership is African. But yet, there's a very strong move, and you know like I made the point that its organisations like the Katharada Foundation, and people like the president and the deputy president who are pushing this all the time. And it's got to be done, because the moment anybody gets slack on it, you give a gap to someone else. And I think at the moment, the ANC is fairly good on the issue. I mean you must have read, recently Zuma made an Indian person his

spokesperson, which is a good thing. But yes, I think the ANC, not by appointing people in various positions, the ANC at a grassroots level, can do much more. I think that's where it probably has to do more, at a grass root level. You know simple things like when the ANC has a press conference, instead of having the entire leadership there being African, if you have a white person there, a coloured, there is a kind of message you are sending. I think at that level, they can do much more.

JS: I think that's what I was trying to weed out and understand, because if grassroots, certainly with the foundation, its operating at a grassroots level. And that's why I think we need to move the idea of non-racialism there, because theoretically we talk about it policy wise, but the implementation of policy takes place on a grass roots level.

PN: Now when Mandela was president, Mandela went out of his way to make sure, he will never appear in public alone, or just with other Africans. He would make sure, because Mandela consciously sent out a message. Mandela was great at non-racialism, and he was sending out that message all the time. He spoke regularly about reconciliation, and working. He made it a point, some people even felt he was going overboard, but one can understand why he made it. Since then, the organisation hasn't become different, but it's slipping. So you've got to, this has got to be in your face all the time. For years and years and years, if you take other societies, I suppose in a place like the Congo, race is not an issue but tribe is a big issue. If your tribe is excluded from the process, it can be very dangerous.

JS: Thank you very much.