

INTERVIEW BETWEEN

**Ferial Haffajee (Respondent) and Fiona White (Questioner)**

**Transcript**

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FIONA : The first thing really, is to ask you what, and obviously I have had heard about this, but if you can give it to me in your own words what your understanding of non- racialism in South Africa today is - and if you have a sense of how that reflects on the history of non racialism >>>>>>>>

FERIAL : I understand it through my own political history, so I come from a school that was from the black consciousness movement and for a long time I was an adherent of that - and that school of thought was that really you don't even acknowledge race, you acknowledge class and you acknowledge racial oppression, that you fight for something different. And then I could see that that particular ideology was getting nowhere and it was pretty clear that the UDF with it's very strong tenant of non-racialism was the ascendant ideology or set of values. And when I got to university I started working with UDF structures instead. So I have always understood it to be a bringing together of the racist tool to ascend race. It was definitely not multi-racialism, it was to get beyond race. And to find a common humanity.

FIONA : Can you say a bit more about the idea of ascending race? Because that is very different

>>>>> A common identity.

FERIAL : It was an acknowledgement that there are four main group in the country, and that was signified in the Congress wheel, but that these groups could be brought together in the process of unity and via the induction and practice of a set of values and principles you could ascend the racial wounds of the past – you could ascend, get past the racial divisions. Without giving up your core identity.

FIONA : And what would those values and practices look like?

FERIAL : They would be unity and diversity, diversity, strength, an injury to one is an injury to all And then non-racialism, non-sexism, and all the values of the freedom charter I guess.

FIONA: And today? Do you still hold that view? Or do you think that's >>>>>>>> day>>>>>>>>we'd be out the country.

FERIAL : I think we've travelled a long, sometimes hopeful and sometimes distressing journey away from that. So, if you break the freedom years up into bits, I would say the first five were the zenith really of the non-racial dream.

FIONA: So, '94 to 99?

FERIAL : Yes, where we were pushed towards reconciliation, some of us kicking and screaming. When the Constitution was written and the Bill of Rights was crafted..so there you begin to enshrine and institutionalize the idea of non- racialism. But that was very quickly replaced in the Mbeki era by very strong modern Africans, and a sense that your place is in... We are not some little island – we are at the tip of Africa, and we became modern day Pan Africans. So often I would ask him, and people around him, “How do you square this? Striving Pan Africanism, (tell me if this gets distracting)(background noise, banging etc) with non – racialism?” and people with >>>Zuma would say “But the two absolutely go hand in hand” Because if you don’t build the self-confidence, the prosperity of black people then non-racialism is merely a chimera.

FIONA : That’s interesting, so , I rush you into Mbeki, so I’m going to ask you as I know you have written about the time. There does seem to be different views on what he really stood for – in terms of was he racist, wasn’t he, was he an Africanist.

FERIAL: I don’t think really, I think racist is the absolutely wrong word to ascribe to him I think he was a Pan Africanist who believed in the dictum that comes from the Congress movement – that striving for freedom for Blacks in general and Africans in particular, striving for a South Africa in which African leadership leads but that in which other races also have a role. So the whole idea of African leadership has come up again and again as the Western Cape had gone through it’s various paroxysms. But he alienated the Right Left severely and it first started with the Helen >>>> experience and the Land Bank then with DG’s from Left... Congress allied DG’s who were pushed out because Mbeki wanted a Black African led civil service to showcase black excellence and African modernity.

FIONA: And is your sense the sense of, when he did the things he did, like I am the “i” in the Africa speech – when he was talking predominantly about all South Africans being African...

FERIAL : Absolutely! That speech is... I think some of his practices didn’t always live up to the principles enshrined in that speech but it must surely go down as one of the greats, for it’s impressive understanding of what a normal African is.

FIONA: That’s interesting. To go back to your own perspectives, today, I mean given the own turmoil you’ve faced in the last few days-You know, has any of your own sense of a future... or how to reconcile...or how to ascend race..I mean how are you feeling about that today?

FERIAL: I think Jacob Zuma is, at his heart, a non-racialist. I think he is a traditionalist and a conservative leader, but I think his years in exile and his schooling in the ANC has made him, at heart, a non-racial person. So when he took over you saw a great diversity in the construction of the Presidency, a great diversity in the construction of the core of Director’s General, suddenly you saw white people becoming DG’s again, and all races... many more.., a much more diverse Cabinet for example, than under Mbeki. But, I think we sit in an epoch where the ANC Youth League is the voice again. I’ve got some studies from Media10 in South Africa which shows that Julius Malema is now the second most high profile political individual, if you count “profile” as being in the media. That’s what he is. And he is, I don’t know what he is, but he certainly isn’t a non-racialist. He is a person who I think still sees the world as crafted in an Apartheid mindset - white imperialist, white colonialist, black oppressed. It’s a very simplistic

understanding of a country eighteen years into freedom- but it's a very, very influential one. So I think non-racialism is kind of ...it's a fading dream - in our public life, in our public debate. And instead now, if you look at popular culture I would think that the identity of young South Africans is that they live in a multi-racial society where white people still control the wealth. So it's a movement from non-racialism to multi-racialism.

FIONA: Do you think that's why Malema has gained such popularity, perhaps in some part to the sense of the whites still controlling...

FERIAL: It goes right to the heart of it, and there's truth in it. Any number of surveys will show that ownership patterns, and ownership and wealth patterns, in the economy have barely moved. Eighteen years later. Which is why I think we can learn a thing or two from , for example, Brazil, which has really been able to use it's massive social development budgets to bring people closer together and build a sense of being "Brazillian", so I want to visit and understand how they did that. Because we haven't been able to. We haven't been able to prod wealth redistribution at all. I mean there has been the phenomenal creation of black middle class. Our studies show that the social mobility of that class has been faster than any class in modern history. Faster than Europe, faster than the UK, and faster even than America, where it takes people four generations to move from working to middle class – it's happened in one generation. But for the larger mass of people it hasn't happened at all. So we do this project called Tatani Project and we've chosen, like, five bell weather places around the country. And, honestly, life in some of those places, it's barely feudal.

FIONA: We better not go off at too much of a tangent here but that is very interesting. When you say that non-racialism is a fading dream, I just want to ask you a bit more about that. And obviously both as an editor and your own experiences personally, you know, that's quite a strong thing to say. There's a lot of reality behind it – what does that mean in terms of the future, and what do you think the repercussions are?

FERIAL : Look, I think we all loved the World Cup because it gave us that momentary dip back into the late 90's, the Invictus movie period where our sense of being South African is larger than our racial identity. So it was like this "Oh My God, that's what we can be, but we're not." And I do ascribe it to a very, very mediocre political leadership. That has failed to re-craft, redesign, our non-racialism from an era of struggle into exactly... how do you... what do you deal with a philosophy like that...how do you make it real in an era of government?

FIONA: And do you see there being anything, any panacea, anything that would change this fading dream?

FERIAL: Another World Cup! (laughter) I think there's no magic bullet. It's intelligent political strategy, it's leadership, it is increasing the size of the "wealth pie", it's fairer wealth distribution, it's giving people a sense of a dream in the sense of hope – that life isn't just about survival but it is about aspirations.

FIONA: I want to make sure that I am understanding you correctly because you said in the beginning that coming out of UDF time and coming out of the Black Consciousness movement that you didn't believe in a non-racial society, but one that transcended things. So I don't want to go and ask you questions about what you feel are the key features of a non-racial society if that's not what you see...I just want to make sure that I am understanding clearly, in your own capacity what you would see as being an ideal sort of...I mean to me they are obviously quite closely linked but will you still see transcendent of race as the ultimate objective?

FERIAL: I tell you what we do, every ninety four we go to schools and we ask kids how they identify themselves. And I think the ideal is where your first identity is South African. Where it's not your racial identity...although that's your racial or ethnic identity, although that's a very important part of healthy growth, to understand themselves in the world, but where your first identity can be I am South African...and I am Black or maybe White, Indian or Coloured because I realize my naivety in thinking we can get out of those boxes is too stupid really. That's people's culture. But to cultivate, I guess, a sense of South Africanism, and a set of shared goals. And, again, a sense that this country will deliver on your aspirations. If you don't have much. And if you are of the middle or upper classes that you'll feel enough solidarity to pay a high tax bill, not get a hell of a lot in return, but feel that you are safe and that you are regarded as an equal citizen.

FIONA: Ok. So that talks of what key features of a non-racial society are; is here anything else you want to add or any other kind of key features?

FERIAL: I guess that's it. Social solidarity, social collusion, aspirations satisfied, fairly distributed wealth...Because, I mean, what does the other side of the picture look like? And this is what I think we risk, is becoming a typical first colonial African society where what we have is an elite, of any colours really, and the rest of Africa is usually Lebanese and indigents, and so we >>>>> have the super elite , those of us that can enclose ourselves from reality and a massive and growing underclass , I think it's a real >>>>>And that underclass is the Malema constituency.

FIONA: I asked you a couple of things. Firstly, what would you say the role of the media is in creating a non-racial society? Or transcending racism?

FERIAL: I think we have to keep...I've done terribly at this. I keep trying to have intelligent race debates, so as not to hide away from the tough questions but also to keep shining the light on what is this philosophy, what does it mean? Keep educating the youngsters who don't know, and then keep, at a higher level ,keep getting clever people to enunciate, to develop the theory of what it might look like in a democracy - I don't think we've ever quite got our heads around that.

FIONA: There is very little written about that. I have been trying to do research and was thinking, "now where is the research?"

FERIAL: It's true. It's not there.

FIONA: There's nothing.

FERIAL: I think we have been so absorbed in state creation that we've forgotten about this pillar that we're supposed to make. Which we are pretty shit at actually.

FIONA: It's kind of unsaid, everyone just wants it to be fine and go away.

FIONA: It's interesting because a lot of the interviewees I have spoken to have said that they really feel one of the key things to do is to create ...to stimulate, debate, and keep it in the public eye, and to keep on talking..but that's the worry that's it's not been happening. So, in many ways, although, unfortunately you are facing it in a personal capacity, it's good that the debates are coming out.

FERIAL: I think we have race debates, but we don't have debates about non-racialism. I really, really wish we had a modern day Steve Biko because black victimology is unbelievable. A sense of still being a victim, of not being empowered, it's scary actually.

FIONA: It's interesting you say that. My husband is a psychologist and he coaches. He's British actually, and he coaches business leaders, and he's a Fillapino anyway so mixed culture, and he struggles very much to understand the psychology of the black leaders, trying to understand why they so desperately need help and why they ask for help but are so defensive about it. For example, one of the leaders of one of the biggest companies, he submitted an invoice for his coaching and the CEO said "I don't have coaches", he's "not coached" and "he is my advisor" and he never called for my husband again even though he had been coaching him for a year. He was very offended that the invoice said "coaching." And, you know, we talk about this a lot, trying to understand. And it talks to me a lot about the insecurity replaced by a need to not be seen as insecure.

FERIAL: It comes straight form my past. I think I've done years of work on myself to get rid of an internalized depression, and that's just lucky that I can because I think it's there...it's there in chips on shoulders, it's there in defensiveness, in still feeling a victim, in not imbibing empowerment.

FIONA: Yes, that's interesting because it talks to more kind of personal issues of how we break down our own stereotypes.

FERIAL: Yes, I think there's a whole lot of work to be done in that sphere.

FIONA: And how do you think, I mean how, just thinking of yourself, what do you think one could do, and thinking of my own self as well, what can one do to sort of break that down? It's not every day you can. Is there anything you do? One of the questions we actually want to ask people is there anything you do as an every day person on a recurrent way to deal with it?

FERIAL: I think that the Democratic movement was immeasurably good at giving us a sense of self...

FIONA: By Democratic movement you mean the...

FERIAL: The ANC really. Giving us a sense of self. A sense of belonging, a sense of power. Of all those things that were by institutional dictates stripped away from you as a human being. But beyond that I think there is such personal work needed because these things, as I have learnt, they come down



FIONA: Again I suppose it comes back to leadership because a few people spring to mind, that are actually religious leaders that are strongly emerging. A most interesting thing has come out of a few other interviews as well- this call to the Church is the >>>>> In the Church there's this move to the Left>>>>

FERIAL: I think the ANC is really >>>>In it's hundred years it's been through epochs of greatness, and poverty of thought and mediocrity...and greatness and poverty of thought ....and I think it's in one of those dips at the moment where it's become >>>>>> in government and to a degree the wind bag faction outside of government. And there's little space for "thinking" and I think it must rethink how it does elections because now it's clear to me that in an era where all we do is roll from one conference to the next that permanent election hearings are pushing it. Fighting.

FIONA: One of the comments that have come up is that political parties, and I suppose you also know about this, you know, just use people who vote, and that there's no sense in following an ideal or an agenda in reality.

FERIAL: I have been following the work of Jacob Dlamini quite a bit and he has written his >>>about what happens in an ANC branch. Really interesting, and all it's about is competition for resources and revenue and >>>> thought.

FIONA: Interesting, and that's obviously filtered down simultaneously.

FERIAL: Yes. But on a kinder note you know, only I know of some ANC leaders, not as many as I used to but the nuts and bolts of running a government, of running a modern state with such a hygienic reputation...it's very, very hard. Like no-one taught me to be an attorney, I always complain about that, no-one taught people to be ministers ...there's no induction to say this is how you deliver water, technically it's tough, it's difficult with the system we have built in local, provincial and national government. So it ain't easy.

FIONA: To go back to the idea of the challenges....where we in a non-racial society, is there anything else you want to add yourself otherwise I have some questions I want to ask you?

FERIAL: Go ahead with your questions.

FIONA : The one is this economic view...well, in the sense that what's come up a lot is that you can't have racial redress...well you can't have a non-racial state if you don't have economic redress first. If you talk with the DA that very strong view that opportunities, well you don't need to focus on the outcomes you know, so the idea of what comes first can happen simultaneously. I don't know if you would agree on that?

FERIAL: What I have very clear in my thinking is that it has to impound equity, it has to happen. It's like the key ingredient of a non-racial state with longevity.

FIONA: So, in your thinking, you argue that you need to focus on redress first, I mean economic empowerment first, before you can focus on non-racialism or ...I ask this because it's obviously related to the question of Affirmative Action.

LENGTHLY SILENCE EXCEPT FOR BACKGROUND DISTORTION

Private chatter

FIONA: I was just about to go back to the difficult question...obviously you've got the different communities where the white community will say that Affirmative Action is alienating and creating racial stress – and in practice it does. I mean I've seen that with a lot of people. Particularly the younger university going generation who feel there's no place for them than here and yet the other argument is "we don't have empowerment and redress" and you can't have non-racialism and people in such poverty. So that's the dilemma.

FERIAL: I think that you have to do them at the same time actually. That it's absolutely essential to create a layer of professionals, and managers and, in other words, a strong black middle class. It's the fundament for me, and we do that through changing the economy and bringing more people into employment. It's the syn-econom for me, the first step...but at the same time, I mean. non-racialism is a constitutional pillar, you can't say "okay, we can just put that bit off until tomorrow", it's leadership. And honestly I think we have allowed the empowered to lead the debate on empowerment. My view is that I don't buy into the notion that there's no place for young whites with skills, not at all, this economy is dying for skills. I think what's happened is that they are just job searching in a normal pool now. Before it was an extremely abnormal pool. There was almost a created space where you would get a job and now the size of...there's many more fish in the same sized sea if you like, bad metaphor, and what they are experiencing is just a normal job market. In a country that has failed to create employment.

FIONA: Yes. It's interesting, what I see ...I've got two younger brothers who are in university and what I see is not the reality, like most of my generation, is not the reality of not getting work, everyone's got work although the jobs are scare and there's a serious shortage...it's the perception of not being seen as part of the country. And it's not my generation but , I'd say, eighteen or nineteen year olds, who feel they are not wanted in the country.

FERIAL: And who sends them that message?

FIONA: I don't know, I mean, I haven't interrogated but that's what I'm trying to understand – why do they get that message and why are people getting that message who came through school with a very clear sense of identity through the Mandela years? And even the Mbeki years, they were very much a part of the country, helped build it and are now feeling so inundated...I don't know.

FERIAL: I don't understand that.

FIONA: Do you think that maybe the ANC Youth League is something that's playing into...



FERIAL: Probably the national rhetoric. If I look at the commentators on online websites, the ID that seems to be disempowered and the deep racial rhetoric, not only of the Youth League but the journalese, is...I can understand why that can be.

FIONA: And obviously this is something I have been wondering about as well...I'm trying to understand why this is playing out like that. To me that is very distressing. Because along with fellowization on university campuses when even I was at university, I mean that's what I see.

FERIAL : Really.

FIONA: And that does, it does distress me. Because it doesn't make sense. So the next question I want to ask is around cultural and social differences.? We have spoken about this, and you did say that you realize those kind of differences are quite inherent and important. Again, going back, how important do you think they are and how do you think you can you overcome people's sense of being different? Do you have a view on that?

FERIAL: I've come round to the view that diversity is a good thing. There's a richness to it and again I saw it during the World Cup when people were just like amazed at all these different Africans. And that we need to build ways to appreciate the differences in culture...and the similarities. Numerous studies show there are things that cut across the South African psyche. We are "chatterig" people – we speak up – we are generous to a fault, in fact the poorest people give the most, kind of fun loving, everybody drinks a lot, badly, sadly.

FIONA: So, building on those similarities, we should be aware of them. The reason I am asking, we'll stick to practical things, not in theory....I just want to also go back and ask you about business. Do you think big business has a role to play and if so how would you....

FERIA: I have spoken and written a lot about this, I think business got very scared in the Mbeki era because he used to Mau Mau them, like when RMB tried to run an anti-crime campaign, when Attorney Dreyer spoke out growing political risk – they were really cut at the knees. And then I saw them retract into a cocoon and move away from their positive role they had crafted in making a social compact in the years just before power changed. And now they are finding their voice again but it is not that voice, it is a far more oppositional, nationalization's dervil for the country. You're got have clear investment rules, so it's not an invested voice, it's like an oppositional voice, they're finding. But I know there are good business leaders like Bobby Kotze, like Beki Sibiya, who are very committed to social compact tax solutions.

FIONA: And do you see...I mean it's interesting...because I haven't made a draft for this to come up but I think it's a very apt one...and it does resonate with the >>> act, with the sense of investment in the sense that you have to have a successful country to have a successful business. That's my understanding.

FERIAL: Much more in those days.

FIONA: It is all cocooned now. Do you see business...I am asking this moving forward...do you see that big business will start to become more outspoken, and whether, what more role can they play now or is it too late now, is there too much of a sense of, particularly..

FERIAL: Not at all, not at all. I think big business has to be shown the place at the table, be shown by government that it sees it as a stake holder. But I think equally on the other side, and sometimes fairly, that government has lost faith in businesses commitment. Every year when the employment equity stats come out, when the equity stats come out, when the scorecard timetables are not adhered to, when there are low levels of investment and high levels of profit taking, then you can see that even people like Trevor Manuel and Pravin Gordon going "But then what the hell else must we do to encourage your confidence?" And I think it was Manuel that once said to me, in an interview, "I don't know what to do now" and I think what we are seeing in Zuma is like, you know "Bugger you, the State will lead. The State will lead the economy."

FIONA: The overall picture I am picking up is one really of, sorry, I am just trying to make sure I understand you correctly, of a time in the early nineties, it was very not late nineties, ninety four or so, when they tried to make three nations and then over the years it just slipped, and never really reached... the bond has really kind of slowed down.

FERIAL: Oh I think the golden period was when the country was growing with all that social mobility and that only stopped two years ago.

FIONA: Do you think it's tied in a lot to the Global recession?

FERIAL: The >>>> lost a million jobs.

FIONA: Is it linked to the same thing? We need to have people in economic debate?

FERIAL: And that's why I think Malema's message is so powerful. It's because we have got political freedom but not economic freedom. We are in power..we are in office but not in power. And that resonates.

FIONA: Yes. Because the pressure is, what kind of future...suffocate, he invilleges it. Where do you go? My colleague is actually interviewing him right now, so I am curious to see what her take is. Or if actually there is an honest perspective. One of my last questions is xenophobia. Do you think xenophobia plays into the race debate? Into the idea of non-racialism? Or do you see it as a separate issue?

FERIAL: I see them as totally separate issues. Maybe I am naïve, but I do.

FIONA: You know I was wondering.

FERIAL: I do.

FIONA: Can I ask you why you say that? Because a lot of people, a lot of interviewers have said that xenophobia and racism are similar problems in the country. So how do you see them separate?

FERIAL: I think perhaps it's linked to an Apartheid ideology. If you felt yourself to be othered and marginalized and excluded, again the psychology of that is that you will do that to others who you perceive to be less powerful than you are, or try to share your already meager resources. I think it's just a continuing of racial patterns, of thinking, that continue but more...we've done a lot of work at City Press on attempts to get rid of foreign shop owners and there what you really see coming through is that this was our moment for empowerment, finally we were supposed to start owning businesses and getting on our feet and surviving and then these foreigners from Somalia and Pakistan and Bangladesh come and they know how to operate business better than us and they sell cheaper than us and now they must get out.

FIONA: It's not a race issue, but rather an economic issue.

FERIAL: And it's the other. I think you see these people as less than you are.

FIONA: And my last two questions...the one you don't have to answer... but I'll just ask because we are trying not to just speak to leaders but trying to understand leaders as people. So, is there anything in your day to day life, it doesn't have to be everyday, but that happens on an ongoing basis, that you feel that personally helps you with your values and aspirations? That you do to try and break down stereotypes. Or say for example that >>>>>>only lived in express suburbs, I was upset, you know, they've put people through school and that kind of thing you know, so is there anything? Just so we can have a little meat on the bone sort of theory?

FERIAL: I really try and see people first, and not race. I have friends across the spectrum. I put kids through school. Just practically you know. I have seen it as kind of my life's duty to showcase black women and youth leadership so wherever I've worked I've done projects that find standard, gives them platform, quotes them, gives them space to write, because I think I was lucky enough to be empowered in that way so I try and pass it on. Pay it forward that way.

FIONA: Do you in your role, again I'm contrasting that with the DA which says that they are strongly for the idea of creating opportunities, so their view for...I spoke to her recently, the young leaders program for example, Ziller's argument is that they take, they find, talented and passionate young women, you know, straight out of school or university, and then help build them into great leaders. She said that you don't try and find great leaders, you are women, and then put them in...you know....To her it's all about creating opportunity. And is that something that happens in your own work environment? Because I see you said you find talented people and then give them space, but are there any sort of empowerment programs, you know, in the media?

FERIAL: Everywhere..Every single media house has got internship programs. I try and move to break down the glass ceilings for other women in media, so try and create teams that are generally non-racial and when I describe it to our people, a team that is generally non-racial is one that reflects the demographics of the country so we create a team like that. I think that's where you get a healthy debate and a diversity going and learning from each other can be pretty tough at times, I can tell you. What else? Mentoring people, setting up systems and mentorship? I just start messaging in some of the ways I was messaged as a young journalist growing up ..."You're almost there, but you're not quite there yet.

You need to be trained. You need to be..." Throw people in the deep end, give them skills and see, okay, here's how they do and this is what they need. It's not to feel that black people are perpetual trainees and mentees, it's trust. Because that's what I've been asked.

FIONA: I'll ask my last question and then let you go as this has taken a long time. The Kathrada Foundation and their work in building a non-racial South Africa...what do you think? Do you have any views on what they should be doing?

FERIAL: I think they're doing it well. I think they are the only Foundation solely dedicated to the non-racial project. And you speak to any of our leaders in the ANC and elsewhere and they will tell you that this is the biggest need but because everybody is so absorbed in the technical nature of creating this state I think it's important to have a think tank that is so focused. And so real world, because I love David presenting some of the research he has done, and it's some really cool stuff. Michelle was supposed to phone and tell me about it, I must remind her.

FIONA: I think they've got a conference in October. That will be the same thing. Ours is much of a component of theirs but hopefully we'll tie up here. Well, it's great to get that positive feedback. And is there anything that you think they could do in terms of working with the media? Or anything that would be useful?

FERIAL: I think they're pretty cool. We keep a constant engagement, and share in the research because often I find there's such wonderful social research being done and it's not being aired. We're a pretty stretched and not very bright bunch of people. These things need to be brought to us.

FIONA: Ok, that's great, thank you very much. Thanks for your time.

FERIAL. Okay cool.

FIONA: And good luck in the next few weeks and in the next days.

FERIAL: Thank you.