

[Derek Hanekom Interview](#)

DH: Derek Hanekom

FW: Fiona White

DH: I'm largely thinking aloud here, I haven't really thought much about what you are interviewing me on.

FW: You don't need to research for this, it's intrinsic. Do you want to know a bit about this project? The Katharada Foundation is doing a small study, talking to approximately 30 leaders in South Africa, on their view on non-racialism. Our study is really trying to understand how influential South Africans understand non-racialism, and really trying to understand a way forward. A lot of the research will fall into the foundation's future plans. So really it's something, not something you have to have prepared for, it's more a sense of what you personally feel, based on your own experiences. So I'm not going to go too much into the history, because we have a lot of background and I'd like to use the time to focus on the here and now. So just to ask you, what are your understanding of the historical roots of non-racialism, and then what does the ideal non-racial society look like? I mean when they were talking about the Freedom Charter, what were they envisaging?

DH: Ok, well I'm going to bypass the first part of your question because you can research that. That's well documented. Let's rather talk about the second part of your question, what kind of non racial society was envisaged. Right, the people who can really tell you were the people who coined the phrases and put it in the freedom charter, so the people of the 50s would be able to tell you, the Katharada's and what not would be able to tell you, what was their thinking when the Freedom Charter was drawn up, when the congress alliance was developed, they all committed themselves to non-racialism and saw a certain pathway towards non-racialism. But 20 years later, when our generation, my generation became active in the 70s, things came to a head in many respects, the ANC was banned, there was a mass banning in 77 of organisations, at the same time there was a resurgence of political resistance, and it wasn't particular aided by the 76 uprisings, it wasn't under the careful guidance of the ANC, it's popular expression as not the fight for non-racialism. The issues that came to the surface were around education, but it was really a fight for justice, for all forms of social justice. And I mean underlying that was the anger and frustration of young people, with the massacre and the putting down of that popular resistance in the townships, many then decided to join the liberation movements because they just wanted to fight. They wanted to become freedom fighters, so some joined the PAC, sometimes it was pure chance about who met you first.

It's not like there was a serious political education that was accompanying these spontaneous popular uprisings, there was the influence of Steve Biko, of black consciousness. The dominant theme at the time could hardly have been said to have been non-racialism. It evolved subsequently to something more, so many UDF leaders had a black consciousness background but they became the champions of a fight for non-racialism, embracing a more sophisticated ideology. A lot of the hard work in a developing political consciousness happened in military camps outside of the country, there were people who spent a lot of time with people in camps in Angola and elsewhere, and they, you can read dozens of stories of

people explaining how their thinking changed when they were exposed to political education. Meanwhile movements were developing in South Africa, the trade union movement, debates within the trade union movement, the reorganization of many organisations which eventually found their way under the umbrella organisation of the UDF, all embracing pretty much the Freedom Charter, and not necessarily explicitly, but aligning themselves and accepting the leadership of the ANC.

How do we come into it, let's say myself and Trish my wife? We get active in the late 70s, the first time we were arrested was in 77, but for whites there wasn't much in the late 70s until organisations got reestablished in the early 80s. The only real meeting point of white activists was at universities and organisations like the young Christian students, there wasn't yet the developing movement towards resisting transcription, for example, there was black sash but they were small. All of this kind of mushrooming of organisations happened in the 80s, so in the 70s essentially you found your little space to identify with organisations who were opposing apartheid. We organized a kind of a demonstration in 77 in John Voster square, and it was just a loose grouping of people, mostly white people expressing solidarity with people who were in detention. Just a few years later, all the people who were involved in those kinds of demonstrations were affiliated with different organisations. We decided to join the ANC, obviously it had to be underground. What underpinned it for people who are not African if you like, is a common rejection of racial oppression, and for the left, you'd have organisations like black sash that stood up for the basic elements of justice, in particular fighting against racial oppression.

I think most of the younger white left were influenced by socialist writings and socialist ideals, and so would have regarded themselves as socialists. The point is that the fight was for much more than just ending apartheid. None the less what was emerging was a notion which has been the position of the SACP and the ANC, that central to it, whatever the minimum was to end all forms of racial oppression and create firstly a society where people would not be discriminated against on the basis of race, and beyond that, socialism or a society of much greater equality, however much it expressed itself, but a society for a more profound and deeper pervasive justice, ending all forms of exploitation. That's still on the agenda, and interestingly it's actually resurfacing now that apartheid has ended, democratic government was installed, even the voices of people like Julius Malema are for economic freedom, I mean on e can question what is meant by that kind of economic freedom, but popular dissatisfaction now is around life experience, you know being poor no services. And there is kind of a link to race and poverty, race and resource allocation, but the fight is more about the fight against poverty, unemployment, and these are words used in the alliance now, that we've got to measure what we do against achieving those objectives.

The danger of it, well not danger, it's correct, is that whereas prior to democratization, the first step being the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist society, the end of apartheid, knowing that these would be the first steps in the creation of a more equal idea society. I know your project is on non-racialism, but the central vision of the ANC is really centred on a single statement, which talks about a non-racial, non-sexist society. So now there is a lack of reflection, that non-racialism and the end of all forms of sexism has been achieved, or whether it hasn't, and application of mind as to what needs to be done along with a number of other things, to achieve a genuinely non-racial, non-sexist country. Interestingly, I think this year in 2011, there has been a bit of a shift towards to it, and what the things are that have helped to

capitalize it, we can get back to later. Let's assume bottom line is that while we need to address all of the issues that impact negatively on people's lives, on social justice, it means fighting crime more effectively, combating corruption, ensuring better governance and better services, it means things like economic growth so there is more investment and more jobs. But while those big tasks confront us, underneath that and not too separate from it, if we put meaning into the notion of working together for change, the notion implies that people of all races, all cultural backgrounds are working together for change, well it would certainly imply a change from where we come from, to a better vision. And that mustn't be forgotten, the working together component. The struggle for non-racialism wasn't just saying look, this is our vision, let's struggle for it, a lot of emphasis was on the non-racial character of the struggle. So the way you conduct yourself, organise yourself, although there might be realities that shape your organisation. And so the ANC took a decision to no longer exclude white people from its leadership. So the African National Congress became then a non-racial party, it became the party that represented all those entities struggling for non-racial democracy. And hence the UDF tacitly if not openly, aligning itself under the leadership of the then exiled and imprisoned ANC. So Nelson Mandela became the figure, the leadership figure, of all of those structures.

FW: So how would you see the ANC today as understanding the ideals of non-racialism?

DH: Where now? I mean let's just take one little step back to the 1990 to 1994 period, with the unbanning of the ANC and the establishment of ANC branches and disestablishment of the UDF structures, the many organisations that worked in different areas, geographical areas and civic organisations in townships, sometimes in sectors and religious sectors, they dissolved. And the more geographically based organisations, let's say Jodac, and Cape Democrats, they all dissolved. And white people, colored people, African people and Indian people, I'll concentrate a bit on whites. Well if I start off with the Indian population, part of our discourse has to be re-examining the terminology we use, what we mean by black and African, because there isn't a common sense. But we can get back to that in a minute, because these things have historical origins, historical roots.

The ANC was unbanned in 1990, and you have an ANC branch in Lenasia, and it was almost 100% Indian. The ANC branches in white suburbs, not so. They didn't come close to being 100% white, clearly as opposed to Lenasia, in those white suburbs where there was likely to be a reasonably strong ANC branch, they were not exclusively white, and a lot of the membership would be black people who were living there for a long time, such as domestic workers. So in that period, 1990 to 1994, far larger numbers of whites were involved in the ANC, these were the white democrats for whom there was room in the ANC. The bulk of the white people, however did not join the ANC, we know that. Today there is a lot of disillusionment, so I would say post 1994, that period of great excitement has declined. There has been some decline in the racial mix of the ANC. So including the prominent white activists, who remain, who have certainly not become right wing, but for home the ANC no longer represents the home that it has in the past. So the ANC, putting aside for the moment its vision, the composition of the ANC starts changing. So the, kind of almost, and fluid, a lot of new people who were not historically the activists joined the ANC, people who were part of other parties, prominent National Party members were in the ANC. But in particular, those who were historically on the left became disillusioned.

FW: And how do you think it has affected the ANC as a party, their approach to the ideals of non-racialism?

DH: I think there was never any change in ANC policy, policies have always been confirmed and have remained pretty much the same. So it's not like the ANC has done an about-turn in its policy and what it stands for, however we find ourselves, the ANC in government. In a situation where a lot of people are trying to become economically empowered, if you like, the growing black middle class which is fantastic, growing black professional class, far too slow because educational growth has been far too slow. But nonetheless, growth of a black middle class, numbers of people changing dramatically in the public sector, black economic empowerment and the emergence of many many smaller black companies, as a result of differential procurement and BEE policies.

But then the scramble starts happening, because not everybody gets it and everybody wants it. And especially when the economy, the level of unemployment is extraordinarily high, and the bulk of the unemployed being African. Watching some of their friends and relatives get rapidly rich, resentment and possibly an ethos developing of when's our turn? So a lot of the activity of the ANC, you now have an elected government official, pressure on them, what temptation is in front of them, not all but many become corrupted by it, many starting to accept bribes, and the ethos changes. Then the character of the ANC is affected, because the ANC is the route to becoming a councilor, there is no other route as long as the ANC is overwhelmingly in power. And that in itself is a job, but it goes beyond that, there is a struggle about who should become the councilor. So these are situations which have happened, probably the absence of strong leadership, strong organizational guidance have allowed that to happen as well, and bad examples from senior leaders have helped that happen. So the ANC does change its character, if not it's policy necessarily. And at least, because of experience the emergence of anger and resentment is always there, until you've achieved a genuine non-racial country, the flare ups are always possible, whether it's whites trying to retain their privilege, trying to cling to what they had, resurfacing in racial experiences. People rushing down to the Eastern Cape as soon as a white person shoots a black person, you know Malema rushing down there saying this is racist. When constantly white people are being killed on farms, you know, that doesn't help to infuse and encourage a change of attitude. So unless you can stabilize that situation, the potential for flare-ups is always there. The way you manage it politically becomes crucial, which more or less brings me to some of the more positive recent developments, but baring in mind it's always fragile.

If you look at what is happening in the colored population, for example, in the Western Cape, often being used as voting fodder. If you go back to 1994, for example, the fear of what they didn't know, that was the De Klerk strategy – he spoke Afrikaans, he spoke to them. So the reality in townships where black people are racist towards other race groups, you know Indian, colored. So in the colored townships, words like kaffir are being used, probably more even than in the right wing white suburbs. And in the years that followed, it changed, many more colored people joined the ANC but in the last few years there has been a move away. This growing feeling of before I wasn't white enough and now I'm not black enough. So this search for identity among colored people is a current day reality, you know wanting to assert one's identity in a confused South African, where identity has not yet come to the point of just being South African, of different shades of color. It still matters today, so that's the reality.

But it comes to the surface, little things. You have someone like Malema making threatening noises, he is president of the youth league, the question is, is this the ANC's position. The equality court hearing earlier this year, I think was quite an important event because on the one hand, kind of defending something that may have been indefensible, the right to continue singing these songs that were racially defensive. The other side of it though is to use it as a political opportunity, to ask as the ANC if they were building togetherness. The need to assert that this is the history we come from, these songs are symbolic, they are resistance songs, they are not targeted at whites, they are targeted at greater oppression. But then also the fact that the fears of people don't disappear unless we help, unless there are strong feelings of reassurance. And it would be an interesting bit of research, to search that word non-racialism in speeches in the course of this year compared to the last few years, and I think that word appears much more frequently now.

FW: So you are saying that in fact the equality trial is really letting the ANC become more aware of fostering a non-racial approach?

DH: Yes, that's true. I think if the ANC's voice comes out a bit more loudly, knowing that there is the reality of polarization and the resurgence of the vision of the ANC. But it doesn't happen in isolation, the role of organisations like the Katharada foundation and voices that are largely prompted by people who have been viewing developments with deep concern, these voices become very important and assert themselves more strongly. And then the leadership says but we have to talk to this. I think that people like, various people, Cyril Ramaphosa, addressing, delivering important key note addresses with the focus on non-racialism, that more of that has been happening. So it has found its way more back into the ANC discourse. But the onus remains on all of us to ensure that it remains there constantly.

FW: Yes, but my flipside to that is my sense of what the general public is seeing about the ANC is the Malema type approach, which some see as African Nationalism, so how does the ANC balance that, when that is the way the ANC is being portrayed in the media.

DH: Yes, it's a very important question, because while I may be trying to put a positive spin on it, the other side of it, bearing in mind that I spoke about the fragility, the other side with Malema and the statements that are made, if you look at the composition of the youth league, there are no people of other races. It doesn't resonate with non-African sectors of society, it turns them off the ANC as a whole. And even recent statements by Malema, and I've got to be careful about being quoted about saying anything in response to those statements, maybe his term will come behind bars. He says he is not afraid of it, but he's really shit scared of it. So I've got to be careful because I am the chairperson of the ANC disciplinary committee. And he did appear in front of us before, but the case was so weak, you know. So the question is, is the leadership of the ANC prepared to act against people like Malema. He is challenging, and the reason I can't publicly, I publicly reacted to a statement he made, that can't reflect on me as the chairperson, should he appear in front of us again.

FW: SO that is interesting that there is an internal battle between the youth league and the ANC. This kind of tension, because a Malema figure is an example of polarizing society, and that's deeply troubling after 17 years of trying not to polarize.

DH: It means we are kind of at a crossroad period. And the political role to confront and say kind of this is not us, that needs to express itself. And we are having an important conference coming up at the end of next year, and it is going to be a crossroad, you know. Is it going to be people who mainly support Malema, or people who do not? Is it going to be the old ANC values coming through, or kind of a new ANC who is supporting a new form of Populism? That is the challenge. So we are living in a very interesting period in the life of the ANC. I think the way we conduct ourselves, the way we do the centenary celebrations, whether we again try to unite the country behind an African National Congress that stood to free our country from oppression, and that becomes celebrated. Its going in the right direction, so far very much. But these are very testing moments.

FW: What do you see as the key features of a non-racial society? And then we are going to talk to the key challenges, those are the two elements.

DH: Well you know a key feature is to, and a lot of very proactive measures have to be introduced and that's part of how we get there, because it's very difficult to achieve racial equality where race doesn't matter, where the racial disparities are so glaring. So you can't just focus on social cohesion, but not doing other things together, it doesn't work. So that is why some principle of affirmative action is correct, but the difficulty is in how you do it. Like land reform, for example, is one of the most glaring means of racial disparity, but grab people's land and force the issue, that will not be achieving non-racialism.

So non-racialism, has to be a society where there is a new common identity with full recognition of what are important to people, cultural diversity, language, but at the same time, the challenge is nurturing and respecting multiplicity of forms of identity within the context of a common identity, you know we are South Africans. So that South Africans, and that, it doesn't just happen. It's got to be nurtured, guided, you've got to have symbols to help guide it, we were lucky to have a symbol like Nelson Mandela who is loved by everybody. It's not often that a leader of the oppressed becomes the hero that unites the nation, it's a very unusual thing and it's also a great thing in our favour. But it's not just a single figure – it's all sorts of people who are prominent, and the fact that we had a liberation movement where there were also prominent people who were non-African, you know Joe Slovo and Kathy. But it also has to be a case where race has to be what it really is, a spurious concept, as some say it is a social construct. Are you defined by being a woman, are you Catholic or Jewish or Muslim. If you were, what will it matter that your skin is a bit lighter than someone else's skin? Biologically it is an absolute nonsense, but you have to get to the point where it is socially a nonsense as well. But we all have to part of breaking down the myth of differences based on skin. But there are all sorts of differences that are not negative, they need not be negative. At the moment, the problems is differences that are so superficial, you know based on the color of your skin. You need to get that, an explosion of challenging the myth of differences based on color of skin.

FW: Yes, as someone white in a predominantly black organisation, how do you face the challenges you face?

DH: Well, a few things. One is that you have to address the racial disparities, in any event we have to face the problem of massive inequality, we've got to narrow that gap. That already says we don't just have black people at the bottom of the pile, and the second thing is I think a little bit of positive social engineering. I mean some things are that schools have been opening, you know when a young black girl is walking with a young white man, walking home from school, it's still rare but every time I see it I just think oh that's fantastic. Things like creation of, at a school level, targeting younger people, of school residences that are by policy racially mixed, it means that you can't just pretend race doesn't exist. And that is the paradox, that in order to achieve non-racialism you have to recognize that differences based on race are real. I think creating residence at an early age, where all races are, at school level, ideally starting from Grade One. The more, you've got to almost enforce a situation where friendships can develop. By the time it happens at university it is just too late. But schools, you see it still together, you see that kids will still gravitate together, and most black people in our country go to school in townships where there is not a single white person. So if you can create more situations, well let me leave it at that, so it's a possible thing. But the problem is that the people who are described as Model C's or born frees, or vanillas, a bit disparagingly sometimes, are normally the product of richer black parents. But you have to create situations where there is a deliberate policy of racial mixing, absolutely equal terms, whereas everyone enters the school say on a bursary. There is elitism, but state-constructed elitism within it. And building a leadership of non-racialism. The pressure is to provide better education for everybody, so it is a problem, but there is a concept that allows for special schools, which could perhaps focus on for example maths and science, where people who go those schools, if you arrive at the classroom from a poor family, if you arrive hungry then you are not in that school on equal terms, you do not have the same opportunity to excel. But if you are put into a residence, based not on the ability to pay, there you are the daughter of a domestic worker, you've worked hard and it's all free, special focus, all kids have equal opportunity, you don't go home to a house where there is no opportunity.

FW: That's great, actually because we also wanted to go into what are the more practical changes that can be made to achieve this and that is a very interesting idea.

DH: And you said what needs to be done? I think the vision is where people no longer define themselves by race. In many societies, prominent black leaders and politicians have said that publicly, that they do not want to be defined by the color of their skin. So our vision has to be one where people are not defined by the color of their skins, but in order to achieve that various proactive things need to be done.

Language is a very important thing, because language is not just an accident, I speak English because my parents were English, and people speak a language because by accident they were born into it. The importance of everybody speaking one language, if you are going to have a united South Africa, bearing in mind that the country must be united, that is the way in which many of our other African countries have a big advantage. So we could possibly do it differently, not simply losing our 11 official languages. But I mean in Mozambique, people all speak Portuguese. In Zimbabwe, people speak much better English than we go here, and I mean there are a lot of languages spoken there too. And in the DRC, people speak French. And we have to get to the point where people can communicate with each other. So it's a myth that it is just the black white divide, certain African languages don't speak to other African languages. We've got to have a common language.

FW: Just two more questions. I mean obviously any form that you fill in in this country, you have to fill in your race. And you mentioned that earlier, how, I'm just wondering, we have had a lot of respondents, a surprising number of people from all races, have said that we are tired to have to tick boxes about our race.

DH: Yes, I think it's one of the toughest nuts to crack, as we do have to reach a point where there is no more definition of race. But as I also said, there are historical disparities that need to be addressed, and how can you target that redress without knowing race? So I do think that it needs to be debated, interestingly Mbeki was often accused of being an Africanist, his I am an African speech is a beautiful speech, but it says that I am an African but I am the son of the Khoisan and we are all African. But it's very interesting how people like the Freedom Front even latched on to this, yes I am African. So one might very, this, it needs to be debated. It was debated a bit at the time, the need to continue in job applications to say I am Indian, colored, white or black, needs to be re-examined, but the question remains how do you achieve the equity that is require by legislation, if you don't at least recognize. If we say well that's gone, I'm South African. You have a right, by the way to identify yourself they way you want to. People can refuse to fill that in. So if you don't want to define yourself as Indian, no one can force you to say that you are an Indian. So let's say that your mother was white and your grandmother was white and you say that you were white, who would dare challenge you? But the problem is that how do we achieve employment equity, or I could easily say we are all Africans, who cares. But nobody can challenge you legally by saying that you are African. Any kind of identity is self-defined.

FW: My last question now, essentially just to paraphrase, the kind of challenge we are aiming towards is achieving equality, economic equality, and would you say that that has to come before achieving non-racialism?

DH: No, they have to come together. They have to come simultaneously. I mean the equality needs to be achieved, I mean in the sense that there are huge inequalities that we have in the moment, need to be narrowed. A huge number of people at the bottom of the pile are colored. It's really poverty and inequality that are the two twin evils, you have to eradicate poverty, and to eradicate that I would argue that there has to be redistribution. And in narrowing the gap, the biggest beneficiary will be in the African people, because in terms of numbers they are the poorest people. It's not about one happening before the other, as it happens, even that gives you an opportunity to focus on all people who are poor, unemployed. Even in closing that gap, the emphasis is not achieving racial parity, but it is the voices that are much more non-racial, for example COSATU, Cosatu very seldom talks about the racial disparity. They talk about low wages, bad working conditions, poor wages, and their members are black and white members. And very seldom you know you hear them talking about you know opposing the racial divide. It's shrouded in unpolarising terms.

FW: It would be interesting to find out if you joined COSATU if you had to tick a box to say what race you are?

DH: No absolutely not. You know what would be very interesting, because it is a tough nut to crack, because in order to achieve employment equity, we know that most employers these days are white. So

it almost like uncomfortable legislation, uncomfortable requirements to follow. So those kind of things really need to be in the discourse, there should be another category saying other.

FW: What's interesting is that, one might assume, or I would assume that it would be a white concern, that you didn't want to put your race down. But it seems to be across races, so that was interesting to me.

DH: But these things are linked to each other, once you have obtained sufficient equity it becomes redundant. Because we are, in fact, people are trying proactively, because that employment equity and gender equity stuff is still there, it goes both ways. I mean every department is concerned if the top 5 management positions are all men, so the next vacancy let's try find a woman. It's not all bad. So I don't have a simple answer for that.

FW: And the last last question, is what role you think the foundation can play?

DH: well precisely that, the constant mentioning of non-racialism, the debating it, the raising of a public understanding of it, through debate, through exchange of ideas, but keeping it on the agenda. Knowing that it is complicated, there are no easy answers, but keeping it alive. And I think that is the most important part. The other part, which speaks to it, is memory, celebrating the life of people like Katharada and others, because they are the initiators of it, they are the living examples of it, they are celebrating the role of all races in the struggle of all races.

FW: And just to round it off, do you think there is anything in more practical terms that can be done, maybe working in communities?

DH: Yes I think that you know not just having one annual lecture, but actually going out to universities and having lectures on campuses and beyond, I think if one treats it as an important project and campaign that is going to require resources and it's going to require people that pledge their commitment to, including myself, to be the champions in their area of influence. If we are going to get to the point where we can have that going out to communities, that lecture, it is going to require a lot of resources but I think it should work towards that, where you use that opportunity. I think political leaders should be engaged with, you should be asking Helen Zille, and others, it's very important on what is your vision, what are you doing to promote, because they tend to. I mean we have spoken critically about the ANC in this interview, but to speak critically about the DA, their campaign has been to attack the ANC as being a threat to non-racialism, while they themselves are more non-racial, and there may indeed be some truth to it, but what are they doing pro-actively? But at the end of the day, I mean the Katharada Foundation might have its' roots based on the freedom charter, on the struggles for non-racialism, might be predominantly ANC in its character, it has to go beyond that. It has to be a project that says that we want to mobilize for a shared view of non-racialism. But to get there, the Katharada Foundation itself needs to have a very strong view of non-racialism, what it means by it, what it can get done. And then it can mobilize everyone who shares that common vision.

FW: Yes, I think that is what this whole project is about, but unfortunately it is very difficult to define non-racialism. Thank you very much, I appreciate all your time.

