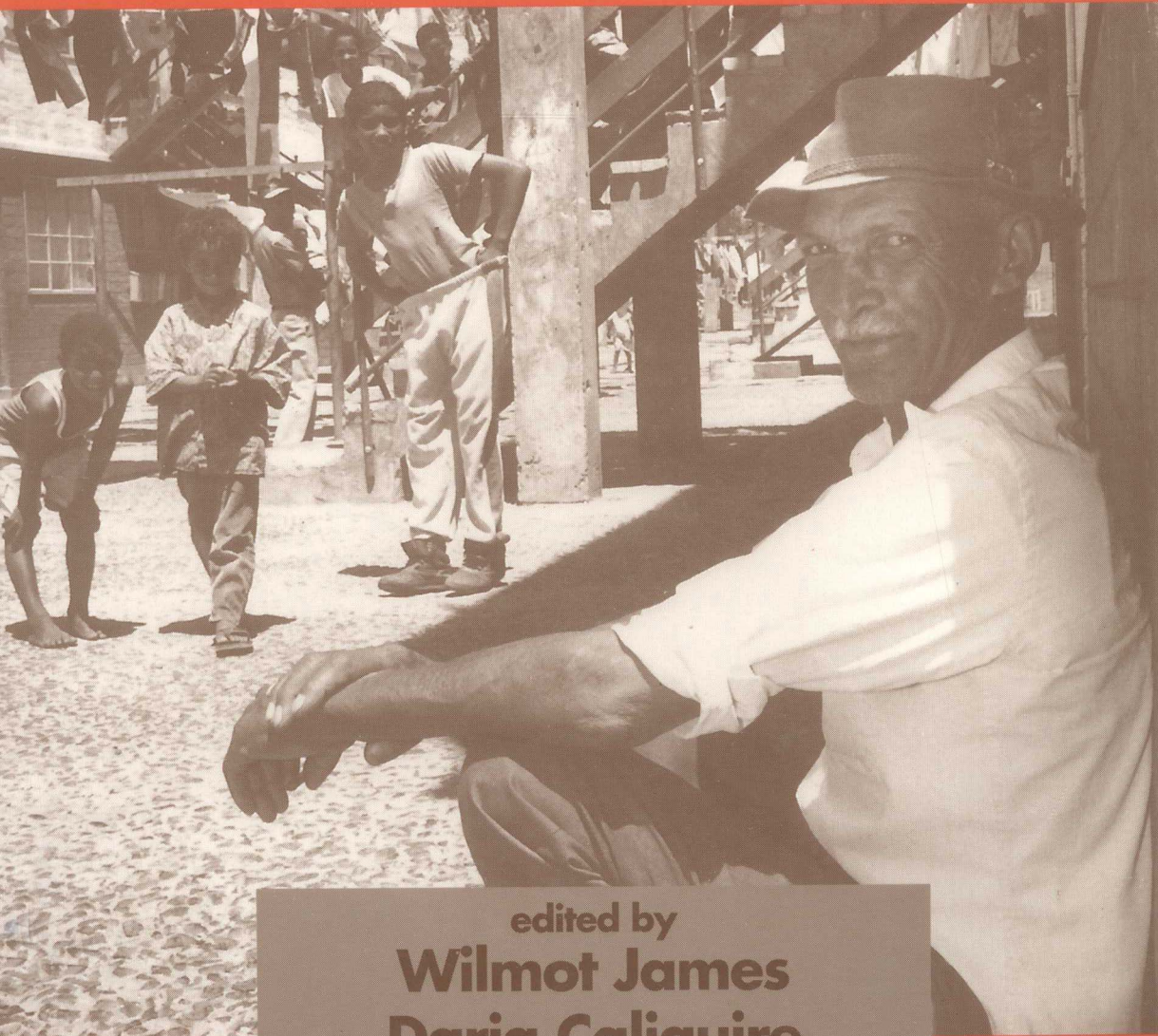


# Now That We Are Free

**Coloured Communities in a  
Democratic South Africa**



edited by  
**Wilmot James  
Daria Caliguire  
Kerry Cullinan**

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**edited by  
Wilmot James, Daria Caliguire, and Kerry Cullinan**

**assisted by  
Janet Levy and Shauna Westcott**



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# **Now That We Are Free**



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# Introduction

**Wilmot James**

Executive Director  
Institute for Democracy in South Africa

**Daria Caliguire**

Researcher  
Institute for Democracy in South Africa

In August 1995, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) held a conference entitled "National Unity and the Politics of Diversity: The Case of the Western Cape". The title reveals a number of concerns Idasa had about the participation of the people of the Western Cape, particularly the coloured communities, in the nation-building project launched by the government of national unity after the elections of April 1994.

This is not to say that other communities in South Africa – for example, people of Indian or Venda origin – do not show similar features of marginalisation from the nation-building project. Marginality is not necessarily imbued with an ethnic quality at every turn: sectors of rural and urban South Africa across the racial and ethnic spectrum feel distant from the political centre that drives the nation-building project.

But, in tackling the topic, Idasa had to start somewhere and thus chose the Western Cape, with the focus on the coloured communities. In preparation for the conference we ran four community-based workshops in urban and rural Western Cape. In the process we encountered on a regular basis cynicism, scepticism and doubt about the benefits brought by our new democracy. Grievances ranged from feeling left out, being dealt poor treatment and being bumped out of the queue for anticipated state benefits.

The conference was designed as a space and an opportunity to voice and to hear the many varied political expressions of grievance, to get a better grasp of the issues residing behind some of the racial tensions in the province, and to begin to define some answers to problems raised. This book is an edited collection of the proceedings. All the papers, save that of Yunus Carrim, were presented in one form or another at the conference.

Participants to the conference had the considerable honour of an opening address by President Nelson Mandela. His speech is reproduced here as the first chapter in the section outlining



the context in which the conference took place. The president's presence indicated his concern and interest in the affairs of the Western Cape, particularly the disaffection in some coloured communities and misperceptions about what his government is trying to accomplish. We were gratified by his remarks.

On the basis of the four community workshops and one research workshop, we commissioned Mark Kaplan of Intermedia to produce a video to capture the areas of racial conflict that have emerged since the 1994 elections, as well as the views of some critical personalities in the debate. The video, entitled "Now That We are Free", was shown at the conference as a somewhat rude introduction to the scope of problems in the Western Cape and the potential for conflict if matters remain unresolved. In the second chapter, Daria Caliguire reflects on the thematic issues raised by the workshops and the video and allow the voices of the communities to filter through as a scene-setter for the chapters that follow.

The third chapter also aims to provide a context for the analysis in subsequent sections, by addressing the burning issue of gangsterism in the Cape Flats. This is a particular pathology, due in part to the legacy of apartheid, which threatens the social fabric of coloured communities in this time of transition. Irvin Kinnes re-frames traditional thinking on the problem of gangsterism in a way that facilitates broad, community-based solutions.

The second section provides a spread of interpretations of the coloured vote in the country's first democratic elections. The various contributions by Brian Williams, Jeremy Seekings and Wilmot James provide readings of the election outcome that differ from the conventional wisdom which maintains that the coloured vote was a racial census of sorts. Yunus Carrim's chapter was not presented at the conference, but is included in the book because of his interesting comparisons between the Indian vote and the coloured vote as distinct cases of "minority" electoral participation in the elections.

The third section deals with identity questions. During the conference proceedings, coloured communities' search for identity emerged as a critical step in a larger process of carving out political space for participation. Ebrahim Rasool, Peter Marais and Julian Sonn examine the construction of identity in racial terms, specifically with reference to the coloured people, and its implications for the creation of a non-racial society and state.

The fourth section considers affirmative action and equity. In an attempt to understand rising tensions between some segments of coloured and African communities in the Western Cape, affirmative action as a means for achieving equity is examined within a framework that recognises the historical linkages between race and access to resources in this country. Howard Gabriels, Mamphela Ramphela and Philip Black and Valerie Flanagan recontextualise affirmative action with respect to public and private sector notions of the policy and how these translate into practice.

The fifth section revisits the concept of non-racialism as an approach to politics. Although the concept is initially examined with reference to the coloured communities of the Western Cape, the analysis soon transcends any regional specificity to speak with greater relevance to the overarching national question: in a society of divided communities, what does it mean to construct a national identity? Furthermore, how can the individual interests of distinct racial or ethnic communities be served without endangering the broader enterprise of creating and managing national unity? The contributions by Hermann Giliomee, Barbara Masekela and Neville Alexander attempt to answer these questions from a broad range of perspectives.

The sixth part brings to bear some comparative views, drawing on the experiences of Canada, Britain, Brazil and Malaysia, on the management of racial and ethnic diversity. The conclusion provides a second approximation of the issues and outlines a programme of action.

For the sake of clarity, we have been forced to use racial categories in some instances. However, the term black is used to refer to all those discriminated against by apartheid, namely African, coloured and Indian people.

We would like to acknowledge the role played by Derrick Marco of Idasa's Western Cape office in the running of the community-based and research workshops. We received valuable advice and direction from Mamphela Ramphele, Neville Alexander, Barney Pityana, David Schmidt and Brian Williams, who acted as a reference group for the conference planners. The organisation of the conference was ably executed by Beverley Haubrich.

Idasa would also like to acknowledge our funders. The Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, represented by Gottfried Wüst and Bettina Braemer, was our main funder and is also a co-publisher of this book. The Royal Netherlands Embassy made a substantial contribution, while additional support was received from the United States Information Service and the British Council.

Finally, Mamphela Ramphele's chapter, "Treading the thorny path to equity", appears in Ramphele, M (1995) *The Affirmative Action Book* (Cape Town : Idasa). ▲



## Section 1

# The Context



President Nelson Mandela

## **Chapter 1**

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# **Citizens of a single rainbow nation**

**Nelson Mandela**

President of South Africa

*Racism is a national problem in search of a national solution. And we are right to look forward to a future in which we shall have South African communities in our residential areas; not racial groups closeted in racially-defined "group areas".*

One of South Africa's most valuable assets is the vibrant civil society forged by its people in the struggle for freedom. It is on the continued vibrancy of this civil society that the future of our democracy depends.

I am therefore most honoured to share in your conference, all the more because I know that my presence here does not signify any relaxation of your vigilance in monitoring the actions of government.

Idasa's contribution to democracy in South Africa is a distinguished one, marked by a readiness to confront challenging situations. This is vividly expressed in the theme for this Western Cape conference. It is right to confront the difficult issues that our divisive history has posed for the community which forms most of this province's population. Idasa does the cause of nation building service by laying bare for frank discourse issues that many would prefer to whisper in corridors.

Countless individuals, of all colours and backgrounds, have contributed to South Africa's attainment of liberty, justice and democracy. Many are from the coloured community, which has

nurtured a long tradition of struggle against oppression. This community has given our nation outstanding leaders whose contribution and sacrifice for the ideal of a non-racial democracy has been immense.

In the past they helped shape resistance politics, through each of its phases. Today they represent our nation as a whole, in parliament and provincial governments, leading the transformation of our society.

Our newly established democracy is the culmination of decades of struggle and the beginning of an era of hope and promise. The particular abuses under apartheid laws which the coloured community suffered – the Group Areas and Mixed Marriages Acts in particular – are things of the past. Under our democratic Constitution all South Africans enjoy the right to be protected and not abused by the law.

South Africa shall never repeat the horrific abuses of detention without trial. Never again will our nation be at war with itself. Imam Haron, Basil February and Ashley Kriel will be remembered as towering monuments of this, our commitment.

Freedom, justice and fairness are the ideals we must strive to fully realise. But already all our people, from whatever sector, feel the dignity and pride of a nation which freed itself in the elections last year. Non-racialism is one of those ideals that unites us. It recognises South Africans as citizens of a single rainbow nation, acknowledging and appreciating difference and diversity.

Turning ideal into living reality will require, among other things, undoing the consequences of discriminatory practices of the past, in particular in employment and education. Affirmative action is a strategy of corrective action to bring previously disadvantaged people up to the same competitive levels as those people who have been advantaged.

This policy has awakened fears among sections of the coloured community. It is sometimes said to be intended to benefit only Africans, and there are claims that a few employers misinterpret it in this way.

It is necessary therefore to repeat categorically that anyone who says affirmative action reserves jobs or opportunities for Africans only is grossly distorting the policy of the government and the African National Congress. Anyone denied an opening in this way is denied a right that belongs to all who have been disadvantaged, and they should take it up with the authorities.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is sometimes the subject of similar false claims. But a look at the facts shows that the Presidential Lead Projects and RDP forums have generated a range of projects in Cape Town and the rural areas of the Western Cape, too many to detail here. They bring direct and indirect benefits for the coloured community.

Having said that, we need to do more. One of the main obstacles to systematic progress and proper involvement of communities in the RDP has been the absence of democratic local authorities. In this regard the local government elections are of critical importance. Democratic local authorities will help us to join hands to heal the social fabric of our communities, damaged by the enforced divisions of apartheid.

The government has already urged an end to racism in the workplace. But we need to go further. We need, as a nation, to strenuously combat racism wherever it raises its ugly head.

There are those who say that some coloured people have not yet entered the new South Africa and that they are prone to using racist language encouraged under apartheid. Where this may be true, we should emphasise that it is not unique to sections of the coloured community. Racism is

found in all spheres of our society. This is aggravated by the fact that we have inherited a society in which racism is configured with geometric precision in the maps of our residential areas.

Racism is a national problem in search of a national solution. And we are right to look forward to a future in which we shall have South African communities in our residential areas; not racial groups closeted in racially-defined "group areas".

De-racialising South African society is the new moral and political challenge facing our young democracy, and it is one that we should grapple with decisively. We need to marshal our resources in a visible campaign to combat racism – in the workplace, in our schools, in the residential areas and in all aspects of our public life.

I use the word "campaign" advisedly. As with all our goals, de-racialising our society requires active co-operation between government and civil society, including non-governmental organisations and voluntary associations.

It is understandable that each sector of South African society should have concerns unique to its history and circumstances. For some within the coloured community, perhaps the most pressing concern is the fear of being marginalised.

If left unattended, this fear could undermine the very foundation of non-racial democracy that we all have struggled to achieve. If parties which seek to encourage and exploit this are not challenged, they will succeed in perpetuating the divisions of the past.

We have favourable conditions for dealing with these anxieties. One year since the elections brought democracy, it is feasible to make a more realistic assessment of what the transformation in our society means. Those who prophesied doom and an early end to reconciliation have been proved wrong. The benefits of the democratic order have become more tangible.

What is called for is a strengthening of the developing partnership among all communities, in the spirit of reconciliation and renewal.

For its part, government is committed to an unqualified observance of the principles of non-racialism and equality. We are clear about our goals and plans and shall always be sensitive to the apprehensions any section of our people may feel.

For the coloured community, as with every other community in our varied land, it means becoming part of the majority by embracing our new society. It means building our South African nation and a better life for all.

In the past, the issues on which Idasa concentrated our minds had great significance for the future nation. We are convinced that this is the case today and that the organisation shall always carry this banner. May delegates here fare well in their deliberations. And may Idasa continue to challenge us in public office. ▲

## Chapter 2

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# Voices from the communities

**Daria Caliguire**

Researcher

Institute for Democracy in South Africa

*"It is interesting that we have these conflicts in the Western Cape between the coloureds and the (African) communities because we were one nation ... It was unfortunate that the system, the previous government, had to remove this from us."*

The April 1994 elections marked the beginning of a period of dramatic change in South Africa – a long-awaited shift from the authoritarianism of the old apartheid regime to the new, inclusive democracy of the government of national unity. But the transition to democracy has brought with it a degree of uncertainty as political space has been opened up for individuals and communities to renegotiate and redefine their own place as well as their relations to one another in the new democratic map of this country.

This feeling of uncertainty seems to be particularly pronounced within the coloured communities of South Africa. In order to gain a ground-level understanding of the sources, nature and extent of this feeling, Idasa conducted a series of interviews which culminated in community-based workshops in the Western Cape at Grabouw, Mossel Bay, Heinz Park and the University of the Western Cape. These provide the raw material used to feel "the pulse" of coloured communities and, where they are neighbours, the perspective from African communities. The voices in this chapter are representative of those articulated in the workshop process. Taken together, they reveal the range of issues facing coloured communities and of positions taken by such communities.



In some sectors, a sense of insecurity has translated into an increasing politicisation and mobilisation of racial identity as a way of securing a political place. In 1995, the growing number of coloured political formations, some of which make secessionist claims, gives testimony to the extent of disaffection and insecurity among certain segments of the coloured communities. Mervyn Ross of the Kleurling Weerstandsbeweging (KWB) gives voice to this movement at its extreme:

We are proud that we are ethnic. And once we are ethnic and being recognised by various other people, we can also go further and say, "Look, we are ethnic. We have our own language, our own culture, our own land and we want to govern ourselves." We are not prepared to be governed by the white man anymore – he has made a mess of it for 300 years. We are not prepared to be governed by black people.

## **Search for identity**

One way of understanding the rise of coloured political groupings and movements is as a collective search for identity. Whereas apartheid imposed a definition of coloured in the past, today the question of coloured identity is undergoing a process of rigorous self-examination. For Father Michael Weder, the search for identity is an intensely personal one, and therefore is only legitimate when self-imposed:

It is about who I am. Growing up in 40th Street in Elsie's River, my first identity of who I was was an Anglican at St Andrew's Church, Eureka Estate, and Father Mark was an *umfundisi* (priest) there. But I was also reminded that I was living in the back quarters, the servants' quarters, of Mrs Singh's, a coloured woman married to an Indian businessman. And my Indian brothers reminded me that I was a *boesman*. And my coloured brothers reminded me that I was a *coolie-boesman*. I ultimately had to make the choice about who I was, and I decided I was a Christian. That was my first formative identity. Later on I discovered black consciousness, and it was part of my healing. I later realised it was not the only aspect of my identity: it is actually much broader. But it is a question of choice, of who will decide.

Beyond the quest on an individual level, a collective search for identity on behalf of coloured communities at this point seems to commence with a reclaiming of the past. Weder goes on to illustrate:

Father McBride reminds us of when as a child his grandfather used to celebrate the 8th of December, and I said, "Father, why the 8th of December as a holiday?" And he said, "That's the day our people were freed as slaves." That date is not on our calendar; it is not an event. But part of our identity lies in those early days and that is where we must start recovering our identity as we become part of the nation.