

## Tata Pume Episode8

Ciarán Oglesby: Welcome to Tata Pume, episode 8, why not? Today I am speaking to Fidele Mutwarasibo who is the research integration officer with the immigration council of Ireland. How are you doing Fidel?

FM: I am doing fine, yeah

CO: Fidele, can you tell us what are the biggest challenges which prohibit intercultural dialogue?

FM: I think one of the biggest one will be the area of myths associated with migration. There are a number of them, for example the most current one is the one that migrants are leaving in Ireland, and therefore, why should we invest in intercultural dialogue, if they are going home. The other one is that migrants are only here for a short while, they are going back. And some are the myth and there are a number of them you could go on and on and on, but we may limit ourselves to those two.

There are issues around languages. You can only have dialogue if you can speak to each other but, mostly for what I am aware, Ireland –unlike other countries- has not programmes which allow migrants to access the English language or the Irish language for that matter. Yes, there are provisions, but most of those provisions are either expensive, if you go private, or inadequate sometimes when the group – everybody from professionals to illiterate or people with low education attainment- get together in a big hall and try to provide language tuition for them.

The other big obstacle is the contact one. Many migrants do not have opportunities to establish contacts. So I can give you an example: asylum seekers. If you are put in a centre somewhere it might be difficult for you to contact the Irish community in one hand because you are in the centre, that sometimes is outside town, and on the other hand because you have not money, because you are only on 19 euro per week. So, therefore the chance of you getting in contact with people of the Irish community, the contacts, are very limited.

CO: And what can be done to overcome this problem, you think?

FM: One of them could be, in relation to the language one, we did produce a report last year, it was a comparative report looking at what is happening in other jurisdictions, whereby we were calling for a rolling out of English language induction classes, overcome the language barrier which is needed the most.

The other one, which is an interesting one, is to create opportunities for the dialogue to take place. Number one, you can think that if people are living in faraway places, you can make an effort to make contact with them, so either you bring them out or you bring Irish people in, so they can meet and talk.

But also, in this busy period of time, I think even at work we should try to encourage some common space, a neutral space, for people to talk to each other, because you can't assume that people working

in an office and assume they are going to talk. They may be meeting just for work and then they disappear. For example, if there is a good excuse, I know we are in recession, but maybe if there is a Christmas celebration, why not to prepare something and ask people to bring it to the office, or the factory and share and then get to talk about the food. So, there are opportunities, and some of them do not require a lot of investment. Let's grab them.

CO: That's very true. And what are the reasons why at times the dialogue breaks-down or stops on your opinion?

FM: There are a number of reasons why the dialogue could breakdown. We refer to the stereotypes and needs area alone. So, if you feel you do not need to talk to people, you have some prejudices, then you may say, ok I do not want to talk to somebody else, you may feel they won't understand you if you talk or you may not have the cultural competence to actually engage in an intercultural dialogue. What I mean with intercultural competence is to know how to start a discussion. It is very common now, a long time ago, when I was new here, I used to be taken aback when I was asked 'where are you from?' Because I was not sure if people wanted to know where I came from really or they were telling me I don't belong. Ok. So, as a starting point, migrant should know what people means, they are trying to establish connexions, but on the other hand, they should know that sometimes, when you ask such a kind of question, people feel you are most or less telling them that they do not belong. So just moving into cultural competence, "Hi, what's your name?" "My name is Fidele" and then you move forward with the questions, get to know the other person before you start knowing more about me.

CO: Why do you think these barriers still exist?

FM: This is because we are not making enough effort; there is not political leadership at the top. They exist because organisations such as the NCCRI are losing their funding; they exist because the likes of the Equality Authority had their budget cut by I think 46%; and they exist because there is not, I think, enough encouragement, enough incentives to do it. And we have to remember we live in a globalised world, and so as the Irish went and lived overseas, so people have come here, for whatever reason they came here, and let's say here now that yes some migrants might go home, but some will remain here, so, why don't we engage and recognise the fact that we are a diverse nation and that we have people from different backgrounds who are present in Ireland today and then let's celebrate our diversity, acknowledge our differences and give everybody a chance to be themselves.

CO: Very true. What problems does the lack of dialogue create?

FM: Ok, for me the biggest one would be arriving to a situation in which Ireland becomes like the rest of Europe, and we have there pariah communities where we have people that would not talk to each other, where we have ghettoisation, where people are living in different enclaves. I hope this won't happen and that is not the Ireland I would like to see. I would like to see an Ireland where we are all talking to each other, where we are not living in ghettos and everybody is confident to talk to the person sitting next to them whether you are in the bus or on the street. We all have to use people's names, (7m) we are all confident to be who you are and to recognise the differences that exist among us.

CO: And we are in a very good position to do this because we have seen all the models that currently exist and we know how not to do it?

FM: Exactly, so we have a chance to learn from other people's mistakes. So it will be a pity if you were to come to a situation where we have ghettos, where we have pariah communities, where people would not talk to each other, where -as I saw on a TV programme on Channel 4 a few years ago- schools have to organise trips to meet people from other communities... (7.40m) because basically the schools were segregated. So I hope, Ireland, we will make sure that does not happen here and that we are going to have intercultural dialogue, we will be competent, we will be comfortable talking to people who are different because the differences often, actually, are not real, they are perceived differences: we all have the same needs, whether it is housing, food, feeling comfortable, feeling at home so focus on things we have in common and make sure we do not have pariah communities here in the future.

CO: Ok. And finally, Fidele, in today's day and age, when you consider how readily accessible information is to everybody -with internet is global village these days- do you think we are in a better position than never before to displace these barriers that to some degree is happening already with people from different nationalities all over the world visiting chat rooms and conversing and breaking down stereotypes as we speak?

FM: Well, that is an interesting one, because technology allows me, for example, sitting here and talk to people who are in the US, in Canada, in Africa, in wherever they are. But let's make no mistake, if I am sick, will the chat room help me to go to hospital if I have not car. If I need someone to help with childcare, for example, because I am going to meet friends, to socialise, shall I go to the chat room and ask somebody to come and help us. Yes, we can use technology, technology breaks down a lot of barriers, but technology also has led to excessive individualism whereby we are proficient (12m) in technology but you don't have the social skills to talk on a one to one basis. And obviously, Ireland being an island nation we have the opportunities to go out and meet people and people have the opportunity to come in and meet us, so, we should yes go to the chat rooms, but at the same time develop our skills to talk to people, being comfortable in the chat room but also out in the street, in our work place, you know, in the supermarket, wherever we go. So, there is no point in saying I have a hundred friends who are to far away when I do not talk to the person living next door to me.

CO: Yes, I understand, there is nothing that can replace interpersonal contact and dialogue but I will be imagining that at a large degree the internet is helping people in profoundly isolated communities or wherever they are in the world to first intimate people from different cultures that they may not have a chance to...

FM: Yeah, I agree completely. I am not saying we should get rid of the chat rooms, obviously we have them have them, they bring a lot of values, but just not get lost in the chat room. Let's live in the real world.

CO: Fidel, thank you very much for your time.

FM: You are welcome. Good luck.

## MUSIC

CO: I am speaking to Jeanette Rheinstrom , Jeanette works as a key worker in a transitional housing accommodation, St Catherine's Foyer, that caterings for homeless young adults between 18 and 25 years. Welcome Jeanette

J: Thank you.

CO: Jeanette herself comes from Sweden, and has been residing in Ireland for many years now. Jeanette, can you tell me about the work that goes on in St. Catherine's Foyer?

J: Well, we work with young homeless people, between the ages of 18 and 25 and the young people come and stay with us from a whole range of different backgrounds, not just homeless that are sleeping in the streets, or anything like that, but people that may have problems at home, and their home life is not longer tenable, or on day they'd rather stay with friends in sofas than having a home for themselves and so for.

CO: Yes, and would there be people from other countries also attending the centre?

J: Eh, more and more. I mean, I have been working at this for roughly four years, and it has been increasing slightly. I do not know if because people have found our service, I mean, it has been running for over four years, so it may be a question of people knowing that the service is out there rather than that they weren't there before the people that are coming from elsewhere.

CO: And would there be migrants that may have come here for a better life or whatever, during the boom and things may not have worked out because we are in an economic slump, etc?

J:No, no so much because we are dealing with a younger age group where a lot of them may have come maybe with families that were seeking asylum from different places and so for. So, there have been not so much economic migration the people that come to us.

CO: And how do these people mix? Does everyone mix well?

J: Yeah, yeah. We haven't had any problems at all.

CO: Great, that it's wonderful to hear...

J: but that has to do with the age group again. People are younger, they are used to see a lot of different faces around and also because the young people that come to us have been here for a good while when they come to us anyway, so they are fairly integrated by the time they come to us.

CO: And young people are a lot less set on their ways and more open to new experiences, also...

J: Yeah, definitely. Not too worry about it.

CO: That is wonderful to hear. Tell me Jeanette, how did you find the integration process when you came here to Ireland?

J: well, my integration process has been very very long because I have living out of Sweden since I was seventeen, so, integrating to Ireland started when I first moved to England somehow because the people I lived with were Irish. So that is so how I learned how to speak English in first place and then I always had friends from here when... I was living in England for quite a long time and I would come over here and visit and I knew a lot of people and that is even before I moved here, so I had a good idea of what I was getting myself into as I already knew people. I think it is different for others that come here and have absolutely no one or no idea of what they are getting themselves into.

CO: What is obviously unavailable, to have somebody when you arrive in a new place?

J: Definitely yeah, yeah, yeah.

CO: And what attracted you to Ireland?

J: A good sense of humour, I think... I mean, I have been living in many places around the world and it is small enough and big enough at the same time, I think, that was my thinking of it. I had been living in huge cities like New York City, London and so for and they are a little bit too big for me, and Dublin seemed more little, smaller town in comparison.

CO: Just the right size...

J: yeah

CO: And did you experience any obstacles when you arrived in Dublin?

J: Well I haven't, I think. In one sense it is difficult to get to know Irish people. I think there is a surface there and it is very very friendly, and I am not saying that people are not friendly underneath that surface but it takes a while before you make true friends. And also because it is a smaller place, people have quite a large pool of friends already, especially if they have been living here and they do not have enough time to make new friends outside that. They may know people from school, and so for and they may have established networks with friends and so for.

CO: I think that it's a big part of Irish culture, a lot more than any other country really. You grow with the same people you were to school and know all your life from the community. Even when you move away and you come back, yeah, very community based and very parochial to a degree.

J: No, definitely, but I think that also in comparison to a city like London or New York for that matter, you also have a hard time making friends with the locals, in the sense that those bigger cities the community that lives around shift so much. Most of the people that you meet are foreign and you make friends with them because they are in similar boat to you.

CO: They are transitional...

J: Yeah. And I think, that sort of happens here also. It is a different dynamic, if you know what I mean.

CO: Yes, yes, very much so... Have you notice any difference in Ireland's receptivity towards different cultures during your time here?

J: I think it's getting better. I love the more the better when it comes to cultures and so forth, I mean, you get all the great benefits from so many different insights and food, and music, and so forth. I think it is absolutely brilliant and in that sense, I think for what I've seen, it is getting better, definitely, people seems to be more understanding, but then, now again with the economic recession this can turn as well, you never know.

CO: You have to be very careful with these things. Finally Jeanette, can you tell me what do you think in your opinion are the biggest obstacles that prohibit or impede intercultural dialogue?

J; I think what we talk about, the network that Irish people have that gives little space for others, or for new people. I think that it is a big part of it, because a lot of people that come here are keen to learn, are keen to know people, you know... Maybe not everyone wants to become Irish as such and I do not think that is a necessity either, but I am not sure, I think that it sound like I blaming everything on Irish, and I am not meaning to do that at all, but I think that is one of the biggest problems, anyway.

CO: What has people's response been like since you've been here?

J: It's being great, I mean. I haven't had any bad responses but then I am from a fairly well off part of the world, and my skin is white and that gives me a huge mega point in competition as such

CO: So, you did not experience any barriers, any cultural barriers yourself?

J: No, just that, what I have talked about already, but I mean, that is from my limited point of view.

CO: OK, that's wonderful. Jeannette, thank you very much for your time.

J: OK, thank you.

## MUSIC

CO: Today I am speaking to Philip Watt, who is the director of the NCCRI, who is the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism. Welcome Philip.

PW: Thanks very much, Ciarán.

CO: Philip, could you tell us about the aims and function of the NCCRI and the work you have undertaken so far

PW: Basically, we are the advisory committee around the government and others around the issue of racism in Ireland and the fact that we are becoming more diverse as a society. And we've provided good advice and we've also developed initiatives to tackle issues such as racism. And what do you think are the biggest obstacles that obstruct intercultural dialogue. Probably a number of things: ignorance is out there and there is still... I think people see that their neighbourhoods are changing rapidly because of the changes that have taken place in Ireland in the last ten years and when most people are fairly happy,

those changes for other people remain challenged you know? And at less people get to know people as people as opposed to 'those people out there', that ignorance and that kind of misinformation will build up. So, I think dialogue is the first stage in creating a better understanding between groups.

CO: What in your opinion are the reasons why sometimes dialogue breaks down?

PW: I think for a number of reasons. I think sometimes, people perceive for example migrants taking their jobs they are undercutting their wages when all research shows that is very far from the case, the vast majority of migrants employed here in Ireland are doing jobs that either Irish people do not want to do or also they have the sort of skills that are badly needed. You can see that from examples of the Philippine nurses, and the South African nurses in our hospitals, or the fact that half of our doctors come from outside the European Union. And for people to say that migrants should go home and, you know, the time of economic recession, it will mean that many of our key public services would collapse overnight. So, I think people should think twice before engaging in that kind of problems.

CO: And what problems can a lack of dialogue create?

PW: I think that in some cases in the worst cases, it could lead to antipathy towards ethnic minorities in Ireland. Sometimes you see harassment and damaging of people's property here and sometimes, in the worst cases, assault taking place, simply because people are perceived to be different or people do not like the colour of somebody's skin. Anyway, those issues are still very rare in Ireland, but nevertheless there are so worrying signs that some of this can be in the increase, you know. In terms of not employing people you know that sometimes people are not employed because of their religion or their minority status... I think that even from our won history in Ireland we have to challenge those false stereotypes and discrimination and ensure everybody has equal opportunities.

CO: Philip, could you paint us a picture or give us a description of the health of Ireland's interculturality over the last ten years?

PW: I think that can be generally very positive. All the signs will show that Ireland has accommodated diversity very well, if you think about it, almost fifteen percent of our workforce is now from outside the European Union. All the changes that are taking place, in the last while, it's amazing there have not been more difficulties and I think that by large Ireland has coped with those changes very very well. Of course, now, with the economic recession there are less and less people coming into Ireland, that's true. But I think there are other issues with existing minorities which are still worrying but the highest level of prejudice is still shown against the Traveller community, our own indigenous minority and the other group is asylum seekers, and, you know, I think much more has to be done by government to ensure these two groups are not as marginalised as they are now.

CO: And in relation to those two subjects, the economic downturn and the Traveller Community, let's talk about the Travelling community first, what do you think when during the week they proposed to the Oireachtas that they would be recognised as an ethnic minority?

PW: Yes, I think that by large, most people recognise them as an ethnic minority, you know. People think of Travellers as a sort of group, they recognise them, they are different to many other people in our society, that they live in an extended family relation, they live in halting sites, you know. Those are the definitions for an ethnic group and in any other country they would be recognised as such. The Irish government seems to have a problem with the term, but most other countries in Europe and indeed, most United Nations and Council of Europe bodies do not have a problem with it. So I think that it is inevitable, and the Irish government will recognise them as an ethnic group and I think that would be very important.

CO: And in an economic downturn, do you think we need an objective organisation like the NCCRI?

PW: Oh yeah, I think we have accumulated a lot of expertise over the last ten years and you know I am very saddened for the fact that the government decided to cut our budget totally and in the last budget we were prepared to take the same kind of pain that everyone had but it has to be said that the last cutbacks for us were totally disproportionate: a hundred percent cutback... You know, I cannot think of any other organisation that received a hundred percent cutback, you know. I do not know what that masses up in terms of antiracism in Ireland, you know.

CO: Yes, of course, it is very pertinent considering the year that is in it as well, the Year of the Intercultural Dialogue...

PW: It is ironic that only twelve months ago the same government appointed us to coordinate the International Year of Intercultural Dialogue. We have turned up the National Plan Against Racism in the past, suddenly there is a sense that we are not longer needed, although I think that this can come back to haunt the government in a severe way. Well, I hope it doesn't but, you know, racism is an issue for Irish society and at least is tackled in a consistent basis it will come back to haunt us.

CO: Very true indeed. How did your organisation role differ from that of the minister for integration?

PW: Well, we have been around for a lot longer. First, not matter how acute the minister is, he just can pick up that expertise. Our workforce is very diverse, from the Polish community, Nigeria, Congo, Irish... There are Irish people who lived abroad and come with lots of experience. We have been engaged in training and that it is not a sort of skill that can be picked up overnight. We also monitor racism and government cannot monitor racism on his own, you know, it has a vested interest, it can't be objective, it is a vested interest trying to say that racism is not a problem in Ireland, when we all know that it is. So, there is not going to be anybody doing that work now, and at least there will be gap in policy and other people will step in the issues, but I am not sure who will do that.

CO: And that was my next question, so who would be taking the mantle?

PW: Ah, well, one positive is that there is a range of groups out there who weren't around when we first started eleven years ago and there are a lot of NGOs out there who do a very good job. And you know, the immigrant council of Ireland will be one example of that; the Irish Refugee Council, that is very positive...; and Traveller organisations, like Pavee Point and the Irish Traveller Movement. You know,

those organisations are very capable, but I think this isn't a body that has an overview in the same way that we would have which looks at racism as it is happening and develops policies to tackle racism. There is not organisation or central body doing that and as result the worry is massive. What it could be very small incidents could escalate because there will not be anybody around to check to see what can be done about it. Obviously the guards are playing an important role but...

CO: They won't be an organisation dedicated to monitoring it...

PW: Exactly, and they are doing something about it what's the point as well.

CO: Finally Philip, could you tell us the highlights for the last ten years for your organisation?

PW: I think the highlight is that we developed a National Action Plan Against Racism, that was the government's plan that it comes to an end this year and I think the Plan is a big highlight and this year in terms of coordinating the Year of Intercultural dialogue was a big honour as well; training that we provided to many groups... but I think that most of our work was beneath the radar. It was tackling incidents on the ground; it was helping the voice of migrants to become louder in Ireland, you know. There is enough of speaking in behalf of migrants: migrants speak on their own behalf. And I hope we played a small part at least in that process as well. I think that was a highlight, you know.

CO: And that is crucial, migrants need a platform to voice...

PW: Exactly. Some of our work was creating the space where they could have their voice heard. You know, another issue I would be very proud of is the protocol we developed for political parties that they all agreed at election time that they would not use racism to get votes and by enlarge we realued that at every election and by enlarge parties stuck to that, you know. I just hope they would continue to do so now that we are not around.

CO: Philip Watt, thank you very much for your time.

PW: and honestly, I must say it was a pleasure to be working with your radio station over the years. I think it is fantastic initiative and you know, you have been very committed to these issues and I want to pay tribute to all of you in there.

CO: Oh, Thank you, and Likewise to yourselves, and very best of luck to you Philip in the future.

PW: And you, bye Ciaran.

CO: Bye Philip.