

**INTERVIEW: Professor Colleen Ward, Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research****Interviewer: Mervin Singham, Office of Ethnic Affairs****Venue: Ethnica Conference, Christchurch****Date: 23 March 2013**

MERVIN SINGHAM: Today we're going to explore that very thorny topic of multiculturalism. Is it a good thing, is it a bad thing, do we really need one at all? And I have an expert here with me Professor Colleen Ward. I'll tell you a little bit about her. She's the Co-Director for the Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research at Victoria University. Many of you might have met Colleen before or seen her speak. She has written many papers on issues related to ethnic diversity and we certainly are very pleased to have her here. So Colleen thank you so much for coming today. The topic of multiculturalism has really big implications for migrants and refugees in this country and I thought I'd thought I'd kick off by asking you a couple of questions. I think people sometimes confuse the idea of multicultural with multiculturalism. What exactly does multiculturalism mean?

COLLEEN WARD: That's a really good starting point Mervin, because a lot of confusion and debate about multiculturalism is due to misunderstandings about what it actually means. Some people use the term merely to refer to cultural diversity, but I think it's less about cultural diversity per se and more about how we manage or respond to culture diversity. So if you ask the question; is New Zealand multicultural? - certainly in terms of population makeup we are - as we all know, almost one in four are overseas born. In fact New Zealand is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the OECD. But you have to go beyond just describing population composition and ask the questions that pertain to whether we have policies that support or respond in positive ways to the culturally diverse makeup of our country, and what are the characteristics of our society more broadly?

My thinking on this is very much influenced by Professor John Berry from Queens University in Canada. He has been studying multiculturalism for four decades and I am in total agreement with him when he talks about a multicultural society being one that has three primary features. First of all, it is culturally diverse but that diversity is appreciated and positively valued. Secondly, that all cultures, all ethnic or ethno-cultural groups in a society are able to a very large extent maintain their traditional cultural heritage and language. Cultural maintenance is a key element of multicultural society. And thirdly, all of the ethno-cultural groups within a nation are able to participate in a fair and equitable way in that society. It's really important that we have both the maintenance dimension and the participation dimension, because if you have one but not the other you don't have a multicultural society.

Here's where I would jump in and say multiculturalism hasn't failed in France, Germany and the UK. They've never had it. It's never been tested. Because if you have an assimilationist policy as Germany does, you don't really permit the cultural maintenance in any meaningful way. Alternatively, the UK actually has quite a lot of multicultural policies, but I don't think they have succeeded in the fair and equitable participation domain. You can't have cultural maintenance with groups living in parallel societies. You have to all come together, understand and accommodate each other, and it has to be a two way interaction between the newcomers (who may be more culturally diverse) and the original receiving society.

MS: That's a very articulate way of unpacking the topic of multiculturalism. I think one of the concerns we've been reading and hearing a lot about is the fact that if you enable and support minority



communities to maintain their cultural identity, their religion, their faith, and you actually encourage it strongly, then you get these communities living in parallel lines, where they're living in their suburb or the area that they occupy. They do their own things and then they don't connect with everybody else. Is that something we should be concerned about in New Zealand?

CW: I think it's definitely something we should be concerned about in a number of ways. In my view, you've very much described the situation in the UK. You have the maintenance and even the encouragement of maintaining traditional cultural heritage, but you can't just have that one part of the equation. You have to have interaction across the groups. There has to be infrastructure, systems, ways of bringing the groups together in a meaningful way - a way that promotes not only understanding of the diversity and appreciation, but also demands reasonable accommodation.

For example, in New Zealand - and I'm very proud of this - we know from some of our own survey research at the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research from over 2,000 households, 89 per cent agreed with the statement "It is a good thing for any society to be made up of different races, religions and cultures". That was significantly higher than the agreement in comparable surveys in Australia and 15 European Union countries.

In terms of the principle I think we're starting on firm ground in New Zealand. I think that diversity is appreciated here. But it's no good to say in principle "I appreciate diversity, it's great to have it" on one hand, and then on the other hand, "As long as it doesn't mean I have to do anything to respond to it". If you say "Diversity is great but I don't want a synagogue, mosque or temple in my neighbourhood", what does that mean? All groups have to be able to accommodate difference in a reasonable fashion. If I value it, I have to accommodate to a certain extent.

MS: Yes, I'm aware of studies in Canada that show people appreciate ethnic diversity but sometimes not in their backyard where it becomes very personal.

CW: That's right.

MS: So I'm going to take this topic a little bit deeper. In terms of what you said before, it's good to allow people to preserve their cultural heritage and identity and encourage that, but you say that people need equal participation. This is the other very important component of multiculturalism. But in countries like New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia where this is a hot topic, some people would say "We already have all those rights to participate. There are human rights laws. There are equal employment opportunity policies within government. People have almost equal rights. Except for if you're resident or citizen there's a minor difference, but people have almost full rights across the board." Does that not mean we already have multiculturalism in a manner of speaking?

CW: I think we fail here. Yes we have the rights and the protections, but how does it play out in reality? This brings me to what I call the third form of multiculturalism which is everyday multiculturalism. How does each of us experience our everyday reality in terms of the culturally diverse people or institutions or organisations we come into contact with? The reality of the situation is when we look at equality or quality, or across different ethnic groups, we find it's not there. For example, Maori are disadvantaged on almost every social and health indicator you can think of - lower median incomes, less home ownership, higher levels of imprisonment, more mental health difficulties. This is not because Maori are in any way in deficit. It's because they're not competing as other groups on an equal



playing field. We find the same patterns when we look at research on migrants in New Zealand. Overseas-born Kiwis or residents in New Zealand have, on average, higher levels of education than native-born New Zealanders, but they're also more likely to be unemployed or under-employed. So it's fine to say that we have these fundamental protections, which we do, but in reality they're not playing out that way. We're not really competing on equal playing fields here.

MS: *Absolutely, I think that's been very much a heart of the debate - the issue of disadvantage tending to be a perennial issue despite policy frameworks and laws that protect equal rights. There are some countries that have formal multiculturalism legislation or policy frameworks and yet they tend to fair worse than New Zealand who don't have a formal policy around it. Does that not mitigate the argument that we might need a multicultural policy?*

CW: I'd be curious to know an example of a country you would cite as having the policies but also fairing worse?

MS: *I would say Australia has had multiculturalism policies in various states and recently the Federal Government affirmed that. I think a lot of people in Australia would say they have worse race relations, worse statistics in relation to Aboriginal people for example.*

CW: I certainly think that Aboriginal peoples in Australia are severely, severely disadvantaged. Being the Professor I'm going to put on my academic hat momentarily and cite a bit of research here. At Queens University, there is a centre that studies multiculturalism and multicultural policy, and they use the term 'multiculturalism' broadly. They have one stream of research which is about multicultural policies for migrant minorities, and another stream of research which is multicultural policies for Aboriginal or indigenous peoples.

If you look at New Zealand in terms of its policies with respect to migrant minorities, you will find that we do fairly well in terms of the OECD countries. We don't do quite as well as Australia, Canada, and one or two of the Scandinavian countries, but we do pretty well. Where we fall down are in areas such as 'Is there an official parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism, an explicit multiculturalism policy?' "Is there a ministry or a body that implements multicultural policy?" "Is there multicultural education or curricula in the school?" "Is there ethnic representation in the media?" "Are ethnic organisations funded?" "Are language programmes funded?" Where New Zealand actually falls down here is on the official affirmation.

When you talk about New Zealand not having that but doing better than some other countries, this in some ways compensates for the lack of a formal multicultural policy. We look to the Government to lead by example. We want to see New Zealand's values reflected in Government policy. Ethnic communities wish to see an explicit statement that multiculturalism is valued in this country and we support it. The official affirmation is one aspect of a bigger multicultural policy understanding.

MS: *So what you're saying is, even though we have legislation and policies that promote equal participation and also the intended elements of preservation of cultural identity, it still might be important for ethnic communities to have a sense that government is showing leadership by affirming those things in a very firm way through multicultural policies?*

CW: That's what I'm saying. Everyday multiculturalism is how you live it and your everyday experience. You want to know that you belong. You want to know you can be, who you



are, and belong, and be accepted and appreciated. And a multicultural policy is a very clear statement of how we do things in New Zealand.

I think the Government's intentions have always been good and honourable. Broadly speaking, I think the way we have responded to issues of race and ethnicity has been ad-hoc, piecemeal, and there is no grand vision or strategic planning. It's like we introduce this or we introduce that, and it may have many positive effects but there is no grand vision.

MS: *You're talking about a sense of coherence around the topic of identity and diversity and so on, rather than ad-hoc, piecemeal solutions as things happen?*

CW: Yes, I would like to see the master plan so to speak.

MS: *If we decided in New Zealand that that we needed a multicultural framework of some kind, whether legislation or just policy without legislation, what does that mean for Maori? What about the bicultural foundations of this country? I know there is a debate going about a treaty-based multiculturalism framework. Would you care to comment on that? How would this work out in New Zealand, given the unique paradigm that we have around the Treaty of Waitangi?*

CW: It's very important to recognise history. It's very important to acknowledge the unique characteristics of New Zealand, and it's critically important to recognise the Treaty and honour its principles. I don't think there is any inherent incompatibility between the Treaty principles and the principles of multiculturalism.

Let's go back to what are the principals of multiculturalism? The principles of multiculturalism mean that each group is able, to a large extent, maintain their traditional heritage culture and to participate in a fair and equitable way in the wider society. Those are the fundamental principles.

Now let's look at the Treaty. The Treaty is an agreement between Maori and the Crown. The Crown is the Government. The Government represents all of us. So essentially we look at the Treaty as an agreement between Maori and Tauwi - those of us who are not Maori - and the Treaty affords rights and responsibilities. Essentially the way the principles of the Treaty have been summarised, they talk about Kawanatanga which is governorship by the Crown. It talks about Rangatiratanga which allows Maori a degree of self-determination, and certainly grants them the protection of their taonga, their treasures, both material and cultural. In the Treaty it's a very clear statement that Maori culture lives and thrives in this country. That's the agreement between Maori and all of the rest of us.

Equality for all citizens is the third Treaty principle. That's very similar to what I've been saying is a principle of multiculturalism - fair and equitable and participation. Equal rights for everyone.

And then we have reasonable co-operation between Iwi and the Crown, between Maori and Tauwi, and we have redress of past injustices. For all of those times where the Treaty has been dishonoured, we have mechanisms to redress those injustices.

I don't see any conflict between the Treaty principles and the principles of multiculturalism. I think where we get into trouble. It's our own language. We often refer to the lived experience of the Treaty as biculturalism. As soon as you say biculturalism on one hand



and multiculturalism on the other hand, its set up to sound like they are in conflict with each other. Think about what biculturalism really means. I'm going to be hit over the head for this, but I don't think we were ever bicultural. What I mean by that is Maori, our indigenous people, our tangata whenua, that part of New Zealand culture and experience will always be there, it has to be there. But when you think about what was the other culture in a bicultural relationship - the Crown, it was never really one single culture. It has been dominated by Pakeha particularly, New Zealanders of British and Irish descent. There has never really been one other culture here.

MS: *The Chinese have been here for a long time and Muslims...*

CW: And Indians have been here for a very long time, and Pacific migration of the 1960s and 1970s. All of this before we changed our immigration policies in the late 1980s, early 1990s, which changed the face our nation. In one generation we have gone from largely Maori/European with smatterings of Chinese, Indian, Pacific peoples and other European groups, to a highly diverse nation. The problem is the language of biculturalism and multiculturalism which sound like they are at odds with each other.

MS: *It almost sounds like the theme of a bridge needed to be built, rather than people seeing things as opposites that are competing interests. You have mentioned a couple of times that when you raised a couple of issues that you might get hit on the head, and I think that simply symbolises how difficult this debate is. At the Office of Ethnic Affairs we often say in a diverse society we have to be able to talk about the hard things, the things that are difficult to approach, because people want to stay away from them in case they damage relationships or cause tensions that people don't want.*

I'm going to now open the floor for you to pose some questions to Professor Ward on this topic. I think it's something we need to debate from an informed position which is why we're having this session. So I'd like to take a few questions.

Public Question 1: I like your explanation on biculturalism, Maori and the others, the race from the other side. That's a good explanation and I've been waiting for it, and I'm very pleased with that. Though you accept that New Zealand practices multiculturalism, we have a diverse culture. We allow people to practice their religion, their custom, languages and so on. So in terms of definition we are actually practicing multiculturalism. What we haven't got is enshrined multiculturalism in our constitution. Is it worthwhile to push for this in the current review on New Zealand constitution, or there is some other means where we could affirm that New Zealand society is a multicultural society?

CW: I think multiculturalism is aspirational. We're in a process moving towards it. We're not there yet. I'm not sure that any place is really there yet, because the equity part of the equation is usually problematic, even when the maintenance part is acknowledged. Regarding the constitutional review, I've said on one hand that Government should lead by example, but I also believe that you have to have a bottom-up as well as top-down initiative. And again, then you get the bridge that meets in the middle.

With respect to the bottom-up and the grass-roots movement, yes I think absolutely this is the time with the constitutional review to make your concerns known. None of us know how the review is going to pan out, but this is a very significant issue. I see a lot of merit in an explicit acknowledgement of the value of diversity and multiculturalism in this country. I would say work on it definitely. In fact this is good because you give me the opportunity to use this quote that I ripped out of the newspaper this morning. Totally different context but



Barrack Obama, who has been visiting Israel says, "Speaking as a politician, I can promise you this: political leaders will not take risks if the people do not demand that they do. You must create the change that you want to see." Go for it.

MS: *I think that's the theme of this conference is that communities need to take a lead. You know you have power, unlock that power, that's what this conference is about.*

Public Question 2: Just around the issue of equality and participation, obviously we have lots of cultural events in our city so there's no problem with participation on a cultural level. We were talking earlier about equality, especially in employment and participating in business, and that you want a sense of belonging and meaning. My question to you - based on what you understand about the predominantly Pakeha New Zealand psyche or what causes this one-way street approach of "We'll stand at our window and enjoy your cultures, but just don't come into my house and share a meal with me, or have what I have in my house"? What is some of the thinking behind this, and what is informed through research?

CW: People like to pick and choose so often. When we ask New Zealand "What do you like most about cultural diversity?" it's the food. So facetiously I would say, "No, actually, I do want to come into your house and share food with you." And secondly, in one of our surveys, we found people also very much like the idea of having multiple holidays, so holidays across ethnic groups.

More seriously I think it's often the case that people think "If you're coming to my country you need to fit in, and if you don't like the way we do things, go home". That's not really a very helpful attitude, especially since we're inviting migrants into the country and then saying if you don't like it go home. I think it's a complex picture.

One of the things I haven't mentioned is what makes multiculturalism work or when does it work properly? And it works properly when each group feels secure in their own identity and their own place, and that goes for the largest and the most dominant groups as well. Sometimes these groups feel threatened. We heard the concern that it was perceived in Christchurch that the new migrants would be taking away jobs. That's a very commonly sensitive issue.

So anything that enhances threat or reduces a sense of security is problematic. I also think a lot of people are resistant to change. It's like "Yes, I think this is great but I don't want to have to change for it to be around me". So it's like "That's really good, but don't inconvenience me".

I will use Canada as an example, although it's very unusual in terms of the world's stage. As part of their multiculturalism policy, they also have the principle of what is called 'reasonable accommodation'. That means everybody, both the diverse minority groups as well as the larger members of the receiving society. Everyone has to reasonably accommodate each other and it's put out there that this is the expectation.

The example I heard quoted recently was a conservative Jewish school built next to a gym, with clear glass with women in gym clothes on the machines. The educators of the school preferred not to have their students seeing the women in their gym costumes. They came to a reasonable compromise where the gym frosted the windows, and the school contributed to the cost of doing that. You can see both sides compromised. Neither may get everything that they want, but multiculturalism is about compromise and that's something I think we have to keep in mind.



MS: *I saw on television a council planning meeting where a resource consent process was happening for a brothel. A group of refugees wanted to set up a mosque with a teaching school. The first resource consent went through straight away, but in the second one the public refuted setting up the mosque. So sometimes it's really ironic the kind of things that happen in the community as a result of debates on identity, race and culture, and so on.*

Public Question 3: I just want to ask how you can encourage self-empowering actions by the disadvantaged cultural communities themselves to improve the reputation, interest and respect from the collective community, as opposed to having rules and enforcing everyone to accept them.

CW: Empowering, start small, start within your community. Start with relationships, building community relationships. When you feel like those networks are strong and vibrant, start building networks across communities. Intercultural contact, the value of intercultural contact cannot be over-estimated. It is really important.

However, having said that, to get the best out of intercultural contact it is preferable if you can work under circumstances that are equal status. If you have intercultural contact with big status differentials, that may not prove to result in positive outcomes. Work together with members of other communities in a co-operative fashion on goals of mutual interest. That's a very good way to empower communities, and make progress on the issues that are important to you. Just slowly, in a sustained fashion, and systematically you will get there. Look to the young people. The migrant refugee communities are often largely at the younger end of the age range. They're our future - work with the youth.

Public Question 4: You talk about cultural maintenance. My views are I agree with cultural maintenance but within the law of the land. And so over the years there has been media reports about for example female circumcision, under-age marriages. What are your thoughts around those within the law of the land?

CW: That's a really important question and I think if you listened to me carefully I used phrases like "are largely able to maintain their cultures", because there are always going to be these kinds of issues. There may be a small number of them, but they're nonetheless important issues, and the rule of law is the rule of law.

There are things that we will not tolerate in New Zealand. There are practices that might be expected or even encouraged in other cultural context such as honour killings - we will not tolerate that in New Zealand. Sometimes it is difficult to know where to draw that line. Sometimes it comes down to a case-by-case or issue-by-issue basis. I am not suggesting that we throw the rule of law away. I can't give you one formula for how you sort every particular issue out, but absolutely we have to adhere to and respect the rule of law.