

## UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration

### Episode 60: Third Culture Dialoguing (29/11/2023)

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#### Dr Esa Aldegheri

هه آل ووس ههآل ـ أ.، benvenuti, fàilte, titambire, welcome to the podcase series of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow. We bring you sounds about integration, languages, culture, society and identity. with us.

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#### Prof Alison Phipps

Welcome everybody and fàilte, thank you for coming to our Spring School, our last day of the online Spring School and of Spring School for this year. Without further ado, I'm going to hand over to Esa, who is going to be your host for today. Thank you, Esa.

#### Dr Esa Aldegheri

Thank you, Alison. Good morning, lovely people. Good afternoon. Good being here online at the last day of the online Spring School, which follows on from wonderful, wonderful online days before and the in-person last week. So it's a really great joy to be continuing this. So this morning's session is a really interesting and multifaceted one. The first session today is going to be held by Dr. Laura Cariola and Dr. Deirdre MacKenna. They're going to talk to us about third culture dialoguing. Deirdre MacKenna has been a programmer of contemporary visual art for 25 years, in Scotland and Italy. Ooh, I'm from Scotland and Italy, hello. And throughout Europe. She's developed and led processes to activate knowledge and create connections for people through transdisciplinary dialogues and exchanges, which makes her the perfect fit for our online Spring School and just work in general. Thank you so much for joining in our growing conversations. Deirdre's research investigates social and environmental change and new methods and models of culture production, which is an interesting word. She's a director of Cultural Documents, which creates an archive of images of human experiences of migration. The project was created and shaped through conversations during different and various trans-cultural projects. And by documenting cultural heritage, the cultural heritage of people, Culture Document contributes to the growing voices and conversations of people who do not and/or cannot define themselves through a single nation state and need to be recognised as having pan-national status beyond limited definitions and restrictions of just one country, its culture or its politics. Which sounds like a really, I don't know, appropriate, more than appropriate conversation to be having in these days of labels and limitations and definitions. So thank you so much. Dr. Laura Cariola comes to us from the University of Edinburgh, not from but at the moment is active within the University of Edinburgh. Dr. Cariola is a mental health practitioner, a linguistic, a linguist, sorry, and a psychologist in the Department of Clinical and Health Psychology at the University of Edinburgh. She herself is a third culture advocate and is of

multicultural heritage. Her background is Italian, Croatian and German. So a multicultural heritage and her research focuses on exploring the lived experiences of third culture kids and their mobile families using both quantitative and qualitative methods appropriately. Her recent UKRI funded project focuses on how third-culture kids use digital technologies to keep in touch with peers during moments and episodes of global mobility. And as part of this session today, she will present a brief snippet of a funded project, a seed funded project that explores third-culture adults, childhood experiences and cultural identity using creative methodology. She also organizes a child migration and mental health course as part of the MSc in mental health in children and young people through online learning at the University of Edinburgh. So loads of knowledge and expertise and creative approaches to sharing that. Thank you for being here with us today. I'm going to stop talking now, mute myself and let you do your thing. And there are some questions that will be interwoven through Deirdre and Laura's presentation too that I will kind of prompt as dialogue making events. So thank you so much. Over to you now.

### **Dr Deirdre MacKenna**

Thank you very much to the Spring School for this opportunity to meet with other practitioners and exchange ideas. Laura and I have had a dialogue over a recent period and this is our first collaboration together today. So we're really grateful for the platform and it gives us an opportunity to actually bring our thoughts into wider dialogue. And Laura and I are treating this very much as an opportunity to listen and hear others as much as we are seeking to develop these new dialogues. Before I start, I'd just like to say a couple of things that Laura and I will often refer to the words space and place. And when we do so, we include the meaning and their physical, virtual, online and conceptual ideas of space and place. And another word that Laura and I use in exchange a lot is monoculture. And while we don't want to kind of conflate lots of assumptions into that word, we do use it as a shortcut to refer to a dominant heritage or cultural heritage of a specific place. And I'm just going to start off just explaining really what our motivation is in presenting ourselves and our practices today. Lara will do the same and then we'll do examples of our work. To explain some of the terms that we're working around, the people that I refer to as third culture have expressed a sense of belonging and membership which has been formed from instances, durational periods, journeys and transient experiences in and through multiple places, as well as being a process of continuous resistance against the assumptions inherent within concepts of monocultural societies or perhaps nation-state identities, those labels that Esa02 was referring to. As we use it, the burgeoning term, third culture, and obviously Laura and I are quite aware that this is becoming more normalised, describes and conceptualises people who have experienced migration and feel membership with others often classed as migrants or migrant communities, and these are different from their home or host cultures. Within our use of the term, home culture would be a passport culture and a host culture is the place or the state in which somebody has experienced migration and is the second culture and the third culture would be the interaction between these two and in between cultural space or a transient space between what is generally acknowledged just as a recognized culture. So the term third culture is becoming popular with many people because it is a way of acknowledging that heritage, travel, migration, and new surroundings create a new sense of identity, unique to each individual person's journey and experience, values, and also like their life world formation. So rather than indicating a specific location, the challenge for a third culture person is in explaining where I belong or where I'm from is

something that we have to do through experiences and journeys, which are made up of moments and long periods of time, and through which our sense of connectedness emerges through the relationships that develop. So working in relational and interdisciplinary frameworks, which is Laura and my methodology, acting as researchers initiating new collaborations, We're seeking to render tangible somehow, to reify these intangible aspects of third culture and transitional sense of identity. And really just in general, asking the question, what does it mean to be third culture? So in doing so, we're seeking platforms and arenas and spaces and opportunities to realize our practices and to give voice to people who don't necessarily define their sense of identity through established institutions and singular nation states. So there's quite a lot of words there, but the dialogue around these terms is so emergent and so transitional and that what we wanted to do this morning really is to make space to just reflect on that itself. So Laura, it would be nice to hear your introduction.

### **Dr Laura Cariola**

Yeah, so thank you, Deidre. So yeah, I mean, third culture is a bit of a term and it's kind of becoming more familiar, I think, also in academic literature, it's more recognized. It's not necessarily like third culture, it's not like a homogenous mix between first and second culture. And a lot of people who are third culture also have themselves mixed heritage with parents of different cultures. Also, first and second generation migrants are also part of it. So it's really difficult to say what is really third culture. And as you say, it's more like an intangible kind of concept or maybe way of seeing culture. So essentially, that's also the point of this meeting. So we would like to engage in an open and reflective and disciplinary dialogue. and with a focus on the world from the perspective of third culture experiences, including limited spaces, sense of belonging and identity and transition, and also openly living through the process of answering questions of belonging and also exploring identity and transition. And as part of this, we aim to create and find a community of practitioners where the notion of third culture is at home rather than something other or out there or not part of their own understanding of the world. And to put this also into use and through this to contribute to a growing sense of community of interdisciplinary practitioners. And the idea of this as well is to raise awareness of third culture within communities and to contribute to work, which essentially challenges monoculturalism and also monoculturalism in Scotland. So I'm handing over to back to Deirdre.

### **Dr Deirdre MacKenna**

Great stuff. So as I said, as part of this session, we will talk a little bit about our roles as dual producer participants. So both Laura and I initiate our projects, but we consider ourselves to be a participant in this work. as a process of formation of understanding and sense making of the context and the communities that we practice in. An important point for us is that our perspective is that we approach situations as third culture members rather than feeling that we're representing a minority, we're working with people that we identify with. And so we're going to move on to present some examples of our practice and then after that, We've got a couple of questions that we'd like to discuss.

### **Dr Laura Cariola**

So this is just like a really brief presentation and of like a more recent project and called Exploring the Cultural Repertoire of Adult Third Culture Kids or Third Culture Adults and through multimodal autobiographies. And this was like a seed funded project from the

University of Edinburgh, School of Health and Social Science. So the exposure to multiple cultures during the formative years, and generally impacts on kind of third culture children's development to develop a coherent sense of social cultural identity, although it's questionable if anyone ever develops a coherent sense of identity anyways. But many third culture adults feel culturally rootless like they don't belong to any culture, including their passport cultures. Surprisingly, there's little known about third culture adults' meaning making of their transcultural identity and also their transitional experiences and how that positioned themselves as sense of self was in that. So through the lens of multimodal autobiographical methodology, I adopted actually a method that was used for bilingualism, but I adopted it for multiculturalism in a way. So this project aimed to answer the following research questions: How do third-culture adults experience and represent their cultural repertoires, and how do third-culture adults make sense of their trans-cultural identities and their transitional childhood experiences? For this project, participants were basically asked to think about their trans-cultural childhood experiences, and then to map these out with multicultural felt tips on a paper with a body-shaped drawing. So really how do they embody these cultural experiences within themselves? And so after the drawing we had our interview. We discussed the drawing to find out more about how was it also like to do this drawing as much as what was represented. So this is just one example of the 26 drawings and interviews that I am connected. So this is a cultural portrait of an early 20 years old woman, just going to call her Mary, and she was born in Singapore and lived in Brunei until the age of 18 and then moved to the UK to study at the university. And she is of Singaporean and Chinese heritage, but she only speaks English. So here in the drawing, we can see she uses symbolism of flags. For example, she drew a union jack in her head to represent that she was educated in the international British school system, which she said influenced her ideologies and ways of learning and thinking. In her hand, there are also lines that you can see. And for her, this represent the words and also the language that she speaks and that she said are really heavily Western influenced. And she mentioned that her hands give her freedom to be anywhere in the world and to use her language to do her job of writing. So she does some journalism of some sort. And she also communicates in English. And then in the chest area, they're like black and yellow stripes, which represent the national colours of the Singaporean flag, where she lived for the most part of her life and the colour that represents the crest of the flag. So if we look at the more kind of the bodily functions of the body here in the stomach area, there's a drawing of food that she grew up with. So it's kind of more Chinese food, for example, rice and there's also chopsticks represented and in her heart area and as a representation of her globe to indicate she perceives herself as a global citizen in the world. And it also probably reflects the kind of more international school idea of the global citizen. And in the feet area, there is a representation of rainforest, rivers, and the sea. And this refers for her to the time in Brunei where she explored rainforest and sea. So this is really part of her memory, how she remembers Brunei. These are really key experiences of her memories. And she also said that she feels really grounded to Brunei hence why it is also in the feet area. As she mentioned that she feels mixed emotions about her cultural identity. However, the emotions, they were not really represented in the drawing and I discussed this with her. And she said that's really kind of part of who she is, that she's more of a logical person rather than emotion. So she's more kind of a practically and logically minded and in terms of her identity and sense of belonging, she mentioned that she was at the moment really thinking about where to go next in life. And she was engaging with bigger questions about her sense of identity at the moment as well. And what

was interesting that because she went to a British international school, she actually only experienced actual British culture in inverted commas when she moved to London to attend university and she said it was a bit of a culture shock and it wasn't really how it was, how British culture was represented in her school. And she really said that she was finding her feet at the moment and she described being influenced essentially by three main cultures. So first Brunei and then Singapore and also Brunei and Singapore are only two hours away by aeroplane. She said they're very different cultures. And then... And also she felt influenced by Britain through her British school system. And she said she feels she belongs to all of these cultures and she doesn't feel segregated in her cultural identity. And she feels close to her cultures through cultural cuisine and the memories she is sharing with friends and families that she's still in contact with. She mentioned several times that she doesn't speak Cantonese or Mandarin, she only speaks English. Yeah, so this is just a representation, just an example of this study of many, many other examples. To introduce my practice and my approach to representing these intangible aspects of third culture experiences and identities, I actually think of my work more as reifying and just literally producing instruments, cultural instruments and opportunities for exchange rather than actually representing because what's really important is for me not to make assumptions about who's going to engage with the work. So because of this kind of difficulty to make a piece of work for a very specific audience, I think it's more appropriate for me to see that I simply work to reify or render tangible rather than to actually represent specific voices. So I'm going to show you just one piece of work but there are many and I have worked in collaboration with many people over the last decade or more to produce these resources. And the example I'll show you was commissioned by Bernadette O'Rourke as part of the COST New Speakers Research Project. It was an EU collaboration with many countries and the aim was to really get under the skin of the experiences of people who are spending significant parts of their lives speaking languages which are not their mother tongue. So of course that is people who have experienced migration and are forming third cultural identities. So the film is very deliberately paced very very slowly and the film was designed as an kind of immersive experience although it could be used online as well and we made slightly different versions of this film. At the moment there are five versions of it again edited differently for different users and for different people and different situations that the film would be used so I'll just describe it a little bit more through still images. What I forgot to say that's crucial and there's also different versions of it in in different languages, depending on who is going to be reading the text. So the images here were donated for the film by the people who we interviewed in order to inform the content of the film. And I actively, as producer-curator, feel very strongly about not using the images of what a person's face looks like to represent that person. So what I asked each contributor to the film, and they were a mixture of kind of self-nominated and approached. We used word of mouth, we did some very minor network callouts, and then people that we were already working with nominated themselves. So there wasn't like a super rigorous scientific approach to finding the people, but what we did have was a really broad range of cultural backgrounds in terms of the various places that people had lived and also the ages, et cetera. So each person nominated an object, which for them held significance. And while for an audience, they might not read into or identify with these objects. It's something actually that I felt strongly would enable the film to resonate for the contributor. And so we carried out long interviews, just generally discussing the same set of questions with the contributors of their experiences of being a new speaker, having to constantly enter into dialogue with a disadvantage, with a lower level

of language fluency than the other people they were in dialogue with. And so we then edited this down and produced this film.

### **Dr Esa Aldegheri**

First of all, thank you so much. That's really interesting work. And I think resonates with so many different aspects of what everyone here is engaged with or interested in. Let's have a wee conversation around these questions. If folk here have questions you could raise your hand or put the question in the chat. I was particularly interested in the third question. I mean they're already interesting but I've been thinking about the third question quite a lot generally. I was thinking while I was watching your your film and listening to your words that I think most of us here have, or all of us, have experience of being in a third culture or what you're talking about. But it feels really important to work out if we're just talking to ourselves or if you're framing the dialogue for transcultural partners too. So I'd love to hear your thoughts about Question 3.

### **Dr Deirdre MacKenna**

Yeah, I mean I can start to say very quickly as a producer and a presenter, who is going to be engaging with the work is one of the most fundamental questions. And so every project and every presentation is amended and tailored accordingly. I feel quite positive that many, many, many people practice that way. But of course, that is not the traditional approach and it's not the institutional approach. And so this is very much kind of post-institutional practice. And I think merits dialogue and absolutely merits being out there in the middle of the table at the start of every exchange. and also every approach where hopefully reciprocation and genuine collaboration is going to emerge.

### **Prof Alison Phipps**

Hi, I've really enjoyed that and particularly enjoyed hearing you say the term third culture, which is beginning to be used. And it's lovely because it's been a term within my own quite narrow field of intercultural studies for 20 years. And it's just one of those lovely breakthrough moments where we suddenly see, you know, you know, feels like your own, which is so important, where curation is done. And I love the way you spoke about reification as your task, because reification is a tricky idea. And I think it's a really helpful one for describing what you're talking about. So I've really enjoyed thinking about what you're talking about. And I do think that question, I think it's a really quite profound one as to how is it possible, even is it possible, to reify the intangible nature of third culture identity. Not least because every third culture identity is unique in and of itself. And I'm really thinking about some of the work that we've been doing I think you'd be really interested in, Deirdre, around using what Piki Diamond has called the Pepeha to or uses as a Pepeha from Aotearoa New Zealand as a way of breaking open those different identities and seeing how fluid they are. And I think just like we've got L1, L2 and L3 in language, we've also got now L2, L1, L2 and L3 in culture concepts, which are a really helpful reification of what actually underneath is a kind of wriggling mass of all kinds of living organisms and changes and possibilities. So I just, I really, I'm really finding that a very helpful way of framing it. And I think my answer to that question is almost, is it possible rather than how is it possible? Or what are those dimensions that I might be looking at, so thank you very much.

### **Dr Deirdre MacKenna**

And I think just to say very briefly, Spring School is providing a really valuable space and opportunities for us to practice in and make sense of these dialogues, so it's really important that that's stated clearly.

### **Dr Laura Cariola**

Yeah, so the idea of verification of a third cultural identity, I think it offers many opportunities to give people who self-identify at third culture a label. Yeah, I think it offers some opportunities. However, I also wonder what is a third culture identity and if this identity can be really pushed upon people that they just become a stereotype rather than where their own authenticity is actually being lost and they're just being perceived as third culture, you know, is this idea of labeling. What extent offers it an opportunities, but to what extent can it also take away from seeing the person and their experiences? What is a very constant question for me is for whom am I writing when I'm writing up my research? I feel like sometimes I'm standing really close to the trees that in the forest. So I need a dialogue often with another researcher who has a bit more of an objective distance, I think, to the whole kind of idea about culture and third culture. Because I am also critical and I understand that the cultural community offers me a sense of community, although it's really kind of a vague community. but it offers me something that I otherwise do not have. But to what extent can I be critical and how do I keep my own emotions out when I'm analysing particularly qualitative data? And who am I writing for? Is it for the third culture people? Is it the participants or is it for people who don't know about third culture? And it's like what assumptions do I bring in? What am I not going to take for granted. So it becomes a really complex dialogue about also critical thinking but also being sensitive and finding a balance there and within it myself in a way that I feel that that's appropriate and ethical as well. So it's really a difficult line to walk I feel. So these are my thoughts.

### **Dr Esa Aldegheri**

Thank you so much. Thank you both very, very much. I'm looking at, Gabby, thank you so much for your comments and questions. So I'm just going to read them out in case everyone can't see the chat on whatever you're looking at this from. So Gabby was wondering if a collage might be a good way of inviting people to represent themselves, of visuals or sounds and even smells, to represent transcultural identities, which is a great thought. And then Gabby was also wondering about the idea of mother tongue, how it can exist and be lost without physical migration, so second generation migrants who choose never to speak their mother tongue, and then talking about the loss and the regaining, recuperation of Gaelic and the loss of regional dialects in Scotland. Yeah Laura and Deirdre, I think it's a very very wonderful programming, can we just take a second or many seconds to thank and congratulate Bella who is behind the wonder that it's Spring School. For how these sessions just already flow into each other so well, it's a work of genius.

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### **Dr Esa Aldegheri**

شكراً, grazie, tapadh leibh, totenda, thank you for listening to this episode. For the full show notes and for شكراً, more information about our work, please visit [bit.ly/UNESCO\\_RILA](https://bit.ly/UNESCO_RILA).

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