

Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript

The Deep Culture Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join hosts **Joseph Shaules** and **Yvonne van der Pol** as we look at the personal growth that can come from travel, living and working abroad, learning a foreign language, growing up in a multicultural context—and the challenges of bridging different cultural worlds.

(Episode 20 – What makes a home a home?)

Where is home? Living between cultural worlds can make it hard to answer this question. In this episode, Joseph Shaules and Ishita Ray discuss what makes a home a home, including the “bridge person dilemma”—how foreign experiences can make us feel unrooted. We discuss the adjustment challenges of third-culture kids, and cultural marginality. We reflect on those who lose a home because of conflict or other disasters. Podcast contributor Zeina Matar shares her experience of loving . . . and losing . . . her home in Lebanon.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:00		
00:00:29	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules and welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. And I am here with this episode’s co-host Ishita Ray. Ishita, where are you now?
00:00:41	Ishita	Hi Joseph, as we speak, I find myself in the city of Lucknow in India, so I’m in my home country but not in my hometown. And where are you?
00:00:45	Joseph	I am in Tokyo at the moment
00:00:55	Ishita	You recorded the last two episodes from California but now you’re back in Japan, so are you back home?
00:01:01	Joseph	I was raised in California so this was my home originally, but now I’ve lived in Tokyo for a long long time
00:01:06	Ishita	And you feel at home there?
00:01:09	Joseph	Well yes, I do, although you know the idea of home is a bit complicated, actually it reminds me of a sign in the arrivals’ area of the Tokyo airport, written in English and Japanese side by side, and in English it says “Welcome to Japan” and then in Japanese it says <i>okaerinasai</i> which means “Welcome Home”
00:01:33	Ishita	So the people who can read the sign in Japanese are assumed to be Japanese, but anyone reading the English sign must be an outsider
00:01:44	Joseph	Yeah I suppose that’s the assumption...Of course I can read both signs so I’m both an outsider but I am also coming home...Well how is it for you Ishita
00:01:56	Ishita	Well I started with a very clear feeling about home, I’m from West Bengal in India but then I had to learn to feel at home in different parts of India, each with its own distinct flavor, and then abroad in France, and working and travelling internationally, and then when I came back to my hometown Durgapur, it was my home but it also felt different, even alien in some ways
00:02:25	Joseph	In what way?

00:02:25	Ishita	Well for example I learned to feel at home having coffee sold with a piece of chocolate on a sidewalk café in Paris, but then back in India I was having tea from a clay cup at a roadside stand. My Indian self , well my Bengali self felt faraway from the me in France
00:02:47	Joseph	You know I think that's something that a lot of cultural bridge people struggle with, this question of home ... as you leave home or you find a new home, or you miss home, or you have to learn to feel at home in different places
00:03:02	Ishita	I think that's an important point...the feeling of being at home. In the end home is not simply a place, it is a feeling, and for cultural bridge people, it can be a complicated feeling
00:03:17	Joseph	So in this episode let's dig into this complication with just a basic question of what makes a home a home
00:03:28	Ishita	We will hear from podcast contributor Zeina Matar about her experience of losing a home due to war, and how she's created new homes for herself
00:03:38	Joseph	And we'll look at what some theory and research can teach us about this human need for home
00:03:45	Ishita	Which brings us to
Part 1: The Bridge Person Dilemma		
00:03:55	Joseph	Right, so home is not just a place, it is a way of talking about our origin as sense of who we are, where we feel that we belong, and this brings us to the Bridge Person Dilemma. There is this fundamental dilemma for people who move between different cultural worlds, we can lose our sense of home or even our sense of who we are...
00:04:18	Ishita	I know this is something that people who grew up moving between different places often experience. Perhaps, especially what are sometimes called Third Culture Kids, or TCKs . So imagine for example someone whose parents are American, but whose work involves moving from one country to another.
00:04:42	Joseph	So although the children's passport may be American, they may spend three years in Saudi Arabia, and then two years in Singapore, five years in Kenya, and so that child is constantly forming new attachments, and yet having to leave others behind.
00:04:59	Ishita	And this gives rise to the bridge person's dilemma as we experience a new place we get this growing sense of familiarity, of "at-homeness"
00:05:10	Joseph	Yes but as we create new connections it can also create a feeling of separation from where we were before. I teach a lot of international students and a lot of third culture kids, they live in different countries, they switch between different languages...I remember one of them describing herself as a chameleon, just blending in wherever she goes
00:05:31	Ishita	That sounds kind of cool I guess, very international
00:05:36	Joseph	Yes but you know psychologically it can be very tough, all this change and adaptation, and it is hard to answer this question, where is home

00:05:45	Ishita	And there is research about the psychological challenges of being a third culture kid. One article for example describes them as lacking emplacement in which to root their identity
00:05:58	Joseph	And so in other words, they don't have a single place that feels connected to their sense of self, no single place that they feel that they really belong. And that can lead to adjustment challenges, so for example I found a blogpost talking about this "born into one culture, raised among others, her identity is most closely aligned with others raised like her, moving internationally . She's not "from" anywhere, although she was born "here", for her this country is another foreign assignment. Feeling out of place is only the tip of the iceberg. She is struggling through yet another adaptation, another culture shock , another free fall."
00:06:55	Ishita	This article goes on to say that third culture kids feel at home with other third culture kids. Their home is not a place, it's the people who have shared their experience
00:07:07	Joseph	Unfortunately that can also make it difficult to feel settled, find a place to feel attached to, a place to call home
00:07:16	Ishita	It speaks to a very powerful human urge to feel connected, to feel secure in the place that we are and the people that we are close to
00:07:26	Joseph	And there is another important point, when you and I left home and went off to see the world it was by our own choice ... and I think it is very different when you don't have a choice
00:07:37	Ishita	True, third culture kids for example didn't ask to move around, they simply had to change schools, make new friends, live in new houses, and that lack of choice means that they may protect themselves psychologically by avoiding attachment to any place. They end up feeling that nowhere is home
00:08:00	Joseph	Well this issue of third culture kids is really deep, we could do a whole episode on this.
00:8:04	Ishita	I agree but for this episode we need to talk about another group of people that also face huge psychological challenges. People who didn't chose to leave home, but were forced to leave
00:8:18	Joseph	Recently we've seen millions of people have been forced from their homes in Ukraine due to the war there, and again there are many many other people who have to leave their homes for other reasons like natural disasters or violence, or just a lack of economic opportunity
00:8:34	Ishita	And the numbers are enormous. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that there are more than eighty million displaced people in the world, with more than thirty million displaced internationally. This is a much bigger topic than we can cover here but there is someone on the podcast team who can share her experience of both losing a home because of war, and talk about how to go about creating a new sense of home

00:9:04	Joseph	So we've asked Zeina Matar from our podcast team to share her experiences with us and maybe she can help us understand what we need to do to find a home when we've lost one
00:9:17	Ishita	And that brings us to Part Two: Home, Loss and Love
Part 2: Home, Loss and Love		
00:9:20	Zeina	I was born in Beirut, in Lebanon, in 1958 and I had a very very nice childhood, loving family , beautiful surroundings, and the thing, to come immediately to what I call home, it is in fact a place in my head, that is still in my head, and it is the house where we used to go every summer in the mountains for three months. And for me this was the personification of what home is, and this came to a very abrupt end in 1975 when the so-called civil war broke out in Lebanon and we were not able to go back to this house. Beirut was divided in two parts, and so we were on one part and our Beirut home was on the other side so you couldn't come back to your home because of sniping and so on so forth. I remember lying in bed a whole day being sick, and my mother coming to me and telling me "it is because we gave up the house", and I said yes.
00:10:55	Joseph	You know, we sometimes talk about being homesick when we're away and when we miss our home, but in this case Zeina was quite literally sick from losing her home
00:11:08	Ishita	Zeina goes on to say that she originally wanted to study in France, but just didn't feel ready to leave home
00:11:17	Zeina	So after this I could not pass my Baccalaureate because of the war basically, so I went to France, I wanted to study Art History, I passed an exam and I could have been taken as a student there, and my father happened to be in London on business and very spontaneously I called him and I said come and pick me up, I want to go back. We went back to Beirut, had again to go through that divided city, and I registered at AUB, the American University of Beirut, and started my course of studies there, and studied Islamic Art and Archaeology, and during that time I used to go and do some archaeological digs in Syria. It was during one of those digs that I met an American professor from New York University, and he had a group of students, and they were touring the Middle East, and we had a conversation, and he said would you like to come and do a Ph.D at New York University . I kind of thought why not? And I did go to NYU on an assistantship and I loved it. I mean it was a great experience, and I felt home also, because I was sent to an Italian Kindergarten, I was sent to a French school, and then to the American University so I knew the system, I knew how things worked out, and I think this is one of the main things if you want to call a place home and feel at home in it, you need to be able to navigate the system.

00:13:02	Ishita	I like what she says about being able to navigate the system. When we were doing the brainstorming with the podcast team for this episode, Daniel described this feeling as being able to find things in the dark.
00:13:19	Joseph	Zeina had found a new home but at the same time it was getting harder for her to return to her home in Lebanon.
00:13:29	Zeina	And in the meantime things were also getting worse in Lebanon, then there was 1982, I went in summer, and there was the siege of Beirut, we were in Beirut, and it was this feeling of guilt going back. And my parents had said from the beginning no matter what happens we are not going anywhere. I mean they sent us away, my brother and me, but they said no way, and my father died in Lebanon. He never wanted to leave. So it was with a lot of guilt feeling that I went back to New York, I was torn, because you feel you are going further and further and further from what was your home.
00:14:21	Zeina	The main thing that I need to call it home is who are the people who are in my life, so my family was always very very important to me, and I knew that no matter how much in shambles Lebanon was, I would be able to go back to my parents anytime. So family is part of what I call home, no matter the geographical distance. This is unimportant, and I had been in the meantime also in Germany to do some research on my dissertation, and in that time the professor who was there told me do you want to come back on a position here so I said to him sure I come back and this is what happened, and I stayed and I met my present husband and had a family so is Germany my home now, yes, sure it is my home, but I do not think of Germany as being my home for ever for example, I don't think of these things, I don't think of building a big house where I would sit for the rest of my life, no this is very very alien to me, and I think it did come through this experience of war. It hurts you so deeply that something happens, I don't know in your mind, or ... or subconsciously or whatever that you say I will not get attached anymore to somewhere or something or in such a way that I will be hurt again
00:16:15	Zeina	Sometimes I find myself very, looking at things in a very cold manner, but I guess it is also part of surviving things, of wanting to, you know, to go on. I have a very, very close friend from that time, and we always say that was the best time of our life basically, being in these mountains and living these years like this, so there is a hole, but life continues and it can be good. I am happy with my life. I wanted my children not to be torn between cultures. I knew they're going to live in Germany, there's no way that we will go to Lebanon to live, so I brought them what I could bring them from the culture, we used to go every summer and spend time with my brother's family at the beach with my parents, the relationships are very strong and they are there, but the physical Lebanon, I did not want them to experience this too much. And this is my problem, it is not their problem, I don't want them to be in the midst

		<p>of it. I feel that I can deal with it because I know it but they don't know it enough, and I don't want to be responsible for them.</p> <p>I think you are always a little bit edgy, our children are not edgy, my husband is not edgy, they are here, they are comfortable. I am always a little bit edgy, I know where my papers are if I want to, if I have to leave quickly, so this uncertainty, this being always a little jumpy also gives you strength because what is the alternative to doing this</p>
00:18:14	Zeina	<p>I believe, honestly, strongly, that every person can find the strength to get over challenges, but maybe my challenges were not as great as other people, you know I did not lose anybody in the war, once my brother almost got killed, yes, and the thing that marked me a lot was more looking at my mother sitting on a chair and having only tears going down and saying my son my son my son and when he appeared, you know these are things that really are very strong in my memory when I bring them up again, I was lucky so I cannot say every person who left or has been forced to leave or can react like this...</p> <p>I feel a deep deep deep deep sadness, this is anger but my anger has accompanied me all my life because of this corrupt elite, and when I sit on my mother's terrace and I look at Beirut I feel it is such a beautiful country with so many resources .. and destruction, so very again, very ambiguous feelings, I have strong feelings, very strong, yes, I wish I could be indifferent in certain things, it would make things easier...I've given up wanting to resolve anything actually, maybe sometimes it is better to let go than trying trying trying to resolve, just let go, and simply accept the fact that it is like this, and then how do I go on with my life, to make it a good life.</p>
00:20:14	Ishita	When I first heard her story, I was struck by just how deep her love of home is, her love for Lebanon , her love for her family
00:20:24	Joseph	And it really touches upon something that is so human, our capacity or our need to feel connected to the things that we know and love
00:20:36	Ishita	And this need is something that Brain and Mind science can teach us something about, which brings us to Part Three: Conrad and his Geese?
		Part 3 Conrad and his Geese
00:20:52	Ishita	So Joseph, we've heard this moving account of Zeina's. It makes me wonder what research or theory can possibly teach us
00:21:02	Joseph	Well nothing as moving as Zeina's story but we can learn that other people face similar experiences and sometime learning some terminology or some theory can really help us make sense of our own experiences
00:21:17	Ishita	The term that comes to mind for me is marginality. As I recall Janet and Milton Bennett wrote about feelings of marginality as a side effect of increased intercultural sensitivity, basically as we learn to navigate in different cultural worlds we start to feel we don't quite belong, we are on the edge, on the margin

00:21:042	Joseph	And of course the word marginal can sound negative but Milton Bennett is talking about marginality as a kind of possible positive outcome as well
00:21:53	Ishita	Yes, he's talking about the ways in which participating in different communities allows us to shift between different ways of perceiving the world, changing our cultural glasses as it were, so marginality develops as part of our ability to look at a given situation from different cultural perspectives, we can feel like we don't really belong because we always have these other competing points of view
00:22:23	Joseph	Yeah and I think this happens to third culture kids, you know if you move from country to country you learn to see things from different perspectives but that also means that your way of looking at things will always be somehow different from the local perspective
00:22:38	Ishita	And that isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact the term constructive marginality is sometimes used to look at marginality in a positive way. In fact, the act of adapting and seeing things in different ways feels positive, sometimes even like a superpower
00:22:59	Joseph	I like that, a superpower because you see things that other people don't see. Well Milton Bennett puts it in kind of dramatic terms by saying: Constructive marginality is the experience of oneself as a constant creator of one's reality.
00:23:30	Ishita	As we navigate through different cultural worlds, we are in effect constructing our own reality using these different perspectives. That is deep. But of course not everyone experiences this in that way some people may feel inauthentic or lack of sincerity
00:23:53	Joseph	And Janet Bennett uses the term encapsulated marginality to refer to that feeling of being stuck between different cultural worlds, kind of trapped between them rather than integrating them into a larger whole.
00:24:06	Ishita	You know I am fascinated by this terminology, but terms like encapsulated marginality and constructed marginality seem rather abstract to me. When I hear Zeina's story it strikes me that her attempts to find a home are deeply emotional.
00:24:26	Joseph	Humans are not just kind of perceiving machines analyzing different cultural worlds, the ways that we experience our identity or our home is not just in our mind it is in our body
00:24:38	Ishita	You know what is funny, when I think about how attached we can be to home, it reminds me of the famous experiment where geese were following the researcher around like he was their mother
00:24:50	Joseph	Oh yes Konrad Lorenz, he showed that baby geese when they're first hatched will start following the first moving object they see and they will continue to do so throughout their lives even if that first moving object is a goat or a researcher or a juju trainer or whatever
00:25:10	Ishita	It makes sense because in the wild the first moving object they're likely to see will be their mother which is why we see ducks and geese with the string of babies strung along behind

00:25:23	Joseph	I mean it is a bit of a strange comparison but I do see a point because just as geese are imprinted by their experiences early in life humans are deeply affected by early experiences too nothing ever tastes as good as your favorite dish as child. And it feels so natural to speak our native language and the music that we listen to as a child makes our body move for the rest of our life
00:25:56	Ishita	That is true but I feel like we're getting pretty far away from our original topic, the feeling of home and how we can make a home, and feel at home
00:26:06	Joseph	What I've taken away from Zeina's story is that home is about caring
00:26:12	Ishita	That is my take away too, we create the feeling of home by investing ourselves, by caring about people like Zeina with her family, and about the places that we live
00:26:24	Joseph	And so having different homes can make us feel detached like we don't belong, but by caring about the people and the places in our lives we can develop this sense of home. And I think we can make a conscious choice to care
00:26:39	Ishita	How about you Joseph, what about your sense of home? You've lived in Japan for so many years
00:26:46	Joseph	You know I've talked about this on another episode but I do feel at home in Japan but it is not because I am accepted as a Japanese person would be, I am always a foreigner here, but I am comfortable in my role as a highly adapted outsider navigating as this inside outsider, and I do care, I care about my neighborhood, my friends, my students, you know the couple down the street that runs the breadstore
00:27:15	Ishita	Well on that delicious note I think we do need to end here
00:27:20	Joseph	Well I am afraid you're right but before we do that we should mention some of the references from today's episode, we talked about the article "International Schools and Third Culture Kids – Identity, Development – A Quantitative multi case study" and that is by Jacob Daniel Huff, and we mentioned a blog post by Nina Sichel, "The Trouble with Third Culture Kids" and we found that on the children's mental health network website, we talked about encapsulated marginality, you can find that in Janet Bennett's chapter "Cultural Marginality – Identity Issues in Intercultural Training" and that is in the book Education for the Intercultural Experience, and also in the same book is Milton Bennett's "Towards ethnorelativism A developmental model of Intercultural Sensitivity" where he also talks about marginality.
00:28:20	Joseph	The deep culture podcast is sponsored by the Japan intercultural Institute and NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I'm the director of JII, and members of JII can join our Learning Circle, where intercultural educators share best practices and you can see both Ishita and I there, to find out more just do a web search for the Japan Intercultural Institute, and if you liked today's episode we'd really like

		to hear from you, you can write us at dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org , a special thank to Zeina Matar for sharing her story with us today , thanks to our sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, our podcast team members , Yvonne van der Pol and Daniel Glinz, and everyone at JII , and thanks to you Ishita so much for sharing this time with me
00:29:10	Ishita	Thank you Joseph for making me feel at home