

**Podcast UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration**  
**Episode 34: Poetry by our Keynote Poets**

Speaker 1: Tawona Sitholé - Artist in Residence of The UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts

Speaker 2: Nyashadzashe Chikumbu - poet

Speaker 3: Esa Aldegheri - poet

Speaker 4: Aine McAllister - poet

**Nyashadzashe Chikumbu**

*Six degrees of freedom*

Broken board  
Salty sea  
Life in an orange jacket  
Deep unrelenting blue

If you ever wanted to speak to badly  
If you ever want to express yourself so passionately  
each time you open your mouth  
it rages into a storm  
Word wrap themselves tightly around your tongue  
And your chest burns like a forest fire

I am visible,  
But I cannot speak  
My visibility attracts  
Unsolicited badges of honour  
Hostile  
Threat  
Deficit  
How do you welcome the unwelcome?

Today I decided I will not speak  
I will not plant my words in a garden  
That refuses to water them  
Instead  
I will use a language as ancient as the stars  
I am not a God  
But I will weave my story with  
wood, colour, mud, and ancient rhythms,  
I will conjure voices that whisper softly  
With beautiful colour

Listen to learn  
Learn to listen to the dialect of my dialogue  
Learn to see the language of my body  
Where should my tongue be  
Weeping your accent

I have found a breathing space  
A space that does not feel threatened  
by my existence  
Paper is safe  
Paper understands  
Paper does not flinch or buckle  
Under the weight of my story  
My story is heavy  
Through paper, canvas, colour,  
I have found a voice

The first painting starts  
as a dry patch of blank paper  
Paper is good  
Paper is safe  
So is the colour green  
So I decide to paint the sky green instead  
Welcoming the unwelcome

I give birth to the foundations of home  
And pay homage to those I have left behind  
In bright births of brown, yellow, grey  
There's no blue there

I let the paper carry my story  
I am here  
I am visible  
I have a story to tell

### **Esa Aldegheri**

*There's this thing called Spring School. It's good. And we do it.*

This day – a chord of many notes –  
began with song  
and the sound of rain:  
a welcome  
flowing through us.

This day – a cord of many strands –  
began with gathering  
our paths and lives like threads  
converging here  
into a rope  
of questions, answers,  
hopes.

And so  
we saw

how ropes can bind and strengthen  
if they are like  
lifelines –  
lines of notes and words  
cast  
against violence  
to hold  
and shelter  
and value.

Because  
we know  
how ropes can also bind and strangle –  
stifle, still  
all movement –  
if they are like  
the laws that still  
tell us who gets to stay  
who gets to live  
who has more  
value.

And so, and then, this day  
we named  
the things that make us  
into makers  
of worlds worth sharing:  
welcome, solidarity;  
joy, respect, community;  
mana – power, our power;  
pasichigare – our connectedness  
al insaniyya - our shared human-ness - ديناسنلا

And so, and then, and now  
we breathe  
here – in this land  
this island  
of time shared.  
Outside  
a garden flourishes  
its paths awash with flowers  
planted for peace  
where not that long ago  
a factory made lorries.  
Inside  
we carry today's seeds:  
new ways of weaving restoration  
new stories threading through us.

And so, and now, and then  
we will do

the things that make us strong.  
Unlike Funtunfunufu  
we will sing (in pentatonic scale),  
and think, and eat;  
grieve, and laugh, and greet  
and listen.  
Listen.

Listen –  
there –  
the sound  
of all of us  
together:  
another song  
about to start.

### **Aine McAllister**

#### *Aoife is Returning*

Aoife is returning  
to where she was taken in  
sent away from  
cast out.

Aoife is returning  
to herself  
to the Court of Bodh  
to where she will speak  
claim  
name  
home.

Where is the way, how will I know?

The way is here and there.  
The code is as it was  
as ever it shall be.

I want to greet you in a way that you will know.  
I was marked out as different; my unbelonging.

Show yourself,  
it can be difficult to name another.

It was difficult for me to name myself; to learn  
I am an instrument for understanding.

I hope  
I hope for you  
I hope for your life.

The sun rises.  
The sun falls.  
The moon comes.  
The moon goes.  
As we must go  
and to ourselves return.  
Did you know...?

You know.  
You know.  
You know the richness  
in your veins,  
the vastness of your soul.  
It is in you, what there is to know.  
It is in your grandmother's mother's hands what there is to know.  
It is in the bright light of your child's eye what there is to know.

Values, value, my value?  
What is value?

Are you a good girl?  
Are you good, girl?  
Do you perform?  
Are you true?  
I will explain to you taboo –  
keep sacred, what is sacred to you.  
On some journeys you must travel inward  
to know the value of what is beautiful in you.  
It is inevitable that when we mourn  
we mourn alone.

I wait for home.  
I wait for home.  
I wait for home.  
I do not want my child to ever have to wonder,  
to wander.  
I want him to return in memory to warmth  
and not to have to seek  
a desperate reconciliation with my loss.  
For my child, in him, I want he doesn't have to search  
for home.  
What is home?

I can tell you all the things I need to know  
about my home,  
but let no-one ever tell another  
what is home:  
let no-one impose.  
Let us show, let us share home.

Let us together trace the contours of our mountains,

bring the distant singing of our ancestors  
from over the seas,  
let us together move towards the shoreline  
to sing a new song  
by whose sound we will weave together  
a rope of hope  
with which we will bring each other  
into gentleness  
into joy  
into love  
into truth  
into home.

I dedicate this poem to the memory of Shireen Abu Akleh.



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