

RESOURCE PACK

# The Syrian Monologues

*Based on personal stories  
of Syrian refugees in Jordan.*



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theatre  
group



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**RESOURCE PACK**  
**The Syrian Monologues**

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**The Syrian Monologues**

*Based on personal stories of Syrian refugees in Jordan.*

Training, Editing & Translation by Iman Aoun

Part of the Social Psychology Program Care – Jordan, June 2015

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**The Syrian Monologues – Sri Lankan Production Directed by**

Jayampathi Guruge and Arun Welandawe-Prematilleke

**Presented in Sri Lanka by**

Stages Theatre Group and Mind Adventures Theatre Company

**Supported by**

Goethe-Institut, Sri Lanka

**Opened**

20th June 2016

7.30 p.m.

Goethe-Institut, Sri Lanka

**Running time**

60 minutes (no interval)

**Language**

English | Sinhala | Tamil

*Cover photograph:*  
Sanjeewa Upendra, performing *Monologue 02*,  
photographed by Prauda Buwaneka

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## The Syrian Monologues, 2014

In 2014, ASHTAR Theatre in Palestine was invited by CARE Jordan to initiate a project with Syrian refugees in Amman. ASHTAR Theatre had already received worldwide recognition with its pioneering project The Gaza Monologues in 2010. Through the Gaza Monologues, the written testimonies of young people under siege in Gaza were translated into 18 languages, distributed to over 36 countries and performed by more than 1700 young people from around the world on a single day. After the success of the Gaza Monologues, ASHTAR Theatre worked with 120 refugees of different ages through the Syrian Monologues project. Twenty monologues emerged from this initiative, written by the Syrian refugees themselves.

Niranjani Shanmugaraja,  
performing *Monologue 03*,  
photographed by  
Prauda Buwaneka

## **The Syrian Monologues – International Artist Call**

On World Refugee Day, June 20, 2016, ASHTAR Theatre Palestine called upon artists the world over to simultaneously perform any of the 20 Syrian Monologues in their respective countries. After this initial global collaboration, artists were invited to continue performing the monologues in their own countries according to their own schedules. Sri Lanka responded to this international call with a performance of four of the Syrian Monologues.

## **The Syrian Monologues - Sri Lankan Production**

“The Syrian Monologues” Sri Lankan Production is a creation of the Stages Theatre Group and Mind Adventures Theatre Company. Two monologues in Sinhala and one monologue in Tamil were directed by Jayampathi Guruge on behalf of the Stages Theatre Group, while Arun Welandawe-Prematilleke directed one monologue in English on behalf of Mind Adventures Theatre Company.

This educational resource pack discusses the production process of the three monologues directed by Jayampathi Guruge as well as the overall theatre exercise done with the performers.



Jayampathi Guruge,  
Stages Theatre Group,  
Co-Director of Syrian Monologues



Arun Welandawe-Prematilleke,  
Mind Adventures Theatre Company,  
Co-Director of Syrian Monologues



## *Director's note on the production process – Jayampathi Guruge*

We received a script crafted from several Syrian refugee stories that was based on true stories of Syrian refugees living in Jordan and written in Arabic. We received its English translation. The stories in the script were then translated to Sinhala and Tamil with the help of a few friends.

What is the next step? These words needed to be brought to life. Bringing to life does not mean someone merely saying or reading the lines. We put effort into finding “what made someone say these words?” and “what compels such things to come out of people?”.

We had in our hands, a script documenting personal experiences of people from a country extremely unfamiliar to us. It was a country we had never been to nor seen, and did not know about nor recognize. We began to think collectively what our responsibility was as artists. We questioned whether it was to stage a play from that script, then receive applause and good praise from an audience. We had no right to play with these stories. The tragic despair we felt from the Syrian monologues convinced us of that much.

A day dedicated for refugees has already been reserved on the world calendar. The crisis of refugees has become an everyday problem to us. It became our aim to share their stories with at least a small crowd in Sri Lanka, on World Refugee Day. We attempted, at least for a moment to be sensitive, to think seriously about the problem, and to shape something we could do about it.

As a group we had also decided to give room for performers of the production to gain some experience on the issue, empathize with the condition of the refugee, and to make the audience feel that they were listening to the story of

a refugee rather than watching a performance. Similarly, we tried to represent, at least for a moment, those who had become refugees for whatever reason, wherever in the world.

The Syrian Monologues is textually a monologue. It is an individual expression of an experience. It is very important that the performers grow accustomed to the lines as well as the information and experiences entailed in them. Simply put, as the director, I approached character building, actor training and acting exercises with the following thought in mind,

“If a Sri Lankan performer is to perform a Syrian refugee’s experience, he must have a substantial idea about it. What should be done about it?”.

Since the script-writing had concluded in the very beginning of the creative process, ‘devising theatre’ as a method, was used mainly to build characters and the performance.

It is quite usual to see a single acting exercise done repeatedly during a training. However, we decided not to do the same exercise repetitively during the training process. It was mainly influenced by what was depicted in the production, which was the unexpected tragedy the Syrian people had to face. Through the script, we were able to recognize that their stories were built on a vast range of experience, and that those experiences were mercurial and unpredictable at any given moment. The decision was taken to ensure that the same sense of unpredictability and risk should be retained throughout the entire training process. There is a tendency for performers to express their emotions in an extremely structured, rehearsed, and inspired manner when they are engaged in a single exercise repeatedly. Since such an outcome was not appropriate for the production at hand, we tried to find space to create characters through a variety of different experiences during the training period. Once the performer

had acquired the appropriate form of his character, he would receive direction and advice from the director. Those directions would guide him to maintain consistency during the phase of building characters within the training period. Whether the performer had acquired the correct form can be observed through their appropriate inflection and articulation of dialogues to elicit proper meaning, and body movement that matches or approximates the character.

This method is used frequently by directors when they are managing performers. The performers too, expect the same from the director. It usually leads the performer's character representation to form within a certain structure. Generally, the performer's character representation will be heavily guided by the expectations and desires of the director. In this production however, we attempted to develop characters from the joint input of both the performer and the director, instead of relying on the director alone.

*From the Director's diary...*

June 2016

I walked in search of a womb to birth a new child. Your meeting and acceptance, I welcome with love and respect. To birth a child, there is a trust we must build between us. When I become a sperm, you must become an ovum. The right to the gradually ripening foetus of our union during the training period, is now equally shared between us. Spectators are biding their time impatiently to see our child's face, to judge, to insult, to despise, and to adore. All those, I leave with them since I cannot satisfy each and every spectator.

In the consummation of our training, I have reached orgasmic bliss several times. Sometimes, it saddens me that I cannot deliver my pleasure to the spectator. I know for sure however, that the bond between you and me is not merely an obligation closing at the end of this performance...

Yours,

*Jayampathi Guruge*

Even at this very moment, there are many people who are displaced somewhere in the world, caught in the crossfire of the Syrian crisis which surfaced as a result of the political power struggles among world powers. We must keep in mind that those people have already faced, are facing and will face a cluster of indescribable, tragic experiences. It could be you or me next, who might have to grapple with such a devastating situation. With these thoughts, as the Director and Actor Trainer of “The Syrian Monologues” – Sri Lankan Production, I present to you, three years from the conclusion of the production, a recollection of our memories from the character building – actor training – acting exercises done with the performers in the creative process.

*Opposite and overleaf:*  
Stefan Thirmaane,  
performing  
*Monologue 04*,  
photographed by  
Prauda Buwaneka







## Character Building – Actor Training – Acting Exercises

This chapter hopes to discuss the character building – actor training – acting exercises which took place during the production of “The Syrian Monologues”. All training activities and acting exercises mentioned here were accomplished with the support of the three performers who acted in “The Syrian Monologues”. Additionally, several new acting exercises and experiments, which were designed by the director as per the requirement of the performance are also mentioned in the chapter. The chapter will also discuss various experiences of the performers and the director, alongwith their decisions taken on matters.

### *Getting to know the performer’s mental state before training*

One day, a performer who had come for training was playing with his phone. It did not take long to realize that he was completely engrossed in his phone. It appeared that he had no mental preparation for that day’s training. What is to be done now? We gradually started talking. He said that it felt a little difficult to do training that day. What should I do now as the director? We carried on our conversation. It became clear through the conversation, that he was getting involved in a new relationship. While our conversation was flowing, I suggested that he should write his Syrian monologue in the form of a letter to his lover, in his own words. I asked him to read the letter once he had finished writing it. He carried out the task without any hesitation. The entire time, we tried to look

at how we would tell this story to a loved one. It was a great training experience. It became evident to me that the training with an actor who was initially unprepared concluded satisfactorily because his mental state was given due attention. As a director, it was clear to me that I must continue to do it and that it is a suitable exercise to be done with the other performers.

*Is it important that a director understands the performer's mental state prior to training?*

Performers come to trainings in different states of mind. It is very difficult to conduct training when they are not mentally prepared for it. Especially for a performance of this kind, their mental concentration is extremely important. It was also agreed on that the performer's contribution is necessary to develop this performance. However, the director does not expect a situation where a performer attends a training without any preparation. It is not the task of the director to be patient with the performer's unpreparedness, nor is it his task to alter the training to accommodate it. It is possible for a director to respond to such a situation and it could be taken to the extent of removing the performer from the production altogether. We have seen plenty of instances where that had happened.

Nonetheless, what is significant here is the capacity present in the devising process to resolve similar situations without making them problematic. This is what happened in the creative process of "The Syrian Monologues". It is important

to realize that through our understanding of the method used in the creative process, we can find solutions to these problems. Regardless of the method used, the director's attentiveness to whether the performers are prepared for it, contributes not only to the production, but also to the relationship between the director and the performer.

### *Why is reading the script important?*

It is the usual practice of most directors who get involved in a creative project with a script at hand, firstly to read the script together with his performers. The preliminary discussion on the theme of the production too gets underway at this point. It is also where performers would familiarize themselves with;

- the articulation of words
- the use of language in the script
- the information contained in the script
- the nature of the characters
- the socio-political background present in the script

Likewise, there can be many other outcomes of a script-reading. We also followed this practice at the very beginning of our own production process.

Apart from those aforementioned, the most noteworthy outcome of script-reading was the information unveiled through the script, regarding the impact of the Syrian crisis on the lives of people, their families, and society at large. This

took precedence in the script over revealing any data of character identification (name, residence, occupation, etc.). That is, we realized that there is no character with an established identity as such in the script. There was space furnished by both the distinct character design in the script, and our imagination to develop a character. On that basis, it was discussed that a character can be built on the agreement of both the performer and the director, using the main incident and data in the script. We then proceeded with character building for each monologue.

### *Building character history on the performer's imagination*

#### *putting forward a side-questionnaire to the performers*

A questionnaire was put forward to the performers without any prior notice during the training. The questioning itself was a very cordial affair. In a way, the process gave the impression of a cordial conversation with a helpless stranger to get to know him. This conversation went on for about one or two hours. There was a sense of freedom that encouraged the conversation to form and progress comfortably. It could be seen in the instances where some would either drink tea or light a cigarette in the middle of the conversation.

All the same, the performer was required to answer questions directed at him based on the information found in the script, aware of himself as the person who had received both the character and the character's experience. Even though there was freedom in the process to add new information necessary to build a character, it was crucial that each new piece of information was supported by

credible and justifiable reasons.

- name
- age
- residence
- details of parents
- details of their hometown
- education
- details of friends
- details from prior to the turmoil in Syria
- how the turmoil began
- their experience of witnessing the deaths of those closest to them
- having to leave their hometown
- what to do now
- their experience of the refugee camp

Simply said, the performer was questioned on everything that we thought could happen to a refugee. It is eventually the performer who develops the character and his character's history.

The performer now possessed a history known to him. It was important that he believed it. Gradually, trainings were aimed at making the lines uttered by the performer, resonate with him as his own experience. The gradual shifts in how they communicated meaning and emotion through their dialogues, made it apparent that this story had also become a personal experience to them.



Subha Wijesiriwardena,  
performing *Monologue 01*,  
photographed by  
Prauda Buwaneka

“My father’s illness in the middle of this great war, with its bomb blasts and gunfire. He cursed himself endlessly, praying for his death. He couldn’t bear that we would be in danger because of him. After the operation, he died. He died because there were no oxygen machines nor medicine he needed. The doctors were waiting until another patient died, so that they could use the machine to help my father...”

*- excerpt from Manal Al Buwaidani – Duma*

I was aware that the performer presenting this monologue had a past, where his father had been hospitalized due to a heart failure. Certain questions were put forward to him based on my awareness of that past. His response came in the form of an appropriate character history that he had built with the aid of both his personal experiences and content in the script.

He later stated that the questionnaire was helpful to him when he was building his character.

### *Storing incidents systematically in the performer’s mind*

I believe it is very important that incidents and experiences found in the script, which are interpreted through dialogues, are absorbed systemically by the performer. We discussed that each dialogue is filled with a host of life experiences. If a performer needs to, he can express those words with a particular emotion based on his ability. Then he can do justice to the character in the script.

However, we realized that there is room for human experiences and complex

human emotions, which are neither written in the script nor can be expressed through words, to be neglected. We realized that it is important to preserve delicate memories and experiences that we believed were deeply personal to a refugee. To do so, they must be impressed upon the performer's mind through some form of imagination and activities.

As opposed to memorizing dialogues, this part of the training had helped the performer to construct in his mind the experience which would have influenced the dialogue to be expressed, and thereby better recall the dialogue.

“It isn't necessary to memorize the dialogues... take your time and tell me what happens in the script instead. You have to understand that in the script, there are experiences that you might tell someone, might not tell someone, and experiences you might let slip over and over again without thinking.”

*- The Director during training*

The performers felt a considerable ease once they received this freedom. They tried to express the story in the script using lines from the script as well as their own words. It let them build a comprehensive incident instead of trying hard to recall their dialogues. In doing so, there was an attempt to methodically marry the dialogue to the incident according to their memory. This made it possible to observe similarities between the language use in the script and the performer's own diction, as well as the addition of his own words to those already found in the script. In some instances, scripts they had on them were kept aside to recall



the incident and dialogues without any help. Even then, the performers tried their best to maintain the characters' emotions at the highest possible intensity.

In this way, the performer built a believable narrative for himself based on the incident in the script. My most notable observation from this training is that, rather than rushing to finish his lines, the performer gradually tried to maintain a state of emotion consistent with both the script and the character he was building. It was noticeable that within this process, a basic sketch of a character that could be believed to be a refugee, was emerging in the performer.

### *Preventing patterns when articulating dialogues*

It is usual for a performer to memorize dialogues once they receive the script and get used to a certain pattern of articulating them. Unbeknownst to the performer, the pattern of articulating dialogues, familiar and comfortable to him, tends to seep into creative projects he is involved in. It could also be identified as the performer caught in a frame. The audience responses to performers of that kind are generally unfavourable. We tried our best to avoid such situations in our production.

The performers engaged in the following exercises to avoid any monotonous patterns emerging in the articulation of dialogues.

- The director did not attempt to establish a structure or a pattern for the articulation of dialogues.
- The performers were given direction to avoid beginning and ending their dialogues in the same way during every training.
- The director listened to the performer's monologue from various distances during their training.
- The performer's training space was subjected to change (a corner in the room, middle of the room, seated on a chair, seated on the floor, in an outdoor environment, etc.)
- The performers articulated their dialogues while doing some other activity (walking, passing a ball, sweeping, running, wrestling, etc.)
- We invited an individual unrelated to the production (a friend of the director's) to a training and arranged for the performers to say their monologues to him.

The performer was able to acquire a diverse experience that avoided repetitiveness during the training process. It became apparent that it would limit his tendency to conform to a structure or create patterns of articulation.

## *Beyond a dialogue dependent performance*

“Don’t rush to finish telling the story. Spend a moment with that emotion. It doesn’t matter if it takes half a day. Just be. Show the emotion within the character.” - *The Director during training*

Each script is very brief and could be read within a few minutes. However, we tried to find a way to express the words in the script while maintaining our emotions for the longest possible stretch of time. The requirement was to bring the emotions felt by a Syrian refugee to the surface. It cannot simply be achieved from reciting the dialogues. Hence, training was conducted to encourage a performance that was not confined by dialogues.

- The performers must take the longest possible time before they recite the first dialogue. They must spend time in the emotion that can be noticed in the dialogue.
- Take the longest possible time to recite the incident that affected them the most.
- The performer must maintain the emotion that affected him the most during his monologue for the longest possible time.
- Once the last dialogue in the monologue is expressed, its attendant emotion must be maintained for the longest possible time before concluding the performance.
- The performer must focus well on the actions that are

unique to people who are under mental duress, such as, distinct breathing, sighing, looking at one point, thinking, etc. They must pay attention to these when they present their monologues.

Likewise, performers engaged in similar exercises, and on some days, they took about 30-45 minutes to go through a single page. At that moment, it could be seen that the performer had closely embodied his character. Since the performer remained immersed in one emotion for long stretches of time, he gradually found it easier to attune himself to the abstract nature of his character.

### *Getting to know the performer's habits*

#### *a new habit for the old one*

Every person has easily recognizable habits that are unique to them in their daily life. This is also common to performers. Similar to those listed below, we can identify many lifestyle habits that differ from one person to another.

- how they walk
- how they sit
- how they move their limbs
- how they use various objects in their daily life
- how they eat and drink
- how they speak

It is very important to act attentively and with great care when working with performers as a director. At times, a performer's usual habits impress themselves

fluidly and easily on the performance, without the performer's knowledge. Similarly, some performers deliberately incorporate their habits into the performance. Here we have tried to identify those habits and prevent them from surfacing, or introduce a new habit altogether to replace the old one.

The process was quite a taxing experience to the performers. It demanded their unwavering attention and an awareness of their body and its behaviour. It became clear that they were gradually overcoming that challenge through their commitment to maintaining their focus for a period of time.

Traits of a new character began to emerge from that process.

“The person performing is at the same time someone who we know and we do not. That is because he no longer had his usual demeanour that we are familiar with.”

– *The Director during training*

## *The study of photographs and videos*

### *Syria at present*

The production of a play itself is a study process. That process may change from one creator to another. Truly, we understood in the beginning itself, that as a team, we did not have a substantial knowledge about the devastation in Syria. It urged us, together with the performers, to search on the internet about what had happened in Syria. We were then able to see the woeful fate that affected Syrian citizens each day.

- Acquire a preliminary understanding about the crisis in Syria.
- Study Syrian refugee stories, videos, and how those stories are told.
- Study several thousand photographs and identify the disposition,

appearance and facial expressions of those living in Syria.

- Identify the nature of refugee camps, how refugees live in them, and how their lives are confined to one place.
- Study the appearance of people who are staying beside the corpses of their loved ones...
- Study the terrified appearance of children who are wounded and helpless...
- Study military interventions and the nature of refugee camps...
- Study the nature of clothes worn by refugees as well as the nature of their music and musical instruments...
- Study the nature of people who are fleeing for their lives with only things that were immediately around them...

It was yet another challenge to include the entire study in the production. All the data that we had observed and collected could not be compressed into a single production. Neither was it necessary to do so. It was clear that we must carefully choose and introduce facts that were understood to be crucial to the production.

In a way, this was both a study on the Syrian crisis as well as an experiential study for the performers based on the use of images and sound. There were several videos and photographs that left us speechless, and distanced from each other, unable to do anything for a while. Later, a discussion on political power struggles in the world and devastating fates that people face, was taken up at length.

This training exercise also set the scene for the performer to better understand the character he was developing.

Based on the contents of the script and the material from our study, certain decisions were also taken with regards to the design elements of the production.

“those days yes... gardens... summer festivals... kids playing on sea shores... women pouring fruit juice... men with their bubbling shishas... all was well... but that safety has disappeared... the war started from all sides.”

*- excerpt from - Suleiman Abu Ghalioun – Hums*

When we came across this particular dialogue, we realized the fact that before the unfortunate turn of events, they had lived well.

### *good clothes – grown old*

There was a discussion with the performers about the significance of the clothing worn by the characters, when developing the character. The study of photos and videos helped the process of designing costumes. We were able to identify that people wore several layers of clothing to protect themselves from the dust and cold. Moreover, we could see that some had fled to save their lives in whatever they were wearing at that moment. We also gathered that most of the refugees who escaped were Muslims, based on their clothing and appearance.

Likewise, the observations we had made led us to choose, for the production, good clothes that had grown old.

### *unpleasant sound – dismal noise*

When thinking about how to incorporate music into this production, we were able to see that even during this crisis people played various musical instruments to ease their pain and despair.

Following a discussion with Stefan (the performer of the fourth monologue), it was decided that a recorder and a mouth organ would be used for his monologue. The music he played when he was getting into character during training, was gradually incorporated into the production. It succeeded in nurturing his character.

One day during training, I took the recorder and started to play it. (I cannot play it). I remember that I did not follow any musical notes or arrangement. It produced an unpleasant sound, a dismal noise. I tried to include that dismal noise in the performance. It was a successful attempt because I noticed that Niranjani (performer of the third monologue) startled somewhat the moment she heard it.

Due to that reason, it was decided that the piece of music with that ominous sound will be played before her story began. It is noteworthy that the music of the overall production came from experimenting during training.



### *exhausted faces*

We saw that, the faces of the Syrian people were riddled with a host of emotions which could not be expressed in words. We also identified that a majority of them were Muslims. We tried to recreate their demeanor and their dirtied, dust-ridden, and exhausted appearance through make-up.

### *An unexpected experience for the performers*

There are instances where new approaches and activities are experimented with, when building characters or the performance itself. Similarly, the training process of this production too had several experiences with experimenting. Those experimental activities were aimed at bringing the performers closer to the experiences within the monologues. Following are a few key points we had identified from the script.

- expectations shattered
- changes in habits
- challenge of power
- unpredictability of every moment
- helplessness isolation

The nature unique to the content found in the monologues contributed to the design of those experimental training activities. Within this process, performers had to go through various experiences and activities that they had not anticipated or expected. It is quite different to the usual theatre training experience they

were accustomed to. We were able to design a successful series of trainings, and a few memories from those trainings will be shared with you here.

“air raids... we heard echoes from the airplanes... kids were crying in fear... and everyone was asking for shelter... I carried our children... my wife carried some things... we walked towards the main road, while the sounds of bombing were ricocheting off us... when we reached the road we saw the rest of our neighbours fleeing, looking for a safe haven...”

“the military had surrounded the city after about two months... and that time, we really had to leave”

*- excerpt from - Suleiman Abu Ghalioun – Hums*

### *a torture chamber*

During one night training, we attempted to place the performer in a moment of mental duress. We tried to simulate a situation that would induce stress by switching off all the lights and confining the performer in a small space, and like in a torture chamber; shouted, bashed various objects on the floor, screamed, and played a dismal sound on the recorder. Each performer faced this exercise on their own. After exposing them to many sounds for about 60-75 minutes, they were kept in an unyielding silence. After a while, the lights were switched back on, and the performer was harshly taken to the front and ordered to recite his monologue. The stories that they told at that moment were very lengthy. They appeared extremely terrified. It was not possible for them to do a performance that they had previously rehearsed. They tried to instead tell a story that they had remembered.

Niranjani (performer of the third monologue) showed signs of mental stress following the end of the exercise during training. For about two hours she was unable to do anything and remained shivering in terror. Part of her memory of what happened at that moment had evaded her.

***What is supposed to be done in such a situation?*** Without showing any excitement, I stood beside her and began speaking slowly to her. I gradually tried to remind her what happened, washed her face with a little water, gave her a bit of water to drink, and massaged her arms and legs. Since she appeared to be returning to normal, we waited patiently without panicking. Until a few days lapsed, we were very careful with her.

***SPECIAL NOTE: We must be extremely careful when delivering an experience of this kind to performers. The relationship with the performers and the awareness about them become especially important in this scenario. We must also realize the limits to which the exercise can be pushed. It is crucial that we clearly understand and pay attention to the performers' thresholds of endurance.***

“We started to talk about it... tell our stories... but... the entire world was silent... as if it was dead... our story did not matter to anyone there...”

- excerpt from - *Suleiman Abu Ghalioun – Hums*

### *Director's note on the activity*

I deliberately ignored the performers during training. I felt their discomfort. I wanted the performers to experience the refugees' discomfort. I pretended to be distracted after asking them to tell their story. I stood up and left the training space without giving any reason. There was no one else there left to listen to their story, since there was no one beside me at the training. If I take my leave, who is there to listen to them? After a while, I returned and disinterestedly asked them to repeat their story. They resumed from the beginning once again. I left again without any concern for them. After neglecting them a few more times, I sent them outside, asking them to tell their story to whoever they liked. I saw their helplessness- staring at people on the road, sitting on the road. No one was interested enough to listen to their story. They returned to me. They were in character the entire time. I was dealing with the character. Once the day came to an end, I listened to their entire story. That particular telling was different from how they usually do it on other days.

Stefan went away walking. I didn't know where he went. He returned after a long time had passed. His face had changed entirely, eyes red. I spoke to him after training had ended for the day. Stefan had asked many people if they would listen to his story. No one had shown any interest. Finally, he came across four girls from university. They had seemed curious and looked ready to listen to him, but when he was about to sit on the ground and begin his story, they had left. Suddenly, his eyes were welling up, he was really troubled. He told me, "no one is ready to listen, man...".

Before starting a training of this kind, I tell my performers, "you have to trust me from here on" since I don't offer an explanation about this exercise before we

commence. The performer has to understand the nature of the exercise for himself while engaged in it. In a way, it is a deep understanding between the performer and the director. Both parties had been prepared to face the risk of the exercise. The performers were aware that my behaviour was intended to give them a certain experience.



Ruvin de Silva,  
performing  
*Monologue 01*,  
photographed by  
Prauda Buwaneka

## World Refugee Day

All the stories we received were held together by the memory of having to flee one's motherland and the devastating fate that unexpectedly struck their lives and their loved ones. It could be said that every exercise we had done was an effort to bring the performers closer to certain events we had seen in those stories. I wanted to deal with them on the last day in a way that would aid them to recall their experiences from each day of training, within a short span of time just before the last day's show.

The show was planned as a situation where a few refugees were brought in front of a crowd and given a short time to tell their stories. The performers were prepared about two hours prior to the show. Their appearance closely resembled that of refugees. The final hours. Again, I dealt with them without any sympathy as I had done during training. At one moment, I came to realize that everyone had entered the worlds of their characters. The only thing left to do was to go tell a story that they had already prepared for. They went, took their time, told their story and returned. The order of the performance had Sanjeewa going first, followed by Niranjani with Stefan last. Until Stefan's story ended, the other two stayed visible to the audience, absorbed in their own worlds. Once his story ended, I went and opened the door, walked them out, closed the door and left. We began to hear pockets of applause coming from the audience after a while.

“Leaving Syria was like having my soul ripped out of my body...  
when my eyes were lingering on Syria,  
my tears flowing through the land I left...  
Syria is my life...  
my breath... how am I to live without breathing...”

*- excerpt from: Manal Al Buwaidani – Duma*

*From the Director's diary...*

### **A self-critique**


It is common to see people who had lost their property, displaced from their homes and left helpless in refugee camps because of the thirty year war in Sri Lanka. I have not actively done anything on behalf of them. It has come to a point where all these problems stem from very complex political agendas and pursuits. Nonetheless, as a team we tried to present a segment of the performance in Tamil for the Tamil speaking community in Sri Lanka. As a citizen of this country, I decided to make this moment an opportunity to represent them. I too am a part of the majority of Sinhala speakers who could not understand the segment of the performance done in Tamil. I feel ashamed that we are still “the Sinhalese who look at the Tamils with sympathy”. I believe at this moment, that as artists we have to make an effort on our own to go beyond the limits of our creative work, and resolve the ethnic dilemma rooted in a language dilemma. We must re-evaluate to which extent do ideologies and politics that we represent in our creative work, exist in our own lives.

I now realize that I have been compelled by my subconscious to make this an opportunity to stand on behalf of refugees as an artist. I would also like to ask the performers to forgive me for any difficulties they had to go through because of me.

Yours,

*Jayampathi Guruge*





Sanjeewa Upendra,  
performing  
*Monologue 02*,  
photographed by  
Prauda Buwaneka



## **The Syrian Monologues – Sri Lankan production Team**

<b>Directed by</b>	Jayampathi Guruge   Arun Welandawe-Prematilleke
<b>Designed by</b>	Jayampathi Guruge
<b>Makeup by</b>	Duminda Alahendra
<b>Monologue 01</b>	<b>Directed by Arun Welandawe-Prematilleke</b> Ruvini de Silva Subha Wijesiriwardena - English
<b>Monologue 02 03 04</b>	<b>Directed by Jayampathi Guruge</b> Sanjeewa Upendra - Sinhala Niranjani Shanmugaraja – Tamil Stefan Tirimanne – Sinhala
<b>Translation (Sinhala and Tamil) by</b>	Nadie Kammellaweera   W.S. Vijesingha   Kirithiga Shanmugapriya Mathishani Dissanayake   Chamalie Gunawardane   King Ratnam
<b>Presented in Sri Lanka by</b>	Stages Theatre Group in Collaboration with Mind Adventures Theatre Company
<b>Supported by</b>	Goethe-Institut, Sri Lanka
<b>Press Design</b>	Venura Balasuriya
<b>Videography</b>	Luna Productions
<b>Photography</b>	Prauda Buwaneka
<b>Special thanks</b>	Ruwanthie de Chickera   Jan Ramesh and the staff of Goethe-Institut   Iman Aoun & Ashtar Theatre   Lasanduni Jayawardena   Malshani Delgahapitiya   Pemanthi Fernando   Sandamali Wijeratne   Nilmini Buwaneka

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This resource pack was produced as part of the 'Artist Research, Archiving and Documentation Project' of Stages Theatre Group.

Through this project, practicing artists engaged in systematic and critical analysis of their own work, analysing a decade worth of theatre productions and processes of Stages Theatre Group. The decade spanned the immediate ten years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka (2009 to 2019).

Sixteen resource packs, such as this one, were created for publication in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Each resource pack, written and researched by artists, examines the surrounding socio-political context within which these productions were created and analyses the creative decisions taken within the process. Supporting video material was also created as part of this initiative. All material produced through this research project can be found at [www.stages.lk](http://www.stages.lk)

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