

Directed by Ruwanthie de Chickera

DEAR RESOURCE PACK
CHILDREN
SINCERELY

RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION



stages
theatre
group

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent publisher.

RESOURCE PACK
DCS Rwanda Sri Lanka Collaboration

First published (online) 2020
© 2020 Stages Theatre Group
ISBN 978-624-5487-39-4

DEAR RESOURCE PACK
CHILDREN
SINCERELY
RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION

DIRECTED BY Ruwanthie de Chickera

A STAGES THEATRE GROUP PRESENTATION

First Performance

Ubumuntu Festival of Humanity - July, 2015

Genocide Memorial Centre,

Kigali, Rwanda.

PARTNERS

Mashrika, Rwanda

Esufally Foundation, Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan community in Rwanda

Well-wishers in Sri Lanka

TWO TEAMS. TWO HISTORIES. ONE PLAY.





The stage is a strange world. In the ordinary world, people have different social, political, linguistic and cultural identities. But these identities are not valid in the world we call the stage. You can be me. I can be you.

DEAR CHILDREN, SINCERELY... RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION was a production that challenged the several ideas of identity. This play was a unique, collaborative and experimental theatrical conversation which entwined the histories of Rwanda and Sri Lanka and which expanded the identities of the cast drawn from both these countries.

This resource pack examines the intense collaboration that occurred within this play. The collaboration was not merely between two casts or even two countries; the collaboration was between two histories and several lives.

Two teams. Two histories. One play...

This resource pack discusses how two teams who were unknown to each other, journeyed together to create one play, how two groups of people who began as outsiders grew so close to each other's histories... It is about the challenges they faced during this journey and how they overcame them. It is about a bond that became stronger through the creation of one play...

We believe that this resource pack will be useful for anyone who is curious to know how two teams from two cultures can adjust and match their lives and art for one purpose.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE PACK

1

**INTRODUCTION
TO THE PLAY**

- THE THREE ACTS OF THE PLAY
- HISTORY OF THE SHOWS
- C A S T

2

TWO TEAMS

- RUWANTHIE AND HOPE
- RESEARCHING TWO COUNTRIES
- REHEARSING IN TWO COUNTRIES
- MEETING OF TWO TEAMS

3

TWO HISTORIES

- D . C . S INTERVIEWS...
- WEAVING TWO HISTORIES TOGETHER
- FIRST STORY - SEVEN DECADES
- D E E P
- EXPERIENCING TWO HISTORIES
- HISTORY AS A SCENE

4

ONE PLAY

- THE ENSEMBLE
- THE BALANCE IN A PLAY
- THE CONTESTED, THE SHARED THE UNSPOKEN

CONTENTS





● **DCS (THE RWANDA - SRI LANKA COLLABORATION)**
starting off their maiden performance at the Ubumuntu Theatre Festival in Kigali. (2015)

INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

DCS (RWANDA - SRI LANKA COLLABORATION)

is a theatre production that offers a parallel reading of the colonial and post-colonial histories of Rwanda and Sri Lanka in the seven decades between 1930 and 1990.

This Stages Theatre Group production is a devised ensemble performance directed by Ruwanthie de Chickera. It comprises three acts.

It is a collaboration between Stages Theatre Group of Sri Lanka and Mashrika Performing Arts and Media Company of Rwanda. Five Rwandan artists and eight Sri Lankan artists worked together on this production.

This play is part of the larger Dear Children, Sincerely... theatre research project (DCS project) that Stages Theatre Group began in 2015. The DCS project collects the memories and experiences of the generation of elders born in the 1930's and takes them to younger generations in the form of storytelling and live performances.

This play is based on interviews that were conducted with senior citizens from Rwanda and Sri Lanka through the DCS project. It was the first international collaboration to be born out of this research project.

The play was researched independently in the two countries and then devised remotely through Skype. The combined cast finally met for 6 days of rehearsal in Kigali before the show opened at the first Ubumuntu Festival of Humanity in 2015. The fact that this maiden performance was the opening play of the festival is noteworthy.

THE THREE ACTS OF THE PLAY

**DCS RWANDA - SRI LANKA
COLLABORATION** comprises 3
acts.

- ACT 1** SEVEN DECADES DEEP
- ACT 2** MARRIAGE, SEX AND LOVE
- ACT 3** UPSIDE DOWN LAND

SEVEN DECADES DEEP

This act symbolically represents a parallel historical journey in Rwanda and Sri Lanka over seven decades from 1930 to 1990. It picks seven historic junctures (one incident per decade) and moves between the two histories of these two countries in the 6 scenes.

ACT ONE



MARRIAGE, SEX AND L O V E

This act is a humorous, non-verbal representation of how the generation that was born in Rwanda and Sri Lanka in the 1930s experienced love, sex and marriage.

ACT TWO





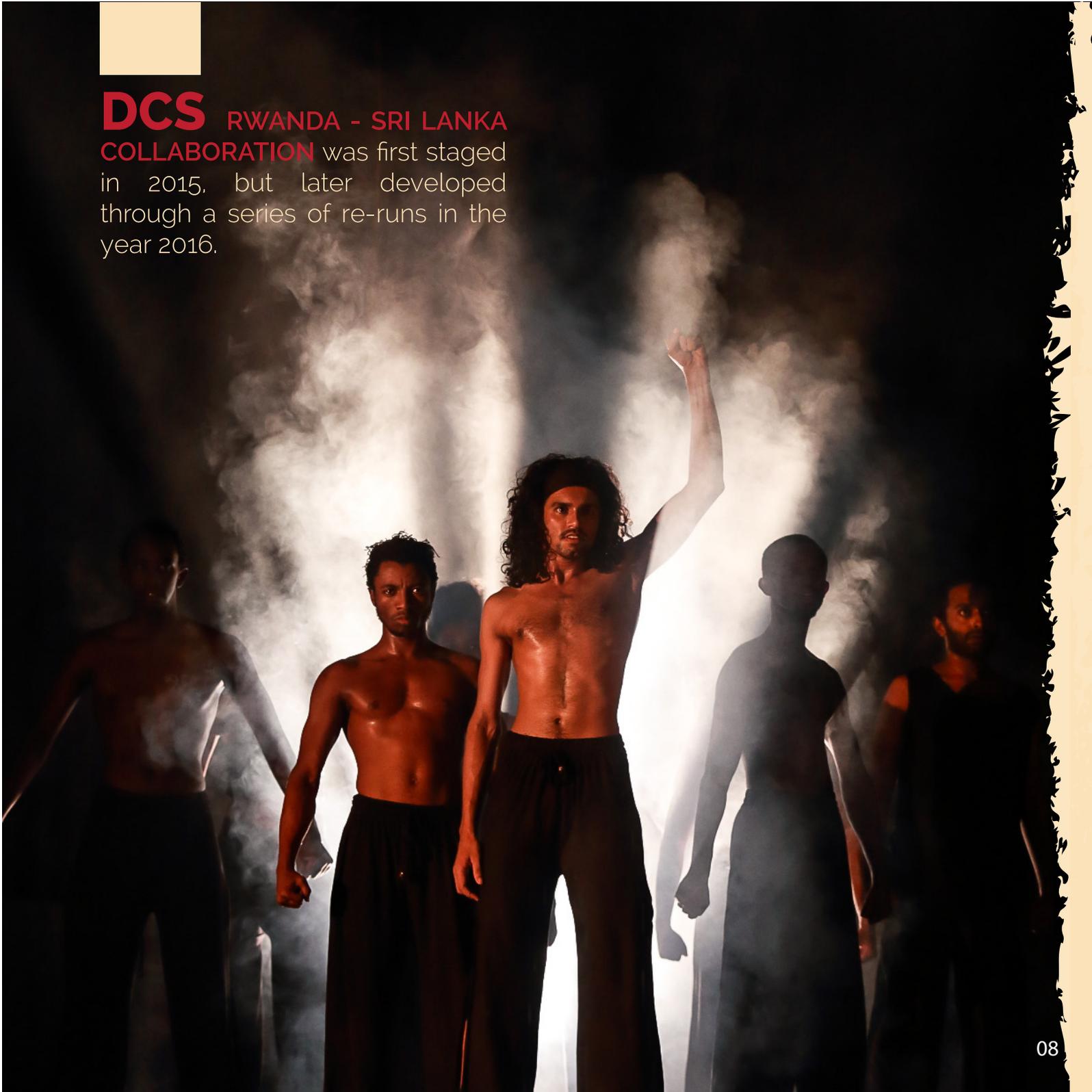
U P S I D E
D O W N
L A N D

This act represents the darkest times from the histories of the two countries.

A C T T H R E E



DCS RWANDA - SRI LANKA
COLLABORATION was first staged
in 2015, but later developed
through a series of re-runs in the
year 2016.





MAIDEN PERFORMANCE

Ubumuntu Festival of Humanity
KIGALI, RWANDA.

JULY 2015

HISTORY
OF THE SHOWS

SRI LANKA PERFORMANCE COLOMBO.

JANUARY 2016

India Tour National School of Drama Festival
18th Bharath Rang Mahothsav
NEW DELHI, INDIA.

FEBRUARY 2016

NSD Satellite Festival
JAMMU KASHMIR, INDIA.

FEBRUARY 2016

NSD Satellite Festival
KERALA, INDIA.

FEBRUARY 2016

Metta Festival
MUMBAI, INDIA.

JULY 2016



CAST

THIS PRODUCTION was initially devised in 2015 with a cast of 12 artists but was subsequently developed and finalised with additional artists in 2016.



ENSEMBLE CAST OF 2015

RWANDAN TEAM

ALEXIA MUPENDE
ANDY FRED
MUNYESHURI INNOCENT
ABDOUL MUJYAMBERE
CLAUDIA SHIMWA

SRI LANKAN TEAM

NILMINI BUWANeka
PRADEEP GUNARATHNE
AKALANKA PRABHASHWARA
PRAMILA SAMARAKOON
SANJEEWA UPENDRA
PEMANTHI FERNANDO
JAYAMPATHI GURUGE



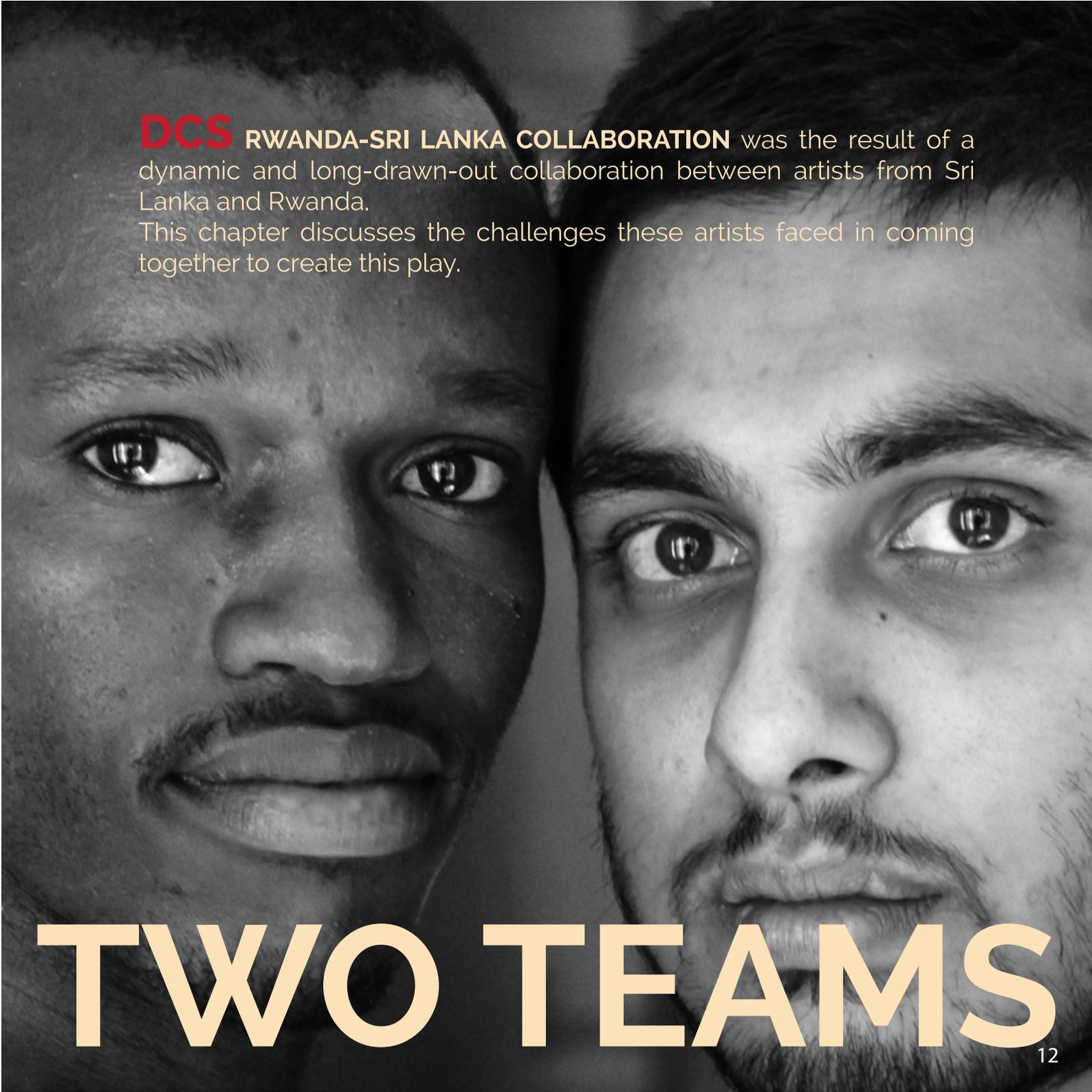
ENSEMBLE CAST OF 2016

RWANDAN TEAM

ALEXIA MUPENDE
ANDY FRED
MUNYESHURI INNOCENT
ABDOUL MUJYAMBERE
CLAUDIA SHIMWA

SRI LANKAN TEAM

PRADEEP GUNARATHNE
AKALANKA PRABHASHWARA
PRAMILA SAMARAKOON
SANJEEWA UPENDRA
PEMANTHI FERNANDO
JAYAMPATHI GURUGE
NIPUNI SHARADA
RUVIN DE SILVA
ARUN WELANDAWA
GEHAN BLOC
BIMSARA HATHARASINGHE



DCS RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION was the result of a dynamic and long-drawn-out collaboration between artists from Sri Lanka and Rwanda. This chapter discusses the challenges these artists faced in coming together to create this play.

TWO TEAMS

"I didn't even know that a country called Sri Lanka existed in this universe...(laughing)."

CLAUDIA SHIMWA

DCS Artist (Rwanda)

The two teams that joined in this new play were initially quite far apart. The two countries are beyond each other's continental borders, one from Africa and the other from Asia. This was the first time that Rwanda and Sri Lanka were meeting through a creative production...

"The first thing we did when we got to know that we are to do a play with a country called Rwanda was trying to find Rwanda in the world map... Later on, we got to know that Rwanda is an African country... But I had never seen a black person in real life."

AKALANKA PRABHASHWARA

DCS Artist (Sri Lanka)

In the beginning, no one from either team had any idea what to expect. It was the first time that most members from either team had even heard of each other's countries. However, in spite of this, a single play is made and then completed within a year. This play is then staged in 3 countries and 6 cities.

After coming so far, it is difficult to imagine that beginnings could be small and incidental. However, this is exactly how this beginning was. It all began with a simple conversation between two artists.



RUWANA

RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA
Creative Director
(STAGES THEATRE GROUP)



HOPE

HOPE AZEDA
Creative Director

(MASHRIKA PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA COMPANY)

RUWANTHIE AND HOPE

IN JANUARY 2015 Artistic Director of Stages Theatre Group, Ruwanthie de Chickera, and Artistic Director of Mashrika, Hope Azeda, met in Ireland at a gathering of women artists through the newly launched ARIADNE project. Through an immediate and strong friendship that grew out of this first meeting, it was decided that the **DCS PROJECT**, envisaged to soon begin in Sri Lanka, would also be conducted in Rwanda. Both countries would interview their senior citizens born in the 1930s and the two theatre companies would attempt a collaboration based on this.

Hope Azeda also had plans of creating a theatre festival in Rwanda that summer – the **UBUMUNTU FESTIVAL OF HUMANITY**. Plans were made for the production that grew out of the **DCS RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION** to open this festival.

When these plans were made, neither theatre company had the financial means to realize this dream. The DCS interviews had not been conducted, there was no idea what shape the collaboration would take, or how many artists would be involved, there was not even a concrete idea about what the Ubumuntu Festival would be.

However, with none of this in place, the artists began the work in earnest in both countries.

RESEARCHING TWO COUNTRIES...

THIS CHALLENGING PROCESS began 5,610 kilometers apart, one team was in Colombo while the other was in Kigali. The DCS project kicked off in both countries with the initial interviews conducted with senior citizens born in the 1930s. Later the transcripts of these interviews were shared between the countries - and this formed the basis of the primary material for the production.



REHEARSING IN TWO COUNTRIES...

THE TWO TEAMS had only a very brief period of 6 days to physically meet and work on the play in Kigali, Rwanda. Until then, the two teams had to communicate remotely through Skype. They used these virtual meetings to discuss the histories of their countries with each other.

However, everybody implicitly understood that this play could not be developed through these limited Skype discussions combined with just six days of rehearsing. And so, since Stages Theatre Group were the pioneers of this project, they took a bigger portion of the creative responsibility onto their shoulders.

Stages Theatre Group studied the DCS transcripts of Rwanda and Sri Lanka and began devising the scenes of the play in Colombo, before meeting the Rwandan team.

The plan was to develop and finalize the scenes when the two teams met in Rwanda.

MEETING OF **TWO TEAMS**

T h e

Sri Lankan team left for Rwanda in 2015 with a play that was half-made. The only thing the team knew at this point was that they would meet their Rwandan counterparts, rehearse for 6 days and then open the festival with this new play. They also knew they would be hosted in Rwanda at the house of Rohith Pieris, a Sri Lankan living there. However, they had not even met Rohith.

The two teams only had 6 days to get to know each other and create an international level play. Six days is a short time even when it comes to one person getting to know another person. These two teams had six days to get to know one another and work together as an ensemble representing a single play that held their combined history and culture.

The cast was confronted with various challenges.



REHEARSAL SPACE

Upon arriving in Rwanda, the Sri Lankan cast realised that they had no space to rehearse in. The Ubumuntu Festival was a fledgling festival, finding its feet in this first year. The challenge for the festival organizers was enormous. Providing rehearsal space and facilities for a play was not top priority.

Luckily, impoverished theatre artists know everything about making something out of nothing, and so turning a home into a rehearsal space was not a challenge. Within a few hours the ensemble had moved the furniture in Rohith Pieris's house around and created an adequate performance space. (The challenge really was for poor Rohith who returned to discover his living room furniture stacked out on his veranda, theatre backdrops being constructed outside his bedroom and signs up in his bathroom.



LANGUAGE

Between the members of the two teams, four different languages were spoken (Sinhala/ English/ Kinyarwanda/ French). English was not the first language for many of the artists. This was a challenge to communication. Then, in addition to the actual words, deciphering each others' accents was also quite difficult!

EXPERIENCES IN DEVISING

The majority of the Sri Lankan team was new to the devising process. However, since they had begun the devising process back in Colombo, they had some idea about devising. The Rwandan team, on the other hand, did not even know that this was going to be a devised piece of theatre. The process was a completely new experience for them.

"At first, I did not understand what was going on. I thought we would get our own dialogues. The play was mostly physical theatre. I had not done it before.

I started by imitating the Sri Lankan team. Once I started doing this, I began to understand what these physical movements meant..."

- CLAUDIA SHIMWA
DCS Artist (Rwanda)

TALENTS & SKILLS

Except for Pradeep (who was a professional dancer), everyone else from the Sri Lankan cast - Sanjeewa/Pramila/Nilmini/Akalanka - were actors of some years' experience. Their primary development had been as theatre actors. Comparatively, the skills that the Rwandan actors had were varied. Innocent was a filmmaker. Abdoul was a dancer. Alex was a model. Andy was a singer. Claudia was a yoga instructor. However, what the Rwandan actors had in common and to a far greater degree than their Sri Lankan counterparts, was physical fitness, energy and strength.

This disparity of skills and strengths posed a problem which needed an immediate solution. How would the artists' skills be combined and integrated into one style of theatre?

Ruwanthie de Chickera, had this to say about the experience of bringing the two teams together.

"As a director, it was one of the most challenging situations I have faced - and also one of the most nuanced and interesting. Immediately I warmed to the Rwandan cast - whose spirit of ease and gentleness I learnt a lot from. Very soon I found out that they were talented, but not necessarily experienced - which meant they had the potential to pick up if they worked very hard, but I was not sure if they would understand the need to work hard. They seemed a truly laid back people. With the Sri Lankan cast - most of whom I was actually working with for the first time too and so not entirely aware of how they would react under this kind of pressure - I sensed some frustration, as people struggled to adjust to a new culture and way of life in a situation of mounting stress."

- RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA
Director, DCS
DCS Report, 2015

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Apart from the 12-hour rehearsal days, the artists of both teams also had considerable additional responsibility to carry out beyond rehearsals. After rehearsals, the Sri Lankan cast worked on designing the play's music, set, props and costumes. The Rwandan cast had commitments in organizing the Ubumuntu festival. The six days leading up to the festival were utterly packed and utterly exhausting.

All of it was a gamble and at any time it could have gone horribly wrong.

However, in addition to working on the scenes, the cast also worked on their relationships, building trust and integrating their energies. The cast practiced yoga and engaged in ensemble building exercises and games every morning. They ate together, sang together and looked after each other. This eased them into their bodies, energized them with a sense of fun and brought a sense of closeness to the team.

I realized I had the commitment of the entire cast when, one night, at the end of a ten-hour rehearsal, at 7pm, we changed into formal clothes and went to attend the official opening ceremony of the festival.

There we relaxed and drank and enjoyed ourselves (it was a beautifully inspiring opening ceremony) and when it ended, my cast got back in the van and returned to rehearsal - where we changed out of our fancy clothes and worked on into the night. At half eleven I paused. I knew they were exhausted, but I also knew if we went over what we had just put together once more, things would fall into place much faster. 'What do you feel like doing guys? Do we wrap up or go over this once more?' Even before the Sri Lankans answered, the Rwandans answered - 'Let's do this once more. Please'. For me, that was one of the most powerful moments of this journey. I sat back and just watched as, between themselves, the cast talked through what needed to be done and then, just got down to doing it.

- RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA

Director, DCS
DCS Report, 2015

● Two teams are ready for a journey as one ensemble.





TWO HISTORIES

DCS RWANDA - SRI LANKA COLLABORATION is a play that ties together the histories of Sri Lanka and Rwanda from 1930 to 1990. This chapter talks about the landmarks the artists passed in the process of weaving these two histories together.

DCS INTERVIEWS

THE DCS RWANDA - S R I L A N K A C O L L A B O R A T I O N

began with parallel research conducted into the two histories of these countries through the DCS project. The DCS project interviewed the people of the generation born in the 1930s. The objective of the interviews was to try and understand from this generation the journey of their respective countries from 1930s to the 1990s.

25 Sri Lankan elders and 17 Rwandan elders participated in the first phase of DCS interviews. A few people from both groups requested to participate in the interviews anonymously - there were more requests for anonymity from the Rwandan senior citizens. It also happened that while the Sri Lankan elders were open to reminiscing about the past and telling the stories of their country, there were a number of Rwandan elders who point blank refused to talk about the past of Rwanda.

"Some elders did not like to share their past with us... They told me... young man...! you don't know the times that we had passed..."

- MUNYESHURI INNOCENT
DCS researcher and artist
(Rwanda)

WEAVING TWO HISTORIES TOGETHER

The Act '**Seven Decades Deep**', which is the first act of the play, represents 7 historical moments from the 7 decades between 1930 and 1990 in Sri Lanka and Rwanda. The scenes of this act move alternatively between the histories of Rwanda and Sri Lanka.

These are the 7 historical moments highlighted in the 6 scenes.

SCENE 1

1930S RWANDA – THE STORY OF THE ID CARD A national Identity Card is introduced by the Belgian colonizers to distinguish between Hutu and Tutsi social classes.

SCENE 3

1950S SRI LANKA – THE STORY OF SINHALA ONLY The Sinhala language is elevated as the only official language in a country where two languages are spoken - Tamil and Sinhala.

SCENE 5

1970S AND 80S SRI LANKA – THE STORY OF THE YOUTH INSURRECTIONS Two Marxist youth insurrections in 1971 and 1989 are brutally crushed.

SCENE 2

1940S SRI LANKA – THE STORY OF INDEPENDENCE Sri Lanka is declared Independent from its' British colonial rulers in 1948.

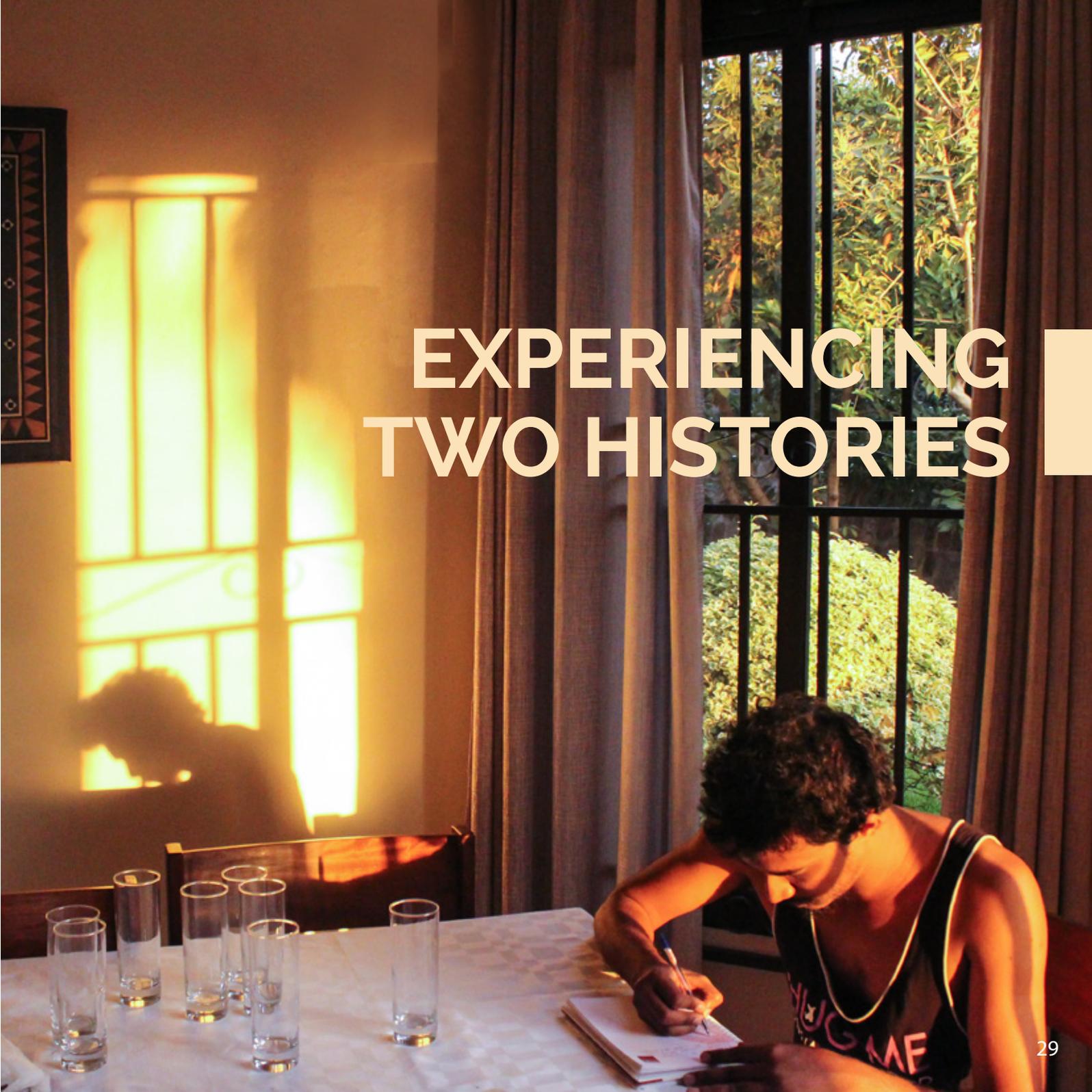
SCENE 4

1960S RWANDA – THE STORY OF THE EXILE The Tutsi minority land-lord class is expunged from the country by the majority working class Hutus in 1962.

SCENE 6

1990S RWANDA – THE STORY OF THE GENOCIDE Almost a million Tutsi and moderate Hutus are killed in Rwanda in 1994.

EXPERIENCING TWO HISTORIES



TO BEGIN WEAVING TOGETHER the two histories of Rwanda and Sri Lanka, the similarities and differences between the two countries were first explored. In order to do this, the artists shared the DCS interview transcripts with each other and studied them.

As they examined and worked with the transcripts depicting the stories of these two countries, the artists came to realize that though the two countries were geographically different, the two countries had passed similar socio-political situations. For example, both countries were once colonized. Rwanda had been under Germany and Belgium... Sri Lanka under Portugal, the Netherlands and Britain. Both countries were subjected to 'divide and rule' policies by colonial powers. Both countries went through civil wars. Both faced mass killings and times of anarchy and terror. Both experienced protracted conflicts between the majority and largest minority. (Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, Sinhala and Tamil in Sri Lanka.)

Amongst all these similarities, the biggest and most obvious dissimilarity between them was that Rwanda had experienced a genocide and Sri Lanka had not. In fact, many members of the Sri Lankan cast had not even known about the genocide in Rwanda prior to this project. They had not even heard the word before.

"I did not know anything about Rwanda. This play was where I heard the word 'genocide' for the first time. Though we, in Sri Lanka had a long experience of ethnic violence, we had not experienced genocide."

- JAYAMPATHI GURUGE
DCS researcher and Designer
(Sri Lanka)

This lack of understanding was a challenge in the creative process. As mentioned before, the responsibility of analyzing the interview transcripts and engaging in the initial devising sessions of the stories was a responsibility that befell the Sri Lankan team. This responsibility was undertaken before the two teams met physically in Rwanda.

As a first step, the Sri Lankan artists spent a lot of time discussing Rwandan history, they also engaged in books, articles, documentaries and films on the Rwandan genocide. By the time they arrived in Rwanda the artists had acquired a considerable knowledge about this historical event - and maybe even some confidence in their new-found knowledge. However, they soon realized, upon their arrival in Rwanda, that there was a huge limit to their understanding.

“When we researched Rwandan history, we came across words like ‘Genocide’, ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’... We started using those words in the scenes during our rehearsals in Colombo. But once we arrived in Rwanda, they asked us to not use these words. They told us that these words are not spoken in Rwanda anymore.”

– AKALANKA PRABASHWARA
DCS Artist
(Sri Lanka)

At the very first combined rehearsal of the artists from the two countries, the Sri Lankan team, in an attempt to display their enthusiasm and effort at making connections with the Rwandan artists, spoke quite openly about what they had come to understand about the genocide. However, the Rwandan cast was reluctant to engage. Very gently, they informed the Sri Lankan team that even the words that were being used - like ‘Genocide’, ‘Hutu’ and Tutsi - were words which were not spoken in Rwanda so freely.

This posed a challenge for the team of artists. How could they depict on stage, something that people were not yet able to speak about?

However, what was clear in the meantime was that what the Sri Lankans had done to familiarize themselves with Rwandan history was insufficient. The artists had to find another way to try and connect with the history of their Rwandan counterparts.

"Though the Sri Lankan cast intellectually understood what genocide meant, though we had even begun to emotionally engage with the issue and the stories, I understood that there was a huge gulf in the cast with regards to any real understanding of the genocide. Within the limited time we had -with the 18-20 hour rehearsals we were conducting every day, the only option to even begin to bridge this gap was to cancel rehearsals for a whole day and for all of us to spend that time, together, in the genocide memorial center.

This was a huge proportion of time off our 'active rehearsals'. However, this time needed to be taken. It was not something that could be rushed, because we 'had a play to make'. That was not an option. This play could not be made, if we could not respect our fellow artists enough to set everything aside and spend one day together with them on this journey into their history.

I remember after that day spent together in the memorial center, we came back and we had nothing to say to each other. The words and the confidence we had previously displayed now seemed crass. So we just spent the evening sitting together in silence.

Without saying anything; in fact, in the silent acknowledgment that some human experiences are beyond words, the cast was immediately closer together."

- RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA
DCS Director
(Sri Lanka)



HISTORY AS A SCENE

The next challenge, of course, was how the artists were going to actually depict the genocide on stage. That this horrific and momentous event had to be part of the play was never in question. Tragically, Rwandan history is defined by the genocide. So we had to address it. But how was the question.



The Sri Lankan and Rwandan artists discussed this at length. It was decided that it was not possible to depict the genocide on stage. There was no way we could do any justice to this. So then, if we could not show the genocide, was it possible to show the end of the genocide? Or the remains of the genocide? Or after the genocide? Was that possible?

The artists started working on the scene. The scene was created in silence and the scene remained always in silence. A mountain of bodies, heaped on the stage, is slowly moved aside by two men working to create a path. The bodies are slowly, gently laid aside in two piles. And a road emerges through the mountain.





ONE PLAY

DCS RWANDA - SRI LANKA COLLABORATION

was first performed in 2015 at the first Ubumuntu Arts Festival in Kigali, Rwanda. Although the initial collaborative performance ended with this year's festival, the collaboration on the play and the relationship between the artists continued. The play toured internationally in 2016. The artists stayed in touch and have taken up space in each-others' lives. Sri Lanka participates annually at the Ubumuntu Arts Festival in Rwanda - and new artistic collaborations are always being dreamed of.

This chapter discusses how this single play set in motion a strong and long-lasting connection. This connection can be discussed under two points. First is the ensemble nature of the play. The second is the balance of the three acts of the play.

THE ENSEMBLE

This play is an ensemble performance. Working within an ensemble demands that the cast get to know each other very well. It requires a deep understanding of the skills, rhythms, capacity and energy of all members of the ensemble. Though these two teams were Rwandans and Sri Lankans outside of the play, within the play they were a single ensemble; the DCS ensemble. Their personal identities - and even their national identities - could not be allowed to stand out within the ensemble.

To be in another body, another identity, to experience another situation, to live in it, even for a moment, is a rare human opportunity which actors are privileged to experience. This production demanded very swift shifting between identities. The acts and scenes within the play move constantly between Sri Lanka and Rwanda. At one moment a Sri Lankan becomes a Rwandan and the next moment a Rwandan becomes a Sri Lankan. To play these multiple roles in this manner, the actors had to intellectually understand the contexts they were representing. However, this was not enough. They also had to emotionally and energetically absorb and interpret these shifting identities - and be able to call on them in an instant.

In order to do this, connection on every possible level, insight from every possible experience had to be gleaned and filtered into the performance. While rehearsals were important, and discussions were crucial, eating together was equally important and resting together, walking together, playing together - all of these things contributed to merging the energies and identities of the actors on stage. In fact, the difficulty in communicating through words (as discussed earlier, the cast did not share a common language) increased the emphasis on the non-verbal communication which, in turn, deepened the connection between the artists.

THE BALANCE IN A PLAY

In order for us to understand how the balance within the play contributed to the success of this journey let's first take a closer look at the 3 Acts this production comprises.



ACT ONE

SEVEN DECADES DEEP

THIS ACT PROVIDES SNAPSHOTS OF 7 HISTORICAL JUNCTURES OF RWANDAN AND SRI LANKAN HISTORY BETWEEN 1930 AND 1990.

SCENE 01

RWANDA IN THE 30'S THE STORY OF THE ID CARD

depicts how the Belgian colonizers turned the fluid class-identity of Tutsi and Hutu into a permanent ethnic identity through the introduction of an ID card system to Rwanda in the 1930s; and how they further fueled the division by spreading false 'research' on different ethnic origins of Hutus and Tutsis.

SCENE 02

SRI LANKA IN THE 40'S THE STORY OF INDEPENDENCE

tells of how there really was no consolidated peoples' movement to end colonization in Sri Lanka. Instead there was a keenly felt admiration for the independence struggle of India.

SCENE 03

SRI LANKA IN THE 50'S **THE STORY OF SINHALA ONLY**

tells how, eight years after Independence, Sri Lanka split along language lines. The 'Sinhala Only' Bill made Sinhala the only official language in the country and reduced the Tamil population to a second-class status.

SCENE 04

RWANDA IN THE 60'S **THE STORY OF THE EXILE**

tells how the Belgian colonizers withdrew from Rwanda in the 60s and how riots broke out against the Tutsis. The 85% Hutu population turned against the ruling Tutsi class, hitherto protected by the Belgians, and chased them out of the country.

SCENE 05

SRI LANKA IN THE 70'S AND 80'S **THE STORY OF THE YOUTH** **INSURRECTIONS**

tells the story of the two Marxist youth Insurrections which took place 19 years apart. The first in 1971 was crushed when a plan to attack all police stations in the country was foiled. The second is remembered as the 'time of terror' and was brutally suppressed by the Govt.

SCENE 06

RWANDA IN THE 90'S **THE STORY OF THE GENOCIDE**

tells how 32 years after the Exile of the Tutsis the 100-day genocide occurred, where almost a million people were killed while the world watched.

ACT TWO

MARRIAGE, SEX AND LOVE

The second act collected together the common approach of the 1930s generation towards marriage, love and sex. This was a non-verbal, humorous depiction of a traditional wedding day; when not just the families, but the couple meet for the first time. The view of marriage as a family duty, the importance of property, the lack of information around sex and the challenges of immediate intimacy with a stranger, were all brought out through the mode of comedy in this scene.

Both Sri Lanka and Rwanda experienced times of sustained terror and horror - experiences which cannot be put into words. Rwanda experienced the 100 days of genocide. Sri Lanka experienced youth insurrections and intense ethnic conflicts at various points in its' history. Upside Down Land examines the physical and psychological stage of complete breakdown of society.

UPSIDE-DOWN LAND

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

UPSIDE-DOWN LAND

Both Sri Lanka and Rwanda experienced times of sustained terror and horror - experiences which cannot be put into words. Rwanda experienced the 100 days of genocide. Sri Lanka experienced youth insurrections and intense ethnic conflicts at various points in its' history. Upside Down Land examines the physical and psychological stage of complete breakdown of society.

THE CONTESTED
SHARED
UNSPOKEN



While building this play, within the overarching challenges of this undertaking - creating a play from the interviews of two countries, creating the play remotely, being limited to only 6 days proper rehearsal - the play that was assembled was done so at a speed and frenzy which did not allow for much introspection.

It was only in retrospect that the director of the play was able to articulate how the balance between the 3 Acts that were created actually contributed to the experience of the play and the ensemble.

"When I look back at the play we set out to make and see the strength of the relationships that formed around it I realize that, unknowingly, there was something in the balance of the three acts we created, which set in place the foundations for a deep exchange between the artists.

The first part of the play was the biggest struggle, the most contested space. It dealt with history - with words, with politics, with events and specifics which we had to protect, which we often got wrong, which we negotiated, struggled with, compromised and finally agreed on. This part of engaging with history, with who we were, where we came from, was a space in which we sized each other up and brought each other in. Creating this section took a good 70% of our rehearsal time.

The second section was a gift, a walk in the park in comparison. It was about love and it was created through laughter and an unspoken understanding with each other. It brought us connection through our hearts and our bodies and the delight in our shared humour and experience.

The third section was a strange, abstract space - reserved for everything we had witnessed, or been through or inherited, which could not be named. It was the unspoken experience of recurring human tragedy and the incomprehensible capacity of human beings to hurt and destroy each other. In acknowledging this within ourselves we were able to connect through this state with the other.

In this manner, this play - not unlike in life - brought the artists together in three ways. Through history and stories that needed to be told, through the ease of love and laughter that bound us together without words and through the acknowledgement that we all carried something too dark to address directly.

This balance - between is what is contested, what is shared and is better left unspoken - is what led to the deep connection between the artists of this cast."

RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA

DCS DIRECTOR

In this manner, the artists came to understand that as important as the content of the play is - in a production such as this, the connections, the insight, the empathy and the potential transformations lie in the nature and shape of the collaboration. These things - which are so hard to define - were what ultimately moved the play and the show towards a unity which was not just presented on stage but which bound the artists together far beyond the end of the performance.



● The two teams appearing as one family after having had journeyed through the histories of the two countries

IN CONCLUSION

DCS RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION began in 2015 as a simple conversation between two female artists - the creative directors of Stages Theatre Group and Mashrika Performing Arts Company. This small conversation grew into an international collaboration and yielded a lasting and deep bond between artists of two continents. What started off as one performance, grew into several performances, what began as one festival appearance continued over the years in the form of several festival appearances and collaborations.

While this play was being made, the two casts explored the histories and geographies of the two countries, conducted many discussions, made mistakes, apologized, returned to the rehearsal room, changed their personal beliefs, challenged each other's beliefs and adapted their habits for the sake of the other.

DCS RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION was ultimately a merging of Rwandan and Sri Lankan artists. Through it, artists from two countries worked together to adjust their art, lives and beliefs for the sake of one play.

DCS RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION truly opened our eyes to what 'collaboration' really means.

Copyright © 2020 Stages Theatre Guarantee Limited

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

Resource Packs

Editor (Writing): Ruwanthie de Chickera

Editor (Video): Malith Sulara

Language Editors: Nipuni Sharada Pathirage (S) King Ratnam (T)

Writers: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando, Jayampathi Guruge, Nadie Kammallaweera, Nalin Lusena, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage, Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Design Editors: Malshani Delgahapitiya, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

Proofreaders: Asha Abeykoon, Geetha de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando, U. D. R. H. K. Gunasinghe, Tracy Holsinger, Aravinda Jayasekara, Nadie Kammallaweera, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage, Sudeshna Ranmuthugala, King Ratnam, Thilaka Subasinghe

Layout and Graphic Designers: Prasad Aluthwattha, David Cotterrell, Sanjaya Ekneligoda, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha, Venura Navod, Deshan Tennekoon

Layout Assistants: Kiyas Ahamed, Malshani Delgahapitiya, Janith Harshana

Research Assistants: Kaushalya Attyagalle, Nalin Lusena, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha, Akalanka Prabhashwara, Dinushika Seneviratne

Translators: Hiranyada Dewasiri(S/E), Arundi Jayasekara(S/E), Manuli Lavanya(S/E), Lihini Nilaweera(S/E), Jinadani Parameshwaram(T), Shamala Vedanayagam(T), Piumi Wijesundara(E)

Video Crew: Venura Navod, King Ratnam, Pramila Samarakoon, Kasun Ukwatta

Web Design and Developer: Ransaka Galmangoda

Administrators: Malshani Delgahapitiya, Mahesh Lakmal

Stages Theatre Group
RESOURCE PACKS

DCS 7 Decades of Sri Lanka

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Design by: Venura Navod

DCS Girls at Checkpoints

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Venura Navod

DCS Monologues

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera

Assisted by: Pemanthi Fernando

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

DCS Rwanda

Sri Lanka Collaboration

Written by: Nipuni Sharada Pathirage

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwatta

Grease Yaka

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

Kalumaali: a fairy tale for grown-ups

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Nadie Kammallaweera

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

Love and Other Objects

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Assisted by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Venura Navod

Ovaryacting!

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Venura Navod

Passing Stage Project

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera

Assisted by: Kaushalya Attygalle, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Sanjaya Ekneligoda, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

The Syrian Monologues

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Assisted by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

The Certificate

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Sanjaya Ekneligoda

Thought Curfew

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: David Cotterrell

Walking Path - a play without words

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Assisted by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

Stages Artist Training Programme

Written by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

Stages Junior Ensemble

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

Stages Senior Ensemble

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

DEAR RESOURCE PACK
CHILDREN
SINCERELY

RWANDA-SRI LANKA COLLABORATION

stages
theatre
group