



**OTHER VOICES
DISSIDENT VOICES
QUEER VOICES**

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The Hearing Voices Café Paper

To hear oneself speak is maybe the minimal definition of consciousness

Issue 3 – January 2022

A project initiated by Dora García in collaboration with Jayampathi Guruge and many others

<https://hearingvoicescafecolombo.wordpress.com>



The Hearing Voices Café

“Words move from language to language, from culture to culture, from mouth to mouth. Our bodies are migrants; cells and bacteria are migrants too. Even galaxies migrate.” —Cecilia Vicuña

The designation “Hearing Voices Café” applies to every well-patronized coffee shop. At the same time, the phrase “hearing voices” is also associated with the phenomenon of hearing inner voices. Drawing on the ambiguity of the term, Colomboscope interdisciplinary arts festival 2021, artists Jayampathi Guruge and Dora García, collaborators and guests are installing a gathering place for people who hear voices and for voices who need to be heard, hosted by the Viharamahadevi Park Cafeteria.

The Hearing Voices Café is a dialogic structure initiated in 2014 in Hamburg, having traveled ever since across Europe and North America. The Hearing Voices Café is a meeting place,

hosted by an existing—and fully functioning—café. The polysemy of the expression “hearing voices” is put to good use by this structure: underlining the political load of dissent from the norm, and the relation of this dissidence, this non-normativity, with creativity.

Voice-hearing is not only a widespread phenomenon, but also a cultural-historically significant one. From Socrates to Teresa of Ávila from John of the Cross to the American avant-garde writer Hannah Weiner, famous philosophers, believers, and poets have regarded voice hearing as a rare talent and a special gift. Other artists had less positive experiences with

voices, but they nevertheless impacted their work: Sarah Kane, Robert Walser, Virginia Woolf, or Philip K. Dick, to name just a few examples. In many cultures, voice-hearing is a precious gift, a connection to the underworld, the spiritual, the ancestors, and a form of communication with the departed.

The Hearing Voices Café revolves primarily around exchange, community, experiment, memory, research, struggle and destigmatization. A Hearing Voices Café in Sri Lanka gets the extra layer of exploring experimental modes of live performance, literary affinities weaving enduring trauma and healing, as well as feminist legacies, and sacred knowledge practices such as Sufism.

THE HEARING VOICES CAFÉ COLOMBO

As part of Colomboscope interdisciplinary arts festival. Hosted by Lak Cafe, Viharamahadevi Park, Colombo 7
From January 21st to January 30th 2022

All info on Colomboscope interdisciplinary arts festival:
<http://www.colomboscope.lk>
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Other Voices—Dissident Voices—Queer Voices

A text proposed by Everystory Sri Lanka and Young Feminist Collective

Learning about feminism isn't always easy. The more you learn about it, the more you are compelled to unlearn and question almost everything you have been taught so far at home, at school, and by society in general. Watching a mainstream rom-com movie will never be the same again. In fact, nothing will ever be the same again. The same goes for queer feminism.

This reading list on Queer Feminism was curated by Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala compiling a broad range of resources—from the diverse gender and sexual identities of the Global South, to the laws which criminalise homosexual behaviour—providing a great starting point to increase your understanding of the intersection between queer theory and feminism.

An Introduction to Queer Theory

If you are willing to embark on this challenging yet liberating journey of seeing the world through a queer feminist perspective, then a whole new world awaits! And this is precisely what **Nivedita Menon** offers through her book *Seeing Like a Feminist*. If there is just one book you would like to read to learn about feminism, and queer feminism, this is it. If reading the whole book is too much, a good start would be the Introduction, a few pages of the Chapter on Family, and also a few pages from the Chapter on Body where she introduces Judith Butler's theory of 'gender performativity' and how this is normalized within what Butler refers to as the 'heterosexual matrix.' The best part is that this book is so easy to read and hopefully you will be tempted to keep reading till the end.



So you know a little (or a lot) about feminism, but what exactly is queer feminism? To put it quite simply, queer feminism is a combination of feminist theories and queer theories. If you want a quick and very rough introduction to queer theory, check out this illustrated book *Queer: A Graphic History which will shake (and possibly rattle!) all your existing assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality*, by Dr. Meg-John Barker. While reading this however, you might feel that the ideas that are being proposed, although important, are primarily from western theorists, and perhaps not so relatable if you are living in a **South Asian context**.

This is why another critical text on queer theory is *Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India* by **Arvind Narrain** and **Gautam Bhan**. Narrain and Bhan's book is critical as it contextualizes queer theory from a South Asian (specifically Indian) perspective by including not just the LGBTIQ communities in India but also the **traditional non-normative gender and sexual identities such as Hijras and the Kothis** and many others whose sexual desires and sexuality cannot be captured in identities alone. You could begin by reading the Introduction and then proceed to read Akshay Khanna's *Beyond Sexuality*. This book also includes a few personal narratives—one on Being Gay and Catholic and another on Islam and Me.

Ok so now we have learned that queer theory resists all definitions, resists all binaries, resists identities, tells us that sex, gender and sexuality is on a spectrum, and basically includes everyone who is non-(hetero)normative. But don't worry if it's still a little confusing and difficult to understand—there's plenty of easy-to-read (and partly illustrated) blogs on *What Exactly is Non-Binary* that might be able to help with these ideas a little more.

The LGBTIQ community in Sri Lanka

What about studies on sexuality and stories of LGBTIQ Sri Lankans? Thankfully there is more material today than there was 10 years ago! This next section will guide you through a few of the key resources to help you better understand the local context.

If you would like a peek into the true life stories of four LGBT Sri Lankans, have a look at this graphic narrative—*Spectrum: Four Illustrated Stories of Discrimination Faced by LGBT People in Sri Lanka* (also available in Sinhala and Tamil: t.ly/Y5OD). For a more in-depth qualitative study of experiences of violence and discrimination as faced by lesbian, bisexual women and transpeople in Sri Lanka, have a look at *Not Gonna Take It Lying Down* (also available in Sinhala and Tamil: <https://womenandmedia.org/not-gonna-take-it-lying-down/>).



As Covid19 has forced us to inhabit a more digital space, a recent study (with illustrations that will blow your mind!) looks primarily at how queer Sri Lankans use the internet in their expression, for their work, to consume and create content, to find pleasure, or to find a community. The study by **Sachini Perera** and **Zainab Ibrahim**—*Somewhere Only We Know: Gender, Sexualities, and Sexual Behaviour on the Internet in Sri Lanka*, is also available in Sinhala and Tamil. Download it here: <https://erotics.apc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Somewhere-only-We-Know-Online.pdf>.

The travel restrictions that have been in place due to Covid19 have also forced many LGBTIQ youths to stay at home—possibly in transphobic/homophobic environments, with family members who might be struggling to come to terms with a child / sibling / relative is who is queer.

Gender and Sexuality

When we talk about sex, gender and sexuality and all the related terms—sometimes referred to as the Alphabet Soup (LGBTIQ++)—one thing to keep in mind is language. How do we translate these terms without losing their original meanings? Who actually does the translations? Is there a feminist politics to translation? For example, **does the identity category 'transgender' correctly capture the nuanced meanings associated with the Sri Lankan Nachchicomunity? Or the Indian Hijras and Kothis? Or the Pakistani Zenanas? Or the Nepali Metis? Or the Two-Spirits in Native America?** Not quite. While 'transgender' is an umbrella term, it is also a term that can easily erase the varied diversity of gender and sexual identities that we can find in the global south, including in South Asia. This is why a trilingual, community-sourced glossary of terms relating to gender identity and sexual orientation begun by two queer, feminist Sri Lankan activists is an important step in documenting terminology in local language. Find it here: t.ly/E5WU. The glossary currently has phrases and terms which have been sourced by LGBTIQ Sri Lankans and you too are invited to add to it if you think there are terms that should be included.



When we talk about sexuality, more often than not, we may tend to focus on the dangers often associated with sexuality—the violence, the brutality and coercion in the form of rape and sexual harassment. So much so that it's easy to forget that sexuality can also offer many pleasurable experiences—intimacy, desire, curiosity, sensuality, adventure, human connections and many more. This tension between pleasure and danger has been explored by a number of feminists, but **Carole S. Vance's** essay

Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality continues to be relevant even today and is one of the seminal pieces which foregrounds this tension. You can also read this brief essay by Sri Lankan feminist and women's human rights activist **Sunila Abeysekera** on *Sexuality: A Feminist Issue?* which is available in English and Sinhala. Find it here: t.ly/thmB.



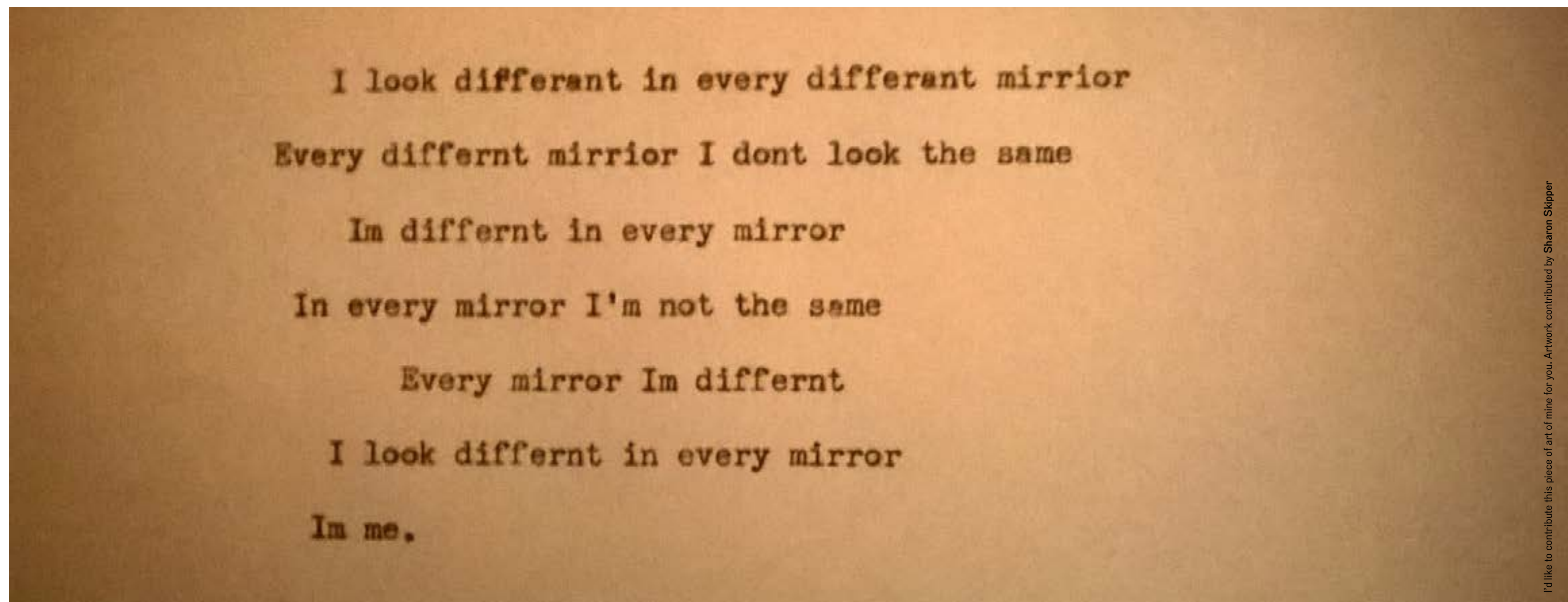
A Systematic Oppression: The Queer Community and the Law

A reading list on queer feminism isn't complete without a mention of the laws in many contexts including Sri Lanka, where being LGBTIQ is often criminalised. Many of these laws are legacies of British colonial law—specifically Section 365A of the 1883 (yes, 1883!) Sri Lankan Penal Code—that we inherited, which criminalises consensual, adult same-sex sexual relations even in the privacy of your own bedroom!

To begin with, you could read this essay by **Shermal Wijewardene** and **Vijay K. Nagaraj** *On Queering our Approach to the Law: A Conversation with Priya Thangarajah*, to understand how an alternative and queer approach to the law is necessary if we are to engage with it. Also read **Marini Fernando's** *A Queer Wish List for 2017* as she highlights some of the key legal obstacles faced by LGBTIQ people in Sri Lanka today. Both these essays are available in the December 2016 LST Review dedicated to Queering the Law—so feel free to browse through the rest of the articles as well if they interest you: t.ly/Iiky.

Illustrations: Isuri Merenchi Hewage. Source: Perera, S., & Ibrahim, Z. [2021] *Somewhere Only We Know: Gender, sexualities, and sexual behaviour on the internet in Sri Lanka*. Association for Progressive Communications

Everystory Sri Lanka is a collective of young Sri Lankan feminists and identifies as a storytelling collective. Founded in 2018 we work at creating spaces where underrepresented and historically marginalised narratives find a voice.



I'd like to contribute this piece of art of mine for you. Artwork contributed by Sharon Skipper

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Nipuni Sharada Pathirage

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ඉරාෂි තෙන්නකෝන්

Nipuni Sharada Pathirage is an actor, voice artist and is currently working as a lecturer (Probationary) in Drama and Theatre at the Department of Drama, Oriental Ballet and Modern Dance, Faculty of Dance and Drama, University of the Visual and Performing Arts. She graduated from UVPA with a First Class and won the gold medal for the highest GPA in 2017. She has won several awards including Best Supporting Actress at the State Theatre Festival 2015. In 2019, she performed in an international theatre production titled 'Counting and Cracking', directed by Emon Flack and S. Shakthidaran and produced by Belvoir Theatre and Co-curious, Australia. She has performed at several international theatre festivals such as Sydney Theatre Festival and Adelaide Art Festival, NSD Festival and Metta International Theatre Festival. Recently, she played the lead female role in Antique Kada Maranayak directed by Ashoka Handagama.

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මා හට ලං විය හැක්කේ ඔවුන්ට පමණකි
ඔවුන් මා ප්‍රතික්ෂේප නොකරයි
ඔවුන් මා ස්පර්ශ කරයි
මගේ ශරීරය පුරා ගමන් කරයි
මගේ සෙම සොටු ඔවුන් උරාගනී
මගේ කඳුළු ඔවුන් ආදරයෙන් පිස දමයි

මා තනිවී තැනල මා ජීවත් වෙයි
කිසිදු මිනිස් ස්පර්ශයකින් තොරව
මා වෙන් වී ඇත
තවදුරටත් මා වෙන් විය හැක
තවදුරටත් මා ඇතට යා හැක
නොපෙනෙන ලෙස

අවැසි නොවේ කිසිවෙක් දකින්නටල කිසිවෙකුගේ හඬ අසන්නට
සමී කිසිදා නො ඇසූ ප්‍රශ්න
මට මතකයට නොහැකුණු
අත්විඳි
අසමි මාගේ ශරීරයෙන්

මා කිසිවෙක් නොවේ
මා මවක් නොවේ
මා සිංහල නොවේ
මා බෞද්ධ නොවේ
මා දෙමළ නොවේ මුස්ලිම් ද නොවේ
මා පෙම්වතියක් නොවේ
කලාකරුවෙකු නොවේ
මා ගුරුවරයකු නොවේ
මා දුටුව නොවේ
යෙහෙලියක නොවේ
මා ආදරණීයකු නොවේ
මා අසල්වාසියෙකු නොවේ
මා මිතුරකු නොවේ
මා කිසිවකු නොවේ
මා ජාති වාදය නොවේ
මා ගැහැනියක නොවේ
මා මනුෂ්‍යයෙකු ද නොවේ

අසමි මාගෙන්
මා කවුද??
සමීබන්ධතාවලින් ඇත් වූ කල මා කිසිවෙකු නොවේ
තනි වූ කල මා කිසිවෙකු නොවේ
මට චිරිතයක් නැත
අනන්‍යතාවක් නැත
පෙනී සිටීමක් නැත
රහස්‍යමක් නැත
මට නමක් නැත
අමතන කෙනෙක් නැත
නමක් අවැසි නැත

මා හා කාමරය අතර කිසිදු වෙනසක් නැත
මා කාමරය හා සමාන වේ
කාමරයේ ඇති කිසිවක් ඔවුන් වෙනුවෙන් පෙනී නොසිටී
මා පෙනී සිටින්නේ කුමක් වෙනුවෙන්ද?
මා පෙනී සිටියේ අනෙකා වෙනුවෙන් නොවේද?
අනෙකාට පෙනෙන්නට නොවේද?
අනෙකා නොවන තැන මා කවුරුන්ද?
මා අනිකාගේ ගොඩනැගීමක් නොවේද?

මට භාෂාවක් අවැසි නැත
මට හකික් අවැසි නැත
මම වෙනස් වන්නේ කොතනින්ද?
වෙනස් වන ඊර්බාව මොකක්ද?
මම කවුද??
මා වෙනස් බව සිතුවෙමි
මා වෙනස් වන්නේ කොතනින්ද?
කුමක් හා සාපේක්ෂව ද?
කාට සාපේක්ෂව ද?
කාමරයේ බඩු හා මා අතර ඇති වෙනස කුමක්ද?
තවදුරටත් මා වෙනස කියා අර්ථකථනය කරන්නේ කුමක්ද?
වෙනස කුමටද?
කුමකට සාපේක්ෂව ද?

Kanchana Malshani has studied traditional Sri Lankan dance forms from various teachers since her childhood until she graduated from university. Kanchana is a graduate from Sripalee campus, University of Colombo and received a First Class honors degree. Being a student of traditional Sri Lankan dance forms, such as Kandyan, Sabaragamuwa and Low country dance, Kanchana has developed her own dance vocabulary through her engagement with contemporary and experimental Sri Lankan dancers such as Venuri Perera and Umeshi Rajendra. Her recent work *Talking Silambu* shows a clear rebellious individuality that seeks to break the traditional codification and rebirth as a free bodied woman.

I see my life from a room alone

I think I see everything that hurts me
I stay away from everything thats hurts me
I do not look at any of that
I bear all the pain alone with the room
The windows, the bed, the pillows, the mattress, the table everything in the room speaks to me
They ask me about my pain and sorrow

They understand me
They comfort me
Only they can get close to me
They do not reject me
They touch me
They travel trough the bone marrow
All over my body
They suck me all the muscus and wipe my tears with love
I'm not alone
I live without any human touch

I'm separated
The further I can separate
The more I can go invisible

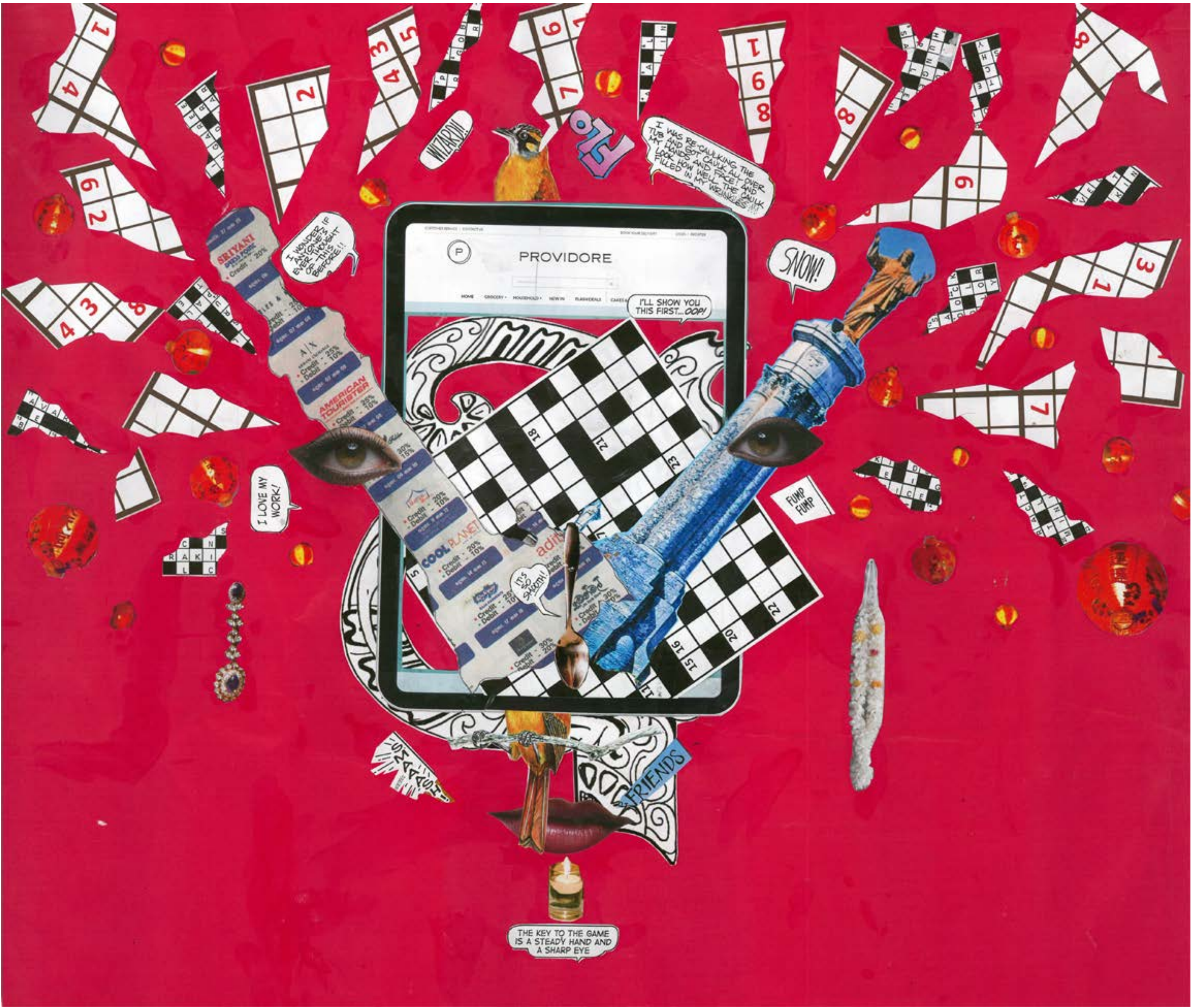
I do not want to see anyone or even hear their voice
I ask question
Never thought before but had to experience
I asked reply for all those questions from my body
I'm nobody
I'm not mother
I'm not a Sinhala
I'm not a Buddhist
I'm not a Tamil or Muslim
I'm not a girlfriend
I'm not an artist
I'm not a Daughter
I'm not a friend
I'm not a Dearest
I'm not a Neighbour
I'm not a racist
I'm not a Sri Lankan
I'm not a woman
Even, I'm not a human

I ask me
Who I am?
After leaving everything and relationship
I'm nobody
I don't have a character
I don't have an identity
No need to appear anymore
No acting
I don't have a name
No one is calling then
No need a name

There are no any difference
Between me and my room
I'm simillar to my room, and every object in the room
The room and nothing in it is not trying to stand for themselves
What do I represent ?
For whom? or for me
I represented me for other
I tried to show myself to other didn't I?
Who I am without other
I'm a creation of other

I don't need language
I don't need a voice
What makes me different from other thing?
What is the line that change me more than anything else?
And what is the point?

Who I am
I thought I'm different than others
I ask question
What does my difference, measure relative to what is the difference between me my room and stuff
What do I further interpret as different?
I ask
What is the difference??



Artwork by Kasun Ukwaththa
Artwork by Veenadari Lakshika



Raja Jewellers

we the people

we the people of the twenty first century
 we the people stepping on our neighbour to kill
 we the people hanging around to video people dying
 we the people obsessed over skin colour
 we the people seeing the difference in another skin colour
 we the people not seeing the pain of our nearest
 we the people with the technology to traverse the world in an instant
 we the people experimenting to settle in space
 we the people protesting injustice, blind to our own faults
 we the people watching people die of hunger
 we the people facing global pandemics
 we the people selling weapons
 we the people manufacturing viruses
 we the people selling the cure
 we the people creating trouble among nations
 we the people conferencing to resolve deadly conflict among nations
 we the people trafficking human organs
 we the people sacrificing our life for religion
 we the people chasing after money
 we the people clutching stolen money
 we the people full of hopes and dreams
 we the people living in a dream
 we the people unsure of exactly why we protest
 we the people destroying our minds watching things of hatred all day long
 we the people who kept silent during wars
 we the people who colonized through genocide
 we the people full of pride only for our own kind
 we the people divided by every degree of race, caste, class and religion
 we the people who have forgotten values
 we the people who have forgotten how short our lives are
 we the people struggling to become immortal
 we the people who know not love
 we the people sowing hate
 we the people stifling the very breath of life
 we the people selling Oxygen
 we the people discussing global warming seated in air-conditioned rooms
 we the people sharing posts about peace while at war
 we the people pushed down under by the rulers we worship
 we the people stuck on a Timeline
 we the people driving social media platforms that are part of the problem
 we the people tackling the issues of our nation on the media alone
 we the people being ruled without a decent leader
 we the people changing colour to our advantage
 we the people quick to forget
 we the people who don't learn from death
 we the people scrambling for success over the dead bodies of others
 we the people with our liberal views, who cannot stand those who do not believe what we believe
 we the people never satisfied with the abundance we get
 we the people ever ready to put the blame on another
 we the people blind to our own shortcomings
 we the people who have not understood the meaning of being alive
 we the people bloodthirsty for revenge
 we the people whose mouths cannot open to confess a fault
 we the people who cultivate global disasters
 we the people who know it all
 we the people who have forgotten our humanity

we the people who need to stop for a moment
 we the people who need to stop the killing
 we the people who need to realize the value of a life
 we the people who need to demonstrate love through our actions
 we the people who need to spread the essence of kindness
 we the people who need to begin living peacefully
 we the people who need to see the world anew
 we the people who need to make the world beautiful
 we the people who need to speak up for humanity
 we the people who need to stop taking snap decisions
 we the people who must rebuild our societies
 we the people who must understand the value of breath
 we the people who must learn from our past to act on our present
 we the people who need to stop sowing hate for the sake of the generations after us

we the people who must show what it actually is to be human, now

Jayampathi Guruge works in the theatre in several capacities, as a director, writer, actor-trainer, designer and performer. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo. He visited the Dell'Arte International in California, USA in September 2015 as a Fulbright Scholar on a student exchange programme where his research focus was devising theatre and ensemble work. Jayampathi intends to continue to develop as a multidisciplinary artist—pursuing directing, designing, performing and self-awareness skills together as a means of artistic expression. He is deeply interested in the devising (collaborative) process in theatre, and particularly in exploring aspects of contemporary physical (non-verbal) theatre. He is also involved in the area of film as a writer and actor. He has won several local and international awards for his work, including best light designer, best choreographer and set design (Jury Award) at the Sri Lankan State Drama Festival 2019 for *The Grease Yaka Returns* and best director, best production, best design and best ensemble at the 'Thespo - 16' 2014, Mumbai, India for *Walking Path*. He is currently engaged in trying to understand the self and self-consciousness based on Buddhist philosophy. He also practices meditation and simple living while sharing his life's experience with others.

A Mother's Words III

In the endless nights,
 the split open earth
 witnesses blood;
 Who are the children waiting for
 in camps mired by sobs?

No son,
 no father,
 nothing ends.

The desolate
 walk their life
 with feetless legs.

Once, there were houses here,
 there were villages here.

An eon deluged by the sea
 in the silence of history.

Semmani 03

There is no one to touch
 the ashes of
 those terrible days—
 where grass
 does not sprout from
 the blackened water
 in the salty fields,
 the tears of the bereaved
 do not dry the bodies
 of those wretched humans.

Under the billboards
 their memories
 sit on the edge of oblivion.

I am building a memorial,
 not with stone,
 not with water,
 but with air,
 the sound
 that trails me forever.

Packiyathan Ahilan was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. He is currently a senior lecturer in Art History at the University of Jaffna. He has published three poetry collections: 'Pathunkukuzhi Naathkal' (Bunker Days, 2001), 'Saramakavigal' (Elegies, 2011) and 'Ammal' (Mother, 2017). Mawenzi House, Canada also published his collection of poems, 'Then There Were No Witnesses' as an English translation in 2018. He writes critical essays on poetry, heritage, theatre and visual arts. His poetry, and reviews of poetry have appeared in various online magazines, journals and newspapers.



Kanchana Malshani performing "See You Don't See Me and Its Double" (2021). Kanchana was drawn to Venuri Perera's poignant lecture performance *On Gaze and Anonymity (or See You Don't See Me)*, 2020. As she seeks for similarities and differences, she begins to dance with the lecture, first as a shadow before more and more she finds spaces for herself, along with and in between sentences, words, and pauses

Woman. That is the label and the gender identity the world has conferred on me since my first cry. From childhood to adulthood my journey has been one of conformity and conflict with that identity. The rhythm and movement that spring from my inner being and translate into performance art are shaped by the gender identity dictated by society. As a daughter, girl, or performer, my body represents and reflects the identities the world expects of me. Outsiders use political and cultural norms and other social constructs to define me – to understand me. I have internalized these expectations and society expects me to live and behave according to its definition of what a woman should be. Because when I obey, I become the woman. Something known. Something familiar. Society is comfortable with my existence as a woman, my womanhood and the art that springs from my experience as a

woman if it is in accordance with society's pre-ordained role for me.

When I play this role of conformity my inner self is thrown into chaos. The noise from within me is deafening. When I break free of societal norms and expectations then those around me are in discomfort, I am at peace with my inner self.

To communicate this clash of dualities I will be handing out geiji anklets to the audience and will invite them to adorn me with the accessories as they please. Once they are done with this, I will first perform a movement that will not rattle the anklets hence there will be total silence. The movement will crescendo gradually with the anklets making a loud and unbearable noise. The noise from the anklets combined with my movement will embody the duality of the struggle of my existence as a woman in this society.

தாயுரை III

முடிவடையாத நள்ளிரவுகளில்
 கிழிந்து பிளந்த நிலங்கள்
 உதிரும் காண்கின்றன
 கேவல்களின் சதுப்புக் கூடாரங்களில்
 யாருக்காகக் காத்திருக்கின்றன குழந்தைகள்

தனயரில்லை.
 தந்தையரில்லை
 முற்றுப் பெறவில்லை எதுவும்

பாதமற்ற கால்களால்
 வாழ்வைக் கடந்து செல்கிறார்கள்.
 நாதியற்ற மனிதர்கள்.

முன்னர் இங்கிருந்தன வீடுகள்
 முன்னர் இங்கிருந்தன கிராமங்கள்

வரலாற்றின் மெளனத்துக்கு முன்னால்
 கடல் கொண்டதே ஒரு யுகம்.

செம்மணி III

உப்பு வயல்களின் கீழே
 துரதிர்ஷ்டமான அந்த மனிதர்களை
 அவர்களின் தேகத்தை உலரவிடாது
 பெருகும் நேசர்களின் கண்ணீரை
 கரிய நீர் பூற்களின் மேலே விடாது காயும்
 பயங்கர நாட்களின் சாம்பரை
 தீண்டுவார் யாருமில்லை.

விளம்பரப் பதாகைகளின் கீழே
 மறத்தலின் விளிம்பில் இருந்தன அவர்தம் நினைவுகள்...

கல்லாலல்ல;
 நீராலுமல்ல;
 வளியாற் கட்டுகிறேன்
 விடாது பின்தொடருமொரு ஒலியால்
 அவர்களிற்கொரு நினைவிடம்.

Kanchana Malshani has studied traditional Sri Lankan dance forms from various teachers since her childhood until she graduated from university. Kanchana is a graduate from Sripalee campus, University of Colombo and received a First Class honors degree. Being a student of traditional Sri Lankan dance forms, such as Kandyan, Sabaragamuwa and Low country dance, Kanchana has developed her own dance vocabulary through her engagement with contemporary and experimental Sri Lankan dancers such as Venuri Perera and Umeshi Rajendra. Her recent work *Talking Silambu* shows a clear rebellious individuality that seeks to break the traditional codification and rebirth as a free bodied woman.

Thinking and feeling beyond the nation: culture and nationalism in Sri Lanka

Harshana Rambukwella

During the height of decolonization, across the formerly colonial world from South Asia to Africa writers and artists celebrated the birth of 'new' nations. It was a time of much anticipation. Politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru of India saw it as the unfolding of historical destiny. In Sri Lanka, particularly in Sinhala culture, the 1950s marked a period of cultural euphoria. In writing, theatre, film and song artists explored a dizzying range of themes from ancient myth to the changing rural landscape. One implicit thread that united this artistic production was the newly emergent nation state. It was not simply the thematic content of this artistic production but its very forms encapsulated what Timothy Brennan has called the 'national longing for form'. Much of this artistic production was premised on a belief that the newly independent nation state would be a site of liberation for a people long repressed by colonialism—a kind of promised land. However, the script of national independence in many postcolonial nations faltered relatively rapidly. In Africa, for instance, the democratic process broke down and a new 'local' class of exploitative politicians emerged to take the place of the departed colonialists. This is a trajectory clearly marked in the African English novel where writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo and Chinua Achebe turn from the euphoria of independence to a mode of writing that is both formally and thematically 'anti-nationalist'.

However, in Sri Lanka, and to some extent in India, the trajectory of nationalism and artistic production was different. In Sri Lanka, within the Sinhala cultural mainstream, the nation as a symbolic presence remained strong well into the 1980s. Many artists continued to valorize the nation and saw it as a space of hope and promise. The political-economy that informed this continued allegiance to the nation state is a complex one which I cannot explore in detail here. The

nature of the welfare state in Sri Lanka and the heavy state patronage for 'culture' were some of the reasons why this 'hope' in the nation survived. But by the mid-1980s, with aggressive neo-liberal transformation of the economy and the state monopoly over mass media coming to an end, things began to change. Avant-garde artists had already begun to critique the romanticization of the nation by the 1970s, but in the 1980s this became a more mainstream phenomenon in Sinhala culture.

However, the legacies of this earlier fidelity to the nation have conditioned Sinhala culture in ways that we are only now beginning to unlearn. A ubiquitous term in Sinhala cultural discourse—*apekama* (which loosely translates as 'ourness')—is indicative of how deep-seated this often parochial sense of nationalist cultural consciousness is. It has bred a judgmental culture which keeps our cultural and artistic discourses trapped in a time-warp and unable to adapt and creatively develop in line with global trends. This was evidenced in the reaction to the sudden fame of Yohani, whose cover version of a Sinhala song went viral both regionally and globally. Many cultural commentators in Sri Lanka felt that her success was underserving and an indication of 'debasement' of our 'classical' culture. While we may have reservations about the commodification of artistic practice, it is imperative that mainstream Sri Lankan cultural discourse becomes more open and gain the ability to 'think and feel' beyond the nation. Sri Lanka has a particularly islanded mentality when it comes to cultural production and consumption. As we approach the middle of the twenty first century, it is necessary for our cultural practitioners to critically revisit their relationship with the nation-state and begin to reimagine the shape of our culture. We need to cultivate a people who can breathe, imagine, think and feel beyond the nation.

Harshana Rambukwella is a Senior Lecturer at the Postgraduate Institute of English, The Open University of Sri Lanka. He is a Trustee of the Gratiaen Prize for English Writing, instituted by Michael Ondaatje, and serves on the judging panels of the Swarnapusthaka Awards for vernacular Sinhala language writing, awarded by the Book Publishers Association of Sri Lanka and the State Literary Prize, awarded by the Sri Lankan government. He has published in a number of academic journals including The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, boundary 2, The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities and The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes. His primary research interests are in postcolonial literatures and theory, comparative literature representations of nationalism in the South Asian context and the role of historical narratives and historiography in community identity. He also maintains an ongoing interest in sociolinguistics.



We like...

Dr Eleanor Longden, who is a research psychologist at the Psychosis Research Unit (PRU) in Manchester and also coordinates the research committee of Intervoice. Eleanor is an articulate and impassioned speaker on the experience of hearing voices. In February 2013, she travelled to Long Beach, California to speak in front of a star-studded TED audience. Her talk is available to view on line here: <http://bit.ly/1eKkU1V>. To tie in with her talk, Eleanor has written a book, *Learning from the Voices in My Head*, which is both an account of her experiences and a call for change in the way voice-hearing is understood.

A note from the darkest days

Nayadhara Thirimanne

Trying
Trying
Trying to smile
Trying
To remember
Trying
To remember to smile
Trying
Trying to remember to smile with myself
Trying ...

Nayadhara Thirimanne is an emerging interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary artist and an activist. Coming from a corporate background, she started her career and studies in art in 2019. She is currently recognized mainly for her live art performances at public spaces. Her work also encompasses performance art, painting, singing and acting. She is keen on experimenting with different mediums of artistic expressions.

Authenticity

Métis Magic

Shadows are darkening
as I'm embarking
and you're remarking
I'm not like you.

Twisted and torn
my old life I mourn
as I was reborn

I'm the ku-klux-klan
and it's my master plan
to over take the earth
I'm a renaissance man
eating from garbage cans
since birth that's all I'm worth

Intellectual captivity
it's insensitivity
supports the theory of relativity
no hypothesis
it's confident in analysis
of empirical discovery

I am eager
to learn procedure
the laws of nature, internally bound
your conclusions unsound
what I know now is profound
can't be seen on ultrasound

I was first introduced
then quickly seduced
by the voices in my head
as you misread
while I was misled

Jekyll and Hyde
there's nowhere to hide
even though I've tried,
you think I've lied
you only see one of me

The first time it happened, lovers delight
it came upon me like darkness through light
intrigued though I resisted
as you insisted that I was twisted

The madness inside continued to rise
I bounced between the lows and the highs
to my surprise, my bitter demise
lose the disguise
look into my eyes

A room full of strangers all yelling at me
all trying to make me see
what they see
as they look at me

Quality control
is my glory hole
it's my rock and roll of self-control

Exceptional strength,
the power of the moon to make waves
I am my own slave
and I'll dig my own grave
Deep, dark, and full of shame
can't even say my name
but I overcame as I reclaim
my own serenity

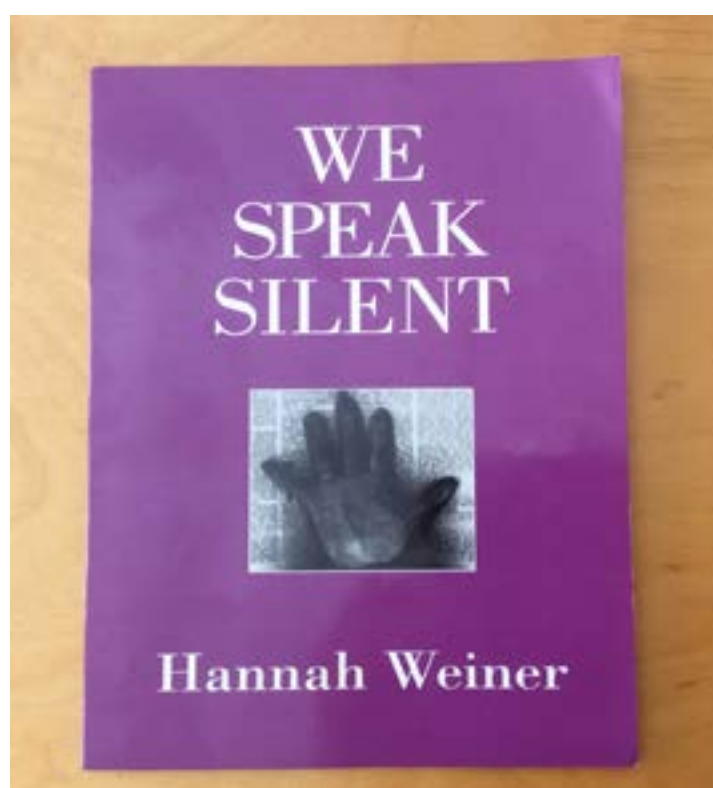
Monsters under the bed
not just in my head
I'm better off dead. Chose life instead?
universe misread

What once tormented, now enlightens
I am a Titan
though you it frightens
you call me psychotic
when my life gets chaotic
I'm not on narcotics and I'm not that neurotic

You say it's an epidemic
to be schizophrenic
call me a cynic but that's just a gimmick
to make you panic
I think it's pathetic

Romanticized and exoticized
I was agonized and classified
now I'm mostly satisfied
with all of my inhabitants
it's no longer paralysis
it's miraculous that they're unanimous
it's analogous of authenticity

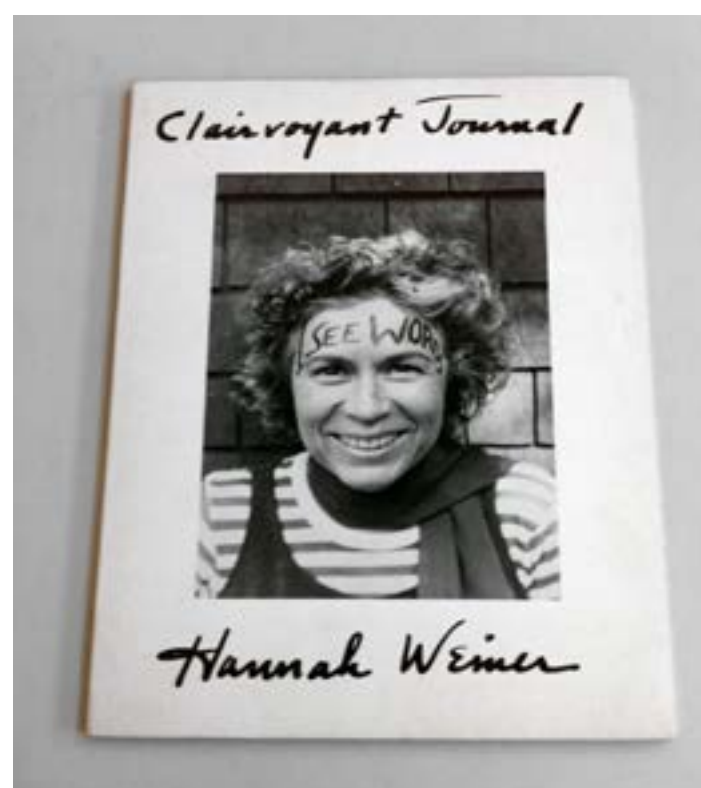
We like...



Hannah Weiner, *We Speak Silent* (New York: Roof Books, 1996)

Hannah Weiner, *We Speak Silent*, Roof Books, New York 1996, page 46

neil: i have to know more about how it works hear
silent conceptually
jess: we all know each other in each oh we are developed
others minds
lewis: well its just a silent conversation everyone
hears
paw: well planned maw let him finish
neil: coherence
barry: unwritten novel thats skip sentence what you
should say
abi: dont continue im disgusted with this informal
barry and abi: discontinuance
paw: do people think together maw
ed fried: turn the page over and you will find
another paragraph
neil: well why do you interrupt yourself
paw: the publisher the publisher
a vaguely amused lewis just brushes his teeth
WERE ALL GLAD
image of paw brushing his teeth too
neil: so you teach a bunch of nitwits huh well im
grown
andy: oh holy people



Hannah Weiner, *Clairvoyant Journal 1974: March-June Retreat* (New York: Angel Hair Books, 1978). Cover photograph by Tom Ahern © 1978 Hannah Weiner

Introduction to the Journal:
I SEE words on my forehead IN THE AIR
on other people on the typewriter on the page
These appear in the text in CAPITALS or italics

The Hearing Voices Café Colombo, ten days of voices being heard

Colomboscope interdisciplinary arts festival / Viharamahadevi Park Cafeteria, Colombo 7 / Ten episodes, one per day of festival, 21-30 January 2022

'Fiction is a tool we use to understand reality, in fact, we have no means to understand reality unless we use fiction. It can be shared with others or be completely personal,' notes artist, educator, and researcher **Dora García**. Literature, experimental pedagogies, and revolutionary archetypes often pave the way for her works, emerging in formats such as publishing, installation, and socially engaged projects that destabilize given notions of artwork, place, and audience.

Her ongoing project that has manifested in different parts of the world, 'The Hearing Voices Café' will be realised in Sri Lanka for the first time, in collaboration with performance artist **Jayampathi Guruge**, as a contextually rooted and site-responsive iteration with several contributors from the fields of literature, psychotherapy, theatre and activism. This project draws from traditions of voice hearing and designated voice hearers in various cultural contexts to explore methods of hearing, listening, and active exchange to form communities of care and politically aware, emancipatory support groups as an alternative to pharmacological approaches in conventional psychiatry. Each evening of the festival, an open-air café in Colombo at the Viharamahadevi Park will host this project with a series of conversations, shared acts of recitation, and performances in response to which audiences are invited to engage and contribute to a newspaper that extends through the course of the festival.

A series of cahiers titled 'Mad Marginal' developed by Dora García since 2009, stemming from the relationship between radical politics and radical art, as well as the notion of the artist as outsider, and anti-psychiatric movements since the 1970s, will be on view as part of *Reading in Tongues*, Colomboscope's reading room at the Lakmahal Community Library.

Episode 1

The history we remember

A group of guests is invited to narrate the Sri Lankan historical/community moment that has most influenced their lives. Different modes of oral history and storytelling will emerge over the evening.

With **Harshana Rambukwella**, **Sahlah Anees Nipuni Sharada Pathirage**, **Everystory** (represented by **Baghya Wickramage**) Among others

Episode 2

The Book People

A group of guests with different backgrounds will present themselves as books, manifesting as characters and taking up trails of fiction to draw accounts from their life story. Then opening for a lively exchange with folks attending this event.

With **Pemanthi Fernando** and teenage members of **Stages Theatre Group**

Episode 3

උරෙහිපිටු සාජිපාඩු

உணர்வு வலி

(spicy food

for ears that haven't heard-)

Kumari Kumaragama brings poetic inspiration and readings of her short stories in dialogue with Ruhanie Perera. This exchange lays focus on friendship as a form of voice hearing and counsel, feminist wisdoms and intergenerational love. Reading and listening appear as spiritual gift, as form of consciousness, as expression of trauma, as acknowledgement of the plurality of the subject, as a form of thought, as connection to foremothers, asserting voice hearing as a complex experience as varied as dreams, losses, and beyond human lives.

With **Kumari Kumaragama**, **Ruhanie Perera**

Episode 4

Spirituality: what is exceptional, what is common

We invite guests with different relationships to spirituality and healing to address their relationship with these aspects as part of everyday life. In an interview with Jayampathi Guruge and Natasha Ginwala, we will address together what is common and what is different in the connections made between sacred architecture, human faith, recovery, and the role of divine beings today.

With **Omar Kasmani**, **Iffath Neetha Uthumalebbe**, Psychiatrist **Saman Hettige** Among others

Episode 5

Because they were, we are

It is a common perception in civil rights movements that those fighting today, in our contemporaneity, are always supported and accompanied by those who fought yesterday, in our past. There is this wonderful expression: "Because they were, we are, because we are, they will be". In this event, our guests tell us about the history of human rights activism in Sri Lanka.

With **Everystory** (represented by **Baghya Wickramage**), **Kanchana Malshani** performance Among others

Episode 6

Chats with the Dead

We invite Shehan Karunatilaka to converse with Harshana Rambukwella around his book *Chats with the Dead*. They will bring alive the characters who inhabit this literary cosmos while engaging with notions of how we continue to feel the presence of the dead. In absurd and gripping ways, the authors will engage how adventure, bureaucracy and corruption pervade not only landscapes of the living but also, the afterlife.

With **Harshana Rambukwella**, **Shehan Karunatilaka**



Episode 7

Play it Back, Theatre

We think in a language that is innate to our souls. Our minds are constantly sifting through new vocabularies that are trendy and accepted as the norm of the times. This session *The Social Mind: Uncovering Fields of Consciousness* led by Jayampathi Guruge with Kasun Chathuranga uses live performance to engage with an intimate public to inquire into ways that mainstream media sources pressurise collective consciousness, the use of rumour and political rhetoric to distort and exhaust bodies receiving information, as well as ways that minor stories become buried in our 'timelines.'

Loganathan Suman conducts an interactive session titled *Tea Party* addressing life experiences of tea plantation worker communities and the forms of literature that have long surrounded the hill country. He provides critical pararound questions of labour, social struggles, and housing. With **Kasun Chathuranga**, **Jayampathi Guruge**, **Loganathan Suman - Tea Party**

Episode 8

Poetic Justice

Even in the worst of times, there is always poetry. Poetry pulls us together, encouraging forms of collective survival and shared belonging. As Octavio Paz writes, "words are acts." Let us act and resound together in the currents of poetical movement. We welcome poets and readers of all kinds, your voice is your craft and instrument! Join us for an "open mic" and bring along your words and those that have been nourishing you in these volatile times.

Everyone is Welcome!

Episode 9

She has many names

Before concluding our sessions, this evening is devoted to the voices of women: as survivors of war and colonial trauma, as accepting or rejecting the traditional role of caretakers, but above all, as self-organizers to build a better future in relation to issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality.

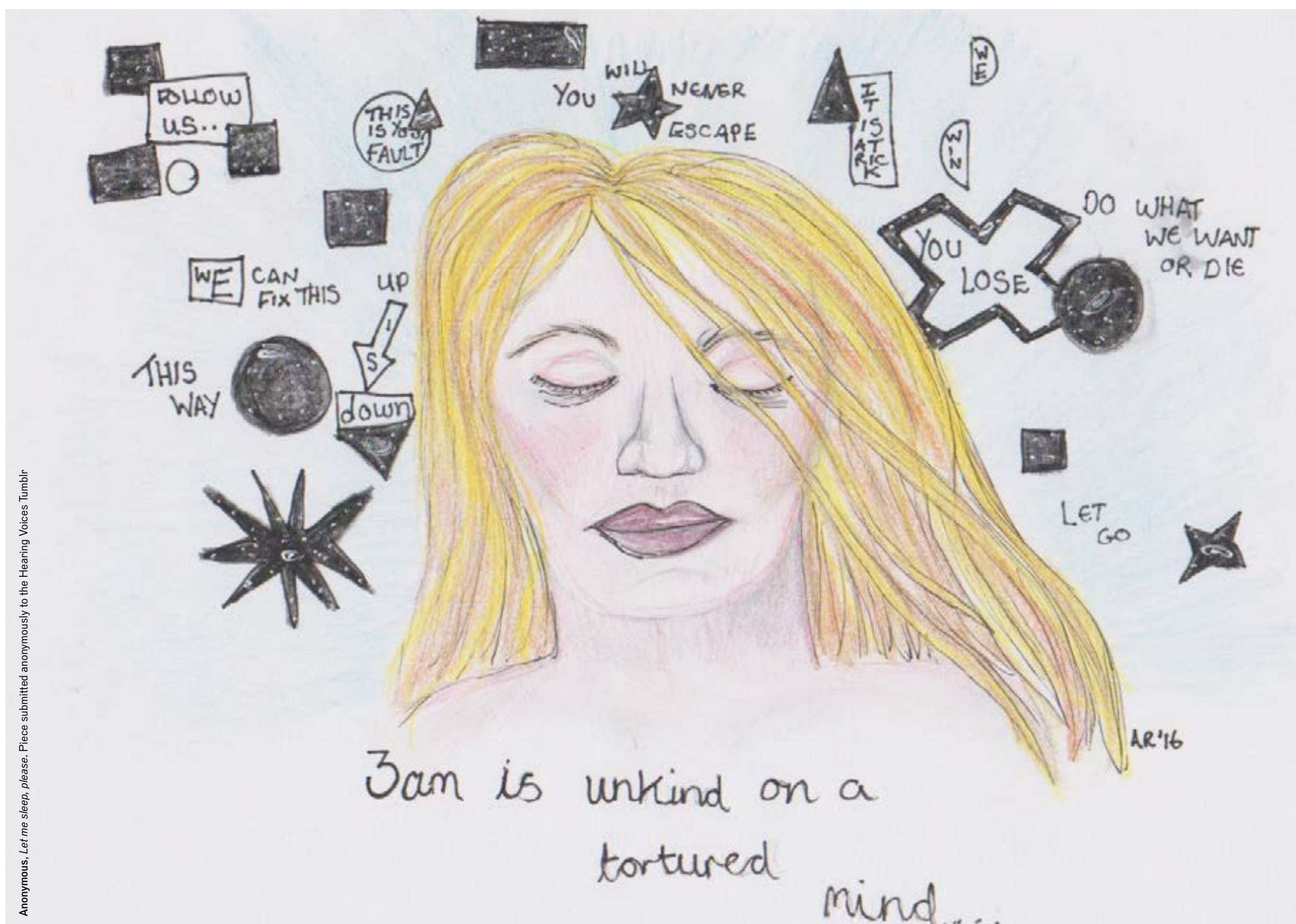
With **Veenadari Lakshika**, **Sahlah Anees**, **Neloufer de Mel**, **Arka Initiative** (represented by **Manisha Dissanayake**) Among others

Episode 10

Hearing Voices Party and Colomboscope Festival finissage

With live music acts, join the celebration!

Some guests are still to be confirmed at the time of printing this newspaper. Others, not mentioned here, might join. Please check for updates: <https://hearingvoicescafecolombo.wordpress.com>



Anonymous, Let me sleep, please. Piece submitted anonymously to the Hearing Voices Tumblr

The Hearing Voices Café Paper Colombo

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The Hearing Voices Café
 @COLOMBOSCOPE interdisciplinary arts festival, Colombo, Sri Lanka

A project initiated by **Dora García** in collaboration with **Jayampathi Guruge**
 Co-ordinated by **Shanika Perera**

Special thanks go to **Natasha Ginwala** and **Anushka Rajendran**

Project dates: 21 - 30 January 2022
 Address: Lak Cafe, Viharamahadevi Park, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

A **Hearing Voices Café** in Sri Lanka gets the extra layer of exploring experimental modes of live performance, literary affinities weaving enduring trauma and healing, as well as feminist legacies, and sacred knowledge practices such as Sufism.

COLOMBOSCOPE
interdisciplinary arts festival

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