

# STAGING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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JOJO KIRTLEY



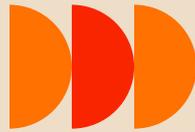
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Churchill Fellowship 2024

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JOJO KIRTLEY



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# THE DEDICATION

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In loving memory of **Aimee Smith**, my sister-in-law. Just before this journey began, we lost her, and grief struck me in ways I could never have prepared for. Even as I travelled, her absence was a constant presence. I carried with me the wooden heart she sent me once, a reminder of her. I thought of her every day; the voice notes we would have sent each other, the reassurance she always offered, the photos we would have shared. Across continents and time zones, I felt the weight of missing her.

When I told her about applying for this Fellowship, about the work I wanted to do, she never hesitated or judged me. No questions, no doubt, just a simple, unwavering: **"Go for it."**

*Aimee had a rare gift: she made you feel normal, grounded, and loved, exactly as you were. She is so missed. To anyone standing on the edge of a leap, take inspiration from her courage and kindness... and go for it.*

## **FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My deepest thanks to the Churchill Fellowship for believing in the power of creative activism and supporting this journey. To Novo Theatre for your support in helping me along the way. To every artist, survivor, and organisation who shared their stories and practice, opened their hearts and reminded me that theatre can change lives as it has changed mine. To my colleagues and pals who spurred me on. To my sons, my daughter and partner - Thank you for letting me have time off being mam and standing by me.



*Aimee's favourite drink - 'A Smithy' that I shared with some lovely supporters of WAM Theatre in USA when I told them all about her.*



# BIOGRAPHY



I'm **JoJo Kirtley** - a writer, theatre-maker and mother of three. I founded Workie Ticket Theatre CIC, a female-led organisation based in North Tyneside in the North East of England, which amplifies women's voices and uses theatre as a tool for social change.

I am a survivor of domestic abuse and this lived experience deeply shapes both my creative practice and my commitment to challenging gender-based violence and empowering communities. Before working full-time in the arts, I was a teacher, and this background continues to inform my community-focused approach and belief in education through creativity



Through my 2024 Churchill Fellowship, I investigated how theatre can be used as a radical, survivor-led tool to challenge male violence and create lasting change in the UK. I focused on female-led, community-based theatre models and organisations that centre survivor empowerment while shaping public understanding and dialogue around domestic abuse and gender-based violence





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This Churchill Fellowship explores how theatre is being used internationally to challenge gender-based violence (GBV), empower survivors, and build communities of care. Through research across South Africa, Malawi, Germany, Romania, Canada and the USA, I examined feminist, participatory and survivor-led theatre practices to understand how creative methodologies can support prevention, healing and social change.

My research highlights that theatre can be a powerful tool for transformation when survivors' lived experiences guide the creative process, and when the work is grounded in care, consent, and collaboration. Many organisations I met emphasised that the **process** – workshops, women's circles, relationships, shared creation – is as important as any final performance. Approaches such as participatory theatre, embodied storytelling and digital testimony demonstrate how creativity can safely hold trauma, spark dialogue and influence behaviour and policy.

These international insights offer timely lessons for the UK, where gender-based violence remains a persistent crisis. Survivor-led and trauma-informed theatre can bridge the gap between awareness and action, providing spaces for healing, education, and cultural change. Cross-sector collaboration between theatre, education, health, and social care professionals is essential, as is long-term investment in creative programmes that challenge harmful norms around gender, masculinity, consent, and power.

This Fellowship has already begun shaping my next steps. I am developing **Theatre of the Survivor**, a methodology informed by these global practices, focused on centring survivors' agency, integrating wellbeing into every stage of the creative process, and using participatory theatre as a catalyst for community connection and systemic change.



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# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



- 
- Survivor-led practice is essential. Survivors must direct how their stories are created, shared, and performed.
  - The creative process is transformative. Workshops, circles, and collaboration provide healing, agency, and solidarity.
  - Embodied and symbolic storytelling protects and empowers survivors. Ritual, movement, and abstraction communicate impact without reproducing harm.
  - Participatory theatre can shift behaviour, accountability, and policy. Methods such as Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre lead to real-world change.
  - Cross-sector collaboration strengthens safety and impact. Theatre should work alongside mental health, education, social care, and justice systems.
  - Digital and anonymous storytelling creates safe expressive spaces. Podcasts, audio work, and online circles allow protected participation and connection.
  - Engaging men and boys is crucial for long-term prevention. Peer-led dialogue helps redefine masculinity and challenge patriarchal norms.
  - Feminist Theatre of the Oppressed builds collective resistance. Power-sharing facilitation disrupts hierarchy and supports community action.
  - Intersectional practice is non-negotiable. Migrant, queer, working-class, disabled, and FLINTA voices must be centred.
  - Theatre can create safe, healing spaces for trauma to be witnessed and transformed. Care frameworks must underpin all GBV-related performance work.



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# INTRODUCTION

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Theatre has always been how I make sense of the world. As a child, after-school drama was a refuge from bullying; later, reading and writing plays became acts of survival and resistance. As a survivor of domestic abuse and sexual assault, I understand both the scars violence leaves and the transformation that can happen when stories are shared, witnessed, and held with care. This lived experience is at the heart of my practice and of Workie Ticket Theatre, the community-led organisation, I founded to amplify women's voices and challenge gender-based violence across the North East.

Gender-based violence is a national crisis in the UK and one that is deepening. Young women face disproportionate risk, specialist services are overstretched and regions like mine continue to live with historic deprivation, poor mental health outcomes, and shrinking support structures. I have met countless women and young people shaped by misogyny, coercion, and systemic neglect. For many, creativity is their first safe space, where confidence grows, trust is rebuilt, and painful experiences can finally be spoken aloud. As my work deepened, it became clear that existing tools were not enough. I needed to learn from practitioners beyond the UK who use theatre not just to raise awareness, but to support healing, shift culture and influence policy.

My Churchill Fellowship explored how theatre can be used ethically, safely and imaginatively to confront gender-based violence and how these approaches might strengthen practice at home. Throughout the Fellowship, I saw theatre used in radical and deeply moving ways. Often, the most political act was not protest, but provision: bus fare, childcare, safety, care. As one practitioner told me, "The small acts have bigger impacts." This Fellowship reaffirmed that theatre is not just performance, but activism, pedagogy, protest, and truth-telling. For this work to last, political will and sustained investment are essential. Policymakers must fund feminist, community-led companies, trust survivors as experts in their own lives, and support the grassroots work that quietly and persistently creates real change.

Theatre is where these stories meet – exposing society's injustices while offering the possibility of something better. My vision is for Workie Ticket Theatre to continue building that bridge, amplifying survivor voices, fostering community power and standing in solidarity with women worldwide. This report is both a reflection on what I have learned and a call to action: a starting point for change.



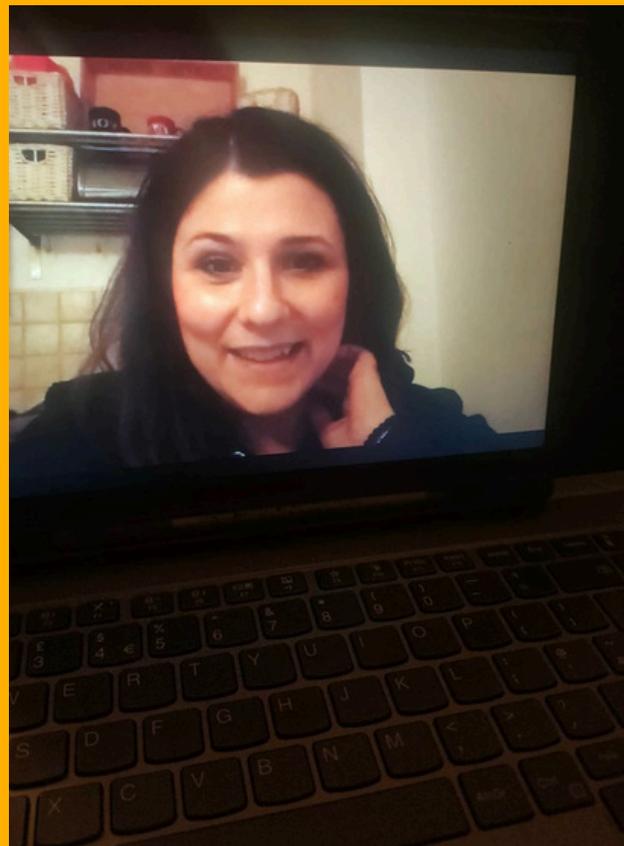
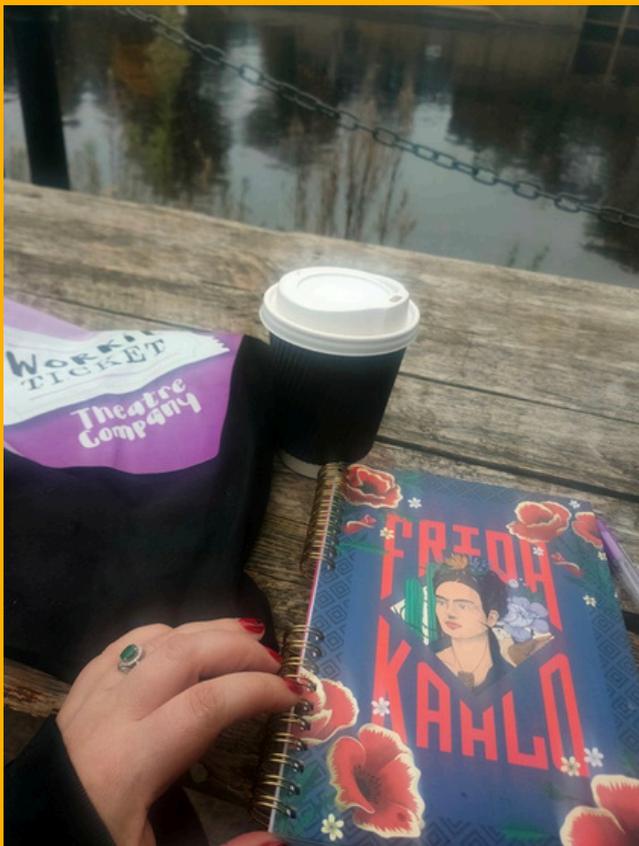
# ACT 1: THE DIGITAL STAGE



## Online learning and global connections

2 - 9 November 2024 (with additional meetings up to Jan 2025).

My Fellowship began with a week in York - my first step away from home in Newcastle and into focused research. I met with artists and organisations whose work echoes my own practice, especially around survivor-led, community-rooted theatre.





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# SCENE 1: DR. NICOSIA SHAKES

## USA/SOUTH AFRICA

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*“Talking about violence, there is an emphasis on the emotional and psychological effect of the violence and not on the spectacle of the violence... women creators tend to stick to ‘what does this violence do?’, rather than showing the act itself.”*

### **Dr. Nicosia Shakes**

Dr. Nicosia Shakes, an assistant professor at the University of California, Merced, author of the award-winning *Women’s Activist Theatre in Jamaica and South Africa: Gender, Race, and Performance Space* (University of Illinois Press, 2023), and practicing playwright. Specialising in Africana studies, performance, and feminist activism in the African diaspora, her research examines how Black women utilise theatre as political intervention and community education.

We discussed the role of women’s theatre companies in addressing gender-based violence through devised, community-led practice. She described a feminist aesthetic she terms “subversive movement”: work that resists the spectacle of violence by foregrounding its emotional, psychological, and social impacts, using symbolic movement, ritual, and testimony. Feminist theatre, she argued, functions as political intervention, linking gendered violence to wider systems of power.

Dr Shakes referenced companies such as Sistren Theatre Collective (Jamaica) and Mother Tongue Project (South Africa), whose work exposes gender-based violence while protecting survivors’ dignity and agency. Rather than reproducing trauma onstage, these practices create space for communities to reckon with harm and imagine alternatives. We also discussed shared challenges: chronic underfunding and the marginalisation of community-based feminist theatre within academic discourse, where devised and unpublished work remains less visible. She suggested that anthologies dedicated to community-based plays could help preserve and amplify these voices.

### **Key insight:**

Women’s theatre companies must often provide support beyond the stage (sometimes even helping women find safe housing) demonstrating the deep entanglement of artistic practice and activism.



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# SCENE 2: WONA COLLECTIVE MALAWI

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*“Something that’s been important for us is making sure women have agency and they’re able to say what they need – creating spaces where they feel open to care, to receiving care, and to share their stories.”*

**Lerato Honda, Wona Collective**

Wona Collective is a proudly feminist, women-led arts collective and media production company based in Lilongwe, Malawi. Founded in 2019 by writer Alinafe Malonje and visual artist Lerato Honda, Wona - meaning “to see” in Chichewa works to preserve and amplify Malawian stories, particularly those authored by women and marginalised communities. What began as a creative collaboration space has grown into a platform for visibility, resistance, and collective care, working across animation, podcasting, writing, illustration and strategic communications.

As a feminist collective unafraid to name their politics, Wona’s work centres care, safety, and radical visibility and I was genuinely excited to meet them and learn from their practice. The Collective has expanded since 2019, to include new members such as Gloria Dzanjalimodzi, a resource mobilisation lead and writer working in gender and economic justice advocacy, and Theodora (Theo) Khofi, a strategic communications officer and psychologist who also met with me online. Both highlighted the challenges of sustaining creative projects in Malawi while also ensuring meaningful impact for vulnerable communities.

They explained that Alongside their media work, Wona runs a physical hub offering workshops, mental health support, and creative resources, building a home where artists can learn, make, and connect. Their projects include 16 Days of Poetry and 16 Days of Music, part of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, and To Whoever’s Listening, a podcast and series of solidarity circles designed as safe storytelling spaces for survivors and refugees. Stories were often shared anonymously or voiced by others, allowing participants to be heard while remaining protected.



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*“Sometimes the art of talking and the community is more important than the... final product. The solidarity circle itself is what matters.”*

**Alinafe Malonje, Founder,  
Wona Collective**

Their approach integrates creative practice with therapeutic care, involving counsellors, psychologists and university partners to support survivors' healing. Wona also works with men and boys, encouraging dialogue that challenges harmful social norms and promotes responsibility, vulnerability, and respect. One of their projects, Letters is a series of podcast episodes depicting women reading letters written by themselves and addressed to themselves, someone else or to an abstract social construct. It is simply stunning. It shows how centring women's voices in creative storytelling can preserve history, spark dialogue, and turn storytelling into a feminist act of visibility and care.

Meeting the team was amazing and we discussed our similarities and differences - I instantly warmed to them all and loved talking about their work. Like many feminist collectives, Wona faces structural challenges including precarious funding and the tension between donor demands and community needs. Despite this, they have cultivated a powerful space for artistic expression, collective care and social change.

**Key insights:**

- Survivor-centred creative storytelling transforms advocacy Wona's approach shows that when digital and creative storytelling is centred on agency, safety, and consent, it becomes a powerful tool for survivor-led advocacy. By allowing stories to be shared anonymously or on survivors' own terms, participants can express themselves and be heard without retraumatisation.
- Feminist funding must be flexible and driven by those it serves. Their work underscores the need for funding structures that are survivor-driven, flexible, and responsive, rather than rigid or extractive. Traditional funding mechanisms often fail to account for the emotional and temporal labour that sensitive storytelling and healing work require.
- Creative practice can shift harmful norms and broaden solidarity Wona's projects highlight that digital storytelling is not just a communication strategy. it's a feminist act that can challenge harmful norms and open up space for solidarity. Their work points to opportunities for the UK in areas like digital solidarity circles, national feminist arts initiatives (e.g., a "16 Days of Art"), online hubs for women artists and deeper cross-border feminist collaboration.



# SCENE 3: THEATRE FOR A CHANGE MALAWI



*“What you can see and what we can measure so clearly... is just this belief, this belief that what you say and what you feel matters and that you are worth listening to. And once you give them that, that’s not something that’s easy to take away again.”*

**Fiona Morrell, Executive Director, Theatre for a Change**

*“The protagonists and all the ones that are to tell the story [are] actually the marginalised group themselves... in a sense, they amplify their own voice... this is something actually coming directly from them.”*

**Shadrack Tembo, Theatre for a Change**



Theatre for a Change (TfaC) uses participatory theatre as a tool for transformation in Malawi and Ghana. Central to their work is the belief that those most marginalised, particularly women and girls, should be given the space, tools and confidence to tell their stories, break the silence around abuse and take control of their futures.

As part of my Churchill Fellowship, I met online with Fiona and Shadrack from TfaC. They explained how the organisation began in 2003 when London-based drama teacher Patrick Young began exploring drama as a tool for personal empowerment. Its success quickly led to expansion – first to Ghana, then to Malawi, where the organisation broadened its focus to address HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, and sexual health education.



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I asked - why Theatre? They both explained that theatre goes beyond the stage. It includes participatory workshops, interactive performances, radio drama and digital storytelling on platforms like Instagram and Facebook Live; using as much creative engagement as possible to spark dialogue, reflection and change. Shadrack described working with vulnerable women and girls through projects such as Leave No Girl Behind, which re-engaged girls who had dropped out of school due to pregnancy, child marriage, or abuse. TfaC's workshops helped these girls rebuild confidence, learn about their rights, and gain the skills to report abuse.

During our online meeting, Fiona and Shadrack outlined the breadth of TFAC's methodology. Their work begins with behaviour change programmes, helping participants recognise abuse and power imbalances. Theatre then becomes a tool to connect survivors' voices with communities and wider systems.

Interactive theatre allows participants to act out real-life scenarios, while interactive theatre for justice invites duty-bearers such as police, social workers, and child protection officers, to confront their responsibilities. Legislative theatre brings survivors' stories directly to policymakers, and interactive radio drama extends these conversations to national audiences.

Male engagement is central: boys join girls' clubs to learn about abuse and their role in challenging harmful behaviours, and partners support young mothers in returning to education or community life.

Key insight:

This kind of Survivor-led, participatory theatre demonstrates a model for empowering individuals and influencing communities, an approach directly relevant to VAWG work in the UK.

*"You go in and it's really quiet and everybody's sort of shy... you go back three months later, and the room is like this explosion of noise and dance. Even if we don't achieve all the policy goals, the fact that people have found their voice is important."*

**Fiona, TfaC**



# SCENE 4: THEATRE-MAKERS GERMANY



Marianne Kjær Klausen studied philosophy and art history in Copenhagen and Berlin and has worked as a theatre-maker for over ten years as a director, dramaturg and occasional performer. Her practice spans classical productions, devised theatre, performance and community-based projects, with a particular focus in recent years on theatre for young audiences. She was Head of the Young Theatre Division at Theater an der Rott and creates theatre not only for young people, but also with young performers.

I met Marianne on-line, a Danish theatre director and theatre-maker based in Germany, whose work merges classical directing with community-led practice. We connected over our belief that theatre can drive empowerment and social change. We compared approaches to staging difficult material, including projects addressing violence and trauma.

A key insight was how closely Marianne partners with women's refuges. Refuge staff attended performances to observe children's responses and offer immediate support. Marianne reflected: *"The most powerful part wasn't the reviews or the staging - it was when the Refuge workers sat in the audience and could see which children they might need to talk to afterwards. That was the real impact."*

We discussed shared challenges: funding insecurity, emotional toll, and managing triggers. Marianne enables young audiences to leave discreetly, while Workie Ticket employs IDVAs/ISVAs to support audience members. She also highlighted the influence of Scandinavian theatre, where taboo subjects are addressed more openly, offering valuable inspiration for UK practice.



I met Anja Demidova, a Russian-born theatre director and activist now based in Berlin. Founder of Can.Act e.V., Anja creates feminist, non-hierarchical theatre that challenges patriarchal systems in art and society. She described her 2024 performance 'Am I Comfortable Enough?', which uses furniture-inspired costumes to explore patriarchal conditioning: "Patriarchy wants women to be comfortable for others, for their husbands, their families, for society. But 'comfortable' is what we say about furniture."

Anja noted that some men avoid feminist performances out of defensiveness, and is now developing a version of the work specifically for male audiences as a way to shift dialogue and accountability. We also discussed Russia's lack of domestic violence legislation and the culture of victim-blaming, drawing parallels with ongoing systemic failures in the UK. Anja's integration of activism, physical theatre, and survivor-led collaboration mirrors Workie Ticket's ethos and we agreed to explore future partnerships.

#### Key insights:

Theatre can be a tool for accountability, not just expression—by designing performances that specifically engage audiences, this shows how art can actively challenge patriarchal norms and create space for reflection and responsibility, rather than preaching only to those already aligned with feminist values.



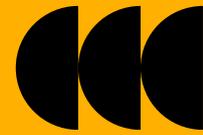


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# SCENE 5: SARA MATCHETT

## SOUTH AFRICA

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I met online with Dr Sara Matchett, South African theatre-maker, director, and voice practitioner, and co-founder of the Mother Tongue Project, South Africa's first women's arts collective. Our conversation explored how both our organisations use theatre to address gender-based violence and support survivors, and the shared challenges of sustaining this work.

I shared how Workie Ticket collaborates with grassroots organisations, schools, and survivors to create workshops and performances addressing misogyny, coercive control, and systemic failures, including the Family Court.

Sara described the Mother Tongue Project's long-running work with women in shelters, refugee women, sex workers, and young people in violent townships, often holding the intersections of HIV, xenophobia, and inequality. At the heart of her practice is a commitment to creating spaces where women can witness and be witnessed, turning embodied experiences into stories that can be shared and collectively held.

A key learning for me was Sara's emphasis on the body as an archive. Her methods draw on body mapping, breath and voice work, Butoh, Navarasa, choral practice, poetry, and song, showing how movement and breath can access what words cannot, and how both process and performance can be transformative. She spoke about 'Walk', a site-specific work developed after the Delhi gang rape, designed to move audiences through ritual, sound, and fragmented scenes, bypassing the numbness created by statistics and repetitive media narratives.



We also discussed backlash – from communities uncomfortable with women speaking out, and from institutional pressures around “trigger warnings” and risk management – and agreed that theatre must confront gendered violence honestly without silencing survivors. Sara shared how performance has been personally sustaining, including using theatre to hold grief, which reinforced her belief in performance as a ritual of witnessing: a way to reach audiences viscerally, build empathy, and open the possibility of action.

#### Key insights:

- Intersectional focus – Sara’s work doesn’t just address gender-based violence in isolation; it explicitly holds the intersections of HIV, xenophobia, and socio-economic inequality. This reminds us that trauma and oppression are compounded, and theatre needs to reflect that complexity rather than treating survivors as a single, homogenous group.
- Embodied storytelling as resistance – The idea of the body as archive is huge. It’s not just a methodology; it’s political. Using the body, breath, and movement to process trauma challenges conventional narratives that often reduce women’s experiences to statistics or written reports. It’s a reclamation of voice and agency.
- Transforming audience perception – Works like Walk show how performance can bypass intellectual detachment. By using ritual, sound, and fragmented scenes, audiences are invited to feel the violence, not just read about it, which can create empathy and a deeper understanding of systemic issues.
- Process over product – Sara believes the process of creating theatre body mapping, voice work, choral practice, not just the end performance. This highlights the therapeutic and transformative potential of theatre for participants, not just its social or educational impact on audiences.
- Witnessing and being witnessed – A subtle but crucial point: the act of witnessing in these practices is reciprocal. Survivors don’t just tell their story; they see each other, and audiences are drawn into a shared responsibility for bearing these stories. This creates a sense of community and collective holding that is rare in more traditional approaches.



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# KEY FINDINGS FROM DIGITAL RESEARCH

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My digital research reinforced that feminist and community-based theatre uses creativity as both activism and care. Across contexts, survivor-led practice, embodied storytelling, male involvement, and trauma-informed facilitation show how theatre can support healing, empowerment, and social change. Overall, key findings included:

- **Theatre as Witnessing and Healing:** Survivor-centred theatre, as seen in Dr Nicosia Shakes' work with Sistren and Mother Tongue Project, focuses on emotional and psychological impacts rather than graphic depictions, a method UK organisations could adopt to empower participants safely, though training facilitators in symbolic and embodied practices may be required.
- **Community-Led Participation and Survivor Agency:** WoNA Collective's approach of letting participants control how their stories are shared fosters empowerment and dignity, a principle highly relevant for UK survivor workshops, but sustaining funding and integrating robust safeguarding measures will be necessary.
- **Participatory Theatre for Social Change:** Theatre for a Change (TfaC) in Malawi uses interactive, survivor-led performance to influence communities and policy, a model that could inform UK schools, refuges, and statutory services, although adapting culturally specific methods and measuring impact may be challenging.
- **Trauma-Informed and Context-Sensitive Practice:** Marianne and Anja Demidova's work demonstrates that integrating staff support and audience care ensures ethical engagement, which UK projects should adopt, but implementing trauma-informed processes requires trained staff and additional resources.



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- Survivor-led change: Enabling survivors to tell their own stories, rather than mediating them, increases agency and confidence – a practice UK feminist theatre should prioritise, with the challenge of balancing artistic support and safeguarding.
  - Process equals performance: The creative process itself is therapeutic and transformative, as evidenced across multiple organisations, suggesting UK projects should value workshops and rehearsal equally to public performance, though this requires time and funding.
  - Embodiment, Ritual, and Storytelling: Mother Tongue Project’s use of body mapping, ritual, and movement transforms trauma into agency, offering UK theatre methods to deepen emotional impact, though ensuring accessibility and participant readiness could be challenging.
  - Subversive aesthetics: Using ritual, symbolism, and abstraction to represent violence preserves dignity and communicates resilience, a method UK theatre can adopt for sensitive topics – though facilitators may need training in non-literal storytelling techniques.
  - Archiving and visibility: Systematic documentation of ephemeral, community-led theatre ensures long-term impact and knowledge transfer – a priority for UK feminist theatre, though limited funding and archival expertise can be barriers.
  - International collaboration: Cross-border networks, as evidenced by exchanges between the UK, Malawi, South Africa, and Germany, strengthen practice and solidarity – a principle UK organisations could embrace, though coordinating partnerships across contexts requires time and resources.
  - Systemic impact: Participatory theatre can shift cultural norms, reporting behaviours, and influence policy, demonstrating a tangible route for UK theatre to contribute to social change – though measuring outcomes and influencing institutions may be challenging.



# ACT 2 – THE EUROPEAN STAGE

## BERLIN AND BUCHAREST

23 February - 2 March 2025

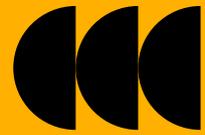
### BERLIN - GERMANY

Berlin has a strong history of feminist activism, from the Weimar Republic to underground movements in divided Germany. Today, the city's vibrant arts scene continues this tradition, with female-led and intersectional theatre collectives confronting misogyny, racism, and inequality. During my Fellowship, I encountered a range of theatre and activist organisations using performance to challenge male violence and promote social change.





# SCENE 1: MATCHBOX THEATRE BERLIN



*“With an emphasis on new writing, we can write our own histories and create female protagonists and characters that can challenge the patriarchy.”*

**Kaya, founder of Matchbox Contemporary Theatre**



Originally founded as STP Berlin (Slip the Tongue Productions), Matchbox Contemporary Theatre is a Berlin-based collective established in 2024. I was lucky enough to spend time with co-founder Kaya Payseno. Together, we visited Theatre Strahl, shared Vietnamese food, and spoke about weaving our personal experiences into our creative work.

Kaya spoke with conviction about the importance of inclusivity, particularly the need to embrace trans-women and ensure that feminist theatre reflects an ever-evolving, intersectional society. We talked about the power of new writing and how it can raise awareness of gender-based violence when rooted in lived experience, community voices and authentic storytelling.

Kaya emphasised that theatre shouldn't be gatekept by anyone and everyone, no matter what background, should be able to access it. This open, fluid approach is central to Matchbox's ethos, creating an ecosystem where creativity thrives at every level.

## Key insights:

- **Inclusivity and intersectionality:** Matchbox's feminist theatre embraces trans and non-binary identities and ensures that marginalised voices are centred, reflecting an evolving, intersectional society.
- **Theatre as empowerment and activism:** Original storytelling rooted in lived experience allows women and survivors to reclaim their voices, challenge dominant narratives, and resist violence.
- **Open access and creative ecosystems:** By dismantling elitism and providing platforms from local festivals to the Edinburgh Fringe, Matchbox ensures theatre is accessible to all, fostering a thriving, inclusive creative community.



# SCENE 2: URBAN THEATER E.V VALUING DRAMATURGY



The role of the dramaturg is central to contemporary European theatre-making, acting as both a bridge and a catalyst within the creative process. A dramaturg not only supports the writer and director in shaping narrative and structure but also provides essential cultural, political, and historical context that deepens the work's resonance. They are the critical thinker in the room, the one who asks why a story is being told now and how it connects to wider social realities.

I attended the **Focal Point** (Точка зборки) Theatre Lab, led by Urban Theater e.V. in Berlin. The lab brought together theatre-makers from across Eastern Europe - Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, and Estonia - to explore how current European events are reflected through theatre.

Each team consisted of a director, playwright, and dramaturg. The event culminated in rehearsed readings followed by open Q&A sessions, encouraging genuine dialogue about how art responds to a shifting Europe. My favourite piece, *Dogs and People*, explored the absurdities of conflict and belonging with both wit and tenderness.

**Key insight:** Dramaturgy functions as a form of activism in itself. It's about framing stories responsibly, ensuring that what reaches the stage reflects lived realities and challenges audiences to think critically. For my own work with Workie Ticket Theatre, this reinforced the importance of dramaturgical thinking of questioning, refining, and contextualising every narrative choice. It reminded me that valuing dramaturgy means valuing reflection, care and collaboration - all essential ingredients for theatre that drives meaningful change.





# SCENE 3: HEROES® BERLIN: EDUCATING MEN TO FIGHT THE PATRIARCHY



HEROES HEADQUARTERS IN BERLIN

*“Heroes is a ‘feminist boys’ project’ but we are here to prevent violence against women.”* **Marie Friesenhahn, project manager**

HEROES® Berlin is a feminist social initiative founded in 2007, engaging young men, especially from migrant backgrounds, with the aim of challenging patriarchal norms and promoting gender equality. It is not a theatre or art-based organisation.

I met Marie and the team, who welcomed me warmly into their space with a cup of tea. Marie explained that HEROES® works to dismantle patriarchal structures and rigid gender roles. Through workshops, participants are encouraged to explore their own experiences, emotions, and societal expectations without judgment. The program addresses issues such as honour-based violence, restrictive gender roles, healthy masculinity, and emotional expression, fostering self-reflection, and critical thinking among its participants.

I asked them - why use theatre in their work- we talked about how using theatre creates a space where young people can critically examine norms around masculinity, honour, gender and violence without being lectured or judged. Theatre allows difficult conversations to happen through story, embodiment and play, making complex social issues accessible and emotionally resonant.



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Through year-long training, HEROES® equips young men aged 16–23 to become peer educators who can facilitate workshops and discussions in schools and community settings. Participants learn about gender equality, self-determination, sexuality, family dynamics, and respectful relationships, often using role-playing and interactive methods. Graduates, known as “Heroes,” then share their knowledge and experiences with peers, aiming to dismantle stereotypes and encourage positive change. The initiative has received several awards, including the Berliner Tulpe and the Hatun Sürücü Prize, recognising its innovative approach to preventing violence and promoting social cohesion.

A distinctive feature is their use of applied theatre, including Forum Theatre. By dramatising everyday situations where honour, gender roles, or power imbalances come into play, participants are invited to intervene, step into the scene, try out alternatives, and explore how change might look in practice (with enough distance from reality to feel comfortable).

I was genuinely blown away by HEROES Berlin’s work - its courage, care and refusal to oversimplify difficult conversations. Their use of theatre allows young people to step into complexity, empathy and accountability in a way that feels deeply human and impactful.

**Key insights:**

Education, peer leadership, and theatre can challenge patriarchal norms and empower young people to reimagine what’s possible for themselves and for their communities. I honestly believe there should be a HEROES project in every city and town. We need initiatives like this now more than ever. The name might not resonate with everyone, but the concept and its impact are truly inspiring.



# SCENE 4: KURINGA - MAKING FORUM THEATRE FEMINIST



*"Theatre of the Oppressed, historically, is delivered, taught by men, so Kuringa offers a space for it to be woman-led.*

**Eva Gloria, theatre educator at Kuringa**

In Portuguese, curinga means "joker" - the wild card. KURINGA is a Berlin-based cultural and activist space founded in 2011 by Bárbara Santos and collaborators, using Theatre of the Oppressed methodologies - especially Forum Theatre - to explore issues including gender-based violence, colonialism, and exclusion.

Visiting Kuringa gave me a vivid sense of how theatre can be adapted through a feminist lens. Their Berlin space felt alive with collaboration, care and creative possibility - a place where rehearsing, performing, and building community happen alongside everyday gestures like sharing tea.



Eva Gloria and I discussed how the new 'feminist' Theatre of the Oppressed builds upon Augusto Boal's original methodologies such as Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, and Legislative Theatre, by integrating feminist perspectives. This approach aims to: challenge patriarchal narratives, highlight intersectional oppressions and empower marginalised voices. This evolution reflects a collective process of awareness and transformation among practitioners.



We also discussed representation and legacy: who is positioned as protagonist, what interventions are rehearsed, and whether the work stays at the level of individual “solutions” or expands into systemic analysis and real-world feminist action. At its best, feminist Forum Theatre becomes a rehearsal for change that connects to survivor support, campaigns, and policy work beyond the room.

**Key insights:** Transformation comes not just from technique, but from values: centring marginalised voices, challenging patriarchal structures, and sharing power between facilitators and participants. In a UK context, this approach can support survivors by allowing them to practise responses to oppression collectively, explore systemic inequalities, and strengthen solidarity. It also highlights the importance of representation and legacy, whose stories are told, how interventions are framed, and how theatre connects to activism beyond the stage.

Applying these principles means designing workshops where survivors’ experiences drive the work, interventions are collaborative, and theatre becomes a space for both reflection and rehearsal for change. For Workie Ticket, I want to create a similar hub to Kuringa here in the UK, where survivors can explore and shape their stories in a safe, empowering environment.





# SCENE 5: COSMINO THEATRE AND RACHEL KARAFISTAN



*"I was told as a working-class girl that theatre wasn't for me. That's why I make my own work and why I make sure other women can too."*

**Rachel Karafistan**

Meeting Rachel Karafistan in Berlin felt like reconnecting with someone I'd known for years. We spoke first online and then in person, returning again and again to feminist theatre as activism: survivor empowerment, international solidarity, and the ethics of how stories are held.

Rachel's work amplifies women's voices across urgent issues including reproductive rights, domestic abuse, and life under oppressive regimes. One project that stayed with me was *Ay Kash - if only*, created with the Under the Starry Afghan Sky Collective. Eleven young women in Afghanistan shared memories, fears, and hopes since the Taliban's return in 2021, communicating through secret messages under constant threat. The work brings their words to the world through film, song, drawings, object theatre, and animation, carefully designed to protect identities while ensuring these stories are heard. #STANDWITHAFGHANWOMEN





Rachel's show *Heartburn*, performed with Eva Rufo, uses story, song, movement, puppetry, and visual art to explore women's lived experience – from abortion and domestic violence to menopause and myth. Rachel spoke powerfully about autobiographical and lived-experience work: authenticity deepens connection, creates empathy, and turns the personal into collective reflection. After every performance, Rachel collects money for one abortion, turning theatre into tangible activism.

We also discussed why the work we do is so important. Rachel reminded me that activism isn't only about marching on the streets; it's also about raising awareness, challenging assumptions, and creating spaces for dialogue through art. She shared that she was moving to Poland to continue her work and hopes to tour her projects further. I truly hope she brings more of her work to the UK, where it could inspire and connect with new audiences.

Over dinner at a beautiful Palestinian restaurant, we spoke about women worldwide whose voices are being silenced. Theatre fits into this conversation as both mirror and megaphone: reflecting lived experiences while amplifying stories to wider audiences. In Rachel's work, activism is embodied, allowing communities to confront injustice, imagine alternatives, and build solidarity across borders.

As we said goodbye, she looked at me with kindness:

"You are a theatre pedagogue, and you should be proud of what you do." That night, I felt it. Truly. Meeting Rachel was inspiring: her honesty, solidarity, and love for the work were so genuine, and the encounter has left a lasting impact on my own practice.

### **Key insights:**

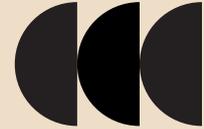
- Activism doesn't have to mean marching in the streets; it can take the form of thoughtful, embodied storytelling that provokes reflection, builds empathy, and drives change. Rachel's practice taught me that the most powerful theatre is where ethics, creativity, and action meet.
- Theatre can be a form of embodied activism: by grounding work in lived experience and authenticity, artists can create deep empathy, spark dialogue, and transform personal stories into collective reflection, while also translating art into tangible action that supports real-world causes.



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# SCENE 6: INTERFEM COLLECTIVE, DRAG AS ACTIVISM

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*"Anyone can do drag... you can be whoever you want to be and that's so empowering."*

**Buzukgina Laboba**

As a committed drag fan, I was thrilled to meet Buzukgina Laboba (Gina), part of InterFem Collective – a Berlin-based intersectional feminist arts and activism group led by migrant, refugee, queer, and BIPOC FLINTA\* people. Founded during the pandemic, InterFem blends creative practice with political action, using drag, theatre, performance, writing, and visual art to build solidarity, create safe(r) spaces, and increase visibility for marginalised communities.

Gina spoke candidly about the risks of white feminism, and about reclaiming feminism through an explicitly intersectional lens. In InterFem's work, theatre functions as protest and confidence-building, with drag at its heart – a tool for transformation, play, and self-determination. We discussed their participatory workshop programme for FLINTA\* communities (with priority for BIPOC and migrants), including Drag King training, gender self-awareness workshops drawing on Theatre of the Oppressed, sessions on individual and collective safety ("Keep me safe(r)"), and exercises that actively reverse the cis-male gaze through feminist performance.

Alongside the joy and energy, Gina also shared the fear created by Berlin's shifting political climate and the rise in right-wing support. Our conversation touched on protest theatre and solidarity actions, including Grieving Doves and the use of work like the Gaza Monologues, underscoring how urgently artists are turning to creative practice to resist oppression and speak truth to power.

**Key insights:** Drag can operate as both empowerment and protest, reclaiming space and visibility while building community. InterFem's model demonstrates how accessible, workshop-led creative practice can strengthen solidarity and resistance, especially when rooted in intersectionality and explicit political analysis.

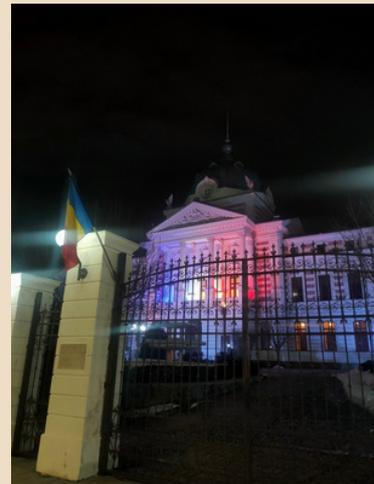


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# BUCHAREST – ROMANIA

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Romania offers a powerful context for exploring how theatre can address gender-based violence. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms, a post-communist legacy, and weak institutional support mean domestic violence and femicide remain widespread. Survivors often face stigma and silence while figures like Andrew Tate thrive (even as many Romanians express frustration with such cases). The country's history of reproductive restriction still shapes attitudes toward women's autonomy and Roma women experience intersecting racism, sexism, and economic exclusion.



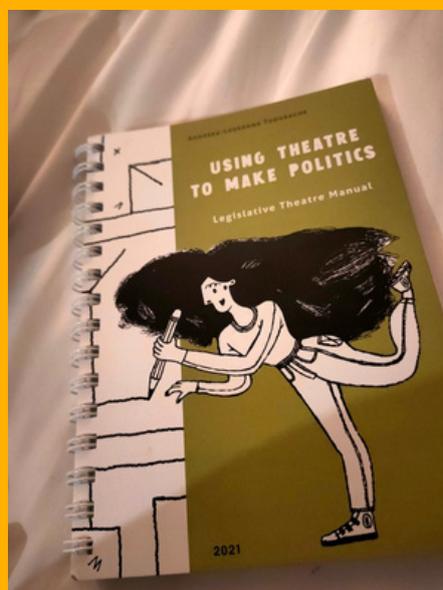
Against this backdrop, Bucharest also holds a strong tradition of theatre as resistance. During my visit, ART Fusion, F-SIDES, and Giuvlipen showed how participatory and feminist performance can challenge taboos, build dialogue, and strengthen intersectional practice.



# SCENE 7: ART FUSION



I spent an afternoon with A.R.T. Fusion, a Romanian youth association founded in 2005 that uses creativity and participation to drive social change. Their work blends non-formal education with artistic methods to empower young people, amplify marginalised voices, and create spaces for learning and action.



At the heart of this practice are participatory approaches including Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum Theatre, Human Library, and street campaigns. These methods ask communities not only to observe injustice, but to analyse it and rehearse alternatives. I was especially struck by their use of Newspaper Theatre, which transforms current news into scenes and improvisations that help young people think critically about media narratives and practice new responses.



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Their participatory ethos was clear throughout my visit. Hearing the team speak so passionately about their techniques reinforced my belief in the power of theatre not only to raise awareness but to empower people, particularly survivors and marginalised groups – to voice their experiences and explore solutions together.

I originally connected with executive director Andreea Loredana online, speaking at length about their use of Newspaper Theatre and Legislative Theatre. Meeting the team in person deepened my admiration – their commitment to gender equality and social change is remarkable. I was especially moved by their openness when discussing misogyny and their insistence that we must work closely with young people, as they are the next generation and the ones who will carry this fight forward. Their work with vulnerable groups – such as using Forum Theatre with Roma and Romanian children in rural schools – showed me how art can become a genuine bridge to social change. This visit offered inspiration and practical guidance for my Fellowship journey, especially regarding how creative, non-formal methods can empower survivors of gender-based violence and strengthen communities.

Newspaper Theatre, one of their core methods, transforms real-life news stories into short performances, improvisations, and scenes. Participants use newspaper articles to explore social issues, debate ideas, and imagine alternatives. A.R.T. Fusion uses this tool to help young people and marginalised communities critically engage with media, articulate their perspectives, and experiment with ways to address challenges affecting them – such as gender inequality, bullying, or social injustice. Like all their methods, it's adaptable, participatory, and profoundly empowering.

Speaking of how Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre add impact, one facilitator (Alex) explained: "They now know how to put the finger on what they want and are doing that to support other local communities." They also shared a philosophy that stayed with me: "Empower them with what they have." This principle, working with whatever local resources are available, is central to A.R.T. Fusion's methodology. It builds confidence, self-sufficiency, and collective agency, particularly in communities addressing gender-based violence, including Roma groups.



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What struck me most is that their work extends far beyond theatre. They create spaces for reflection, learning, and collective action: conferences, discussions, workshops, and community gatherings. Their approach is practical and peer-led, with a strong emphasis on youth leadership, gender equality, and inclusion – including work designed for disabled young people and those with learning differences. Their ethos is clear: if art, theatre, and politics do not include everyone, then what is the point?

Every year, A.R.T. Fusion hosts a Feminist Theatre Festival, a platform for creative activism. Despite ongoing struggles to secure sustainable funding, their impact is undeniable. I was impressed by how they invite policymakers and politicians to witness their work, intentionally seeking to influence real and tangible legislative change. Their passion for empowering women and fostering social transformation is evident in every conversation, performance, and workshop.

Seeing their work in schools, communities, and international programmes reminded me how powerful education and theatre can be in the fight for gender equality. They are cultivating a network of informed, confident young women prepared to challenge the systems that oppress them. I am deeply grateful to have witnessed their work first-hand and to learn from a team that believes wholeheartedly in theatre's power to change the world.

**Key insights:**

Working with young people is essential, engaging them early in open conversations about gender, justice, and equality. Modernising Newspaper Theatre makes it strikingly relevant for today's audiences, and intersectionality is key: addressing misogyny and discrimination requires understanding how different forms of oppression overlap.

Boal's techniques, such as Forum Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed, are endlessly adaptable, enabling facilitators to tailor them to any group or setting. And perhaps most importantly, creating tangible resources – manuals, toolkits, books – ensures that projects live beyond their initial delivery, allowing them to be shared, adapted, and expanded.

My time with A.R.T. Fusion reaffirmed what I've always believed: art can transform, empower, and liberate. And in the hands of dedicated feminists, activists, and educators, it can help shape a more just and inclusive world.



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# SCENE 8: F-SIDES: FEMINIST FILM

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I met members of F-SIDES, Romania's pioneering feminist cineclub, in a small sunlit café in Bucharest. Founded in 2020, F-SIDES was created in response to gender inequality in the film industry, and it combines screenings of films made by women with facilitated discussion – building a feminist public space for reflection, debate, and community. Over coffee and laughter, Elena-Andreea Negoii and Anastaseu Ștefan shared their experiences of using film as a tool for social change, and we reflected on the shared challenges and possibilities within feminist art and activism.

F-SIDES' mission is to amplify women's voices in cinema while fostering public discussions around sorority, bodily autonomy, education for girls, violence against women, intergenerational communication, migration, and ecofeminism. The club holds bi-monthly screenings in Bucharest and across other cities including Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, and Sibiu. These events go beyond simple film exhibition: each screening is followed by in-depth discussions featuring filmmakers, academics, journalists, and representatives from civil society organisations.

One of the organisation's most impactful initiatives is F-SIDES Chapters, coordinated by Elena-Andreea. This educational outreach programme brings feminist cinema and critical conversation to ten smaller Romanian cities, many of which have limited access to cultural events. Using a carefully curated curriculum of eighteen films directed by women, the programme engages teenagers in exploring issues of gender equality, diversity, and representation



Elena described the programme as a way of “opening doors to worlds they didn’t know existed.” She spoke movingly about how, for many participants, these workshops are their first introduction to feminist ideas and their first experience of seeing women’s lives portrayed with nuance and agency. Having lived and worked in several countries, Elena brings an international perspective to her work, but her heart is clearly rooted in community development and education. She acknowledged that explaining this kind of work to people outside the cultural sector can be difficult. How does one measure the ripple effect of an open conversation, or the transformation sparked by a single film? Yet the results, she said, are often quietly profound. Young people begin to question inherited ideas, see themselves reflected on screen, and learn to articulate their own perspectives.

Anastaseu Ștefan, a trans director, actor and community builder, is another key figure within F-SIDES. He contributes creatively to the Chapters programme and to the organisation’s wider commitment to inclusivity and intersectionality. Ștefan has a wonderfully direct and humorous way of communicating: “I can explain patriarchy in two minutes using a meme.” Beneath this humour sits a serious commitment to accessibility and cultural participation. His work reflects a belief that feminism should be open, creative and engaging, rather than academic or exclusionary. Through workshops, creative campaigns and community events, he helps feminist ideas resonate with younger generations, particularly those who may feel alienated from mainstream activism.

Elena and Ștefan’s focus on decentralisation, bringing culture to towns outside the capital, strongly resonated with my work in communities across the North East of England. We share a belief that meaningful change happens locally, through relationships and collective creativity. They also reflected on the emotional labour of this work, speaking openly about burnout, self-care, and the role of joy, humour and connection in sustaining feminist activism.

### **Key insights:**

Feminist cultural work is most powerful when it is collaborative, intersectional and rooted in community. Dialogue, rather than didacticism, starts conversations rather than dictating answers. Finally, feminism can be tangible – not an abstract theory, but a lived practice of inclusion, empathy, and storytelling. It’s about creating spaces where people can see themselves differently and, in doing so, begin to imagine a fairer world.



# SCENE 9: MIHAELA DRĂGAN GIUVLIPEN



Meeting Mihaela Drăgan - a Roma actress, playwright, activist, and cofounder of Giuvlipen (founded in 2014) - was a moment I had quietly hoped for. Giuvlipen (meaning “feminism” in Romani) is Romania’s first independent Roma feminist theatre company, using experimental theatre to confront racism, sexism and discrimination while placing Roma women’s voices unapologetically at the centre.



Beyond theatre, Mihaela is a pioneer of “Roma futurism,” using speculative storytelling to resist the historic oppression that continues to shape Roma lives. Her courage is unmistakable; I heard anecdotes about her standing up to Andrew Tate’s entourage, a reminder of her refusal to be silenced in the face of misogyny and intimidation. In person, she was warm, open and generous. We spent hours together moving between cafés, talking, smoking and sharing stories about heritage, prejudice and the lived reality of being a Roma woman in Romania. I listened as she spoke about systemic brutality and discrimination. My role was simply to hold space, a reminder of how listening, when intentional and respectful, can be an act of solidarity.



Our conversations certainly offered insights that will directly inform my work. Mihaela spoke about the harmful role theatre and film have historically played in shaping stereotypes about Roma women, narratives that erase them entirely or reduce them to damaging caricatures. Reclaiming their stories, including the revival of Roma witchcraft as a feminist political act, becomes a powerful form of resistance and visibility.

She also discussed her projects with Roma women in which domestic violence emerged as a central and painful theme. Giuvlipen created artistic spaces where women could speak openly about experiences that are often silenced within their communities and ignored by wider society. Her approach resonated strongly with Workie Ticket's ethos: building trust, creating culturally rooted spaces, and using theatre not as therapy but as a catalyst for visibility, empowerment, and change.

By using Roma feminist theatre, this work achieves something that policy papers, statistics, and service frameworks alone cannot. Theatre creates a space where Roma women are not objects of concern, but subjects with voice, agency, and authority. It shifts Roma women from being spoken about to being listened to on their own terms.

Roma feminist theatre makes visible the intersecting violences Roma women experience; gender-based violence shaped by racism, poverty and state control - without reproducing harmful stereotypes. Rather than framing violence as a "Roma cultural issue," theatre allows stories to be placed within their social, political and historical contexts, exposing how exclusion, surveillance, and institutional neglect enable abuse. Ultimately, Roma feminist theatre does not just raise awareness; it redistributes power. That redistribution of power is visible in Mihaela's work and her unwavering commitment to her own community.

### **Key insights:**

Mihaela reinforced that survivor-led practice must also be culturally specific and co-created. Intersectionality is the difference between work that "includes" and work that is genuinely safe, truthful, and useful. Meaningful feminist work must acknowledge these overlapping systems. These principles will directly shape how I collaborate with marginalised women in the UK and develop projects that reflect their lived realities.



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# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM MY EUROPE VISIT

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During my Fellowship in Berlin and Bucharest, I saw how theatre, film, and creative activism are being used to challenge gender-based violence, amplify marginalised voices, and foster social change. Across both cities, participatory, survivor-led, and intersectional approaches create spaces where communities can reflect, rehearse alternatives, and reclaim agency.

Key findings with relevance for the UK:

- **Survivor-led and marginalised voices strengthen impact:** Centring lived experience builds solidarity, credibility, and resistance, especially when practice is explicitly intersectional.
- **Participatory methods rehearse change:** Forum Theatre and peer-led workshops help communities explore social issues, test interventions, and connect creative work to action.
- **Multiple forms deepen reach:** Autobiographical theatre, drag, film, and participatory performance expand who can speak, who can listen, and how ideas travel.
- **Accessibility is a strategy:** Low-barrier tools, workbooks, and community resources support participation without professional gatekeeping or large stages.
- **Youth leadership matters:** Working with young people builds long-term cultural change by equipping the next generation to challenge misogyny and inequality.

Across these practices, storytelling functions as a catalyst for transformation – a way to hold complexity, build connection, and move from reflection towards real-world change.



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# ACT 3 – THE TRANSATLANTIC STAGE: USA AND CANADA

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Toronto, Canada – 17 to 20 April  
Montréal, Canada – 20 April to 22 April  
Lenox (MA) – 22 April to 25 April  
New York, USA – 25 April to 29 April



“Catching a plane to Dublin and then to Toronto, wearing my Alanis Morissette T-shirt”... but then crying because I was leaving the bairns for 12 days” should probably be the title of this next chapter.

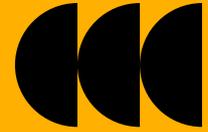


It captures the mix of pride, panic, and pure emotion that comes with stepping out into the world to do this work. Standing in the airport, clutching my bag and silently humming ‘You Learn’, I suddenly found myself welling up at the thought of nearly two weeks away from my children. Twelve days isn’t long in the grand scheme of things, but at that moment it felt like a lifetime.

This fellowship is about growth, courage and pushing beyond the familiar – not just professionally, but personally too. And so, after a teary goodbye and a deep breath, I began the journey.



# SCENE 1: MIXED COMPANY THEATRE TORONTO



I had the pleasure of meeting Simon Malbogat in person after previously connecting over Zoom. Simon is the founder and artistic director of Mixed Company Theatre, a Toronto-based organisation that has used theatre for social change for over 40 years. Their work spans from challenging gender roles in an amphitheatre in Turkey, to powerful online projects amplifying the voices of migrant workers, to addressing women's safety on public transport and in shelters and exploring themes of consent in Toronto schools.

Simon shared so many stories of the amazing work they do in the Toronto communities they work in. Delivering postsecondary programmes, interactive workshops and Forum Theatre presentations for college and university students, responding to campus issues such as consent and mental health while remaining adaptable to wider social justice contexts. Their practice is grounded in listening to communities and building spaces where dialogue and "rehearsal for change" can lead to real shifts in perspective and behaviour. Their tagline - Engage, Educate, Empower - closely aligns with my ethos at Workie Ticket.

During our initial online meeting, Simon wore a mask, an intentional workshop tool he uses to engage young people and facilitate difficult conversations. This resonated strongly with my own practice. Masks are among the oldest and most powerful tools in theatre, capable of transforming performers and intensifying storytelling. Observing Simon's use of this technique prompted me to reflect on how masking might be integrated into my own creative and facilitation work, especially as we are working more with young people.



In a conversation with Simon, we discussed how Mixed Company uses Forum Theatre in a way that is distinctly their own, much like Kuringa. While rooted in Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, their work is carefully created, rehearsed and performed before being replayed with the audience invited to intervene as "spect-actors" to explore positive alternatives. Simon emphasised that Forum Theatre is a powerful tool that must be used responsibly: its purpose is to create theatre that enables social change, not personal therapy, and this requires skilled, trained facilitation. Simon told me about Harvest Justice: Twice the Speed of Lightning, a participatory Forum Theatre initiative developed from interviews with migrant farm workers in Canada. Using interactive performance, audiences are invited to step into scenes, test alternatives, and explore practical routes to accountability and change. It is a model of how theatre can move beyond awareness into reflection, dialogue and action.

Later, I attended FLEX at Crow's Theatre (Obsidian Theatre). Set in 1990s America, the play's soundtrack and cultural references evoked nostalgia while also underscoring how much—and how little—has shifted for women over time. What resonated most strongly, however, was the atmosphere in the room: the collective energy, the conversations it generated, and the palpable sense of shared attention. It served as a reminder that solidarity is produced not only through content, but through the conditions theatre creates for people to gather, witness, and think together. This principle sits at the heart of Forum Theatre and mirrors the ethos underpinning Mixed Company Theatre's practice, reinforcing for me the importance of creating work that prioritises collective reflection as much as narrative or message.



**Key insight:** One key insight from this exchange was the understanding that when Forum Theatre remains responsive to lived experience, the work belongs to participants rather than the facilitator. The emphasis on co-creation and community ownership positions theatre not only as a space for storytelling, but as a site of shared problem-solving and social change. Simon also stressed the importance of recognising the economic and structural inequalities that shape people's lives, particularly within applied and community contexts. This reinforced my commitment to shaping my own work with survivors in ways that centre their voices, experiences, and needs, using theatre not simply to represent stories, but to support reflection, dialogue, and meaningful social change.

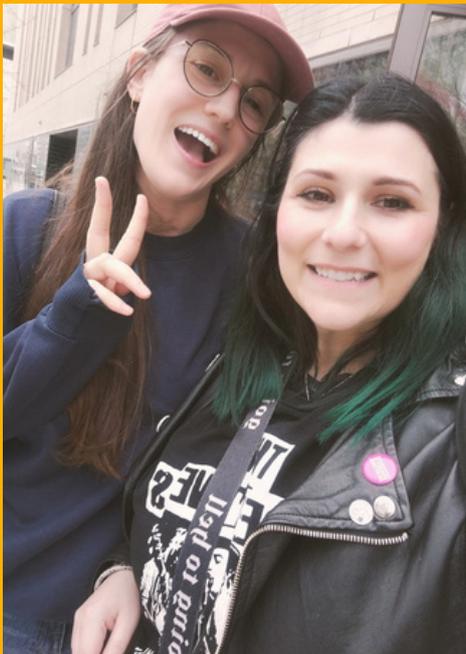


# SCENE 2: RACHEL CAIRNS THEATRE TO PODCAST



*“People talk about abortion as if it’s always this really difficult choice. And yes, it can be complex, but there’s a lot of secrecy around it... assumption that it must be hard. The thing is, abortions are very common and the data shows that for many, it’s not actually a difficult decision...”*

**Rachel Cairns, podcaster & theatre-maker**



During my time in Toronto, I met Rachel Cairns, a fierce feminist writer, theatre-maker, filmmaker, and podcaster. Her one-person show *Hypothetical Baby* resonates deeply with my own practice, offering a brutally honest, politically sharp, and darkly funny exploration of abortion that refuses simplification. Through personal storytelling and rigorous research, the work challenges stigma, exposes systemic control over reproductive bodies, and demonstrates how solo performance can hold complexity, vulnerability, and rage without compromise.

In a field often saturated by “lads with mics and nowt much to say,” where the podcast boom has amplified confidence rather than care, Rachel’s ‘Aborsh’ stands out as both radical and necessary. In contrast to a podcast culture increasingly shaped by the manosphere—where grievance is monetised and women’s bodies are endlessly debated rather than listened to, ‘Aborsh’ refuses simplification. Billed as “a podcast about abortion in Canada...”, it instead offers something far rarer: nuance, accountability and space for voices so often spoken over.



Aborsh is far more than that. It situates abortion within an intersectional framework - examining how race, class, relationships, healthcare, geography, spirituality, and economics shape people's experiences of choice. Beginning from her own story (having had an abortion on Christmas Eve 2019), Rachel skilfully weaves personal narrative with expert voices to expose both the systemic barriers and emotional complexities of abortion. Unlike the WONA podcast, which is collective and conversational,

Aborsh fuses autobiography, verbatim text, interviews, and Rachel speaking directly to the audience with facts and real-life stories. By balancing lived experience with data and policy, she creates a space where both heart and head are engaged. The effect is both intimate and political.

What makes the podcast especially powerful is the way it refuses to stay within the narrow "pro-choice vs. pro-life" binary, instead framing abortion as part of a wider reproductive justice movement that also considers housing, caregiving, decolonisation, and systemic inequality. The podcast's impact has already been recognised: Season One won Planned Parenthood Toronto's Choice Award for excellence in sexual and reproductive health and rights advocacy.

Our conversation ranged across urgent feminist concerns: the restrictions of the class system on creative careers, the rise of femicide in Canada (particularly among Indigenous women, where action is urgently needed), and the responsibility to let these devastating realities fuel our work. On the way back to where I was staying, we continued discussing the marginalisation of Indigenous women in Canada and the worrying spread of toxic narratives from the USA into Canada and the UK.

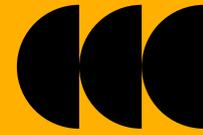
**Key insight:**

Podcasts can be used as a tool to create change and raise awareness, fusing verbatim theatre with conversations, interviews, and research. This format reaches large audiences in ways traditional theatre sometimes cannot. Inspired by Rachel's approach, I'm reflecting on how Workie Ticket could revisit and reimagine our own podcasting work, which we began during the pandemic. With these insights, there's an exciting opportunity to create a platform that fuses lived experience, research, and conversation, reaching new audiences and amplifying voices that too often go unheard.



# SCENE 3: FEMINIST MEN IN THEATRE

## MONTREAL

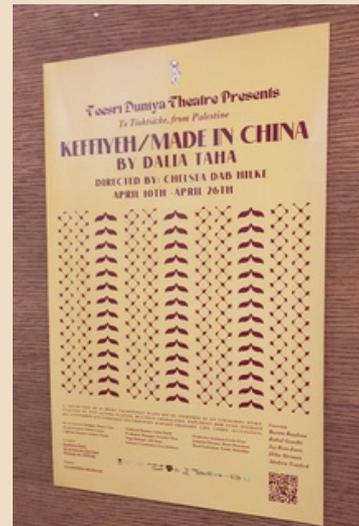


Montréal proved to be a significant and intellectually rigorous stop on my Fellowship journey. On my first evening, I attended *Keffiyeh / Made in China* by Palestinian playwright Dalia Taha, presented by Teesri Duniya Theatre. The word “occupation” is never spoken, yet it resonates throughout the work, demonstrating how theatre can powerfully communicate political reality through implication rather than declaration.

Teesri Duniya Theatre, co-founded in 1981 by artistic director Rahul Varma, has a long-standing commitment to politically engaged, socially transformative theatre. The company was established to challenge tokenistic multiculturalism and to create space for authentic stories rooted in anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial practice. Over four decades, its work has addressed racism, colonialism, gender-based violence, war, migration, genocide, and refugee integration, while actively resisting “colour-blind” casting in favour of meaningful multi-ethnic representation. This approach has not only shifted cultural narratives but has also launched and sustained the careers of many artists of colour.

A key insight from my conversations in Montréal was the role of theatre as both activism and a tool for dialogue and healing. Rahul Varma described how verbatim productions based on the lived experiences of Syrian refugee families were used to foster understanding and connection between refugees and Canadian audiences. He emphasised that politically engaged theatre is not simply cultural expression, but an intervention capable of influencing public discourse and empowering communities.

I also connected with several theatre-makers whose work directly interrogates misogyny and male violence. Julia Aimsforth shared a prison-based project created from interviews with incarcerated women, alongside *Meet Me*, an interactive performance exploring dating, consent, and cancel culture in the post-#MeToo era, developed with Live Action Theatre Project and Teesri Duniya. This work demonstrated how audience-interactive and digital tools can be used ethically to place responsibility and choice in the hands of audiences, encouraging deeper engagement with complex social issues.



Jean-Marc Dalphond introduced me to *Projet Polytechnique*, a documentary theatre and podcast project responding to the 1989 *École Polytechnique* massacre, in which 14 women were murdered in an explicitly anti-feminist attack. Dalphond's cousin, Anne-Marie Edward, was one of the victims. The project emerged after he received a wave of misogynistic abuse online when posting a tribute, prompting a wider examination of the persistent roots of misogyny and incel culture in contemporary society.

I also finally met playwright Adam Kelly Morton (who had organised us all meeting!), creator of *The Anorak*, a play examining Marc Lépine, the perpetrator of the Montréal Massacre. Although I did not see the production staged, reading the script and discussing it with Morton highlighted the ethical challenges and necessity of confronting male violence on stage. Both Morton and Dalphond exemplify a model of male allyship that rejects defensiveness and centres accountability, demonstrating how men can actively interrogate toxic masculinity while amplifying feminist perspectives rather than displacing them.

Collectively, my experiences in Montréal reinforced the potential of theatre to challenge harmful narratives, support survivor-centred storytelling, and engage audiences in critical reflection on violence, power, and responsibility. These approaches directly inform my own practice in the UK, particularly in using theatre as a preventative and educational tool to address gender-based violence, misogyny, and the cultural conditions that enable them.

#### Key insights:

My time in Montréal confirmed that theatre is a powerful tool for feminist activism, capable of confronting misogyny and violence while modelling accountable male allyship and centring women's voices.



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# KEY TAKEAWAYS CANADA

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My time in Canada offered powerful lessons for my theatre practice. At Mixed Company Theatre, Simon Malbogot reinforced the importance of flexibility – adapting Forum Theatre so it stays rooted in lived experience and genuinely belongs to the community. Seeing FLEX at Crow’s Theatre reminded me how form, space, and design can create immersive conditions for feminist dialogue and collective reflection.

Meeting Rachel Cairns showed me how podcasting can function as a form of feminist theatre, blending story, data, and testimony to reach wider audiences and spark social change. Alongside this, talking to Julia Ainsworth about her project Meet Me highlighted why this kind of work is so important. It places audiences at the centre of the storytelling, turning them from passive spectators into active decision-makers who experience the consequences of their choices. By blending live performance with digital, game-inspired interactivity, it offers theatre-makers a powerful and contemporary way of telling complex, challenging stories that encourages empathy, reflection and deeper engagement. In Montréal, artists like Adam Kelly Morton and Jean-Marc Dalphond demonstrated how men can act as genuine feminist allies, using theatre to interrogate masculinity with honesty and accountability.

Finally, speaking with Rahul Varma of Teesri Duniya Theatre reaffirmed that politically engaged theatre is a form of activism and one that can hold racism, gender-based violence, and structural inequality together, refusing easy narratives and demanding social change. Overall, Canada proved to be an incredibly impactful context for this work, demonstrating how boldly theatre can be used to push boundaries, challenge dominant narratives and actively contribute to social change and it left me eager to continue exploring and learning from this approach in future projects.



# SCENE 4: WAM THEATRE USA



Back in October 2024, when I first connected with WAM Theatre online, all I wanted was to learn more about rural theatre companies working with women. After a warm, generous conversation about their projects, they invited me to visit. I never imagined it would actually happen, but six months later, I found myself crossing the border into the USA. I'll admit I was nervous (the whole Trump situation didn't help), but I went with an open heart.

Founded in 2010 in the Berkshires, Massachusetts, WAM Theatre, short for "Where Are the Women?" was created to challenge the underrepresentation of women in theatre. Co-founded by director and producer Kristen van Ginhoven, WAM's mission is both simple and radical: to create opportunities for women and girls through theatre while using performance as a tool for philanthropy. Every production donates a portion of its proceeds to organizations supporting women and girls, and since its founding, WAM has contributed over \$100,000 to causes ranging from domestic violence support to education access and reproductive rights.

WAM's productions focus on women's stories of survival, resilience and justice, ensuring that voices often sidelined on mainstream stages are heard and celebrated. Their work extends beyond the stage through community engagement and education programmes, which are particularly important in rural areas with limited access to the arts. What stood out during my visit was the spirit of generosity and solidarity that permeates all aspects of their work.

Meeting Artistic Director Genée Coreno provided an immediate insight into WAM's approach, combining activism, creative leadership, and the political power of performance. The experience was transformative, reinforcing the value of creating platforms for women in the arts and offering practical and inspirational lessons relevant to my work with Workie Ticket.



The following day, I was welcomed into a WAM team meeting and shown around their facilities, which include a large rehearsal space, a kitchen, and dedicated offices. The setup exemplifies an environment that supports both creative work and administrative efficiency, an approach I hope to adapt for Workie Ticket.



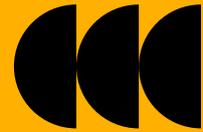
I also had the opportunity to speak individually with key team members, gaining insights into the various aspects of running a socially engaged theatre company. Genée Coreno, Artistic Director, described her journey from theatre and activism into leadership, emphasizing the use of theatre as a tool for equity and social change, particularly in amplifying women's and non-binary voices. Her work on projects such as *Fragments of Outside* demonstrates WAM's commitment to bold, socially engaged programming. Molly Merrihew, Managing Director, outlined the operational and strategic considerations of running a nonprofit arts organisation, highlighting the importance of long-term planning and community engagement in sustaining the company's mission. Erin Patrick, General Manager, explained the practicalities of coordinating productions and supporting artists, emphasizing the value of creating a supportive environment for both staff and audiences. Aimée K. Michel, Associate Artistic Director, shared her approach to curating and directing productions that resonate with local communities, demonstrating the impact of collaborative storytelling on social change. C. Jade Nicholas, Communications and Engagement Manager, highlighted the importance of storytelling in outreach, describing strategies to connect with diverse audiences and amplify WAM's mission.



These conversations provided a holistic understanding of how WAM integrates creative, operational, and engagement strategies to produce socially impactful theatre, offering valuable lessons that are directly relevant to my work developing Workie Ticket as a company addressing gender-based violence.



# SCENE 5: THE FIRESIDE CHAT



*"I can tell you a million statistics, but I can hold that story for a lifetime."*

**Divya Chaturvedi, Elizabeth Freeman Center**

Probably the most important statement, I heard on my journey. Divya leads a women's domestic abuse charity, not a theatre company, but her words about the enduring power of story stayed with me.

WAM Theatre's Fireside Chat was a powerful culmination of my time with the organisation. Held during Prevention of Violence Against Women week at Doctor Sax House in Lenox, MA, it brought together theatre-makers, service providers, survivors, and community members in an intimate, emotionally charged space. I took part in The Art of Service: Bridging Theatre and Direct Service, moderated by Genée Coreno, alongside Divya Chaturvedi.



Together we explored how theatre and frontline services can collaborate to support survivors, challenge harmful systems, and create spaces for healing and change. Genée opened by grounding global and local statistics in community care, reminding us that behind every statistic is a story, a life.

The evening felt intentionally held: daffodils on tables, pledge cards on seats, warmth in the room. It reaffirmed that theatre is not only art, but activism, and that events like this should happen more often.



After a reluctant goodbye, I travelled on to New York, stopping in Albany in a small, in-between moment to process what I had learned. The visit reminded me that solidarity is built not only through stories, but through care, activism, and the radical generosity that emerges when women work together.

WAM showed me that theatre can hold both truth and hope, and that community is built not only on stories but on care, activism, and shared spirit. I left inspired, supported, and deeply grateful, carrying lessons that will shape my work for years to come.

#### Key insights:

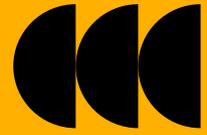
My visit to WAM has directly informed the future of Workie Ticket. Survivor-led storytelling remains central, recognising narrative work as a means of reclaiming agency and resisting erasure. WAM's approach to valuing creative labour—financially, emotionally, and organisationally—will be embedded into our long-term strategy.

Trauma-informed practice underpins all creative work, with care built into atmosphere, consent, pacing, and support. Storytelling, when combined with cross-sector collaboration with survivor services, amplifies impact and drives social change. Finally, consistent and intentional communication is vital; maintaining a clear, coherent identity strengthens visibility and influence.





# SCENE 6: THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED NYC (TONYC)



I was honoured to take part in TONYC's Level 1 Joker Training, which introduced me to the foundations of Forum Theatre through online learning and a two-day in-person intensive. Guided by Liz Morgan, Marcela Artunduaga and Ania Upstill, we explored the Joker's complex role: artist, facilitator, disruptor, listener.

The course was rooted in Freirean praxis: reflection and action in constant dialogue. Every game and exercise asked us not only to move, play, and create, but also consider how these activities shifted our understanding of power, oppression, and possibility. Playful warm-ups like the Question Game and Consent Game sat alongside deeper activities such as Good Teacher vs Bad Teacher, Fishbowl Listening, and the Great Game of Power. We explored Image Theatre and Families from Image of the Word, discovering how frozen images can reveal relationships, emotions, and the systems shaping them.

During story-sharing, my own experience of domestic abuse was chosen for the group's Forum exploration. I spoke about post-separation abuse, and the deep harm caused by not being believed-by authorities, by services, by the systems meant to protect. Through Image Theatre and Aesthetics of the Oppressed, my group sculpted isolation, invisibility, and the systemic walls survivors face. Instead of retelling events, they embodied the emotional reality. In the Forum, spect-actors intervened to imagine what could change if authorities listened or if support structures worked. Watching others step into "my" role showed me, starkly, both systemic failure and the possibility of collective transformation. What moved me most was how quickly art forged connection. We had just met, yet people's images, poems, and models resonated deeply. Forum Theatre doesn't just rehearse revolution - it builds empathy, solidarity and shared understanding.



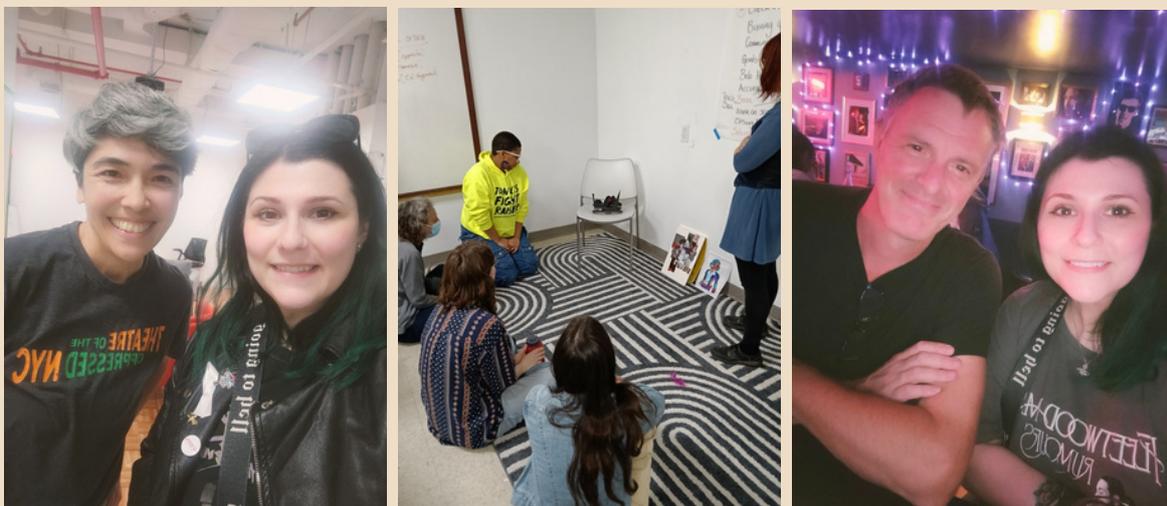
Learning to be a Joker felt significant and personal. The role holds a delicate balance of artistry, ethics, and care. It asks for honesty and accountability: a commitment to creating spaces where communities think together, challenge together, and practise freedom. One principle that stayed with me was *demechanisation* - the process of disrupting the mechanical behaviours we absorb under oppression. In the context of gender and GBV, it felt especially powerful. Many survivors carry mechanical habits of shrinking, apologising, lowering their voice, or bracing for danger. Through play and physical exploration, we rehearsed alternatives: standing taller, reclaiming space, speaking with authority. These small embodied shifts felt like rehearsals for liberation.



A highlight of my time in New York was meeting Sulu LeoNimm, TONYC's executive director. We had spoken online before, but visiting their space brought our conversations to life. Sulu is a theatre-maker, Joker, community facilitator, and co-author of The Wildcard Workbook. They shared their experiences of using Legislative Theatre, which brings ordinary people's stories directly into policymaking. Through Forum-style performances, communities explore problems on stage, spect-actors intervene and propose solutions, and these ideas can then be presented to decision-makers.

Sulu shared how TONYC has performed directly for city council members in New York to show how policies impact everyday lives, while similar approaches are used internationally, like in Malawi, to connect survivors' stories with policymakers. When I asked about its application to gender-based violence, Sulu emphasised that Legislative Theatre is fundamentally about dialogue, agency, and participation: creating space for people to share experiences and imagine change, while prioritising safety, consent, and debriefing. "Ultimately," they said, "you can't control everything... even as the Joker." That honesty reinforced the importance of survivor-centred practice within any legislative or community-facing work.

We also spoke candidly about the ongoing challenge of sustainable funding, and how financial pressures shape both artistic and community practice. Sulu and I agreed that for survivor-centred work, adequate resources are essential to ensure participants' safety, proper debriefing, and meaningful engagement with policymakers.





### Key insights:

My time in New York affirmed that Theatre of the Oppressed is not just a methodology, but also an ethical, political, and deeply survivor-centred practice. These tools create agency, especially for those whose voices have been dismissed. The transformation from spectator to spect-actor is a powerful reminder that GBV is never an isolated issue: it is shaped by systems, structures, and communities – and it can be challenged by them too.

Most of all, I learned that TO doesn't "fix" gender-based violence. Instead, it creates conditions where people can think together, question together, and imagine different futures. It reminds us that change doesn't only happen in Parliament or courts, but also in rehearsal rooms, community spaces, and shared stories. When held with care, theatre becomes a rehearsal for freedom.





# SCENE 7: EMMANUELLE ZAGORIA



I met Emmanuelle Zagoria in New York and instantly loved her. We even went to see a play together at the Women's Theatre, which wasn't really our thing but gave us food for thought.

Emmanuelle is a Franco-Australian artist who uses music as a form of protest, blending theatre, voice, and composition to challenge systems and spark change. Her solo works, such as *What's in the Handbag?* (a feminist electro-musical disco show) and *Climate Changes* demonstrate her commitment to using art as both provocation and invitation: a space where humour and politics intersect. Zagoria's performances often challenge patriarchal narratives and invite audiences into playful yet critical reflections on gender, power, and belonging.

Alongside her creative work, she is an experienced educator, teaching voice and musical theatre in Paris and New York, where she encourages students to embrace vulnerability, spontaneity, and creative risk. Her practice exemplifies how performance can be both personally expressive and socially conscious, a meeting point of activism, artistry, and empowerment.



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# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE USA

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My research trip to the USA provided significant insights into feminist creative activism, trauma-informed practice, and community-centred theatre-making that will directly inform my work with Workie Ticket in the UK.

Learnings I will be taking forward:

- **Storytelling is a tool for survivor agency and social change.** WAM's commitment to centring lived experience, amplifying marginalised voices, and embedding trauma-informed care across all aspects of practice reinforced the value of narrative work as a method of empowerment, healing, and resistance.
- **Value women-led labour.** WAM's unapologetic approach to valuing women-led labour, particularly their transparency around fundraising and philanthropy, demonstrated that resourcing feminist creativity is itself a political act.
- **Participatory practice creates agency.** In New York, training with Theatre of the Oppressed deepened my understanding of participatory, ethics-driven methodologies that prioritise agency, dialogue, and collective problem-solving. Joker Training demonstrated how Forum Theatre can help communities rehearse alternatives to violence, and how embodied work can make structural harm legible.
- **Policy and systems change need safeguarding.** Conversations with TONYC affirmed the potential of Legislative Theatre to bridge lived experience and policymaking, alongside the need for robust safeguarding and adequate resources.
- **Collaboration strengthens impact.** Across contexts, the strongest work sits at the intersection of creative practice, frontline services, and community knowledge, sustained through long-term partnerships and consistent organisational identity.

My key findings underscore the importance of survivor-led storytelling, trauma-informed facilitation, confident and ethical fundraising, consistent organisational identity, and sustained partnerships with domestic abuse charities and lived-experience experts. Implementing these insights in the UK will strengthen Workie Ticket's capacity to create socially engaged theatre that is grounded in care, activism, and genuine community impact.



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# CONCLUSION

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This Fellowship has gone beyond research: it has been a journey of solidarity. From Berlin to Bucharest, from Malawi to New York, I have witnessed how theatre can challenge silence, confront injustice, and create spaces where survivors are not only heard but believed. Every conversation, workshop, and performance reaffirmed that theatre is not merely art: it is activism.

I carried the voices of home with me: the women in North Tyneside whose stories first ignited my work, and my sister-in-law Aimee, whose quiet encouragement to “go for it” helped me begin. That spirit of determination echoed through every community I encountered, from Roma feminists to youth activists in Malawi, from creative practitioners in Berlin to survivor-leaders in Canada and the USA. Their courage, generosity and refusal to give up under immense pressure have reshaped how I understand the purpose and power of theatre.

This Fellowship has also shown that the UK stands at a critical moment. Rising misogyny, shrinking services, austerity and the backlash against women’s rights demand creative and political responses anchored in survivor leadership. Survivor-led theatre cannot survive on goodwill alone. It requires structural commitment: trauma-informed practice, ethical facilitation, embedded safeguarding and long-term investment. We cannot ask survivors to share their stories within systems that do not protect, support, or value them.

And yet, I remain hopeful because I have seen how theatre can ignite dialogue, deepen understanding, and catalyse movements for justice. I have watched young people debate consent, women reclaim joy after violence, and communities come together to challenge silence. Theatre bridges the local and the global, connecting a woman in North Tyneside with a woman in Malawi through their shared fight for survival. It builds worlds where care is political, creativity is a right, and survivors lead the way.

This is not an ending but a beginning. The knowledge, inspiration and friendships forged through this Fellowship will shape the next chapter of Workie Ticket Theatre and the continuing development of Theatre of the Survivor. The work ahead is long, but it is necessary, urgent and possible. Be realistic: one play is not going to change the world. **But it can change who gets to speak -and that is how the world begins to change.**



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# EPILOGUE: HOW I WILL USE THIS LEARNING

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**Over the next year, I will embed the learning from this Fellowship directly into the growth of Workie Ticket Theatre CIC and the development of Theatre of the Survivor. I will:**

- Integrate survivor-led, feminist, and trauma-informed practice across all programmes.
- Develop training for practitioners in ethical facilitation, safeguarding, and story stewardship.
- Strengthen partnerships with women's services, youth organisations, cultural institutions, and universities, so the methodology is applied in both community and educational settings.
- Create new workshops and school-focused resources that centre survivor voice and agency.
- Share the learning nationally through talks, sector networks, and conferences, contributing to a wider movement for safer, braver, more ethical survivor-led theatre in the UK.

## **WHAT THE UK CAN LEARN**

My research highlights several opportunities to strengthen survivor-led and feminist theatre practice across the UK:

- **Put lived experience at the centre** of creative decision-making, championing survivor-led models rather than sidelining them.
- **Embed trauma-informed practice** across the arts sector through training, safeguarding structures, and clear pathways for facilitators and Jokers working in socially engaged theatre.
- **Build cross-sector collaboration** between theatre-makers, women's services, educators, and activists, so practice is connected to real-world support and accountability.
- **Expand youth-focused education** on gender-based violence in schools using participatory methods that build critical thinking, consent literacy, and peer leadership.
- **Increase long-term, accessible funding** so survivor-led work can be sustained with dignity, care, and ethical storytelling at its core.



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# THE CURTAIN CALL: THEATRE OF THE SURVIVOR

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## A FRAMEWORK FOR BETTER SURVIVOR-LED, FEMINIST THEATRE PRACTICE IN THE UK

Theatre of the Survivor is a creative, political, and ethical methodology developed through my Churchill Fellowship research across Malawi, South Africa, Germany, Romania, Canada, and the USA. Rooted in feminist, intersectional, and trauma-informed practice – and shaped by my own lived experience – it is a living approach informed by survivor stories, international collaboration, and the belief that theatre can enable both healing and social transformation.

This is not yet a complete methodology, but a snapshot of its current form: a framework I have begun to pilot and refine through funded practical research. It adapts global best practice for UK contexts with one central conviction: Survivors are not the subjects of theatre; they are its leaders.

No single play, project, or creative act will change the world overnight, but it might change someone's world. And sometimes, that small change is what matters most.





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# THEATRE OF THE SURVIVOR: THE MANIFESTO

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## **CARE IS THE WORK**

A brew, a biscuit, a chat.  
Safety first. Always.

## **SURVIVOR-LED**

Not subjects.  
Not case studies.  
Leaders, experts, creators.

## **ART IS ACTIVISM**

Practice anti-fascist feminism - loud,  
proud and unapologetic.

## **PROCESS OVER PRODUCT**

What happens in the room is the  
activism.

## **INTERSECTIONAL OR NOTHING**

All women. All identities.  
No tokenism. No exclusions.

## **CREATIVITY IS A RIGHT**

Accessible. Local. Free or low cost.  
No gatekeeping. Joyful.

## **WE REHEARSE RESISTANCE**

Forum Theatre. Newspaper Theatre.  
Embodied storytelling. Protest  
performance. Courage is a practice.

## **NO SPECTACLE OF VIOLENCE**

Dignity before drama.  
Storytelling without harm.

## **ARCHIVE THE WORK**

Podcasts. Digital stories. Toolkits.  
Survivor voices preserved, not  
forgotten.

## **FUNDING IS POLITICAL**

Survivor-led, feminist, community  
theatre - must be resourced - not  
sidelined.

## **SOLIDARITY OVER COMPETITION**

Collaboration across borders,  
sectors and communities.

## **ENCOURAGE YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

Consent, care and critical  
thinking are skills. Young people  
lead change.

## **NEW WRITING IS RESISTANCE**

We write our own histories:  
herstories by women, survivors,  
queer, and marginalised voices.



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# THEATRE OF THE SURVIVOR: THE METHOD

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## **Safe and brave spaces:**

Warmth, consent, support workers, childcare, accessibility.

## **Core techniques:**

Forum Theatre • Newspaper Theatre • Verbatim • Embodied Practice •  
Digital Storytelling • Protest Theatre • Legislative Theatre. Sharing  
methods workshops. Interactive Theatre.  
Creative Digital Storytelling.

## **Youth and prevention:**

Peer mentoring, masculinity work, consent education, generational work.

## **Cross-sector action:**

Arts × health × education × social care × activism.

# THEATRE OF THE SURVIVOR: THE INVITATION

Become a spect-actor, not a spectator.

Reflect. Participate. Witness. Act.

Theatre won't end gender-based violence  
but it can shift culture, build solidarity,  
and empower survivors.

It begins with a brew.

From there:

we listen, we create, we act, we resist, we survive – together.



# I'll Have an English Breakfast Tea

JoJo Kirtley

In every country, I drink tea and listen.  
Cup warm in my hands,  
I'm reminded: this is the work.  
Not the keynote. Not the spotlight.  
But the circle where stories  
loosen over a brew.  
Although the World is loud.  
Here, truth begins.

In Malawi, girls step forward.  
What you feel matters.  
Once you find your voice,  
it cannot be taken.  
Theatre for a Change hands them the mic  
not rehearsing change, but legislating it.  
WoNA Collective turns testimony  
into podcasts and poems,  
where listening is the art.

In South Africa, women's theatre  
refuses spectacle.  
It shows the aftermath  
breath, silence, scar.  
The Mother Tongue Project writes stories  
into muscle and movement,  
rituals of mourning  
instead of statistics.

In Germany, the tea is strong.  
Grief to glitter and back again.  
InterFem struts defiance in sequins.  
Matchbox launches new writing.  
Heroes Berlin teaches boys  
to unlearn patriarchy.  
Kuringa rewrites Forum Theatre.  
Cosmino smuggles Afghan women's  
voices onto European stages.  
Jetzt ist Schluss.  
Enough.

In Romania, my tea cools.  
A.R.T. Fusion teaches boldness,  
bringing Newspaper Theatre  
into classrooms.  
F-Sides screens films by women.  
Giuvlipen, fierce Roma storytellers,  
rewrite erased histories.

In Canada, I ask for English Breakfast  
& Toronto hands me coffee.  
Mixed Company Theatre  
turns protest into rehearsal, care into technique.  
Rachel Cairns brews Aborsh,  
naming choice and survival.  
In Montréal, The Anorak and Projet Polytechnique  
confront the 1989 massacre,  
insisting misogyny starts with men but ends with us all.

In the USA, New York's Theatre of the Oppressed  
turns spectators into spect-actors  
revolution rehearsed before it's risked.  
In the Berkshires, WAM Theatre proves  
the radical act can be childcare, a stipend,  
a chair at the table.  
New writing is political.  
Listening is power.

And here, in the North East,  
the tea tastes of resilience.  
Survivors build their own spaces,  
turning theatre into sanctuary, into rising.  
We remember our sisters  
in Sudan, in Palestine,  
and everywhere pages are still being written.  
And the girls in quiet English villages,  
where violence is weaponised in culture wars,  
invoked only when it can be blamed on brown men,  
then ignored the rest of the time.

They say theatre won't change the world.  
But I have sat with women,  
tea warming my hands,  
and watched change happen  
inside them.

So here is the call:  
fund the rooms where women gather.  
Protect the circles that hold survivors.  
Theatre won't end the violence alone.  
But it sparks the reckoning,  
sews survivors back into the archive,  
and reminds the world:  
when women rise,  
everything rises with them.



# CREDIT & THANKS TO:

the  
CHURCHILL  
fellowship

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## UNITED STATES

WAM THEATRE (MASSACHUSETTS) - [HTTPS://WWW.WAMTHEATRE.COM](https://www.wamtheatre.com)  
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THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED NYC (TONYC) - [HTTPS://WWW.TONYC.NYC](https://www.tonyc.nyc)  
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