



# I am Lysistrata

An article from The Company

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“Mo makani” or “out of place” is a feeling I have carried around in my heart since I was a child, a feeling of othering that stood in my way of any real belonging to anything, any group and any place.

I first heard about the organisation Makani (“my place” in Arabic) through a member and a friend in 2023. I heard about the workshops she did and the lovely women she met. I loved the idea of theatre and what it made her feel. However, I got the same feeling in my gut: I felt that it wasn’t Makani/My Place or a thing for me. I nodded my head in admiration and forgot about it.

In February 2024, this dear friend (Niveen) asked me if I wanted to be part of a theatre workshop and get involved in the play they were doing, since the Makani organisers had asked for new members. I was surprised. I said: “really? I am not an actress?” She reassured me about the place and the people and told me to consider it. I asked her what it was about, she laughed and said: “a sex strike.” My eyes were wide open, and said “really? Oh if only my family heard this!” But then I thought “why not?”

Soon I was contacted by Makani’s kind project assistant (Tashy), who told me about Makani and their different projects and explained what the theatre workshop was about in more detail, sending the rehearsal schedule in advance. I confirmed my participation, then forgot about it.

At the time, I have to say that I was in the worst situation. Sadness, loneliness, and unemployment were recurrent themes in my life. I felt without purpose, outside everything and out of place, my feet didn’t have a solid ground underneath.

When the rehearsal day came, London weather didn’t fail me. It was as miserable as ever, grey and rainy. I decided not to go, feeling I was not an actress, and I couldn’t do anything well, and that the world was sending me a sign with its weather, so I shouldn’t go. But a quiet voice inside me told me: “go, you won’t lose anything, you’ll only be wet for a bit”. So, I did.

I entered the hall on the fifth floor of the Theatre Deli rehearsal space after being welcomed by Sepy, the director, and was surrounded by smiling faces.



I saw Niveen, Juliana, Joy, Sheila, Anastasiia, Maria, Shanzay, Noor, and Rebecca. I was the second Syrian gal after Niveen, but then I heard someone else talking in Arabic with her. It was Carmen, the play's writer.

The instant comfort that I felt was stunning. I didn't know anyone except Niveen, and I didn't speak much with the lovely women because I am shy, but the vibes flying in the air were remarkable.

The atmosphere was cosy, full of laughs and jokes, and it soon became a haven I eagerly waited for. The play was a collaborative effort, meaning that the play is sort of an adaptation of *Lysistrata*, *The Greek Woman*. It was written based on our improvisations to scenarios given by Carmen the playwright and Sepy the director, a genius thing they adopted to sharpen our hidden creativity. Sepy and Carmen were on top of the sessions; they had them well-planned, coming up with different exercises that provided me with a space to really be myself and challenge my shyness and anxiety.

It was a space of the present. For the first time in my life, I was living in the present mentally and emotionally. I didn't worry about the past or the future, I was not worried at all. We started each session with many icebreakers and mood instigators. It brought up the spirits.

At the first session, Carmen and Sepy asked us what we wanted to accomplish with the play. For many, it was about telling their stories, but for me and a few others, it was the confidence we lost, the space we lacked and the ability to talk without worry.

Then, the serious stuff started. One of my favourite scenarios was narrating the best life event of another woman in the form of a song or a poem. I talked about the father of one participant, whom she watched over the years making a necklace of jasmine for her mother. Another scenario was trying to come up with a cause that we would strike against.

Carmen was phenomenally creative in bringing out the different sides of us and then employing them in the play. One of the most incredible things Sepy and Carmen kept on doing was the check-in and check-out part, where we talked about how we felt before and after the sessions. It was an exciting day when she shared the play structure and the first three scenes with us. We started reading, and the plot got clearer bit by bit.

The check-out allowed us to share how we felt, and I shared my concern; for the first time, I was anxious, as I didn't have a lot of lines to say, and I was worried that my character in the play would be flat, 2D, nothing special about her. It was a few days before my 40th birthday and I guess I was having a life crisis.



They listened carefully and assured me that these were only two scenes. They asked me how I would see my character, and they told me that I have a unique voice, which made me feel comfortable again. I wasn't judged or shamed, but I was welcomed to say what was on my mind, validated, and asked for opinions on how I wanted my lines to be. I said: just clever, I wouldn't mind anything else, I just want them to have a character. And now, after getting the first draft of the whole play, I would say: yes! I am happy with my character; it is an animated version of me.

At the time of writing this blog, we are waiting for the final and last version of the play script. It is almost ready, and the anticipation is building up. I am a choir member who performed on the Barbican stage. There was some fear, but the unity in voices and performance took the fear away. But doing this play for three days takes worrying to another level, especially since each character has something different to say. I am worrying about remembering my lines or making a mistake. But most of all, I am overthinking the impressions we would leave on people: would they like the play? Can we reclaim a stage that is not for us? Would people be willing to listen to a different story or form of a play?

To be honest, another part of me is not that worried because I know that we have the brilliant and super funny Juliana, who is fearless in providing jokes. We have the newly joined sister, the beautiful Sheila, who brought in beautiful energy and kept surprising us with wise words. The one-in-a-billion Rebecca, who is super funny and exciting on and off stage. The sweetheart Shanzay who is the strongest and most creative gal. Maria, the coolest and bravest and most chilled woman ever. Anastasiia, the kindest soul, most helpful woman and mother of two who kept on taking our photos and creating amazing videos. Joy, the strong-minded, full-joy and warrior woman. Niveen, my sister, a fellow creative person and the most thoughtful woman in the circle who keeps on hugging us. Noor whose smile shines in the room and calmness melts hearts. Hanna the most capable actress who I watch astonished while she read lines with us and brings lines to life. Sepy, the calmest, most vibrant and wise director who brings words to life. And Carmen, the most patient, funniest, Word-Dame, eloquent, and genuine person ever! I am honoured to share this circle of trust with all of you.

My enormous thanks to everyone involved in the play, from the team behind it (Sara, Itab, Alex, Tabitha, Tashy, Aisha, Sadeysa) and my fellow Lysistratas, whom I met and was happy to form with them all the strongest bond ever: the bond of sisterhood, the bond of Art, the bond of Humanity.

I hope the audience feels the authenticity, love, and effort in this play. I hope it touches their hearts and also makes them revise their positionality. I want to say loudly: It is Makani now!