

GHOSTS

“*Ghosts*” is a short, silent play about trauma suffered by refugees who have been displaced as a result of war or other calamities.

Global Health Equity Foundation (GHEF) incorporated the pilot of “*Ghosts*” into its scientific symposium held in Bonn, Germany in November 2019 at the Bonn Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Learning BIM e.V.

The performance, which was developed and directed by the award-winning German director Stefan Herrmann, brings hidden traumas into conversation, opening paths to healing.

Working on “Ghosts” had a big impact on me. I realized how important it is to raise awareness of the issue of refugees suffering from trauma and post traumatic stress disorder. We explored the dynamic within a couple where one partner has had a traumatic experience and the other is having difficulty dealing with it. In my mind, theater has to make an emotional impact on the audience. Although listening to a scientific talk can be very rewarding on an intellectual level, good theater can transform you emotionally. The challenge with “Ghosts” was to create that transformation in a very short amount of time. The performance had to strike a chord in the hearts of audience members within twenty minutes.—Stefan Herrmann



Description of the *Ghosts* Project

Background

GHEF developed successful programs for suicide prevention in rural America. The Foundation's experience in this field was applied to their support for "Ghosts." GHEF's goal is to create scalable, easily disseminated, and compelling versions of their dialogue approach to addressing challenging healthcare issues.

How It Works

Moments of great intensity often remain in our memories and set change in motion. In the theater, this change can happen equally to the actors on the stage as well as to the audience. At the core of the "Ghosts" project is biographical theater work. Participants introduce stories and experiences from their own lives. This biographical material is developed during rehearsals through a variety of different exercises and improvisations. Together with the director, an effective aesthetic form is created.

"Ghosts" is a silent performance that is inclusive of all languages and ethnicities. GHEF's goal is to support the play as an instrument to facilitate discussion about trauma among various groups and in different settings: including researchers, community leaders, refugee centers and schools. GHEF works with psychologists and public health experts at Johns Hopkins and at the Health Tool Box to ensure that "Ghosts" is effective and results oriented. The impact of exposure to the play is determined by measuring increased awareness of trauma, of definitions of trauma, and of symptoms. Discussions following a performance of "Ghosts" encourage people to seek help

There is an urgent need for action in this field. Unprocessed traumas may affect entire families. Children are particularly vulnerable. The project "Ghosts" gives refugees and their children the opportunity to approach this topic carefully and in a playful way, thus encouraging the participants to seek professional help.

Many refugees from the Arab world are traumatized. They have experienced terrible things in their homeland, or they experienced trauma during their travels to Europe and during their resettlement. They learn the local language, they try to find work, and they raise their children. They support each other.

Preliminary research has shown that some refugees, especially young Arab men, do not want to admit their trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder—even though they show all the symptoms.

Director, Stefan Herrmann

Stefan Herrmann learned his craft as a director from Claus Peymann, Thomas Langhoff and Volker Lösch. Herrmann has been engaged at various theatres in Germany, including the Hamburger Kammerspiele, the Berliner Ensemble and the Staatstheater Stuttgart. His productions *Das Himbeereich*, *Hass* and *Drugland* were nominated for the Cologne Theatre Award. His interpretation of *Michael Kohlhaas* won the Monica Bleibtreu Award at the Privattheatertage in 2017. Herrmann also has been developing participatory and biographical theatre projects on socially relevant topics for over ten years. Most recently, he directed an adaptation of *Spring Awakening* with young refugees, a production which addressed the conflict of puberty and growing up in a foreign culture.

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Actors



Lou Zöllkau is a German actress, born in Cologne in 1989. After graduating from the Folkwang University of Arts, she started her career as a stage actress at the City Theatre of Cologne. There she played parts in productions such as *Hamlet* (playing Ophelia) and *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (playing Marianne). Her cinema debut was 2016 in the movie *Not. Now.* Currently she plays the leading role Elisabeth in *Children of the Night* at the City Theatre of Cologne.

Lucas Sánchez is a professional actor living in Cologne, and mostly working on stages in Germany and Austria. He graduated from the Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences in 2014. Since his graduation he has worked as an actor in theater productions, musicals and films. His experiences include: the role of Gregor Samsa (from *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka); and the role of Laertes (from *Hamlet* by Shakespeare). In addition, Sánchez is the lead singer in *The Songs of Bob Dylan*.

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Research

Mixed-Methods Epidemiological Study of the Intersection of Trauma and Displacement Trajectories

- ◆ Our objective is to assess the mental health and social status of Syrian refugees in Germany, as well as to develop a culturally responsive instrument designed to measure the co-occurrence of traumatic stress and/ or traumatic growth & displacement & integration trajectories. Rather than focus solely on traumatic stress and disease, we are also interested in understanding what displacement-related factors are more likely to result in outcomes of resilience and positive growth.
- ◆ Additionally, our objective is to develop and conduct such research in partnership with Syrian refugee communities in Germany using an equity lens.
- ◆ We will develop and pilot a mixed-methods, integrated mental health & displacement trajectories instrument in partnership with study communities.
 - Data collection will be conducted with both refugees and service providers in mental health and refugee services.
 - Domains that the instrument will assess include conceptions of illness; symptom levels using existing and adapted scales for Arabic-speaking populations; care-seeking behaviors and informal systems of care; resilient behaviors and capacity.
- ◆ In tandem with the research/ instrument development study, we will begin a *collective impact project* with our study communities. we will use a community change model that harnesses communities' own innovations and capacities to achieve post-traumatic growth, positive transformation, and health. An integrative analysis of participatory mapping data & pilot instrument data will be conducted to further develop the collective impact project.

It is critical to have an instrument not merely focused on measuring "problems," but, as befits an equity-based approach, to also be strengths-faced and assess levels of resilience.— Namrita Singh, PhD

Namrita S. Singh, PhD MSc is a public health practitioner with expertise in global mental health, equity-based approaches, and social & behavioral interventions. Dr. Singh is the Founder and Principal Advisor for the consulting and evaluation firm, Health Research Toolbox, and also serves as Social Epidemiologist for the State of Colorado's Public Health Department, in addition to her associate faculty appointment at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Singh has worked extensively with war-affected and displaced communities in various countries, including on US federal grants and with international humanitarian organizations. She is a former recipient of NIH funding and was a 2010-11 Fulbright Fellow.

Dr. Darwish is a faculty member at the Johns Hopkins Center for Humanitarian Health studying complex humanitarian emergencies, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Upon graduating with an MD from Damascus University, he joined the Red Crescent/Red Cross in Syria and Lebanon as the Coordinator of Emergency Medical Services and Disaster Management from 2016 to 2017. Dr. Darwish helped develop the emergency response program by training of staff and volunteers in health responses in crises, camp management, and emergency needs assessment. In 2017, he came to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to pursue a Master in Public. He stayed on as faculty in the Johns Hopkins Center for Humanitarian Health. His research aims to inform sustainable, evidence-based health programs and policies in complex humanitarian emergencies.

Objectives: Answering Urgent Questions

What is missing is an understanding of the effects of a traumatic past. What does this inheritance mean for our personal identity and our family identity? What effects do the children and their children feel in a traumatized family? How can you ameliorate those effects? How do refugees deal with traumatic experiences? Is there even time and energy to address the issue?

These questions are at the center of the short drama "Ghosts," and are also explored on the scientific, data-driven level by GHEF and its partners.

Link to a promotional video <https://vimeo.com/375801291/e9370a7470>

Available dates for a touring presentation of "Ghosts"

Contact GHEF for available days in the timeframes listed below. connect@ghef.org

- January 20-26
- February, no availability
- March 9-12
- April 14-24 (excluding the 20th)
- April 27-May 6th (excluding May 1)
- May 11-17 (upon request)

Production requirements

- Stage or similar performance space
- Two movable sofas
- Sound system

Costs

- During the prototyping phase year of 2020, €1200 per performance
- Plus travel and two days accommodation (contact GHEF for details)



Global Health Equity Foundation

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6, Chemin des Pluviers, Plan-les-Ouates Geneva CH-1228 • Switzerland
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www.ghef.org/ch • connect@ghef.org

Fritz Jörn • Fritz@Joern.De • mobile +49 171 3322017

Tayeb Al-Hafez • tayeb.alhafez@ghef.org • mobile +49 160 4973615



GERMANY BY AFFILIATION:

Bonner Institut für Migrationsforschung und Interkulturelles Lernen (BIM) e.V. (gemeinnützig/Charitable)

Brüdergasse 16 – 18, 53111 Bonn

Tel: 0228-33833911

BANK: SPARKASSE KÖLN-BONN

IBAN: DE54 3705 0198 0000 0563 82 BIC: COLSDE33XXX