

Trojan Horse - responding to the Ayesha Manazir Siddiqui's article about translating the script

We gave Ayesha many opportunities to withdraw from the project after she raised some reservations, and even pull the publication of it. She did not. When Ayesha talked to one of the teachers about the play during the translation process, they felt misunderstood and stressed. They asked her to go to Birmingham to meet them, and she didn't. They were hoping she would be at press night but she wasn't. They have been asking for the chance to properly sit down with her and explain themselves and their story. The stress of losing control of their own narrative all over again is, we believe, so unfair. Particularly when the idea of an Urdu translation came from the teachers, and she was selected as the translator by them through her application and writing sample.

Ayesha claims that we willingly changed the pupils names to more 'genuine' Pakistani names on her request. We changed them because she asked several times, even though the original names were decided in consultation with the teachers and our script consultant Aisha Khan from Freedom studios.

Ayesha talks about the damaging dichotomy of the good teacher vs his terrorist brother. We agree that if this was a piece of fiction, that would not be our go-to narrative choice. But it is in there because the teacher it is based on wanted to counter the narrative that already exists in the press tying him to his brother.

Ayesha says we leave the racist rhetoric of Elaine Buckley hanging - she cites the scene where Elaine states that Pakistani people don't educate girls. But we intentionally made sure the following scene was Farah telling Ann Connor, the inspector: 'You think that Muslim men are like oppressing their women - have you ever even studied Islam?' The reason Elaine's position is in the play is in order to counter it. The play is verbatim theatre and, for credibility, has to be grounded in the different narratives that were part of the real life affair.

Throughout this project we have had a lot of debate about who the characters are speaking to and who the audience is (ie. what might come across as the role of the interviewer) with the teachers, pupils and governors. And something they have all been clear on is that they want this play to be as accessible to their accusers as it is to people in Alum Rock. That's why certain things have been added in redrafts at the request of the teachers (ie. after saying 'It was like being in Barzakh' a teacher asked if we could add the line 'what Christian's would call Purgatory'). We worked with them and our script consultant Aisha for 2 years to get the play to a position they were happy with and felt was truthful to their voices. It's uncomfortable but the people this play is about were insistent that Trojan Horse is as persuasive to MPs in Parliament as it is to the communities of Alum Rock.

We have done 4 years of soul searching while working on this project. We have been hyper aware of our whiteness and what that brings. But ultimately this was not a story we were not going to write because we are white. The injustice is too enormous and no one else was taking it on.

We also believe Trojan Horse is, amongst many things, a play about class and about Birmingham. I went to a school not dissimilar from Park View in Birmingham and the impact of this case on friends and neighbours is still being felt today. The dichotomy in the play that Ayesha finds problematic is the dichotomy of class, and it is a reality - between low and high aspirations, between criminality and good GCSEs. Ayesha takes issue with the play presenting the school as an idealised beacon of hope. But for someone without much money, that's what school can genuinely and truthfully be and Park View school certainly was.

We completely agree that theatre needs to do better and work harder to be more representative, inclusive and accessible to all. We believe this play has been a genuine collaboration and the shared political aims of the play and the voices of people we have interviewed have always driven the project. We will continue to work with them and stand together to tell this vital story.

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