

**An Examination the Role of Theatre provides  
for the Migrant Experience and Considering The  
Types and Styles of Theatre best suited to this  
Dramatic Investigation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This PhD submission has two complementary parts, my play *The Hot Pot* with a supporting essay which describes my methodology, the process and the outcomes. The primary aim of the project was to examine how best I might utilise the theatre to explore aspects of the current migrant experience in the United Kingdom. Towards this aim research was carried out through discussions with individual migrants from different eras and different ethnic origins who had come to live work and study within the United Kingdom. By monitoring the migrant experience through extended conversations and presenting a range of characters on stage I hoped to provide a counter perspective to the collective media representation of those who had moved to the United Kingdom. The aim was to challenge stereotyping terms such as “migrants” and “the BAME community”. Thus as the play developed it was clear though it shows the individual humanity of people from a variety of diverse migrant backgrounds the demands of drama required character focus. This led to the positioning of the character John at the centre of the debate and action. He is explored both through his own thoughts this leads to his troubled relationships with his girlfriend, his parents and the people he meets casually at the hotpot party.

The supporting essay discusses migrant experiences through the presentation of recorded interviews, official data and personal recollections. It also explains the project’s search for a suitable stylistic approach while drawing on a range of theatre theorists who in various ways greatly influenced the shaping of the drama.

## **DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Shakeel Saleem (candidate)

Date: 22/12/2023

## **STATEMENT 1**

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.  
Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Date: 22/12/2023

## **STATEMENT 2**

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents and my wife without their support and belief in me I would not have reached this stage.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My supervisor Professor D.J.Britton knows the journey we have been on in the last four years together, beginning with relative calm seas through all the volatile moments he was with me helping to guide this unreliable ship safely onto firm land. I set out on this unknown voyage Professor D.J.Britton decided to take me as one of his students he made sure we reached the end almost intact. I would also like to thank all the staff at the university for their kind help and support in various capacities.

I would like to give special thanks to the anonymous research participants who migrated to the United Kingdom during different periods of time for letting me interview them. They gratefully shared their experiences as well as details about their private lives to help me and without their support, the research would not have been possible.

In the end, I thank my family for their endless support throughout. My wife provided me with unlimited support and she never lost her unwavering belief in me.

## **Table of Contents**

*Declaration*

*Dedication*

*Acknowledgement*

*Abstract*

1. Introduction	9
2. Methodology	13
3. The Migration Experience	15
4. In their own words: conversations with migrants	17
5. Migration Census Overview	22
6. Migrations: Historical Background and Current Trends	24
7. Afro-Caribbean Migration	25
8. Immigration from the Indian Subcontinent	25
9. The Immigration Acts	26
10. European Immigration	27
11. Regional Differences	28
12. Recent Updates	29
13. A Prime Minister with Migrant Parents	31
<b>Theatrical Research: Significant Influences</b>	
14. Introduction	32
15. Augusto Boal	33
Image Theatre	34
Invisible Theatre	34
Forum Theatre	34
Boal and The Hot Pot	36

20. Peter Brook	41
21. Peter Brook and The Hot Pot	42
22. Arthur Miller	46
23. Arthur Miller and The Hot Pot	46
24. Henrik Ibsen	49
25. Ibsen and The Hot Pot	49
26. Harold Pinter	49
27. Harold Pinter and The Hot Pot	50
28. Samuel Beckett	60
<b>Current Migrant Voices</b>	61
Introduction	61
29. Hanif Kureishi CBE	62
30. Dismissal of Kureishi's Possible Family Exploitation	63
The Buddha of Suburbia: Chapter One	64
The Buddha of Suburbia: Chapter 10	68
31. Kwame Kwei-Armah	72
32. Elmina's Kitchen	74
33. May Sumbwanyambe	75
34. The Trial of Joseph Knight	76
35. Kamila Shamsie	78
36. Home Fire	79
37. Unbecoming British	80
38. Broken Verses	81
<b>INFLUENCES AND COMPARISONS WITH OTHER WORKS FROM RECENT WRITERS ON THE MIGRANT EXPERIENCE</b>	83

HOME FIRE and THE HOT POT	84
Home Fire: Chapter One	84
Home Fire: Chapter Two	89
AYAD AKHTAR	95
<b>A Note on Violence in the Theatre</b>	98
POST COLONIAL THEATRE	98
HUMOUR IN THE HOT POT	106
THE CONVERSATIONS IN RELATION TO THE PLAY	113
<b>Conclusion</b>	124
<b>First Chart: Migrants share of the United Kingdom's population</b>	28
<b>Second Chart: Regional distribution of UK's foreign born population</b>	29
<b>Third Chart: UK's foreign born population by birth</b>	30
<b>Fourth Chart: Top ten countries among migrants born in the UK</b>	31
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>Anonymous Questions for Migrants</b>	135
<b>THE PLAY THE HOT POT</b> (available as PDF)	195
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	306



## **THE HOT POT**

*I pulled that future out of the north wind at the landfill site, stamped  
with today's date, riding the air with other such futures,  
all unlived in and now fully extinct.*

Simon Armitage

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

My play *The Hot Pot* is a tragedy. As in classical tragedy, the central fictional character John is brought down by a combination of unfair circumstances, rejection, jealousy, obsession and self-delusion. His attempts to express his identity are denied by what he sees as a racially discriminatory commissioning system in the publishing industry. A gradual realization that he is not genetically the man he thought he was triggers his self-loathing.

Fatherhood and a tendency to place certain important figures on a pedestal is a central theme, as is the issue of interpersonal communication. John's frustration at not being given the public voice he believes he deserves is connected with his inability to talk with the woman he loves. These despairing feelings drive him to violent anguish where his intolerances and prejudices are revealed.

I know this does not fit the accepted model of a man suffering a minority complex and he does not emerge as a sympathetic character. I wanted to show the hurt damaged people of whatever background feel and how this could drive them to excess. I wanted to examine the cause of his anger, not just as a person from a specific migrant community but also as an individual.

The play grew from a specific incident in my life before I started the PhD, I was invited by a friend to a party in the town where I was living. On the way there the friend explained what we were going to experience was something called a hotpot. Until then my understanding of the meaning of a hotpot was a meat dish from Lancashire.

This was different my friend explained:

“This hotpot is a gathering of friends and relatives, they decide beforehand which type of food they want to eat. Everyone brings one of the ingredients and the person who hosts the party puts them together and they cook it in a huge pot”.

At the party, it was clear no-one myself included was of English origin. I had not met any of the people at the party before we were all migrants or the offspring of migrants. I am the son of Pakistani migrants, others at the party came from all over the world.

All those present had their unique stories and these emerged as the generous hostess put the ingredients into a huge pot of water which was left bubbling for about one hour while we got to know each other.

These stories and the blending of the ingredients simmered in our cultural hotpot this is what sparked my inactive imagination and this was the starting point for what became my play *The Hot Pot*.

I talked to one of the guests more than the rest of them, his family migrated to the United Kingdom from Nigeria in the nineteen seventies. He told me about his life experience of extreme racism and prejudice. He was angry he believed English people in positions of power deliberately stopped him from progressing in his life. I listened to every word he told me, he barely left room for me to comment.

As we gathered around the hotpot and we ate the delicious food I discovered he was engaged to the hostess of the party. She was of East Asian origin and she had travelled to the United Kingdom as a student. She intended to learn how to speak perfect English in the United Kingdom so she could return home one day with improved career prospects.

At university, she met the man who told me his story and they were planning to marry each other. She told me this as we ate and the conversation flowed pleasantly I was thoroughly enjoying the mixed company of non-English people. For the first time in my life I

was surrounded by extremely diverse people who were not from one specific racial or ethnic group.

Initially it was wonderful.

Suddenly the atmosphere changed the man who told me about his life began arguing with everybody, he verbally lashed out at all the people this included me. His passionate words were forceful about the English way of life he said:

“We lick their dirty arses clean.”

I wanted to question him, but it was impossible and suddenly he erupted into a torrent of violent words he accused us all of “bowing down to the corrupt English system”.

Eventually he did calm down enough so we spoke to each other normally. We sat on a sofa and as we began talking, I got a sense of what lay at the root of his anger. It was his sense of rejection, in particular he was furious the film and TV scripts he wrote were dismissed out of hand by English producers.

I asked him a fundamental question:

“Did these people meet you face to face?”

He said:

“No”.

I said:

“Did they know your background originates from Nigerian migrants?”

He said:

“I’m not sure about this some of the places where I sent my scripts did ask me to fill in my name, my details and my parent’s details including their occupation and country of origin.”

I asked him:

“If some of the producers did not know you’re a son of Nigerian migrants how could they be racist and prejudiced against you?”

Almost immediately, he turned on me:

“You’re the same as all these cockroaches who remain quiet in this country. You should have the exact same chances like everybody else. You know deep down you’re a low life bum licker. In this country you will never have the same opportunities as the English.”

The man was in pain, he cried out like a wounded animal. Whether the cause of his rejection was racism or not, who could tell? What was clear he passionately believed it to be so and it occurred to me in that moment that I’d never seen on stage the characteristics he displayed.

The same applied to his girlfriend and to the different people eating from the hotpot that night whose lifestyles, experiences and opinions were hugely diverse. They tended to be represented in the United Kingdom under stereotyping collective terms such as “migrants” or “the BAME community”.

These people were not from one specific country. They were not of the same ethnicity or faith system, they were unique individual humans with a varied assortment of individual personalities, problems and ambitions impossible to categorize in one label.

This eye-opening party marked me forever.

I was born in the United Kingdom to a working-class family. My parents migrated from Kashmir, my father in the late 60s and my mother followed him in the early 70s. During my upbringing, it was clear the way my Pakistani-Kashmiri cultural heritage was portrayed through various forms of social outlets did not match the complexities existing between individuals I witnessed in my family. Nor did they match the differences I witnessed in the dreams, aspirations and ambitions of my parents.

I often wondered whether, if this was the case for my community how much was the wider immigrant population misrepresented? The hotpot evening crystallized this question.

Following the hotpot evening, I considered how best to address these people's lives in a way which might be useful in the national debate of how migrants are portrayed.

Theatre was my first love, as I reflected on that surprising night over the months that followed I decided the best approach might be to use my observed hotpot experience and those conversations for the basis of a fictional piece of theatre.

I began to work on the script, I used the title *The Hot Pot* (rather than hotpot, like the dish) because it seemed to me this offered broader metaphorical possibilities. For not only was this about cultural mixing it was about the heat of anger.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

My creative thoughts began from private introspection, drawing on my own personal experiences and observations. From there a broader political social context began emerging concerning the wider issue of the place of immigrants within a long-established culture such as that of mainstream Britain.

The issue is frequently divisive, especially in the way it is portrayed online by social media. Migration issues feature regularly in both fictional and documentary forms on TV, in films, books and theatre. The potential to present polarizing political views is ever-present and remembering my hotpot experience I was drawn to the thought the more generalised and less individually a human opinion is expressed, the more divisive it becomes.

Thus, I approached the PhD strongly believing we should look more closely into the complex internal lives of migrants and their offspring as complicated human beings in order to fully understand their individual stories. Since theatre works best when it has a clear focus, I decided to put the character I named John at the centre of my work.

My creative process was drawn from personal experience and observation, this was also shaped by reading (see the bibliography below). In considering theatre and its forms, I went back to basics. My imagination was sparked by the following definition:

*The term 'theatre' has its origins in the Greek word theatron, meaning a 'place for looking'. Thus, originally, theatre referred to both a place as well as to a particular form of sense perception. Today, the concept of 'theatre' can refer to: (1) a building; (2) an activity ('going to' or 'doing' theatre); (3) an institution; and, (4) more narrowly, an art form. In the past, theatre was often used as a synonym for drama, a usage that can be still be found in the names of some university departments. The terminological complexity of the term means that the object of theatre studies is multi-dimensional and composed of many different fields of enquiry and scholarly perspectives. (Balme, 2008, p14).*

The phrase from the above quote, 'theatre has its origins in the Greek word theatron, meaning a place for looking' confirmed my intuition. If I objectively monitored the migrant experience, perhaps theatre would provide me with the means of transferring these observations sincerely to a wider audience. If I combined my observations with an enquiry into the theatre techniques and platforms available for my presentation, I might be able to add something to the national debate.

To support my observations I conducted a series of further conversations with individuals from migrant communities, the people from the hotpot evening and beyond. These I added to my personal experiences in developing my narrative. I decided The Hot Pot should not only provide its present-day migrant characters (like those at the party) with unique voices, it should find a way to depict the thoughts feelings and experiences of earlier migrants. Therefore, in shaping the character of the angry John I decided to provide generational

context by adding scenes with his fictional parents who journeyed to the United Kingdom in the 1960s. In the play, their conversations with their son are intercut with the party night.

The disparity in age perspective between the generations is obvious I wanted to show geographical diversity as well. In my Hot Pot play, characters are drawn from a range of different countries. This reflected the geographical profile of migrants and their offspring I had conversations with while preparing for the play.

Stylistically on the advice of my supervisor, I wrote the sections individually.

I wrote the hotpot scenes as a continuing dialogue, the parental scenes in one piece and John's monologues separately. These elements merged together, with transitions being added. The idea of live scenes with naturalistic exchanges intercut with John's direct address to the audience appealed to me, it added pace and tension. This made it possible for John to walk into conversations without full scene changes and similarly for other characters to walk into John's space without a break in the overall narrative.

### **3. THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE**

I was fascinated by a definition of the word "migrate" I came across in the Britannica Dictionary –

***Migrate:***

*To move from one country or place to live or work in another. 'He migrates from New York to Florida each winter'. 'Thousands of workers migrate to this area each summer'. Of a bird or animal, to move from one area to another at different times of the year. 'The whales migrate between their feeding ground in the north and their breeding ground in the Caribbean'. 'They followed the migrating herds of buffalo across the plains.'* (Britannica Dictionary).

The reference to animal migration interested me. We talk of migrant birds, yet these spend only part of the year in the United Kingdom. They return to another location later. I

wondered the extent to which human migrants hold the place they came from in their hearts and memories in their geographical compass. If they had wings, would they fly home for winter?

On coming to a new country, a migrant carries baggage unique to whichever country they come from. This might include -

Life experience luggage.

Spiritual luggage.

Cultural luggage.

Language luggage.

Political luggage.

These forms of personal baggage are not physical. Rather they are deeply embedded within the migrant's life experience they are rooted in their core and yet they remain mostly hidden. These forms of baggage comprise everything the migrant has been exposed to from life in another country, ranging from extreme hardship to an elevated social and professional status they cannot replicate in their new country.

Either way the lack of language skills and social dislocation may lead to a sense of alienation. If the migrant goes on to have children, the next generation will not share direct experience of that cultural baggage. Theirs (like John in *The Hot Pot*) is a second-hand alienation.

I took notes on the conversations I had with fellow migrants. These conversations were not conducted in the form of social-science interviews, rather they were broader and more nuanced. The questions I asked them became the basis for my writing and the characters I developed had their origins in what I heard.

All those I spoke to said how difficult it was to fully understand native English speakers, especially people who have strong dialects and accents. They felt in the eyes of the majority



of people in the United Kingdom they would never be seen as the same as those of English heritage. This echoes my experience of growing up in the United Kingdom in a Pakistani-Kashmiri household.

Therefore, with a conviction I might be able to shine a different light on the complexities and differences within non-white migrant communities I began a process which in parallel attempted to find an alternative means of depiction and an examination of how theatre might provide a platform for such a depiction.

#### **4. IN THEIR OWN WORDS: CONVERSATIONS WITH MIGRANTS**

The most useful conversations I had with various migrants took place via zoom in 2019/2020. Along with my own experiences and with what I saw and heard at the hotpot party they helped to underpin the characterisations in my play *The Hot Pot*.

The oldest person I spoke to travelled to the United Kingdom from Pakistan in 1960 to work, the second migrant came to study for a Masters in marketing from Hong Kong in 2000 and a third left China in the year 2010 because of family issues.

These conversations confirmed for me the enormous difference between the personal concerns of younger recent arrivals and those of early migrants. This is interesting to me because in age terms I sit somewhere between these two groups and my own perceptions are different. However, the single biggest problem the migrants in these conversations all experienced was in speaking and understanding the English language sufficiently.

This is something which I having been brought up in England as the child of migrants, did not experience. The migrants quoted below all spoke a little English when they arrived in the United Kingdom, it was not enough to avoid putting themselves at a severe disadvantage -

*I was beaten in a nightclub. Someone asked me if I was a fag. I thought I know enough English, I thought he wanted a cigarette. He punched me many times until I woke up in hospital. I was terrified of going out alone. I stayed asleep mostly. Sometimes I woke up*

*sweating thinking I was going to be beaten again. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P12).*

*I was speaking to other people; I believed I was speaking in normal English but when they kept asking me to repeat everything when I talked to them it all came out wrong. I was always scared people were going to hurt me. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P26).*

These experiences caused doubts about ever being accepted and a reaction was this,

*Everything about my life in England was about embracing the Chinese life... because of how difficult it was to integrate into the way of English people, how they live. I didn't want to change myself. I didn't want to become like them because I am not them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P39).*

All those I spoke to felt the lack of government or other official assistance for migrants especially with language contributed to the fact that they weren't able to communicate effectively with local people.

*The biggest hurdle I had to overcome ...was I could not speak English at a high level...I did not understand when I was going to be in England...how different it was going to be. No one helped me to understand what was going on. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P24).*

*The way I experienced everything for the first six months was the worse because I kept calling my parents on the phone... I wanted to return straightaway because I don't have confidence in speaking English. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P28).*

*I wanted to leave as soon as possible during the first 48 hours. All I wanted to do was return to my family...It was impossible for me to speak to English people because I did not understand them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P54).*

*I was the most scared about talking to Scottish people because I heard their words, their accents were too strong. I was hiding in the flat because I did not know how to talk to anyone who did not speak Chinese. No one was helping me about my problems. The amount of money I had would last me about two weeks so what I did is talk to somebody in one of the local Chinese restaurants if I could have a temporary job. They were the ones that made me have good health about everything because we could speak normally to each other I didn't need to hide anything about myself when I was with them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P5/6).*

One person I spoke to realized once he arrived in the United Kingdom he had not thought out the process of migration in depth beforehand. He is gay and he had made the journey to the United Kingdom because of the difficulty homosexual men face in his own country and because his family found the issue difficult. He was not prepared for the fact that he would find homophobia here too.

*My dream was not to stay a waiter, I wanted to do something else. Sometimes if customers found out I was gay they would leave or refuse to pay their bill. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P12).*

*I hope in the future my parents will accept everything about me. If I could go back in time and change something it would be to never tell them about my sexuality because it caused a big problem in our lives. I've been living in Scotland as an openly gay man married to another man. It seems like lots of people still don't like this type of behaviour. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P17).*

In one conversation, an older male migrant talked about what he experienced when he settled in the United Kingdom in 1960 as a migrant worker.

*At that time the first few months I had to go to the shops the thing I experienced is when English people saw me outside they spat at me, they swore at me and they attacked me. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P52).*

He felt it was important for him to talk about how abusive the foreman was to all migrants.

*From India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, West Indies or Jamaica; it did not matter if these people were Irish, Scottish or Welsh. The foreman picked on all of us more than the white workers it was to make us suffer more. At that time I ended up in a huge argument with one of the foremen in the factory because he picked on me about the food I ate, the clothes I wore and the way I spoke. Anything I did he made fun out of it just like my name he made fun out of it and all the people's names that he said did not sound English. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P55).*

*The foreman at work always said Paki, Nig-Nog, Gollywog, Blackie, Coloured Coon, Black Bastard. Mostly he said fucking this blackie, fucking that blackie and fucking everything that related to the word fucking black. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P57).*

*I learn some English from men at work mainly it is very bad swear words. I can read signs outside shops that said no blacks, no coloureds, no Irish and no dogs allowed in the shop. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P53).*

He talked about how in the 1960s and 70s, he did not speak to anyone about how much abuse he suffered.

*It is impossible for me to explain to anybody how much pain I went through in the first few months being away from my family because every single moment I was at work I was in that house and when I was outside all I wanted is my family. I have to be with them and I missed my friends which was a huge number in total. I had over a hundred friends at that time I was growing up by the time I left that country I knew about 400*

*friends I had to say goodbye to them individually. It was painful to see how much they were going to miss me and how much I was going to miss them. Even now I remember most of these things more than anything. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P55).*

The lowest point for him was when he found out there were no places for him to practice his religion.

*This is a confession I have to make, at that time I did not obey any of the religious beliefs I've come to accept much later on in life because I was working 16 hours a day.... I abandoned my religion ... it caused me a huge amount of pain. I had to confess to my parents I wasn't involved in religious behaviour in England I did not stop crying for a long time. They were the ones who told me to forget about things like this because it was exceptional circumstances for me to be in England in the first place...I always have bad dreams about not praying when I was working in England, I hate myself for not praying in London. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P56).*

He wanted to make sure he talked about how the people who live in the United Kingdom see him as a migrant from 1960 until the present time.

*The first thing I remember was some English woman called me in the airport 'what you fucking looking at Nig-nog?' The other day I was shopping in the local supermarket in Sheffield doing my normal shopping a young man about aged sixteen...laughed at me and then he said "die Paki bastard". I know I have changed in all these years I've been living as a migrant in the United Kingdom but one thing remains, no matter where I am in the United Kingdom I hear someone who sees themselves as English say something nasty to my face. I've never said one thing to them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P62).*

*All I can say to you is this, I know all of my children have had a better life than I had because they had access to education. All of them went to school. All of them went to*

*college then all of them went to university. This is all I cared about. The way they had access to job opportunities I know if they had been born in the country I was born all their opportunities would be limited. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P62).*

*There is another side of me that is extremely sad because my children don't care about my culture, my language and my religion; they care about other things. I know I cannot complain because of how well my life turned out. Many times I think back to that time in 1960 because if I had defied my parents, I never come to England, I don't know how my life would have turned out. I would say overall I've lived in England I have had good opportunities in jobs and there's been some bad people I encountered who see themselves as English. I've also known nice and kind people that are English. I would say this is the exact same experience I had in my country because if those people speak the same language as me, if they have the same skin colour as me and if they have the same behaviour as me on the inside, they are completely different to me. This is why I experienced some of the worst times in my life in 1960 when I came to England the first time, my cousins were the ones that didn't like me and they were the ones that didn't encourage me about anything. I struggled understanding the English language I suffered the most. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P63).*

The people I met at the hotpot party my family experiences and these zoom conversations provided many of the ideas which led to central characters in The Hot Pot play, John, Celia and Pops in particular.

## **5. MIGRATION CENSUS OVERVIEW**

A census is carried out in the United Kingdom every ten years. Details of the 2011 census relating to ethnicity can be found on:

<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of England and Wales was 56.1 million, of which 86.0% was White. Asian ethnic groups made up the second largest percentage of the population at 7.5%. This was followed by Black ethnic groups at 3.3%. Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups were at 2.2%. Other ethnic groups were at 1.0%.

Amongst the specific ethnic groups, individuals from the White British ethnic group made up the largest percentage of the population at 80.5%. This was followed by Other White at 4.4% and Indian at 2.5%.

From 2001 to 2011 the percentage of the population of England and Wales that was White British decreased from 87.4% to 80.5%, the Other White group saw the largest increase in their share of the population from 2.6% to 4.4%. The percentage of the population from a Black African background doubled from 0.9% in 2001 to 1.8% in 2011. (Anon 2011. *U.K. Government Census*).

The Census data covers the populace from around 25 million private households. It includes collective establishments like care homes and university halls of residence. All of the percentages are rounded to one decimal place. This data does not include households that did not answer the question about ethnicity.

Some 94% of households completed The 2011 Census. Of those 97% answered the question about ethnicity. The data uses the standardised list of 18 ethnic groups developed for the 2011 Census. The ethnic groups used in the 2011 Census are slightly different from the 2001 Census ethnic groups. In 2011, in the White Category two ethnic groups were added Gypsy and Roma. Later, Arab was added. The Chinese ethnic group was moved from the Other category to the Asian category. (Anon. *U.K. Immigration Statistics. Macrotrends 1960-2023*).

On 27 August 2021, the Office for National Statistics published its quarterly report on the latest official migration statistics for the United Kingdom. The report covers the period up to

the year ending March 2020. These latest figures are drawn from data from the Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). They provide the most up to date estimates on people crossing the United Kingdom border under the United Kingdom immigration controls. (Anon 2020. *Latest migration statistics*. Smith Stone Walters).

Net migration refers to the difference between the number of people arriving and those leaving the country. The report estimates during the year approximately 715,000 people moved to the United Kingdom and around 403,000 left the United Kingdom. This leaves a net migration figure of 313,000 for the year ending March 2020. This corresponds to the highest level on record since March 2016 when the estimated figure was 326,000. The report suggests long-term net migration between 2016 and 2019 generally was steady, nevertheless current data shows a marked increase in immigration and net migration. This increase was partly driven by a rise in non-EU students arriving in the United Kingdom to study, mainly Chinese and Indian citizens.

## **6. MIGRATION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT TRENDS**

### **7. Afro-Caribbean Migration**

The term Afro-Caribbean relates to people who originate from the former British Caribbean colonies. Most trace their origins back to Africa. In The 16th and 17th Centuries, the triangular trade led by the Europeans saw some 12.5 million black African slaves put on ships to European-held colonies in the Americas, including the Caribbean islands.

About 10.7 million slaves survived the journey. In the past 70 years, a significant number of people with Caribbean roots have come to the United Kingdom to live and work. Great Britain, France and the Netherlands have the highest number of Afro-Caribbean populations in Europe. (Anon. *The Empire Windrush: The story of the Caribbean's who came to Britain in 1948*).



In June 1948 a ship originally part of Nazi Germany's fleet before being captured and repurposed by the British docked at Tilbury, Essex. This was the Empire Windrush. She carried 1,027 passengers of whom 802 came from across the Caribbean to start a new life in Britain. The majority were men whose varied jobs included mechanics, carpenters, tailors, missionaries, boxers and even piano repairers. Their voyage is generally accepted as the beginning of post-war Caribbean immigration to the United Kingdom.

The Second World War left Britain with a sudden labour shortage. In 1948, the government set up a working party to consider the employment of colonial labour. The working party did not advocate comprehensive immigration but unstructured movement from the Caribbean followed regardless. (Anon. *The Empire Windrush: The story of the Caribbean's who came to Britain in 1948*).

At that time, there were no limitations on the number of migrants arriving from the Commonwealth and if they were British subjects, they had full rights of being classified as British citizens. This rule was confirmed in the British Nationality Act of 1948, though extensive immigration was not foreseen at the time. (Anon. *The Empire Windrush: The story of the Caribbean's who came to Britain in 1948*).

## **8. Immigration from the Indian Subcontinent**

The British Indian and Pakistani community totals over one million. It represents about 2.3% of the national population in the United Kingdom. Most have ancestry in the Indian sub-continent.

In 1947 Pakistan was separated from India by The Indian Independence Act. The dislocation of Muslim and Hindu populations caused by this separation marked the start of increasing Asian migration to Britain. At that time, the economic circumstances in India were poor and interfaith violence was extremely bloodthirsty. Initially this migration was inconsequential. Before the 1950s, the numbers mostly consisted of soldiers and factory

workers. About 30,000 Indians lived in the United Kingdom in 1951. By 1970, the number had grown to over 300,000.

The first wave of Asian immigrants began working in the foundries of Wolverhampton. Early Pakistani migrants came mainly from rural parts of Pakistan. Many were untrained and poorly educated. They found work for example in the textile factories of Yorkshire and the Midlands.

A second movement of immigrants came from the metropolitan areas of Pakistan. These people were generally better educated and found job opportunities in engineering, teaching and in the health services. A large proportion of these later arrivals settled in London which provided better work opportunities and accommodation.

## **9. The Immigration Acts**

For the five years after the post-war beginnings of West Indian and Asian immigration, annual migration from the former British Colonies remained at no more than 2,000 per year. This number increased significantly in 1954 and then by 1961 it reached over 135,000. The Cabinet considered initiating thorough checks on the movement of non-white individuals into the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom economy grew rapidly in the late 1950s and 1960s. Migrants from India, East and West Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Ghana, Cyprus and many other Commonwealth Countries came to work in Britain.

The 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act aimed to restrict the numbers of migrants. It set up a voucher system for migrants entering the United Kingdom to work. This backfired many of the migrant men working in the United Kingdom at the time had intended to go back to their families in the long-term. Now they realized they would not be readmitted if they left the United Kingdom, they brought their families to join them and they settled permanently in Britain.

The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act restricted entry to workers who had a father or grandfather born in the United Kingdom. When Asian refugees expelled from East Africa arrived in the United Kingdom they were met with antagonism from sections of the press and the protests organised by anti-immigration groups. (Anon. *Origins of Commonwealth immigration Labour shortage and a declining population*).

## **10. European Immigration**

After the Second World War European migrants were welcomed. The Ministry of Labour employed recruitment officers in Europe in an effort to combat the labour shortage. Later when Britain was a member of the European Union (1973-2020) the EU's freedom of movement regulations meant that people from EU member countries could live and work in the United Kingdom without restriction. Arguably, the most significant source of migrants was Poland.

Before both World Wars, fewer than 2,000 Polish people lived in the United Kingdom. The reason most Polish men immigrated to the United Kingdom initially stemmed from the number who joined the British forces during World War II. These Polish forces were viewed as heroes. (Dustmann, Christian and Frattini Tommaso and Theodoropoulos, Nikolaos. *Ethnicity and Second Generation Immigrants*).

Out of the total of 180,000 or so Poles in the United Kingdom at the end of the war, about 120,000 decided to stay. They tended to work in low paid hazardous jobs such as coal mining. British trade unions demanded no Polish person should be employed as long as a British man was in need of a job. However, Polish integration into the United Kingdom's growing multicultural society has succeeded relatively smoothly, perhaps because they share common physical features with the British population. (Crawley, Heaven 2018. *The Situation of Children in Immigrant Families in the United Kingdom*).

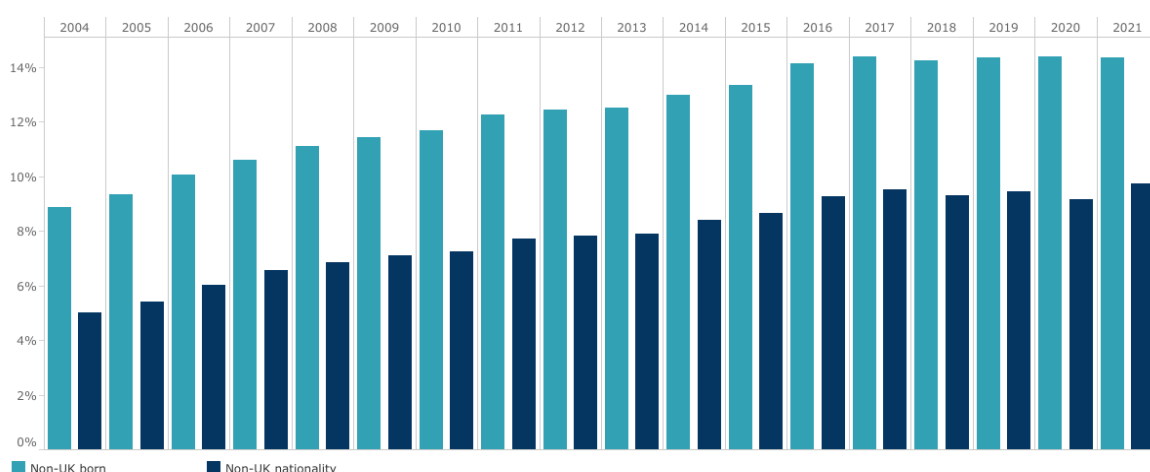
## 11. Regional Differences

As of The 2011 Census, the most ethnically diverse region in England and Wales was London where 40.2% of residents identified with the Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic groupings. Out of all regions, London has the smallest percentage of White British people at 44.9% and the North East of England has the highest percentage at 93.6%.

People from the Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic groups are most likely to reside in London rather than any other region with 58.4%, 35.9%, 33.1% and 49.9% doing so respectively.

81.5% of the general population of ethnic people live in urban locations and 18.5% live in a rural location. The ethnic groups most likely to live in urban locations are Pakistani (99.1%), Bangladeshi (98.7%), and Black African (98.2%). Newham in London is the local authority where people from the White ethnic group make up the lowest percentage of the population (at 29.0%); 8 out of the 10 most ethnically diverse local authorities are in London. (Anon 2022. *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*).

Migrants as a share of the UK population, 2004-2021



Source: 2004-2020: ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, Table 1.1. and 1.2.; 2021: Migration Observatory analysis of Annual Population Survey, 2021.

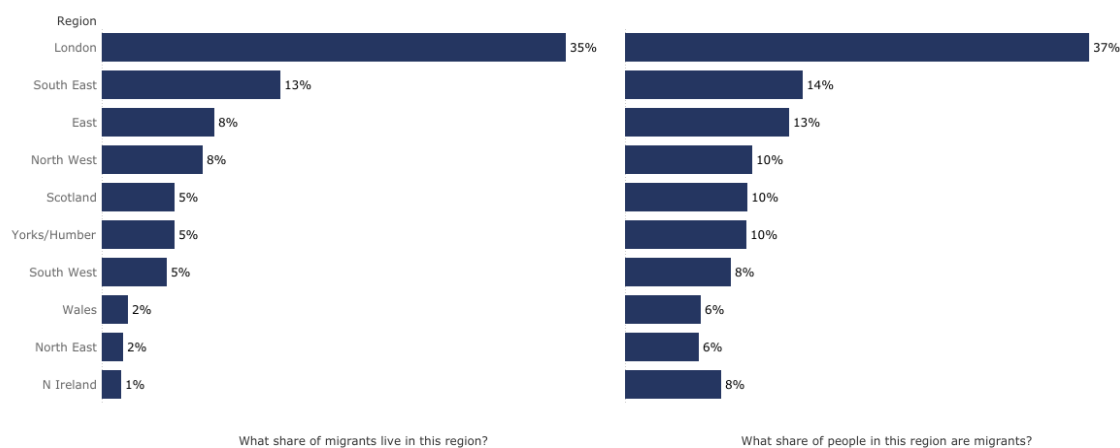


<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

In the year ending June 2021 about half of the UK's foreign-born population resided either in London (35% – 3,346,000) or the South East (13% – 1,286,000). (Clark, D. 2022. *Migration figures in the UK 1991-2020 Published by Migration figures in the United Kingdom from 1991 to 2022*).

Northern Ireland, The North East of England and Wales currently have the lowest share of the United Kingdom's total foreign-born population at 1–2% each. In comparison, the United Kingdom born population is evenly distributed. (Anon 2022. *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*).

Regional distribution of the UK's foreign-born population  
Year ending June 2021



Source: ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, Table 1.1.

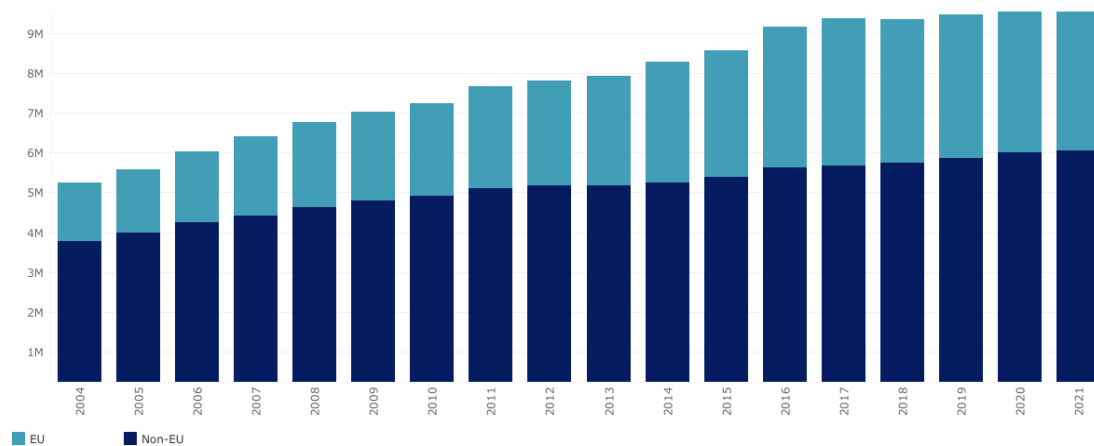


<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

## 12. Recent updates

In the year, ending June 2021 people born outside the United Kingdom made up an estimated 14.5% of the UK's population. That is about 9.6 million people. (Anon 2022. *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*).

Foreign-born population in the UK by place of birth, 2004-2021



Source: 2004-2020: ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, Table 1.1.; 2021: Migration Observatory analysis of Annual Population Survey, 2021.



<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

The expansion of foreign-born population has slowed since the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, however net migration remains positive despite a net outflow of EU citizens. In 2021 an estimated 36% of migrants were born in the EU. (Anon 2022. *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*).

The most common country of origin for migrants in the United Kingdom is India followed by Poland and Pakistan (9%, 7% and 5% of the total). (Anon 2022. *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*).

Top ten countries of birth and nationality among migrants in the UK  
Year ending June 2021



Source: ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, Tables 1.3 and 2.3



<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

Poland is still the top country for people gaining British Citizenship (696,000) they account for 12% of non-UK citizens living in the U.K. This figure is down since 2018 when it was estimated at 905,000. (Anon 2011. *Government data Ethnicity facts and figures*).

In the twelve months to March 2020, approximately 715,000 people immigrated to the United Kingdom while 403,000 emigrated away from the country resulting in a net migration figure of 313,000. This net migration figure was the highest since the year ending March 2016, when it stood at 326,000. (Anon 2011. *U.K. Government Census*).

### 13. A Prime Minister with Migrant Parents

At the time of writing, the United Kingdom has its first non-white Prime Minister and the first to be a child of Asian migrant parentage. Rishi Sunak was born 12 May 1980. He has been Prime Minister since 25 October 2022. Sunak served as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 2020 to 2022, he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury from 2019 to 2020 and he has been Member of Parliament for Richmond Yorkshire since 2015.

Sunak was born in Southampton to parents of Indian descent who migrated to Britain from East Africa in the 1960s. He was educated at Winchester College and went on to study

philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) at Lincoln College Oxford. He earned an MBA from Stanford University as a Fulbright Scholar. At Stanford, he met his future wife Akshata Murty, the daughter of Indian billionaire N. R. Narayana Murthy of Infosys.

After graduating Sunak worked for Goldman Sachs and later, he was a partner at the hedge fund firms The Children's Investment Fund Management and Theleme Partners. Sunak supported Brexit in the 2016 referendum on EU membership. He voted three times in favour of the then Prime Minister Teresa May's Brexit withdrawal agreement. After May resigned, Sunak supported Boris Johnson's campaign to become Conservative leader. Sunak replaced Sajid Javid as Chancellor of the Exchequer after Javid resigned in February 2020.

## **THEATRICAL RESEARCH: SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES**

### **14. INTRODUCTION**

While researching the play I read as many books and plays as possible. I found the theatre theorists who had the greatest effect on how I began thinking about *The Hot Pot* were not from my British/Asian migrant background. They were six internationally recognised figures: Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, Arthur Miller, Henrik Ibsen, Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett.

Though I was drawn to the approaches of these writers, initially I did not delve too deeply into their backgrounds. Later I came to realize even though they may not normally be associated with the migrant experience they do in fact all have migrant or exiled backgrounds. Boal was Brazilian of Portuguese parentage who spent much of his life in exile. Brook, Pinter and Miller though raised in Britain and the United States were from Jewish migrant families. Brook then spent much of his working life in France. Beckett was Irish he lived and worked in France and the great Norwegian playwright Ibsen spent 27 years exiled in Italy. In the following section, I discuss how these figures influenced my writing.



The Hot Pot was conceived to address modern social economical political concerns and stylistically it is rooted in the present day. However, my play would not exist without the theatre conventions it incorporates. Interestingly the theatre thinkers who influenced me had their own personal influences. For example, Boal draws on Aristotle, Miller was influenced by Ibsen. This chain of influences highlights the unbroken embryonic nature of theatre.

### **15. Augusto Boal**

Augusto Boal (1931 to 2009) was a Brazilian dramatist who created the methodology outlined in his book *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). This is a form of interactive theatre in which spectators become performers and act out possible solutions to society's and their own problems.

*I Augusto Boal, want the Spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the Character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own Space and offer solutions. By taking possession of the stage, the Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. (Boal, 1979, p22).*

Boal grew up in Rio de Janeiro. A chemical engineer he attended Columbia University in New York where he was interested in the role theatre plays in the development of societal practices.

In 1955, Boal returned to Brazil and he began his theatre career with the Arena Theatre in São Paulo. In time Boal became the company's artistic director, a post he held until 1971. In the Arena Theatre Boal developed his theories on dramaturgy. In the late 1960s, Boal was inspired by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogia do oprimido (Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*. In 1968, Boal began working with this revolutionary educator, experimenting by creating The Living Newspaper Theatre.

The Living Newspaper Theatre was a form of theatrical social commentary, this far-reaching approach considered rebellious by the Brazil's military rulers. In 1971, Boal was

arrested and tortured. Boal spent the next 15 years in exile during this time he published *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas políticas (Theatre of the Oppressed)*. Theatre of the Oppressed was immensely significant among social activists particularly in the developing world it identified three distinct forms of activist theatre.

### **Image Theatre**

The performers form a tableaux that represents an oppressive situation and during the course of the performance the watching spectators are invited to interpret proposed changes to the tableaux.

### **Invisible Theatre**

A previously written and rehearsed problematic condition is performed by actors in a public place in order to provoke instantaneous reactions from passersby. The passersby have to remain ignorant of the fact they're taking part in a theatre production because for them the experience must feel real.

### **Forum Theatre**

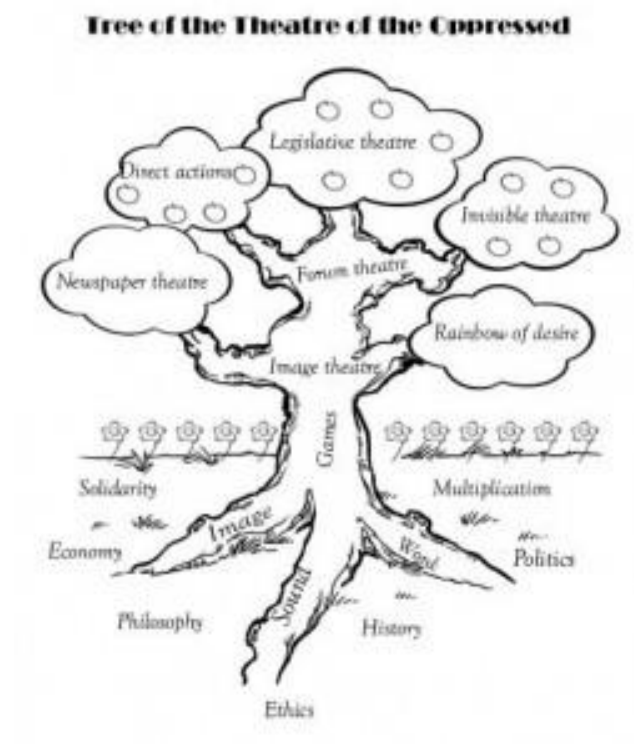
This is the most commonly followed Boal technique. During their performance actor's act out a short scene based on an event, that unswervingly concerns purposeful oppression. The viewers are officially encouraged to propose possible solutions to the problems in the scene and sometimes they are encouraged to perform.

Both Image Theatre and Forum Theatre require skilled facilitators called Jokers. These are designated mediators between the actors and the spectators. Boal set up a centre for the practice for his various theories in Paris. He organized international Theatre of the Oppressed festivals in the early to mid-1980s. In 1986, Boal travelled to Brazil where he established a Centre for The Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro as well as other community theatre companies.

In 1992, Boal published *Jeux pour acteurs et non-acteurs* (*Games for Actors and Non-Actors*) in this book he describes exercises and techniques for putting his method into practice.

From 1992 to 1996, Boal served on Rio de Janeiro's city council. He developed what he called Legislative Theatre. Similar to Forum Theatre this approach primary focus is on policies and laws that could help solve society's recurrent problems.

Boal argues it is the bourgeoisie who control the means to propagate art, the ruling class dominates social political and economic life this results in these people in power dominating all forms of art. Boal suggests the ruling class deploy art as a necessary fundamental tool of absolute oppression.



## **Boal and The Hot Pot**

The moment I began to shape the Hot Pot, Boal's determination to give a say to the unvoiced was uppermost in my mind. I had to avoid cliché and simplification in order to let my characters speak freely. This is a challenge when the central character says things which are unpalatable. What impressed me the most in Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* is his belief the individual will of a character is the motive for their actions. As a result, all the characters should have the freedom to act on their internal divine sovereign right to freely express their inner most desires. This is ultimately accomplished by granting them authority to such an extent they demonstrate their rebelliousness within conditions of incredible repression.

Everything I depicted within my central troubled character John came bubbling to the forefront of my play. A passage in *The Theatre of the Oppressed* resounded powerfully with me. Boal writes:

*A man, in a given moment, happens to exert a passion, that is not an action worthy of tragedy. It is necessary that that passion be constant in the man; that is, that by its repeated exertion it has become a habit.* (Boal, 1979, p.12).

In The Hot Pot John's innate belief of utter oppression has become his fervent compulsion. I was attracted to Boal's way of understanding the multifaceted sides to characters who believe they suffer injustice.

*And how are the criteria of inequality established so that all become aware of them? Through laws. And who makes the laws? If the inferior human beings (women slaves, the poor) made them, they would, according to Aristotle, make inferior laws just as their authors are inferior.* (Boal, 1979, p.22).

In *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, the spectators are linked with sensations that heighten their levels of pity fear and disgust when they begin recognizing that the weak members of society who do not hold the reins of corrupt power are toothless. The Hot Pot examines the

aggravated disappointment and dissatisfaction in John and this keeps in mind Boal's belief that heroes/villains are empowered to fight the system even though they fail.

Boal's tragic heroes are depicted for the most part without empathy or catharsis. This drew me to his work, in my play John believes he is oppressed by people he cannot see comprehend or reach out to as a result he lashes out at everybody around him especially at the hotpot party. At the same time John cannot communicate with his parents in a simple straight forward way and when his girlfriend asks him to prove who persecutes him he is silent because he has no proof.

As a result, the deep rooted antagonism within John deteriorates to such an extent that his persecution fixation concentrates solely on the concealed powers he believes have complete control over powerless people like him. This I believe fits well with Boal's underlying theories.

I found it interesting that Boal a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Marxist, draws on Aristotle (384-322 BCE) in his discussion of how theatre might confront modern social concerns. I was particularly attracted to the section in *The Theatre of the Oppressed* that deals with Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy:

*Knowledge consists in elevating ourselves, through dialectics – that is, through the debate of ideas posed and counterposed, of ideas and the negations of those same ideas, which are other ideas – from the world of sensible reality to the world of eternal ideas. This ascent is knowledge.* (Boal, 1979, p.10).

The way I developed *The Hot Pot* challenged me to think of how I could create something above and beyond the simple documentation of life, at the same time as remaining as authentic as possible.

Boal's techniques of role-switching with characters hiding behind an alienated social mask, his genre eclecticism and the use of music to complement/oppose dramatic action did

not on the other hand appeal to me. For my purpose, the idea of a Joker explaining issues to the audience was needlessly disconnected from the narrative of my drama and if deployed, I fear it ran the risk of demeaning the audience. In developing *The Hotpot*, I was aware I needed a style which would always keep one foot in the world of social realism.

The aspect of Boal's work that influenced me the most was from his book *The Theatre of Oppressed*. I was interested in criticism of Brecht's plays, notably his statement:

*...in Brecht's plays, however, the unbridgeable gulf between stage and audience remains.* (Boal, 1979, p.21).

Some of Boal's comments in *The Theatre of the Oppressed* helped me understand how I wanted less naturalistic scenes to play out especially concerning John's family and his inability to communicate to them successfully.

The more I read the book *The Theatre of the Oppressed* the more I focused on Boal's belief that once the spectator takes an active role in the theatre's production, even though he admits the theatre play is fiction the viewer is part of actual reality.

*The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-Actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality. By taking possession of the stage in the fiction of the theatre he acts: not just in the fiction, but also in his social reality. By transforming fiction, he is transformed into himself.* (Boal, 1979, p.22).

Ultimately, the way Boal influenced my work stemmed from the following passage in *The Theatre of the Oppressed* –

*This invasion is a symbolic trespass. It symbolises all the acts of trespass we have to commit in order to free ourselves from what oppresses us.* (Boal, p.22, 1979).

This is what I wanted for the central character John, as long as he feels suppressed by forces he cannot understand the inner anguish he internalises is released by lashing out at

characters outside himself. I began to understand more of Boal's work by focusing on key elements of *The Theatre of the Oppressed* like this passage:

*If we do not trespass (not necessarily violently), if we do not go beyond our cultural norms, our state of oppression the limits imposed upon us, even the law itself (which should be transformed) – if we do not trespass in this we can never be free. (Boal, 1979, p.22).*

The more I developed my play the more I started to step out of normal boundaries of what is normally accepted on the stage. However, at some point I realized that if I pushed this too far the audience might not be able to fully understand John's behaviour in causing tension with characters around himself. I knew I had to focus on some realistic scenes that made sense outside Boal's theories in *The Theatre of the Oppressed*. At the same time this passage from Boal resonated with the non-realistic scenes in my play –

*Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude. In this book I also offer some proof that the theatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. (Boal, 1979, p.24).*

The following section from Boal's book shaped some of the most heightened scenes in my play –

*For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilise it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what 'theatre' is. (Boal, 1979, p.24).*

Boal's broader belief that change is imperative fitted my intention, from the beginning I had to find a way to be free of preconceptions. I could not allow myself to force Boal's analysis into my play. I found that some critics saw flaws in his approach.

An article by Yonghee Lee for example describes how as a non-American working with Americans in a Theatre Forum workshop she struggled to have a voice.

*Since I was not the same as most of the participants in terms of race and ethnicity why would they have cared for my suggestion? (Lee, 2015).*

*...I regretted the fact that Boal and/or his techniques did not help empower me to become a spect-actor; I reluctantly sat back and played the stereotypical quiet Asian girl. (Lee, 2015).*

During the workshops Lee found herself out of place, she could not bring herself to interrupt the scene and play the role of the protagonist.

*I realized that I could not enter into a scene on an equal footing with the native English-speakers already involved. It was very possible that the entire context of the scene would shift and suddenly, rather than being about the protagonist role, it would mutate into a situation about me: the non-native speaker trying to interact with native speakers. (Lee, 2015).*

*...After much reflection, I concluded that the most important factor in my inhibition—despite my eagerness – was my insecurity in speaking English. (Lee, 2015).*

At Lee's prompting, I realized that adherence to all of Boal's theories including all the research I undertook did not sit well. For example with the conversations, I had with interviewing immigrant people. Lee's article goes on to say:

*As a Korean living in the United States, I felt that the cultural and linguistic barriers overwhelmed my desire to undergo a self-transformation in to a spect-actor. Boal frequently stressed the importance of physicality, which is supposed to overcome spoken language barriers. (Lee, 2015).*

*...Yet since forum theatre is led by dialogues between a spect-actor and professional TO actor, during the workshops, I found myself feeling somewhat out of place. (Lee, 2015).*



This rang true for me, since a key point in my play is to show how characters struggle when they don't have a chance to speak freely in the same common language. For example, when John communicates to his parents at home they speak English but the way they speak it differs immensely because of their diverse backgrounds. Similarly, Celia's initial lack of power in her relationship with John stems from her poor command of the English language which they communicate in strained ways.

## **16. Peter Brook**

Peter Brook (1925 to 2022) was an English theatre and film director and arts theorist. In England, Brook began his career at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, moving to the Royal Opera and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Brook directed the first English-language production in 1964 of *Marat/Sade* by Peter Weiss. It transferred to Broadway in 1965 and won the Tony Award for Best Play and Brook was named Best Director.

Peter Brook was influenced greatly by the work of Antonin Artaud and his ideas for his *Theatre of Cruelty*.

Brook and Charles Marowitz undertook The Theatre of Cruelty season (1964) at the Royal Shakespeare Company, aiming to explore ways in which Artaud's ideas could be used to find original forms of expression in the process they wanted to retrain the performer. The result was a series of works made up of improvisations and sketches, one of which was the premiere of Artaud's *The Spurt of Blood* (1925).

Brook was also inspired by the theories of experimental theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht, Chris Covic and Vsevolod Meyerhold and by the thoughts of G. I. Gurdjieff, Edward Gordon Craig and Matila Ghyka.

Having moved to Paris, Brook founded The International Centre for Theatre Research. This was a multinational company of actors, dancers, musicians who travelled extensively

within the Middle East and Africa in the early 1970s. The troupe played at immigrant hostels in villages and in refugee camps.

### **17. Peter Brook and The Hot Pot**

Brook emphasises if an actor speaks to an audience he needs to truly feel emotion within, that an audience is bored when they hear a monotonous recital of words lacking emotional resonance. I was greatly influenced by Brook's belief the human connection of performer and audience is the core of high-quality theatre. Brook defines the human connection through numerous diverse mediums, one of which is choice of style. Brook writes:

*This is the running problem of what we loosely call style. Every work has its own style: it could not be otherwise: every period has its style. The moment we try to pinpoint this style we are lost. (Brook, 1968, p.14).*

During the development of The Hot Pot, I was empowered by Brook's view on the playwright's role within the theatre.

*A playwright is required by the very nature of drama to enter into the spirit of opposing characters. He is not a judge; he is a creator—and even if his first attempt at drama concerns only two people, whatever the style he is still required to live fully with them both. (Brook, 1968, p.39).*

I began understanding the immensity of the task I accepted in creating my play The Hot Pot from scratch. Brook clearly defines how difficult it is for a playwright to create realistic believable characters with distinct personalities:

*The job of shifting oneself totally from one character to another—a principle on which all of Shakespeare and all of Chekhov is built—is a super-human task at any time. (Brook, 1968, p.39).*

I knew as a beginner-playwright I came to see this was my biggest hurdle, how to incorporate believable levels of realism in my play. I wanted to portray all the characters as realistically as possible. The more I concentrated on Brook's ideas of how each character of my play should be shown with human sympathy, the more confident I became. A passage in Brook's *Empty Space* resonated with me. Brook writes:

*It takes unique talents and perhaps ones that do not even correspond with our age. If the work of the beginner-playwright often seems thin, it may well be because his range of human sympathy is still unstretched—on the other hand, nothing seems more suspect than the mature middle-aged man of letters who sits down to invent characters and then tell us all their secrets. (Brook, 1968, p.39).*

Brook said for the actor to genuinely feel what his character is intended to feel he must realize those emotions on his own, this is without the director telling them. The director's job is to procure existing emotions within the actor. If this is accomplished successfully then a genuine human connection is made between the actor and audience. The more I read Brook's *Empty Space* the more I accepted that Brook did not follow conservative methods of acting, staging and performance. Brook writes:

*...in this sense, the theatre is relativity. Yet a great theatre is not a fashion house perpetual elements do recur and certain fundamental issues underlie all dramatic activity. (Brook, 1968, p.14).*

I was interested in Brook's work with The Theatre of Cruelty Workshop, using the theory created by Antonin Artaud in his 1932 manifesto. Through a series of violent lighting, staging and acting *The Theatre of Cruelty* was created to overwhelm the audience and to shock them into a heightened state that exceeded entertainment. Brook frequently used features of this shock-and-awe technique. However compared to Artaud Brook aimed to make his concepts clearer on stage:

*The title was by way of homage to Artaud, but it did not mean that we were trying to reconstruct Artaud's own theatre. Anyone who wishes to know what 'Theatre of Cruelty' means should refer directly to Artaud's own writings. We used his striking title to cover our own experiments, many of which were directly stimulated by Artaud's thought—although many exercises were very far from what he had proposed. (Brook, 1968, p.58).*

Brook aimed to use all aspects of the theatre stage to present the audience with a genuinely pure emotional experience. My central character John dominates all the characters he comes across in *The Hot Pot*. I was hugely influenced by how Brook practiced one exercise in his Theatre of Cruelty Workshop. This involved an actor attempting to portray a certain state without using physicality at all. Brook writes:

*We did not start at the blazing centre, we began very simply on the fringes. We set an actor in front of us, asked him to imagine a dramatic situation that did not involve any physical movement, then we all tried to understand what state he was in. Of course, this was impossible, which was the point of the exercise. The next stage was to discover what was the very least he needed before understanding could be reached: was it a sound, a movement, a rhythm—and were these interchangeable—or had each its special strengths and limitations? So we worked by imposing drastic conditions. (Brook, 1968, p.59).*

Throughout my play, I knew I had to rein in the explosive actions of the central character John because as Brook says, theatre which attempts to imitate reality and fails at it is what he calls *The Dead Theatre*. Brook writes:

*The theatre's needs have changed, yet the difference is not simply one of fashion. It is not as though fifty years ago one type of theatre was in vogue while today the author who feels the 'pulse of the public' can find his way to the new idiom. The difference is*

*that for a long time playwrights have very successfully traded on applying to the theatre values from other fields. If a man could 'write'— and writing meant the ability to put together words and phrases in a stylish and elegant manner—then this was accepted as a start towards good writing in the theatre. (Brook, 1968, p.43).*

I took into consideration Brook's idea that the audience wants to move beyond simple nostalgic theatre. To do this Brook says the audience must allow themselves and the theatre to transcend the invisible.

In Brook's second chapter of *The Empty Space*, he tells the story of a tall man who partook in an activity that required the participants to act like a child. Brook writes:

*The onlooker is a partner who must be forgotten and still constantly kept in mind: a gesture is statement, expression, communication and a private manifestation of loneliness— it is always what Artaud calls a signal through the flames— yet this implies a sharing of experience, once contact is made. (Brook, 1968, p.61).*

After reading this, I understood I had to find a way to make sure the character of John's sense of facing the world alone is manifest in his way of isolating himself from all the other characters. I had to avoid stereotyping the characters. Brook writes:

*When new plays set out to imitate reality, we are more conscious of what is imitative than what is real: if they explore character, it is seldom that they go far beyond stereotypes; if it is argument they offer, it is seldom that argument is taken to arresting extremes. (Brook, 1968, p.40).*

The most important influence I took from Brook in my work was that character is the heart of everything. That well rehearsed words in the theatre are not enough to reach the audience. It was important for me to not fall into similar problems. In *The Empty Space*, Brook writes:

*Even if it is a quality of life that they wish to evoke, we are usually offered no more*

*than the literary quality of the well-turned phrase; if it is social criticism they are after, it seldom touches the heart of any social target; if they wish for laughter, it is usually by well-worn means.* (Brook, 1968, p.40).

### **18. Arthur Miller**

Arthur Miller (1915 – 2005) was born in Harlem in New York City, the second of three children of Augusta Barnett and Isidore Miller. Miller was of Polish-Jewish descent. In Miller's article *A Boy Grew in Brooklyn* (1955), he wrote an account of how being the offspring of Jewish parents in America affected him deeply.

At The University of Michigan Miller majored in journalism and his plays bring together an almost journalistic style with theatre heightened naturalism. While at university, Miller wrote his first play, *No Villain*. Miller's 1947 play *All My Sons* was a success on Broadway and it earned him his first Tony Award. *Death of a Salesman* premiered on Broadway in 1949 at the Morosco Theatre, directed by Elia Kazan. The play a commercial and critical success won Miller a Tony Award, the New York Drama Circle Critics' Award and the Pulitzer Prize. It was the first play to win all three major American literary awards.

In *The Crucible* (1953), Miller equated the situation in The House Un-American Activities Committee with the witch-hunts in Salem in 1692. Only moderately successful at the time, *The Crucible* is now Miller's most frequently produced work throughout the world.

In 1955, a one-act version of Miller's verse drama *A View from the Bridge* opened on Broadway with *A Memory of Two Mondays*. The following year Miller rewrote it as a two-act prose play it was directed by Peter Brook in London.

### **19. Arthur Miller and The Hot Pot**

Miller's realistic portrayals of impressive characters encouraged me to project the characters in my play through natural situations. *A View from a Bridge* not only addresses immigrant life in America (Italian immigrants in this case). Its main character Eddie Carbone

dominates all the other characters similarly to the way my central character John overpowers everybody around him in my play *The Hot Pot*.

In *A View from a Bridge*, Eddie Carbone believes the Italian immigrants who come to live with his family interfere with the relationship he has cultivated with his niece. Later on, he starts to believe they're ruining his life.

In my play *The Hot Pot*, John believes all the characters around him including his parents and girlfriend are colluding to undermine his status as someone who wants success on his own terms and he does not accept how they see him from their subjective points of view.

I was able to watch several productions of *A View from a Bridge* on video like *Vu du pont* (1962) and *National Theatre Live: A View from the Bridge* (2015).

The way Miller's central character aggressively behaves to his niece and the way he controls and manipulates her gave me confidence in creating the central character John.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman's story is told through a series of montage of memories, dreams and arguments. Willy Loman is extremely disillusioned he could even be senile. *Death of a Salesman* helped me understand the generational gap between the parents and the sons gave rise to the problems of communication between the generations. This helped me to construct scenarios between John and his parents.

Willy Loman's son Biff steals things because he wants proof of success, even if it is artificial verification. John similarly wants to find a way to demonstrate his achievements to his parents even if they are not interested in his ideas of success.

Miller's idea of tragedy helped me gain traction within my play. John's aggressive personality does not only stem from the faults within him. John needs to be seen in the wider context of the imperfections he experiences through all the rejections he has encountered. As Miller stated in 1949:

*Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity. The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens-and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions. Seen in this light, our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological. If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is obviously impossible. (Miller Arthur, 1949).*

Miller's *A View from the Bridge* had the most influence of any single play on my work. The complicated lives of immigrants, how they are treated by a non-migrant family and the commanding nature of a central character helped shape my thinking. However although Miller's commitment to stage realism was important to the development of my characters as I continued writing I realized his concentration on forcing his characters to repeatedly interact with each other did not fit the way I wanted my play to shape stylistically. This led to the intercutting approach I eventually took.



## **20. Henrik Ibsen**

Miller was himself influenced by Ibsen (1828 – 1906), who led a new wave of sociological and ethically infused writing for the theatre. The Norwegian playwright and director sometimes referred to as the father of realism, was one of the most influential playwrights of his time. His important works include *Brand* 1866, *Peer Gynt* 1867, *An Enemy of the People* 1882, *A Doll's House* 1879, *Hedda Gabler* 1890, *The Wild Duck* 1884 and *The Master Builder* 1892. Ibsen is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare.

## **21. Ibsen and The Hot Pot**

The play *An Enemy of the People* influenced me considerably. In it a man dares to expose an unpleasant matter publicly and for this, he is punished. In *The Hot Pot* John's insistence, whether rightly or wrongly that he is exposing persecution by unseen people in power casts him in a similar mould. John cannot prove his persecution he expects the other characters to agree with him and he cannot accept them questioning him. John puts extreme pressure on all the other characters around him whether they deserve it or not.

Ibsen presents society as an ongoing struggle for existence, this helped me in shaping John's parents fear of outsiders. I came to see that Ibsen's work lets each character have the awareness to articulate their own thoughts.

I took this as a guiding principle throughout the construction of my play.

## **22. Harold Pinter**

Actor turned playwright and Nobel Prize winner Harold Pinter (1930 – 2008) was born in Hackney east London. Pinter attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but he did not complete the course. Pinter refused national service as a conscientious objector and completed his acting training at The Central School of Speech and Drama, Pinter worked in repertory theatre in Ireland and England.

Pinter's career as a playwright began with *The Room* (1957) this was closely followed by *The Birthday Party*. Pinter early works were described by critics as comedy of menace. Later plays like *No Man's Land* (1975) and *Betrayal* (1978) are known as memory plays. Pinter appeared in productions of his work on radio and film and he directed almost 50 productions for stage, theatre and screen. Pinter received more than 50 awards, prizes and other honours including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005 and the French Légion d'honneur in 2007.

Pinter's dialogue style is terse and broken by pauses. This became Pinter's trademark so much so the style is known as Pinteresque. This approach especially noticeable in *The Caretaker* (1959) unifies the distinct styles of Realism and the Theatre of the Absurd. This appealed to me in the development of *The Hot Pot*.

### **23. Harold Pinter and The Hot Pot**

In writing *The Hot Pot* I found I was moving towards the same blend of a realistically absurdist narrative. Language in absurdist drama is typically used in a way that amplifies the audience's confusion through forever-evasive dialogue. Ronald Knowles explains:

*Language, character, and being are here aspects of each other made manifest in speech and silence. Character is no longer the clearly perceived entity underlying clarity of articulation the objectification of a social and moral entelechy but something amorphous and contingent.* (Knowles, 1988, p.41).

In *The Hot Pot*, the way John refuses to listen to others fits how Pinter is concerned with *communication itself, or rather the deliberate evasion of communication.* (Knowles, 1988, p.43).

In *The Room*, Rose is isolated from the other two characters and she expresses herself in awkward ways. The deceptive nature of unreliable language is incorporated in my play. When John and his father fail to communicate, this might be considered an absurdist-heightened approach.

*The Room* ends violently when Bert returns to find Rose stroking the blind black man Riley's face. Bert delivers a long monologue about his experiences of driving his van at the same time as describing it as a woman. Then suddenly Bert beats Riley until he is lifeless and Rose cries out:

"Can't see. I can't see. I can't see".

This deep-seated anger led me to the fluidity of my central character John. He does not conform to a straightforward way of behaving with the rest of the characters. Through *The Room* and *The Caretaker*, I began to see a possible means to perceiving Pinter's language is to ignore the precise words characters say and instead to seek the hidden meanings behind the entire text.

In the middle section of *The Hot Pot*, I had to show scenes between strangers I found this extremely difficult. Drawing on *The Caretaker* helped me. Pinter shows how strangers who come across each other engage in an absurdist way. My play is not an absurdist work. On the other hand, it does not show realistic scenes all the time. Edging towards absurdism from time to time helped me develop a style which included failures of communication, anger and violence.

Pinter's desire for brevity helped me trim the initial drafts of my work, shortening exchanges between the characters. As Pinter puts it:

*I have mixed feelings about words myself...* (Pinter, 1976, p.14).

*Words written by me and by others, the bulk of it a stale dead terminology; ideas endlessly repeated and permuted become platitudinous, trite, meaningless.* (Pinter, 1976, p.14).

As a result of this search for dramatic brevity sometimes the way my characters communicate is not always conversationally naturalistic. I tried to ensure the language is to

the point and it left room for context. Here is an example from The Hot Pot when John tries to offer a book to two people he has just met at the hotpot party.

**THE HOT POT SCENE 11:**

*The flat, lighting change reveals a display of Tolkein materials. JOHN is talking to two guests, Abu and Steve.*

**JOHN:**

So you agree with me about the overt racism in publishing?

**ABU:**

Maybe...you may have a point but not everyone is...

**JOHN:**

They send my manuscripts back they don't understand what I'm getting at but they're superficial, man! I tell them "text, con text, subtext" and they say...

**STEVE:**

I'm starving when we gonna eat?

*John carefully pulls out one of the Lord of the Rings books. He starts flicking through it.*

**JOHN**

Listen guys I want to give you a copy of the greatest book ever written.

**STEVE:**

Ah so you do have taste because it has to be The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

**JOHN:**

What? No, I'm talking about the holy grail.

**ABU:**

Yeah I loved that Indiana Jones...not the new crappy ones I'm talking about when Bond met...it's the third one when he...

**JOHN:**

Indiana wha'? I'm talking about the most amazing book ever conceived, Lord of the Rings.

*An awkward silence.*

**JOHN:**

Don't be shy guys take 'em they're gifts.

**ABU:**

That's generous mate but it's wasted on me...I'm not into kids stuff.

**STEVE:**

Nor me.

**JOHN:**

It's not for kids, millions of intelligent adults all over the world read this book and look at this...

*John takes his mobile phone out he starts reading from it.*

**JOHN:**

If you look at all the statistics according to...reliable online sources The Lord of the Rings books, movies, DVDs, Blu-rays and other merchandise...see on the socials... the millions of people of all ages love this book.

**ABU:**

Whatever gets your rocks off I'm saying this book was written in Medieval Times when they had no gas or electricity and trust me it's for kids.

**STEVE:**

Abu's right and it's totally Medieval Johnno. (Saleem, 2023, 11:29).

The way John insists the guests need to take the book turns into a non-realistic scene somewhat heightened rather like Pinter's first play *The Room*. *The Room* is a tragicomedy

about an anxious woman whose life is disrupted by the arrival of a mysterious messenger. The man is black and blind. When her husband comes home, he attacks and kills the man. The play ends with the woman claiming she is blind just like the dead man.

*The Room* contrasts the everyday social normal etiquette with a growing forbearance of terror and confusion. The anxiety of alienation is palpable in the strange relationship presented between wife and husband. Even though both characters are in the same room initially, they seem to live in separate worlds. This helped shape some of the scenes in my play *The Hot Pot* that deal with similar themes of isolation communication breakdown and ambiguity. In *The Room* I was intrigued by how the wife and husband communicate, nothing is spelt out explicitly about their ambivalent relationship.

The scene below from *The Hot Pot* demonstrates similar themes.

#### **THE HOT POT SCENE 4:**

*They ignore Pops, the Mother continues speaking to John.*

**MA:**

No...no...no... no... no... no...no...no...no... the devil...the devil...the devil...

**JOHN:**

I knew it Ma don't start with tha' voodoo bullshit.

*Ma exaggeratedly blows all over John.*

**JOHN:**

This is nuts.

**MA:**

The devil...the devil...the devil...he's got ya... don't be foolish son, why you doing crazy things? You ain't a kid and...

**JOHN:**

I knew it...listen to me Ma there ain't no devil. I knew you wouldn't listen to me. The thing is, the truth is I met her and we've been living together

*Mother makes the sign of the cross over John.*

**JOHN:**

Maaaa don't do this shit, I wanna talk about so much stuff I couldn't talk about tha' stuff before and you...I knew it...the same old voodoo crap.

**MA:**

Son she ain't one of us... they funny looking.

**JOHN:**

Please Ma don't do it... (Saleem, 2023, 4:15).

Commentators have sometimes reflected on the way Pinter presents women. I found the reference below particularly interesting:

*Pinter cannot imagine a form of mastery that departs from the dominant of cultural power often the only way to claim power for his female characters is to take the masculine stand. (Dr. Chaitanya and Fayaz, Gowsia 2020).*

From the same article, the following passage highlights the problems the writers experienced when they examined Pinters work from a manifestly feminist critique.

*The persistent dramatisation of misogyny in his plays leads to a question as to whether the objective is to strengthen misogynist structures or to demonstrate oppressive actions towards them. Pinter claims that the realistic accuracy was never an intention. But his work challenges the basic power structures as a writer associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. (Dr. Chaitanya and Fayaz, Gowsia 2020).*

Reading this I had to go back to question John's attitude to the women in The Hot Pot. I wanted to ensure that John's bullying is answered. Thus when Celia finally leaves now John is alienated and alone this is when he is in dire need of a new strategy.

**THE HOT POT SCENE 36:**

*John has a can of beer.*

**JOHN:**

Celia this beer's warm. Where did the ice-cold cans go?

**CELIA:**

You are drinking too much John.

**JOHN:**

I know how much I can hold, trust me.

**CELIA:**

But I don't, I mean sometimes I don't trust you.

**JOHN:**

You have to we have nothing else but trust.

**CELIA:**

I do not trust you because I cannot believe you. You say white people stop you from success but it is just words, you prove nothing.

**JOHN:**

I don't need to prove anything because I know it and I know I love you. You know that and I can prove that.

*From his pocket John takes out a small bottle he shows it to Celia.*

**CELIA:**

What is this...?



**JOHN:**

It's like the ending of that play you've been studying in English class, you know the Shakespeare one.

**CELIA:**

Romeo and...Juliet?

**JOHN:**

Yes Celia if you don't trust me if you don't believe me I'm going to take these pills. Say you trust me, say you want us to be together then I won't take them.

**CELIA:**

I loved you John I care about you. But you don't take me to meet your family, you don't want a family with me so I go without you.

*Celia walks past John, he grabs her.*

**CELIA:**

Let go my friends say you hurt people. They say you are a beast, you are rejected by people you do not see.

**JOHN:**

If you walk away you're responsible for what happens to me.

**CELIA:**

No I won't be responsible, John I'm telling you for the last time...

**JOHN:**

Celia you have to stay with me...All I'll do is work hard, no matter if I push trolleys in a supermarket I don't care about making it as a writer.

*John puts the bottle under his mouth.*

**CELIA:**

What are you doing?

**JOHN:**

I'm going to count to the number three and if you don't want to be with me and you walk away I won't walk again.

**JOHN:**

One...

**CELIA:**

No...you can't do it.

**JOHN:**

Two...

**CELIA:**

Please John you must stop it.

**JOHN:**

Three.

*John moves the bottle towards his lips Celia slaps the bottle away and they hug each other and they kiss.*

**JOHN:**

You know what they say in China if you save a person's life?

**CELIA:**

You are responsible for that life yes I know.

**JOHN:**

So now you have to do one more important thing for me.

Give me your phone.

*Celia hands the phone to John, he dials a number and then he hands it to Celia.*

**JOHN:**

On that number somebody is going to talk to you, after they talk to you they're going to want your details and they will want you to make an appointment to take care of your big problem.

**CELIA:**

What is my big problem?

**JOHN:**

That big problem inside you I want you to take care of it, so it is just you and me Celia. No-one else. I know you will do this for us Celia. All you have to do is make the appointment with some clever people and they will take care of everything. I promise you I'll be with you I will hold your hand and you don't have to worry. I will be different, you will be different we will have a table for two forever.

*Celia puts the phone in the air her hands begin shaking.*

**CELIA:**

No I can't do this John we must share table for three.

**JOHN:**

Yes you can, you can do it and you must do it.

*Celia puts the phone to her mouth she talks into the phone.*

**CELIA:**

Hello yes...

*She flings the phone aside.*

**CELIA:**

No! (Saleem, 2023, 36:105).

## 24. Samuel Beckett

This movement towards absurdism led me to the playwright who influenced Pinter greatly, Samuel Beckett (1909-1989). Beckett was an Irish novelist, dramatist, short story writer, theatre director, poet and literary translator. Beckett worked for most of his life in France and he is acknowledged as one of the key figures in what the critic Martin Esslin dubbed *The Theatre of the Absurd*. In his 1960 essay, Esslin focuses on Beckett, Arthur Adamov and Eugène Ionesco. Esslin defines the absurd with a quotation from Ionesco:

*...absurd is that which has not purpose, or goal, or objective.* (Esslin, 1965).

John's reaction to his fate by the end of the play has echoes of this he starts to see he has no apparent meaning and he is a string-less puppet controlled by unseen forces.

In his introduction to the book *Absurd Drama* (1965), Esslin wrote:

*The Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.* (Esslin, 1965, p.23).

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955) features two central characters Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo) who engage in a variety of discussions while awaiting the Godot who never arrives. The way the characters behave with each other in *Waiting for Godot* has many levels of absurdity. I felt I could incorporate Beckett's and Pinter's ideas to address the absurdity

that dramatises the difficulty isolated migrants and their offspring encounter when struggling to successfully communicate from extremely differing viewpoints.

My theatre piece *The Hot Pot* is explicitly about the migrant situation in the United Kingdom and I did not come across any works by Beckett or Pinter which fitted the structure of what I wanted to create. They helped me in creating a play tackling realistic issues laced with dark undertones. Absurdist ideas helped me get through an extremely tough section of my work.

## **CURRENT MIGRANT VOICES**

### **Introduction**

From the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, authentic Asian and Black immigrant voices were largely missing from British theatre, books, T.V and film. From the 1980s, a growing wave of Asian and Black U.K. based writers began challenging dominant white narratives.

The output of multi-cultural contemporary playwrights, novelists and screenplay writers continues to grow. To understand the place of my play within the context of this growth I focused on four significant figures: Hanif Kureishi, Kwame Kwei-Armah, May Sumbwanyambe and Kamila Shamsie.

**29. Hanif Kureishi CBE** (born 1954) is perhaps the most widely known of these figures. A British playwright, screenwriter, filmmaker and novelist of South Asian and English descent, he was named in the 2008 list of the 50 greatest British writers since 1945. Kureishi has arguably more successfully represented the experience of Asian migrants and their offspring than anyone before or since.

Kureishi was born in Bromley, South London to a Pakistani father Rafiushan (Shanoo) Kureishi and an English mother Audrey Buss. Kureishi's father was born into a wealthy Madras family, whose members moved to Pakistan after the partition of British India in 1947. Rafiushan came to the U.K. in 1950 and he worked at the Pakistani embassy.

Kureishi started his career in the 1970s as a pornography writer under the pseudonyms Antonia French and Karim. Kureishi went on to write plays for the Hampstead Theatre, Soho Poly and by the age of 18, he was with the Royal Court. Kureishi found fame with *My Beautiful Laundrette* directed by Stephen Frears, a film about a gay Pakistani-British boy growing up in 1980s London. The screenplay especially the racial discrimination described contained elements from Hanif's experiences as the only Pakistani student in his class at school. Kureishi followed this with the acclaimed novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

*My Beautiful Laundrette* is set in London during the Thatcher years, as reflected in the complex often-comical relationships between members of the Pakistani and English communities. The story focuses on Omar, a young Pakistani man living in London. It tells of his reunion and eventual romance with his old friend, a street punk named Johnny. The two become the caretakers and business managers of a launderette originally owned by Omar's uncle Nasser.

Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* won the Whitbread Award for the best first novel. It tells the story of Karim a mixed-race teenager, desperate to escape the suburbs to have new experiences in London in the 1970s. He eagerly seizes an unlikely opportunity when a life in the theatre presents itself as a possibility. He gets to know new people from completely different backgrounds, like the working-class Welshman Terry, who is an active Trotskyist and wants him to join the party or Karim's lover Eleanor who is upper middle class but pretends to be working class. Mixing with the people surrounding Eleanor and Pyke (a manipulative theatre director), he realises they are speaking a different language because they had received a better education. The book leaves its reader on the brink of the 1979 general election. It went on to become a television serial.

### 30. Dismissal of Kureishi's Family Exploitation

Kureishi's family have accused him of exploiting them by using thinly disguised references in his work without asking their permission first. His sister Yasmin has accused him of selling her family down the line. She wrote in a letter to The Guardian, that if her family's history had to become public she would not stand by *and let it be fabricated for the entertainment of the public or for Hanif's profit*. (McCrum, Robert 2016).

She said Kureishi's description of her family's working-class roots were fictitious: their grandfather was *not cloth cap working class* (McCrum, Robert 2016), their mother never worked in a shoe factory, and their father was not a bitter old man. Kureishi denies this criticism.

Yasmin wrote:

*My father was angry when The Buddha of Suburbia came out as he felt that Hanif had robbed him of his dignity, and he didn't speak to Hanif for about a year.* (McCrum, Robert 2016).

The suggestion Kureishi used his family as the basis of characters in some of his work disturbed me and it gave me food for thought in the construction of my own play The Hot Pot.

The four Kureishi works I explored appeared firmly rooted in the author's narrow settings and they were clearly a reflection of 1970s and 1980s London. I aspired that The Hot Pot would be both current and less easily pinned to a particular time and place.

Looking at the three more recent writers what stood out for me was how highly they value research and they seek to express their observations in fictional ways. This helped me understand the need for an objectively researched backbone in The Hot Pot which could then be subjectively heightened in a fictional treatment.

Interviewed in The Guardian Kureishi said:

*Immigrants now have no face, no status, no protection and no story...Everyone, including the most reasonable and sensitive, has made up their mind that the immigrant is everywhere now and he is too much of a problem. (Kureishi, 2014).*

The Hotpot play has strong resonances of the attitudes and character traits displayed in Kureishi's work, as I will demonstrate below.

### **The Buddha of Suburbia: Chapter One**

*My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it's enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why. Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything. (Kureishi, 2009, p1).*

### **Discussion:**

The first scene from the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* resonates with Scene 25 in The Hot Pot play (see below) which shows John using racist language in front of his parents when he describes how others see him on the outside. Even though his mother tells him to never use racist language to describe himself, John does not let go of the fact this is the way other people see him because of his outside appearance.



In Kureishi's novel Karim makes note of being almost an Englishman and makes indirect reference to his Indian heritage. Even if Karim identifies as English during the rest of the novel he's unable to forget others see his Indian side first.

**THE HOT POT SCENE 25:**

*The parent's house John is with Ma and a silent Pop.*

**MA:**

Why not move in with us? It's rent free and I'll cook you...

**JOHN:**

No Ma, Celia does all the cooking for me. And no I've made no plans with her about the future because my problems with work or lack of work is a mess. But maybe one day it'll shine brightly. I send my writing to bigots they don't reply to me, if they reply they say my work's not good enough. These bastards won't give me the break I deserve.

**MA:**

You lost too much weight.

**JOHN:**

Ma all I need is a break.

**MA:**

What do you want from me?

**JOHN:**

I want you to meet her and sit down with her, spend time with her.

**MA:**

They're yellow in Korea.

**JOHN:**

You can't say that Ma.

**MA:**

I've seen 'em eating slugs...it's disgusting, it's not human to eat a tiger's...private parts.

**JOHN:**

Stop saying those things, she's not yellow and she's not Korean.

**MA:**

Bright yellow.

**JOHN:**

That's...Ma you're saying racist stuff.

**MA:**

Where she from then?

**JOHN:**

She's from Taiwan.

**MA:**

Tha's what I said, she's Korean. Boy, if you told me you were in love with a man if he's one of us I'd take that over her.

**JOHN:**

You can't be serious.

**MA:**

In love with a man from our county is better than yellow...

**JOHN:**

Just once I want you to listen to me and understand what I'm talking about. You can't say these things to me or have expectations Celia's can't be like you 'cause there's no such thing. I want everybody to be themselves. White racists, when they look at my black skin they believe I'm inferior and we know it's not true. I'm a human, not a freaking bum licking nigger.

**MA:**

How dare you say things like this? You said...did you really say bum licking nigger...what will Pops think?

**JOHN:**

He's busy, right? Every time I open up, every time I talk about my life no one cares about these things. Ma, they're never going to give me a shot, they're never going to give me an opportunity or a job 'cause I'm a low life black-bastard.

**MA:**

Don't you ever...don't you never say these crazy words again. You have a mother and you have a... you thinking about marriage now is wrong, what if you tie yourself to the wrong one for the rest of your life? It's not easy son, look at your father and me.

**JOHN:**

Yeah look at you, after all these years you can't even get my name right. Who's Jason Ma? And who's Jack and Tommy and the others running around in Pop's head?

**MA:**

Son there's things about me you can't dream...

You want some ginger cake?

**JOHN:**

Yeah...why not let go?

**MA:**

I'm going out for a few hours, you give him medication every...

**JOHN:**

I know what to do Ma, I'm not stupid. (Saleem, 2023, 25:80).

There are further resonances between the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Hot Pot* particularly between Chapter 10 in Kuresiha's work and Scene 26 in my play.

## **The Buddha of Suburbia: Chapter 10**

*He was right. But just when I was feeling at home in the loin-cloth and boot polish, and when I'd learned my lines before anyone else and was getting as competent as a little orang-utan on the scaffolding, I saw that our conflicts hadn't ended.*

*Shadwell took me aside and said, 'A word about the accent, Karim. I think it should be an authentic accent.'*

*'What d'you mean authentic?'*

*'Where was our Mowgli born?'*

*'India.' 'Yes. Not Orpington. What accent do they have in India?'*

*'Indian accents.'*

*'Ten out of ten.'*

*'No, Jeremy. Please, no.'*

*'Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience.'*

*I could hardly believe it. Even when I did believe it we discussed it several times, but he wouldn't change his mind. 'Just try it,' he kept saying as we went outside the rehearsal room to argue.*

*'You're very conservative, Karim. Try it until you feel comfortable as a Bengali. You're supposed to be an actor, but I suspect you may just be an exhibitionist.'*

*Jeremy, help me, I can't do this.'*

*He shook his head. I swear, my eyes were melting. A few days passed without the accent being mentioned again. During this time Shadwell had me concentrate on the animal noises I was to make between the dialogue, so that when, for instance, I was talking to Kaa the slithering snake, who saves Mowgli's life, I had to hiss. Terry and I had to hiss together. When hissing, the thought of Dad lecturing to Ted and Jean at Carl and*

*Marianne's was an aid. Being a human zoo was acceptable, provided the Indian accent was off the menu. Next time it was mentioned the entire cast was present.*

*'Now do the accent,' Shadwell suddenly said. 'I trust you've been rehearsing at home.'*

*'Jeremy,' I pleaded. 'It's a political matter to me. (Kureishi, 2009, p.146/147).*

### **Discussion:**

This is one of the turning points in the novel for Karim, on the day of his audition even though he performs outstandingly Shadwell doesn't seem to be impressed. This is when Shadwell asks Karim to perform the scene again but this time he wants him to use an Indian accent and it's as though a wasp is chasing him Karim has no choice he agrees even though he feels stupid. As a new actor this experience makes Karim feel like a child, in the sense Karim has no power to object to the changes the director forces on him. By the time, Shadwell casts Karim he learns that being Indian has its advantages and despite his experience of painful racism, he embraces some success because he is able to play a specific part in the play. By the end of this scene, Karim knows the Indian part of his identity isn't something he can get rid of arbitrarily.

Even though the people who reject John's work are not shown to be racist in any way when he does not receive an explanation for their rejection of his work John starts to believe these people must be racist since his work is always rejected the underlying them has to be prejudice based in deep rooted racist connotations.

### **THE HOT POT SCENE 26:**

*Alone, John talks into his phone.*

**JOHN:**

What...you rejected my work... again?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I'm saying...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No...no...

**JOHN:**

You can't keep rejecting my work. I need to know the reasons for the rejection, you said before you were going to accept my work.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

If you keep rejecting my work you must explain why.

**JOHN:**

I'm calm, I'm listening to you...

*John moves a little to the right.*

**JOHN:**

Can you...

*John moves a little to the right.*

**JOHN:**

Can you...good. Yes what you're saying is always the same things. You enjoyed reading the first three chapters and then you tell me send the rest. I send it and you reject it, why is that?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Why is that?

**JOHN:**

Yes I'm listening to you. I demand feedback, I know...even though you said you have a policy of never giving people feedback who send work to you...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I need to know why do you reject my work? I need to understand if this is personal and if this is something to do with my skin colour.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Sure I'll wait go get him...please.

**JOHN:**

Is this...I'm O.K...I need to know the truth.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No you can't stop talking to me in one minute. That's not right... if you send me a poxy email and a text like you always do I can't accept it. You don't explain things, all what I want is to meet the editors and the...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No I don't know anything about that.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes I know how to read, in theory I read your non-discriminatory policies. But in practice they are...

**JOHN:**

Listen, I spend months on each book and what you have to understand you're destroying my ability to connect with my writing. You keep saying you're going to give me a chance and you're happy with my work. It's always the same story and then you reject it.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...

*John moves a little to the right.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...

*John moves a little to the left.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...are you...

**JOHN:**

Hello...

**JOHN:**

You can't hang up on me like this... (Saleem, 2023, 26:83).

### **31. Kwame Kwei-Armah**

Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE was born Ian Roberts in 1967 in Hillingdon London and he was raised in Southall. Kwei-Armah is currently artistic director of the Young Vic theatre in London. Ian Roberts changed his name to Kwame Kwei-Armah at the age of 19, after tracing his family's history through its more recent West Indian past to its origins as slaves from Ghana.

Among the wider public Kwei-Armah is best known for playing paramedic Finlay Newton in the BBC medical drama *Casualty*.



Kwame Kwei-Armah's parents were born in Grenada in the West Indies, then a British colony. They later migrated to England, where his father found work in the Quaker Oats factory in Southall. His mother took three jobs to pay for Kwei-Armah and his two siblings to go to a stage school.

As an actor, Kwei-Armah appeared in the original London production of *Elegies for Angels, Punks and Raging Queens*, which played at the Criterion Theatre in 1993. In 2007, Kwame Kwei-Armah starred as E. R. Braithwaite in the two-part BBC Radio 4 adaptation of Braithwaite's novel *To Sir, with Love*. Kwei-Armah was later a judge for the BBC World Service's International Radio Playwriting Competition.

As a playwright Kwei-Armah's creation, *Bitter Herb* (1998) won him a Peggy Ramsay award and it was subsequently put on by the Bristol Old Vic where he became writer-in-residence. *Blues Brother*, *Soul Sister* was produced at the Theatre Royal, Bristol in 1999 and *Big Nose* was performed in 1999 at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry. Kwei-Armah's fifth play *Elmina's Kitchen* premiered in May 2003 at the National Theatre. In 2005, it transferred to the Garrick, making him only the second black Briton to have a play staged in London's West End. (In 1990 Ray Harrison Graham's Fringe First award-winning play *Gary* had played at the Arts Theatre). Kwei-Armah was awarded an OBE in 2012 for services to drama.

Kwei-Armah wrote and directed the world premiere of *Marley a musical based on the life and music of Bob Marley* which ran at Centre Stage, Baltimore in May and June 2015. A rewritten version was performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 2017 under a new title *One Love: The Bob Marley Musical*. Kwame Kwei-Armah collaborated with Idris Elba on the musical *Tree* at the Manchester International Festival in 2019. Controversy surrounded the show. The Guardian published a story in which writers Tori Allen-Martin and Sarah Henley claimed the concept was theirs and that they had removed from the production. (Brown, Mark 2019).

In a video of a Q&A at the Oxford Union, Kwei-Armah talks about living with his parents. He says it was like existing in two different types of theatre, in the family he would be serving rum to his father and his pals while his mother was hosting church meetings in the living-room.

Kwame Kwei-Armah tells how one night he was on a bus travelling home when he saw a *BMW wrapped around a tree, he learned it was being driven by two young black men who'd been shot in a black-on-black crime.* (Wilson, John).

This incident distressed Kwei-Armah,

*Back then, guns on the streets of London and in the black community were relatively rare...I didn't know what to do. Art is my only weapon, so I went home and started writing the first scenes of Elmina's Kitchen that night.* (Wilson, John).

Kwei-Armah grew up at a time when animosity arose between communities. At the time of the April 1979 Southall riots, his father came home after the evening work-shift and he took him out to see the Hambrough Tavern was on fire. Kwei-Armah saw a police van arrive and the moment the police started charging at the crowd using batons and shields he ran home frightened. Kwei-Armah claims to have seen from his front room the police chased only black and Asian boys along the street. This was followed by skinheads who were chasing the black and Asian boys behind the police. (Wilson, John).

This singular event shocked Kwei-Armah, it made him feel he was living in an alien environment and toughened his determination to do well in his education. He later wrote about the event in *A Bitter Herb*. (Wilson, John).

### **32. Elmina's Kitchen**

The characters in *Elmina's Kitchen* symbolize various generations of Black British descent whose parents and ancestors are from a Caribbean backdrop. The play depicts a world of crime and violence. The identity of teenage Black British youths is reflected through

the character Ashley. He embraces Black British youth culture and wants to join a gang. Ashley's father Deli runs a West Indian restaurant, he attempts to shelter Ashley from this Black British criminal life which is plagued by illegal drugs, violence and murder.

Reading *Elmina's Kitchen* helped me understand how Kwei-Armah tries to authentically portray the Caribbean community in The United Kingdom. The way he highlights the distinct way this minority has survived in British society helped clarify how British immigrants and their offspring are instilled with their historical identity.

### **33. May Sumbwanyambe**

May Sumbwanyambe is a librettist, a radio dramatist, an academic and a playwright from Edinburgh.

Sumbwanyambe's previous productions include -

*Ghost Light*, (Edinburgh International Festival and National Theatre of Scotland).

*Joseph Knight*, (BBC Scotland, National Theatre of Scotland).

*After Independence* (Arcola Theatre, Papatango Theatre).

*After Independence* and *The Trial of Joseph Knight* (BBC Radio 4).

May Sumbwanyambe is currently writing new stage plays for The National Theatre of Scotland, the Citizens Theatre and Gridiron Theatre/The National Trust for Scotland. In 2013 Sumbwanyambe became the inaugural Papatango Resident Playwright, this saw his debut play *After Independence* produced by London's Arcola Theatre and it opened in 2016 winning the Alfred Fagon Audience Award.

In 2018 Sumbwanyambe was a contributing author to two theatre theory books:

*How to be a Playwright* (Nick Hearn Books) and *Scenes from the Revolution Making Political Theatre 1968-2018* (Pluto Books/Edge Hill University Press).

May Sumbwanyambe parents had come to Edinburgh from Africa to train for doctors. They later moved to Lincolnshire in England. Sumbwanyambe studied law at Leeds

University, he was fascinated by what he called the slow stories of human life and conflict in all their complexities. Writing for the student newspaper, Sumbwanyambe was sent to review *Sing Yer Heart Out For The Lads* by the much admired black British playwright Roy Williams.

Sumbwanyambe said:

*I never even wrote the review. I just knew that I was in love, and that writing plays, and being involved in theatre, was what I wanted to do. I wrote a play really quickly after that, and sent it in to West Yorkshire Playhouse, and the answer came back that the play was terrible, but they wanted to talk to me, because there was something promising there. And that was really the start of my life as a playwright. (McMillan Joyce, 2022).*

Now, 15 years on Sumbwanyambe is seen as one of the key creative figures in Scotland's artistic efforts to come to terms with its colonial past and chiefly with the Scottish involvement in slavery and the slave trade.

Sumbwanyambe's 2018 BBC radio play *The Trial of Joseph Knight* is based on the true story of a black slave, he was freed by the Scottish courts in 1778 from slavery to the Wedderburn family. It has since become a stage play.

### **34. The Trial of Joseph Knight**

Joseph Knight was enslaved and taken first to Jamaica and then to Scotland. He brought a case to the Justice of the Peace Court in Perth in 1774 in an attempt to leave the employment of John Wedderburn who had educated him and then he used him as a domestic servant. Joseph Knight's escape and recapture helped pave the way for the abolition of slavery in Britain.

The first hearing found in Wedderburn's favour. An appeal to the Sheriff of Perth found for Knight. Wedderburn appealed to the Court of Session, arguing slavery was to be

distinguished from perpetual servitude and that while he could not be recognised as a slave, Knight was bound by his servitude.

The Court of Session endorsed the sheriff's judgment declaring:

*The dominion assumed over this Negro, under the law of Jamaica, being unjust, could not be supported in this country to any extent: That, therefore, the defender had no right to the Negro's service for any space of time, nor to send him out of the country against his consent: That the Negro was likewise protected under the act 1701, c.6. from being sent out of the country against his consent. (Anon. Knight v. Wedderburn is Upheld).*

Sumbwanyambe states:

*It's interesting that although I never practised law, many of my stories have the detail of legal cases as their backdrop. I love the contradictions that exist there – like the fact that Henry Dundas, whose statue and pillar in Edinburgh are now so controversial because of his connections to the slave trade – was the advocate who made the case for Joseph Knight's freedom at the Court of Session in 1778. I'm also interested in expanding the range of stories of black people in Britain. There's a very strong tendency in British theatre to stereotype black stories as "urban" stories, but that's not the whole picture; there are plenty of black middle-class families who face different issues, and growing up near Grimsby, I lived in an area that was all about the land and agriculture. So I'm still intensely interested in the whole story of land ownership and farming, and that dimension of British and colonial history. (McMillan Joyce, 2022).*

Sumbwanyambe's play *After Independence* (2016) is about the fortunes of a formerly white-owned farm in Zimbabwe (his father's homeland) was a critical success in London. In a comprehensive video essay made for the Happenings series (a partnership between the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh and the

Traverse Theatre) Sumbwanyambe talks about his private experiences to investigate the depiction of black people in the media. Sumbwanyambe argues that young black British people are disenfranchised by a broken down biased justice system and that black British people are misrepresented by the media and institutionally discriminated against by factors like political class during moments of social unrest. This was followed by a Happenings Response Session involving Dael Orlandersmith, May Sumbwanyambe and Natasha Thembisio Ruwon, held to mark Black History Month. For this, three black artists were commissioned to respond to the representation and misrepresentation of Black lives in the media. It focused on creating political theatre.

I was impressed by how Sumbwanyambe took a historical factual incident from the 1770's and dramatized it in a style which reached a wider contemporary audience. I was encouraged by the skill with which he used theatrical technique to transform observation and research into compelling dram

### **35. Kamila Shamsie**

For a wider perspective on the migrant experience, I chose the novelist Kamila Shamsie. Shamsie (born 1973) and she is best known for her award-winning novel *Home Fire* (2017). Shamsie was born into a family of intellectuals in Karachi, Pakistan. Her mother is a journalist and editor Muneeza Shamsie. Shamsie has lived in the U.K. since 2007 and has both British and Pakistani citizenship. In 2017, Shamsie joined the Centre for New Writing at Manchester University, where she is Professor of Creative Writing.

From Pakistan, Shamsie went first to the USA as a college exchange student. Shamsie took an MFA at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she was influenced by the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali. Shamsie wrote her first novel *In The City by the Sea* while still in college and it was published in 1998. Shamsie received the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999. Shamsie's second novel *Salt and Saffron* followed in 2000,

after which she was selected as one of Orange's 21 Writers of the 21st century. Shamsie's third novel, *Kartography* (2002) received widespread critical acclaim.

Both *Kartography* and Shamsie's next novel, *Broken Verses* (2005), have won the Patras Bokhari Award from the Academy of Letters in Pakistan.

Shamsie's seventh novel, *Home Fire* was described by the BBC as a powerful story of the complexities of love, family and state in wartime, it won the Women's Prize for Fiction.

Shamsie identifies as a Muslim and is the author of the non-fiction work *Offence: The Muslim Case* (Seagull Books, 2009). Shamsie is one of a new wave of Pakistani writers based in Britain. Others include Mohsin Hamid and Nadeem Aslam. These writers are successful in both Pakistan and the West.

### **36. Home Fire**

Females born in Pakistan in the early 1970s were expected to become wives and mothers. Shamsie a defiant feminist was fortunate because her literary family included several female writers. While Shamsie's earlier novels deal primarily with her homeland, *Home Fire* is a work of wider reach dealing with radicalisation within a Pakistani family (migrants and their children) in London. Drawing its structure from Sophocles' *Antigone*, the book is a condemnation of simplistic political debates about terror, security and religious extremism. This was particularly interesting to me in the light of the anger at the heart of *The Hot Pot*.

It was London theatre director Jatinder Verma who suggested Shamsie write a modern update of *Antigone*. Shamsie quickly decided on the story she would tell but preferred to pursue it as a novel rather than a play. In an interview with *The Jakarta Post*, Shamsie described her first thoughts:

*When I read the play — which has at its center two sisters who respond differently to the legal repercussions of their brother's act of treason—I knew immediately that I*

*wanted to connect it to a story that was very much in the news at the time, that of young British Muslims and their relationship with the British state...When you write a novel you don't think about subjects as being sensitive or not—you just think of them as being interesting and complex, and you wonder how to tell them in a story that's about a group of characters.* (Heriyanto Devina, 2018).

### **37. Unbecoming British**

I found Shamsie's conversation with Sonia Nair at the Wheeler Centre about global faultiness and torn loyalties especially informative. I also watched *Unbecoming British* Shamsie's 2018 Orwell Lecture in which she talked extensively on the polarizing questions of citizenship, migration and the transformation of rights into privileges. The lecture considered the cost of recent attempts to move citizenship from a protected legal status to a privilege.

In an interview with The Guardian, Shamsie commented:

*Being a UK citizen makes me feel more able to take part in the conversation.* (Thorpe Vanessa, 2017).

In my thoughts about the migration process, I found it interesting how much pressure Kamila Shamsie felt before she had a chance to apply for a British passport:

*What getting the passport did do was to remove the anxiety. I had always wondered if I would be able to stay if the laws changed. I had a sense I had got to be really good and stay under the radar and I would probably have been more nervous about writing this book if I had still been on the verge of citizenship. Being a citizen makes me feel more able to take part in the conversation. I noticed the first time I used "we", as in "we British", was after the Brexit vote, as in "What have we done?"* (Thorpe Vanessa, 2017).



Kamila Shamsie discussed the place of literature, arguing that it solely lies on the existence and identification of people, places, personalities and the movement of the world in and around them:

*Literature, deals with reflecting the society, is well embedded with the idea of acknowledging identities of men and women we talk about. With identity we mean different identities i.e., identity as an individual, transnational identity and much more. Literature is a reflection of society and the realization of identity forms a major part of it. Post Colonial literature, in fact deals widely with the issues of identity crises due to various divisions and sub divisions that have taken place in the Asian history leaving people in a state of confusion, looking forward in all direction in search of a being.* (Thorpe Vanessa, 2017).

Shamsie added:

*The identity of people have a huge impact on the culture that they follow the society they live in.* (Thorpe Vanessa. 2017).

Again, this is at the core of what I wanted to explore in *The Hot Pot*.

### **38. Broken Verses**

The last Shamsie novel I read was *Broken Verses*. Shamsie narrates the story of a 31-year-old Pakistani unmarried woman in search of an identity that is cast in her mother's image. I found parallels between this situation and the father/son relationship and identity search in *The Hot Pot*.

Finally, an interview with *The Guardian* demonstrates how Shamsie uses fiction to combine the personal and political and almost predict what could end up happening politically in The United Kingdom. *Home Fire* it should be noted has a non-white Home Secretary,

*A friend tweeted at me when Sajid Javid was appointed home secretary this week. My novel Home Fire, published last year, has among its characters a man called Karamat Lone: Britain's home secretary and child of working-class Pakistani Muslim migrants, who makes his fortune in the corporate world before becoming a Tory MP. My first response was to dismiss the idea. A Tory with a Muslim background holding one of the great offices of state? Ridiculous. If it had been just a few years earlier, I probably would have moved on to another idea. But it was the summer of 2015 and the political landscape of Britain included three children of Pakistani-British bus drivers: Sajid Javid, Sadiq Khan and Sayeeda Warsi, all in their mid-40s, young enough and prominent enough to make you wonder how far any one of them might progress in a few years. The novelist in me couldn't help but think that a certain kind of narrative logic demanded that if you have three very different people from an unusually similar background occupying the same field, at least one of them must go very far; the feminist in me suspected it wouldn't be the woman. (The fact that Warsi had resigned from the cabinet over Gaza probably bolstered this belief.) So, you could say that while Karamat Lone is a product of my imagination, I wouldn't have been able to imagine him if I hadn't first looked at that trio of politicians and believed that one of them might one day occupy one of the highest political offices in the land. (Though not the highest – my imagination still can't quite conceive of a Pakistani-British prime minister.)*

(Shamsie, Kamila 2018).

As things have turned out, at the time of writing we have a Prime Minister who though neither Pakistani nor Muslim is of Indian heritage. (See the migration section above).

Shamsie's work has opened doors for new non-white writers like myself who are attempting to address questions of individual identity among migrant communities. It is

interesting that *Home Fire* grew from *Antigone*, a classical tragedy and The Hot Pot has its roots firmly planted in the same tradition.

## **INFLUENCES AND COMPARISONS WITH OTHER WORKS FROM RECENT WRITERS ON THE MIGRANT EXPERIENCE**

### **KAMILA SHAMSIE**

Kamila Shamsie is a Pakistani and British writer best known for her award-winning novel *Home Fire* which was listed for the Booker Prize. It is a thought provoking and socially pertinent tale of clashing cultures which deals with a family's grief and loss. The central character Isma is torn between service to family and faith with her sense of individuality the driving force in the novel.

Shamsie was influenced by the classical Greek playwright Sophocles's drama *Antigone* which dates from the 5th century BC. In the play *Antigone*, the main character a princess of Thebes is forced into a choice. A decree from the King states she cannot bury her traitor brother Polynices. This would mean leaving his body on the battlefield at the mercy of carrion crows and stray dogs. If she follows her humanity in defying the order and burying Polynices it means her own death.

*Antigone* inspires the main plot of *Home Fire*, the narrative's pacing and points of view are structured in a similar vein to the play that uses the myth as a way to explore unresolved family conflicts. Isma is a British Muslim of Pakistani origin who lives in modern day London and she is the carer of her younger sister and brother the twins Aneeka and Parvaiz. Isma devotes her life to her sibling's health and happiness and by doing so she sacrifices her own well-being. Isma receives an offer from a respected mentor to travel to America to co-author a paper. Aneeka and Parvaiz turn eighteen Isma decides to accept the offer since she concludes she cannot look after them forever.

Aneeka is a talented young woman and she wants to study law. The disturbed Parvaiz leaves the siblings home to find a private space where he tries to understand the death of their father a jihadist who died during transit to imprisonment in Guantanamo Bay. Isma is devastated when Parvaiz leaves London to join ISIS, she contacts the police to inform them of Parvaiz's decision. Aneeka says that Isma has betrayed the family and she has destroyed their family life.

Shamsie was interviewed about *Home Fire* she spoke about her struggles that related to Islamophobia after she became a citizen of The United Kingdom.

*One of the things that became interesting to me as I was comparing 1980s Pakistan with 2019 Britain is that [under Zia] we were very aware we were living under a surveillance state. We have a different version of that here, but we do have it. I am very interested in how countries who have established democracies think they can tear up the norms. It's really dangerous. It's not just proroguing and attempts to overturn the Supreme Court; it's who is paying what to political parties and what they get in return. We saw a lot of that cronyism during Covid. And I wasn't at all surprised. (Allfree, 2017).*

### **HOME FIRE and THE HOT POT**

There are echoes of Shamsie's concerns as expressed in *Home Fire* in my play The Hotpot. Below I present quoted sections from *Home Fire* and I discuss these echoes.

#### **Home Fire: Chapter One**

*That had been a while ago. The plane would be boarding now. Isma looked over at the suitcase. She'd repacked when the woman left the room and spent the time since worrying if doing that without permission constituted an offense. Should she empty the clothes out into a haphazard pile, or would that make things even worse? She stood up, unzipped the suitcase, and flipped it open so its contents were visible.*

*A man entered the office, carrying Isma's passport, laptop, and phone. She allowed herself to hope, but he sat down, gestured for her to do the same, and placed a voice recorder between them.*

*"Do you consider yourself British?" the man said.*

*"I am British."*

*"But do you consider yourself British?"*

*"I've lived here all my life."*

*She meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive.*

*The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, The Great British Bake Off, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites. After that early slip regarding her Britishness, she settled into the manner that she'd practiced with Aneeka playing the role of the interrogating officer, Isma responding to her sister as though she were a customer of dubious political opinions whose business Isma didn't want to lose by voicing strenuously opposing views, but to whom she didn't see the need to lie either.*

(Shamsie 2017, p.12/13).

### **Discussion:**

Isma Pasha is detained at Heathrow airport for no apparent reason before her flight to the United States. Even though Isma made sure not to pack, anything that might raise flags like a Quran family pictures and books for her research the security officer looks through every item of her clothing. Isma's experience of unexplained detention at Heathrow instantly introduces the idea of how Muslims are stereotyped. In this case what Shamsie talks about the most in her interviews relates directly to Islamophobia and these are at the forefront of her

belief Muslims are associated with terrorist groups and therefore these people are put through extra checks at security deliberately.

Isma in the novel is targeted because of unfounded stereotypes, this scene mirrors scene 21 from my play which shows how John rightly or wrongly feels persecuted when his work is repeatedly rejected without explanation because he is black.

**THE HOT POT SCENE 21:**

*John alone looks at his mobile phone and then he dials a number. There are unheard responses from the other end between his lines.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No I want to know, did you get the last manuscript I sent?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes I understand about that. You said you will get back to me today, you said by text but... the thing is I said this to the other one who was messing me about.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Is this...please get her.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes this is John...the one who...listen to me I keep sending my manuscripts to you people and I know you're not reading them.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I...that is...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Or maybe they're just reading parts of them?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes I'm not stupid. I'm waiting for a full response.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes this is not the point, all I want is somebody...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Heloo...hel...helloo...can you hear me?

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

Can you hear...me now?

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

I hear you, no need to shout.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Who is this?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

So you can...no it's not enough because you keep delaying every single time I'm waiting for feedback. I have to know what's going on. I need to know why you keep delaying. If they're going to go ahead with my manuscript I need time to prepare.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Okay...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Okay, yes you'll contact me within an hour?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I understand but...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Hellooo...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Can you hear...me?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Can you...

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

Can you hear...me?



*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

*Is there...*

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

*Ohhhhhhhhhhh fuck this bullshit. (Saleem, 2023, 21:60).*

## **Home Fire: Chapter Two**

*You don't have to decide that's the end of it," Hira Shah said (to Isma) that evening, when they sat down together for a typically elaborate meal. A single woman in her mid-fifties who had never had to cook on a regular basis for anyone, Hira retained the idea that company for dinner must be occasion for pyrotechnics in the kitchen, no matter how frequently company was over—or perhaps she did that only when her company hadn't had anyone to mother her in a long time.*

*"You should at least try explaining why you feel the way you do. What is there to lose?"*

*"What is there to gain? He'll be going back to London soon in any case."*

*Hira looked at her over a forkful of rogan josh.*

*"Do you know when you were at LSE I thought you found me offensive?"*

*"That's ridiculous. Oh, you mean that first term. When I rolled my eyes at you?"*

*It overturned seven hundred ninety years of precedent in British law, the Kashmiri lecturer had been saying during an impassioned presentation on control orders and their impact on civil liberties when Hira saw the quiet girl in the third row roll her eyes.*

*Would you like to say something, Ms. Pasha?*

*Yes, Dr. Shah, if you look at colonial laws you'll see plenty of precedent for depriving people of their rights; the only difference is this time it's applied to British citizens, and even that's not as much of a change as you might think, because they're rhetorically being made un-British. Say more. The 7/7 terrorists were never described by the media as "British terrorists." Even when the word "British" was used, it was always "British of Pakistani descent" or "British Muslim" or, my favorite, "British passport holders," always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism.*

*Well, you have quite a voice when you decide to use it. (Shamsie, 2017, p.36).*

### **Discussion:**

This scene takes place when Isma hosts dinner for Dr. Hira Shah. This is the most explicit reference to Shamsie's belief people of British Pakistani descent British Muslim and British passport holders always have something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism. Doctor Hira wants Isma to tell Emonn about her family background and their history so he can understand her better.

Scene 36 of *The Hotpot* features a similar dilemma, John is cautious in introducing his girlfriend Celia to his family. John's mother sees people from Asia as inferior to her own West Indian background and John is worried if he introduces Celia to his mother she will use overt racist terms in front of her and this will jeopardize his fragile relationship. One reason John wants Celia to have an abortion if his mother discovers a woman from Taiwan is pregnant with his child she will turn her back on him forever.

### **THE HOT POT SCENE 36:**

*John has a can of beer.*

**JOHN:**

Celia this beer's warm. Where did the ice-cold cans go?

**CELIA:**

You are drinking too much John.

**JOHN:**

I know how much I can hold, trust me.

**CELIA:**

But I don't, I mean sometimes I don't trust you.

**JOHN:**

You have to we have nothing else but trust.

**CELIA:**

I do not trust you because I cannot believe you. You say white people stop you from success but it is just words, you prove nothing.

**JOHN:**

I don't need to prove anything because I know it and I know I love you. You know that and I can prove that.

*From his pocket John takes out a small bottle he shows it to Celia.*

**CELIA:**

What is this...?

**JOHN:**

It's like the ending of that play you've been studying in English class, you know the Shakespeare one.

**CELIA:**

Romeo and...Juliet?

**JOHN:**

Yes Celia if you don't trust me if you don't believe me I'm going to take these pills. Say you trust me, say you want us to be together then I won't take them.

**CELIA:**

I loved you John I care about you. But you don't take me to meet your family, you don't want a family with me so I go without you.

*Celia walks past John, he grabs her.*

**CELIA:**

Let go my friends say you hurt people. They say you are a beast, you are rejected by people you do not see.

**JOHN:**

If you walk away you're responsible for what happens to me.

**CELIA:**

No I won't be responsible, John I'm telling you for the last time...

**JOHN:**

Celia you have to stay with me...All I'll do is work hard, no matter if I push trolleys in a supermarket I don't care about making it as a writer.

*John puts the bottle under his mouth.*

**CELIA:**

What are you doing?

**JOHN:**

I'm going to count to the number three and if you don't want to be with me and you walk away I won't walk again.

**JOHN:**

One...

**CELIA:**

No...you can't do it.

**JOHN:**

Two...

**CELIA:**

Please John you must stop it.

**JOHN:**

Three.

*John moves the bottle towards his lips Celia slaps the bottle away and they hug each other and they kiss.*

**JOHN:**

You know what they say in China if you save a person's life?

**CELIA:**

You are responsible for that life yes I know.

**JOHN:**

So now you have to do one more important thing for me.

Give me your phone.

*Celia hands the phone to John, he dials a number and then he hands it to Celia.*

**JOHN:**

On that number somebody is going to talk to you, after they talk to you they're going to want your details and they will want you to make an appointment to take care of your big problem.

**CELIA:**

What is my big problem?

**JOHN:**

That big problem inside you I want you to take care of it, so it is just you and me Celia.  
No-one else. I know you will do this for us Celia. All you have to do is make the appointment

with some clever people and they will take care of everything. I promise you I'll be with you  
I will hold your hand and you don't have to worry. I will be different, you will be different  
we will have a table for two forever.

*Celia puts the phone in the air her hands begin shaking.*

**CELIA:**

No I can't do this John we must share table for three.

**JOHN:**

Yes you can, you can do it and you must do it.

*Celia puts the phone to her mouth she talks into the phone.*

**CELIA:**

Hello yes...

*She flings the phone aside.*

**CELIA:**

No!

*Around the side of the stage the hotpot friends emerge from the shadows.*

**ABU:**

No.

**STEVE:**

No.

**SIEANNA:**

No.

**ZANDRA:**

No she won't do it because it's her choice, not yours. (Saleem, 2023, 36:105).

## **AYAD AKHTAR**

Ayad Akhtar's one act play *Disgraced* (2012) comprises four scenes, it opens with a married couple in their New York Upper East Side apartment. Emily is a painter who takes inspiration from Islamic tradition and she sketches a portrait of her husband Amir who is an American-born lawyer. Amir has renounced his Muslim background, the couple discusses the night before this was when Amir was mistreated by a racist waiter. This incident inspires Emily to paint a portrait of Amir based on Diego Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja, which portrays a former slave who serves as the artist's apprentice.

Amir's cousin Abe has changed his name from Hussein to obscure his Muslim background, Abe wants Amir to represent an Imam who is on trial for apparently raising money to fund terrorism. Amir refuses but Emily convinces him. Later Amir admits to feeling a sense of pride when the Twin Towers fell on 9/11 he accepts it was an act of unprovoked violence yet some part of himself felt self-righteous because it meant for once the West had not won, this is a feeling he tries to repress. He accuses Emily's Jewish friend Isaac of having comparable feelings in regards to The Israeli Occupation of Palestinian territory, this is in spite of Isaac saying he is critical of Israel. At a domestic level, we learn that Isaac and Emily have a past relationship. That Isaac's partner Jory has won the promotion that Amir was expecting and in a moment of fury, Amir beats Emily violently.

The play ends with a fourth scene that takes place six months later, Amir is packing up his possessions in the apartment when Abe and Emily arrive without warning. Abe explains to Amir at Emily's prompting he was interrogated by the FBI after his friend used ambiguous terrorist language to threaten a barista at Starbucks. Abe reveals that he has given up on assimilation and now he wants to turn towards Islamic fundamentalism. Emily asks Amir to stop writing letters to her and then she leaves Amir unwrapping the painting she sent him.

This is the portrait she worked on in the first scene and the lights go out at the same time Amir ponders the painting.

### **Discussion:**

The central conflict in *Disgraced* is drawn from American culture and politics in the post-9/11 era. The play is set a decade after the September 11 2001 terror attacks that brought down the Twin Towers in Lower Manhattan. Within two months, the U.S. Congress passed the Patriot Act a controversial set of laws that saw dramatic increases in the rights of government bodies to survey investigate detain and prosecute civilians in the name of counter-terrorism. This new law particularly affected American citizens with Muslim backgrounds.

In *Disgraced*, Imam Fareed is prosecuted under The Patriot Act under suspicion of funding terrorism. Amir is increasingly annoyed by the extreme inspection he faces at airports whenever he flies on a plane. In this way, Akhtar highlights stark differences in how Muslim minorities and white Americans experience daily reality in the post-9/11 era.

At a personal level, deceit is embodied in each of the characters: Emily and Isaac's affair, Amir's cover up of his Muslim background and Jory's concealment of the fact that she was promoted at Amir's expense. The theme of duplicity emerges in the twin facets of Abe's and Amir's identities. They both struggle to make effort to assimilate into mainstream American society both men change their names to hide their Muslim backgrounds. They both uphold an inconsistent mixture of beliefs accepting the notion of freedom and affluence in America, whilst holding a deep-rooted loyalty to the Islamic teachings they took from their families.

Ayad Akhtar's structure using a dinner as a situation for the characters to communicate to each other overlaps with the ideas in my play *The Hotpot*. The necessity for them to lie to each other and deceive each other matches some of *The Hotpot*. Similarly the themes of alienation and isolation Amir and Abe being seen as outsiders even though they are born in



America resonates with my play. Especially interesting in *Disgraced* is the way the main character Amir denounces his religion at the same time feeling an uncomfortable pleasure when the Twin Towers fell. Amir beating up his girlfriend after he finds out she betrayed him this has similar themes to John finding out Celia is pregnant.

I was impressed by the plays structure and the use of complicated characters in complex situations where no simple answer is offered to their multifaceted problems they face in contemporary America. Most of all Amir born in America but feeling like an outsider surrounded by Americans echoes John's predicament and anger in *The Hotpot*. At the same time, the violence that erupts in Amir matches the violent outbursts from my central character John. I admire Ahktar's words given in an interview:

*The situation of all theater, a situation that can awaken in us a recollection of something more primordial, religious ritual — the site of our earliest collective negotiations with our tremendous vulnerability to existence. The act of gathering to witness the myths of our alleged origins enacted — this is the root of the theater's timeless magic.* (Akhtar, 2017).

*I can't be a spokesman for anything other than my own concerns. I have to be free to wrestle with my own preoccupations, and if I'm bringing any political awareness to that process, that mitigates my freedom. I also believe that at a subtle level it's perceived by the audience. Even if it's a very uncomfortable experience, the audience must experience some pleasure – or, if not pleasure, they must be rapt. If I can do that effectively, I can trust audiences to decide how they feel about this, that or the other.* (Moss, 2013).

## **A NOTE ON VIOLENCE IN THE THEATRE**

Violence has been part of theatre since the first dramas of Ancient Greece. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example Oedipus puts out his own eyes. These violent acts did not take place in front

of the audience, they were described by a chorus. Shakespeare chose violent subjects such as war, suicide, rape and murder in his tragedies. For example, *Titus Andronicus* was staged in 1589 and it depicted murder, rape, cutting off organs and cannibalism.

Shakespeare's contemporaries like Christopher Marlowe, John Webster and Thomas Kyd preferred to display violence on the stage.

In more modern times, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) marked a change in the approach of British theatre to violence –

*The type of violence was dominantly emotional. Over the years, the outcry of violence from humans has become more and more brutally violent. Towards the end of the second millennium in the 1990s, the British theatre plays were dominated with sexual, economic, self-directed, economic, and emotional violence. (Ajda, 2020, p.104).*

In some ways, *The Hot Pot* is a violent play, it is emotionally violent and in places, it features physical aggression. My intention is this aggression is not used theatrically for sensational effect, it is the outcome of the anger which underlies John's character precarious situation.

### **POST COLONIAL THEATRE**

Whilst I did not set out to write a play which fitted within the academic definition of post-colonial literature, reading Gayatri Chhatrikavorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and Edward Said's *Orientalism* with his essay *Reflections on Exile* demonstrated that the ideas I developed in *The Hotpot* related to post-colonial literary discussion.

In particular Said's analysis of how those of Asian or Oriental ethnicity became depicted as other, and Spivak's depiction of how peoples of the former colonies and especially women within them might be seen as subalterns thematically link to characterisations within *The Hotpot*.

John's self-perception and his expectation that Celia must follow his will echo Said and Spivak's concerns.

Generally speaking the term post colonialism is used to describe the literary and social efforts to regain and reevaluate the history of peoples subordinated under imperialism. The term decolonization gained currency during the 1960s as states which were once under imperial rule entered a transition to national self-determination and independence. This processes encouraged the people who had struggled under political social economic and cultural oppression to regain their lost identity.

European imperialism began in the 16th century in the Americas, the West Indies Australasia and Southeast Asia. By the 19th and early 20th centuries it encompassed much of the land mass of the globe.

Postcolonial literature addresses the issues and consequences of decolonization relating to the political and cultural independence with themes such as racialism and the aftermath of colonialism at the forefront.

The role of literature in this movement was challenged by what postcolonial critic Edward Said (1935-2003) refers to as *cultural imperialism*. Migrant literature and postcolonial literature overlap but the extent to which postcolonial theory relates to migration literature in non-colonial settings is a matter of current debate.

Said was a Palestinian in exile from his homeland living in the USA, his books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) are the examination of the influence of colonialism on intellectual life colonized countries. In *Orientalism* Said examines how writers in Britain and France wrote about countries across Asia and North Africa using stereotypes to present what they call the Orient negatively. These stereotypes attempted to give a rationale to British and French colonisation, this allowed them to prevent the peoples of the Middle East and Asia from expressing themselves as distinct peoples and cultures.

Gayatri Chhatravorty Spivak (b.1942), moved from Kolkata India to America to study. She uses the theory of deconstruction to critique and analyse the mistreatment of postcolonial countries by dominant nations. Deconstruction theory characteristically opposes strict definitions. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* an essay included in the collection *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988) Spivak makes a direct connection between feminism and postcolonial studies. The concept of the subaltern is fundamental to Spivak's essay, referring to those who are subordinated in society, whether through class gender race or sexuality. In her *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak identifies non-Western women as a subordinated group and she argues that when academia is centred on the Western world this excludes those beyond these boundaries. Meanwhile historians in the West control the narrative of what people understand about the West. Spivak comments:

*Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject. The theory of pluralized "subject-effects" gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge. Although the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy, and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has "no geo-political determinations." The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject.* (Morris, 2010, p.304).

The example Spivak provides in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is of a subaltern group of the 'Sati' women in India. Some Hindu groups still practice sati, in it a widowed woman allows herself to be burned alive during her husband's cremation and throughout Hindu belief this was classified as an admirable thing for the widowed women to do. During colonial rule, the British banned the practice of sati. Although Spivak does not defend the

Sati, she raises the fact when the British banned it this encouraged the stereotype that Indian women had to be saved from Indian men by white colonisers:

*The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men.* (Morris p. 347, 2010).

Spivak argues subalterns cannot speak for themselves when they lack access to education and other resources needed to communicate effectively and thus their voices are never heard.

In the realm of practical theatre, postcolonial playwrights have produced works opposing the colonization of their native cultures, sometimes highlighting elements of their culture destroyed by the colonizers. For some postcolonial playwrights the pursuit for their own racial and cultural identity replaces the need for nationhood. Whether theatre is the best place to examine such questions is discussed in Christopher Balme's book *The Theatrical Public Sphere*. Balme suggests that theatre as an art form and institution can indeed participate in the arena of public debate on topical issues ignored by other media. Balme argues that theatre can become an active participant in public political struggles. Balme does not focus on the aesthetic work of theatre performances he is preoccupied with the examination of how theatre relates to wider society.

This suggests that plays such as *The Hotpot* can have an impact beyond their artistic ambitions, this is promising although I believe those artistic ambitions should not be forgotten in the pursuit to make a political point. Finding a balance between the two was crucial in the development of *The Hotpot*.

Balme's *Decolonizing the Stage* (1999) focuses on the syncretic aspects of plays from post-colonial cultures including Maori, Australian Aboriginal, Native American, South African and Indian societies. Balme's argument is however somewhat diminished by the fact that he is not from any of these societies. The same observation can be made about some other otherwise useful critical writing on post-colonial literatures. Brian Crow and

Chris Banfield's book *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theatre* gave me an introductory understanding of the process of cultural oppression arising out of the colonial period and encouraged my reading of Said's work. However, they mostly focus on postcolonial theatre in Africa, India, the Caribbean and Aboriginal theatre in Australia (with some chapters on black theatre in America) yet neither is from these parts of the world which is again the West speaking about the Oriental.

In *The Hotpot* John's parents are a by-product of British colonialism, having come to the U.K. from the West Indies. By the time, John is born people like Said and Spivak had started to re-evaluate how the colonial past is too often seen through Western eyes. Said sees separation from a homeland as an unfortunate state of affairs and he believes the state of detachment gives exiles a unique vision. In *Reflections on Exile* Said contrasts the role of exile in the twentieth century with that of exiles from centuries before:

*But the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.* (Said, 2012, p. 210).

Spivak also spoke about the same issue in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak? The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with "woman" as a pious item.* (Morris, 2010 p. 365).

In the light of these views, I re-evaluated my play and now see it as closer to the postcolonial debate than I had originally imagined. Everything that happens to my central character John is based on his paranoia about his identity in the world he does not understand. The more I read about post colonialism from Spivak and Said's work the more I understood about John's predicament results in perceived rejection leading to a steady loss of confidence.

Spivak believes it is the responsibility of people in positions of power and privilege to give a voice to the marginalized. The absence of this responsibility real or perceived is closely linked to how John ends up marginalized in the play.

Bit by bit John begins to suspect people in high places are stopping him from succeeding, even though he does not have proof about his suspicions he continues to believe as long as his work is rejected John knows that his parents and ancestors were the victims of colonialism. This means John will never have trust in people who run large corporations and industries within the United Kingdom. The more pressure John puts on himself to fit in around the people in the play the less assurance he has in himself.

Spivak believes Western perspectives of post-colonial studies serves to silence the third world, given that post-colonial studies are a feature of the West's recent intellectual tradition. As Spivak puts it:

*Their project is to rethink Indian colonial historiography from the perspective of the discontinuous chain of peasant insurgencies during the colonial occupation. This is indeed the problem of "the permission to narrate" discussed by Said. As Ranajit Guha argues, The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism . . . shar[ing] the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness—nationalism— which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writing—to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. (Morris, 2010, p. 324).*

Said influenced me most on the question of how John sees himself as an exile. Even though he is not an exile in a physical sense whenever John is around his family especially his mother the lack of direct communication heightens John's form of exile from his family. As Said puts it:

*Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.* (Said, 2012, p. 210).

John is alienated from his family when he wants his mother to listen to his problems and understand his predicament when his work is rejected instead of listening to John's problems his mother starts to talk about the problems John's father faces every single day.

This fits in with Said's belief,

*We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement.* (Said, 2012, p 210).

In particular this passage from *Reflections on Exile* expresses the torment John feels when he is worried about the loss of his identity at home,

*These and so many other exiled poets and writers lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people. From them, it is apparent that, to concentrate on exile as a contemporary political punishment, you must therefore map territories of experience beyond those mapped by the literature of exile itself.* (Said, 2012, p 212).

Ultimately, the more John focuses on his spiritual exile the more he starts to distrust other characters around him especially when he meets them at the hotpot party. This section from



Said helped me understand how much the character John suffers on the inside and every single time John wants to express himself to another character it comes out in the wrong way.

*The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.* (Said, 2012, p. 210).

By the end of the play, John is separated from the woman he loves and by the time, he returns to his parents it is too late. This passage from Said provides scope for the inner torment John feels even though he is born in the United Kingdom he feels like an outsider rejected by everyone around him,

*We come to nationalism and its essential association with exile. Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages.* (Said, 2012, p. 212).

John's exile of not belonging at home or outside it is reflected in what Said says about people being neither insider nor outsiders:

*...just beyond the frontier between "us" and the "outsiders" is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons.* (Said, 2012, p. 212).

This passage from Said's *Reflections on Exile* matches the state of John by the end of the play –

*Because exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people.* (Said, 2012, p. 214).

All the conversations I had before I started the play with migrants who came to the United Kingdom in different periods of time proved to me from their points of view they found it extremely difficult to communicate in the English language.

By reading Spivak and Said's work on post-colonialism with its effects still apparent including in the interviews I did before I started the play, I have come to accept that some aspects of my play exist within the context of the post-colonial literary discussion.

Landry and MacLean argue the work of the Subaltern Studies group offers a theory of change. I wrote my play in the hope it might throw a new light on how migrants might be portrayed in the theatre.

Landry and MacLean's breakdown on Spivak's essay is taken from the following passage is their conclusion on what Spivak wanted to achieve through her essay,

*The insertion of India into colonialism is generally defined as a change from semi-feudalism into capitalist subjection. Such a definition theorizes the change within the great narrative of the modes of production and, by uneasy implication, within the narrative of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Concurrently, this change is seen as the inauguration of politicization for the colonized.* (Landry MacLean p.205, 1996).

This what my play hopes to achieve noting that the colonized includes those who have migrated from places previously subjected to colonisation.

### **Humour in The Hot Pot**

The Hot Pot is a tragedy as with most tragic plays it has moments which an audience might well find awkwardly or absurdly comic, like the early exchanges between John Abu and Steve about Tolkein for example. I am aware other writers have used comedy successfully in addressing migrant or racial issues but I have rarely found this appealing.

Paul Beatty's novel *The Sellout* (2015) humorously explores the enveloping historical effects of racism on people of colour, its context is very American and I found little resonance between it and my own thoughts about immigrants within Britain. The same might be said of the novel *The Trees* (2021) by American author Percival Everett, set in the small town of Money Mississippi. The novel follows a series of murders that seem to have identical patterns. Everett's humour draws on the influence of Mark Twain and it requires an appreciation of its particularly American sense of what is funny.

Closer to home the comedian Richard Bean (born 1956) had his playwriting breakthrough in 2009 with *England People Very Nice*, this was directed at the National Theatre by Nicholas Hytner. It tells of four waves of immigrants: French Huguenot Irish Jewish and Bangladeshi.

*England People Very Nice* features a play-within-a play. The holding form involves a group of multi-racial asylum seekers waiting to hear who will be granted work permits and who will be sent back to their countries of origin. To pass the time the characters decide to put on a play of their own about their experiences of immigration, assimilation and multiculturalism over the past four hundred years. All the characters end up in the East End of London. They inter-marry and they attempt to incorporate themselves into the British way of life whilst trying to uphold their ethnic identities even though they deal with racialism and violence.

To me Bean's approach of the subject of immigration takes a comic-book approach, as seen in the following example from the play *England People Very Nice*.

ENGLAND PEOPLE VERY NICE: Act Four

Summer 1941. The Blitz. An air raid siren. A Bethnal Green street, the Britannia Pub as was. The street of Victorian workers' houses is now overlooked by the Rothschild Buildings. All buildings are blacked out for night and war. In a doorway, Mohammad Sona Rasul aka

*MISTER MUSHI*, beside him a large cooking pot full of clothes, etc. *MUSHI* is the boy lover.

Two wet Bangladeshis run on chased by a policeman, they go off. Enter two *STRETCHER BEARERS*. They discover a body in a doorway. They are joined by a *POLICE CONSTABLE*.

CONSTABLE: Indian Lascar. Merchant navy. Stoker? Donkey wallah? Who knows?

STRETCHER BEARER 1: Who cares? He's dead.

CONSTABLE: He'll have jumped ship at Tilbury. They swim the dock.

STRETCHER BEARER 2: Criminal then, ain't he.

CONSTABLE: As a citizen of British India, he has the legal right to come ashore. So come on lads, show some compassion, he's a human soul, and some mother's son.

STRETCHER BEARER 1: You alright officer?

CONSTABLE: I've been on a course.

*MUSHI* is loaded onto the stretcher. He sneezes/coughs.

STRETCHER 2: That's all we need.

STRETCHER 1: Oi Mush! Hop it!

*MUSHI* is tipped off the stretcher and the bearers move off to find a corpse.

MUSHI: (Giving *CONSTABLE* a bit of cardboard.) Uncle friend! Big man barriwallah!

CONSTABLE: (Reading.) This address is Aldgate.

MUSHI: England people very nice!

CONSTABLE: There's good and bad in all. Come on Mush! This way. (Bean, 2009, 4:73/74)

At no time does the scene open up to give any of the characters a chance to express anything but stereotypical one-line sound bites.

There are no discernible connecting themes in *England People Very Nice* to bind the origins of Chicken Tikka Massala in London to the invention of the ballpoint pen by Laszlo Biro in 1938 and the Bethnal Green tube tragedy in 1943 when 173 people were crushed to

death as they entered the station's bomb shelter. All the scenes are treated as comedy sketches in a joke-filled stage.

For me the question is whether this form of broad and sometimes confrontational jokery can be useful in lifting the lid on sensitive subjects such as racism, or whether it does little more than adding to perceptions of stereotypes.

Richard Bean said in one interview he should have the right to shock people even though he might upset them. In the same interview, Bean was asked if anyone refused to work with him:

*One Asian actor did refuse a role in England People Very Nice because "it was not respectful enough of his culture". (Lawson, 2014).*

Bean said he was amused to see the performer in the jihadist comedy film Four Lions.

Certainly, the play *England People Very Nice* did upset some people. During a talk by given by Richard Bean in 2009, Keith Kinsella a teacher at Blackfen School for Girls and Hussain Ismail a playwright walked onto the stage carrying placard protesting against what they called racist depictions of ethnic groups in the play *England People Very Nice*. Mr. Ismail said:

*Richard Bean is making it seem like all Bangladeshis are drug dealers or users, muggers and marry their cousins. (Itzkoff, 2009).*

*...It is meant to be a comedy about immigration, and it's meant to make you laugh. It doesn't. The play is trashy, and tries to mask its ugly prejudices behind claptrap, cheap humour and tired stereotypes. The Irish and the Bangladeshis come off worst. The Irish are wife beaters, alcoholics and incestuous. Bangladeshi youth are muggers, drug dealers or jihadis. (Ismail, 2009).*

*...Is this really the level of debate on immigration and multiculturalism that goes on at the National Theatre? (Ismail, 2009).*

In another interview, Bean accepted he had been nervous about the reception of his work.

*There were Islamists standing outside Whitechapel Tube handing out leaflets saying I had a dog in a play of mine called Mohammed. Rubbish! They were trying to get someone excited enough to come round to my house and blow me up or something. I suppose I might just get stabbed in the back one day at Rectory Road train station — that's where I am if you want to do it! (Cavendish, 2014).*

As a comedian, Bean argues he should have the right to express himself in any way.

*Fortunately we still live in a nation with free speech, he continues. You can say pretty much anything. (Cavendish, 2014).*

In another interview Bean talked about his reasons for writing *England People Very Nice*, Bean said he regarded the experiment of multiculturalism as a failure:

*I mean for 15 years we've had tolerance and sensitivity training in this country. What this country needs is de-sensitivity training. (Anon. Interview: Richard Bean The non-PC playwright).*

*...There are two types of multiculturalism in this country. There's the ephemeral — which is music, food, clothing; those kind of things which enriched the culture of this country. And they're lovely. But then there is the second level of multiculturalism, which personally I don't want in this country. I want this country to have a clear culture which is based on the rule of law. British law. We are all equal before the law — men, women, homosexuals. And I don't want to see little cantons set up where — and this is genuine multiculturalism — you can beat your kids or your wife if you come from a culture where corporal punishment is still allowed. Frighteningly, there are now sharia courts set up around the country. There were six guys up for beating their wives, they took the option of going up to the sharia court, which told them that it was really*

*very naughty. To me, that level of multiculturalism is not going to be acceptable.*

*(Anon. Interview: Richard Bean The non-PC playwright).*

The way I developed my play takes a very different course to Bean's sense of humour in *England People Very Nice*. The reason I focused on the often-unlikeable John I wanted the audience to understand the predicament he faces. Bean's style of over-the-top characterisation and broad comedy would not have helped. I wanted character development which included some built-in humour rather than characters who are primarily the vehicles for the writer's jokes

In the scene below, my characters talk about normal everyday things and even though I added humour to the scene, I tried to ensure I respected their individual voices:

**THE HOT POT SCENE 35:**

*The International Club Celia Abu Sieanna Steve and Zandra sit on chairs they're deep in conversation.*

**ZANDRA:**

Shall we stream a movie? You'd like that Celia, eh?

**ABU:**

Nothing like a good old tear-jerker.

**STEVE:**

Home Alone gets me every time.

**ABU:**

An oldie but a goodie.

**SIEANNA:**

Stupid of them to leave that kid...

**CELIA:**

Please tell me friends who is the one who is home alone...

**ZANDRA:**

It's a comedy about...

**STEVE:**

No...no Celia love it's the most heart breaking movie about...

**SIEANNA:**

A young boy left at home...

**STEVE:**

ALONE.

**SIEANNA:**

While his parents go away on holiday.

**CELIA:**

This is cruel why do they leave a child...

**ZANDRA:**

Enough guys, for Celia's sake let's go for something more upbeat.

**SIEANNA:**

Yeah. A musical maybe.

**ABU:**

Good idea. It's lovely to have you with us Celia. You relax.

**ZANDRA:**

Home Alone a tear-jerker? What are you made of Steve, butter? (Saleem, 2023, 35:103).

### **THE CONVERSATIONS IN RELATION TO THE PLAY**

The most useful conversations I had with various migrants took place via zoom in 2019/2020. Along with my own experiences with what I saw and heard at the hotpot party, they helped underpin the characterisations in my play.



The oldest person I spoke to travelled to the United Kingdom from Pakistan in 1960 to work, the second migrant came to study for a Masters in marketing from Hong Kong in 2000 and a third left China in the year 2010 because of family issues.

These conversations confirmed for me the enormous difference between the personal concerns of younger recent arrivals and those of early migrants. This is interesting to me because in age terms I sit somewhere between these two groups and my own perceptions are different. However, the single biggest problem the migrants in these conversations all experienced was in speaking and understanding the English language sufficiently well.

This is something which I having been brought up in England as the child of migrants, did not experience. The migrants quoted below all spoke a little English when they arrived in the United Kingdom, it was not enough to avoid putting themselves at a severe disadvantage and I have given examples of how the conversations helped create the scenes in my play. I have discussed how some of the conversations relate to the scenes in the play *The Hot Pot* and how they helped me understand the way to show the struggles of the migrant people I spoke to on zoom.

In scene 17 John questions Zandra's sexuality even though no other character asks her questions about her sexuality he makes her feel uncomfortable and then he underlines his unruly behaviour by insisting homosexuality is against human nature.

### **THE HOT POT SCENE 17:**

*Only the women are at the hotpot. John is hovering out of sight.*

**ZANDRA:**

I was looking forward to bringing Jo to the party. She was looking forward to having a well-deserved rest from crunching numbers.

**SIEANNA**

She would have been welcome, wouldn't she Celia?

**CELIA**

Very welcome, yes.

**SIEANNA**

Your man needs a leash, maybe he's got too much testosterone to spare.

*John enters he has overheard.*

**JOHN:**

Who's gonna put a leash on me? I know you said it behind my back 'cause you ain't got the balls.

**CELIA:**

John you can't talk like that. Zandra is my guest. I bring my guests to this party they are my friends because I care about them.

**JOHN:**

And she loves another woman, that's what I heard...right?

**ZANDRA:**

Yes and we're getting married. What about it?

**JOHN:**

For me, a woman can't have a wife it's not natural.

**CELIA:**

John!

**JOHN:**

What? It's a free country.

**ZANDRA:**

You want to explain to me why can't I marry a woman I'm in love with? It's legal, what's your problem?

**JOHN:**

It's against nature.

**CELIA:**

Please John don't do this...

**ZANDRA:**

Celia love why are you with this monster...

**JOHN:**

The question I wanna ask is why aren't you with her...Celia love?

**ZANDRA:**

You're a...b...

**JOHN:**

Yes? Everyone says they want freedom of speech but as soon as I open my mouth you turn on me. All religions this includes all forms of society created by man know two females cannot reproduce.

**ZANDRA:**

And all the shitty societies created by men made the fucking mess we're in now.

**ABU:**

What's wrong with you, man?

**CELIA:**

John just leave her alone.

**JOHN:**

Oh my...jeeeeeeeez you taking her side over me?

**CELIA:**

In my country we treat guests with respect.

**STEVE:**

If this woman wants to marry another woman, what's it to do with you?

**JOHN:**

This is my home I say what I like in it and like usual I'm alone, I see that now. What you're doing I mean all of you... is bullying me.

*John storms off.* (Saleem, 2023, 17:46).

Scene 17 came from the following conversation as it shows the struggles of a migrant gay man when he was beaten in a nightclub.

*I was beaten in a nightclub. Someone asked me if I was a fag. I thought I know enough English, I thought he wanted a cigarette. He punched me many times until I woke up in hospital. I was terrified of going out alone. I stayed asleep mostly. Sometimes I woke up sweating thinking I was going to be beaten again.* (Zoom conversations with Anon, P12).

In scene 10, Celia needs to explain to the guests what the hotpot means and this is when she feels more in control of herself compared to many other scenes when she cannot express herself properly in the English language.

### **THE HOT POT SCENE 10:**

*Celia and John's flat. Chinese New Year. On one side of the stage is the hotpot simmering on top of a small table. Sieanna, Zandra and Celia are gathered around it.*

**ZANDRA:**

Tell me again what's the hotpot about?

**SIEANNA:**

Yeah I was lost back there...

**CELIA:**

All of you bring ingredients.

**SIEANNA:**

Yes.

**CELIA:**

We take the raw ingredients we put them into the hot pot it is simple.

**SIEANNA:**

Didn't you say you separate them?

**CELIA:**

Yes I will put hard food first and then I put soft food later.

**ZANDRA:**

Like the potatoes and...

**CELIA:**

Yes sweet potatoes go first...

**SIEANNA:**

I brought a bottle of wine just for the ladies.

**CELIA:**

Not for me...

**SIEANNA:**

But you love pinot...

**CELIA:**

Please, not today.

Maybe soon I buy big bottle of champagne. (Saleem, 2023, 10:27).

Scene 10 originated from the following conversations since they show the person I talked with felt fearful whenever they spoke English and if they resorted to their previous Chinese way of life they felt more confident of themselves.

*I was speaking to other people; I believed I was speaking in normal English but when they kept asking me to repeat everything when I talked to them it all came out wrong. I was always scared people were going to hurt me. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P26).*

*Everything about my life in England was about embracing the Chinese life... because of how difficult it was to integrate into the way of English people, how they live. I didn't want to change myself. I didn't want to become like them because I am not them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P39).*

In scene 8, Celia proves to John he made fun out of how she spoke English early on in their relationship. At the same time, John insists the people they encountered at her workplace were making fun out of him even though he had no proof. Celia has to remind John to speak more slowly since she cannot fully understand him when he speaks too quickly and this adds extra strain on their fragile relationship.

### **THE HOT POT SCENE 8:**

*Celia and John's flat, a little later.*

**CELIA:**

Many people come into restaurant they have different skin no one laughs at them, you come with dark skin and you laugh the loudest. You say I speak funny English.

**JOHN**

That's different.

**CELIA:**

All people come to restaurant they laugh and enjoy themselves.

**JOHN:**

I keep telling you the plain facts you don't understand them. Listen Celia they were laughing at you, end of the story.

**CELIA:**

I listen and John...

**JOHN:**

I don't want you to be a slave to white jackals. Decent people come to this country like my folks. They break their backs so their kids go to school, they go to college and they go to university exactly like me.

**CELIA:**

You say you thrown out of university.

**JOHN:**

What! Are you on their side? They make sure we're kicked out for... don't you understand my ambition? One day black people are going to see great things in my books. They're going to witness a miracle and they're going to know my name. What I'm talking about is we...

**CELIA:**

I know about us, that is good John, I would like...could we please do something good together. Chinese New Year very soon we can have party, yes? I can make hotpot, yes? I invite friends from international club.

**JOHN:**

Celia love you keep talking about petty things... I'm talking to you, are you listening to me?

**CELIA:**

Please, speak more slowly.

**JOHN:**

This is important, right? I'm putting a dossier together on white corrupt corporations in this country because this shit is serious. I'll expose the twisted book publishers, the biased online stuff and let's not forget the whiter than white mainstream media. I want the world to

see the truth because I want them to know they're stopping talented black people like me from achieving great things and they're stopping my people from seeing my great words. People are desperate to see a black face writing for them...I want to do great things Celia and I can because I have to do it for the black...

**CELIA:**

Yes it's very...

**JOHN**

For the migrants, you know.

**CELIA**

Ahhhh so you have the migrant now? You have a bad head, yes.

**JOHN:**

I said migrants, not migraine.

**CELIA:**

John...

**JOHN:**

What?

**CELIA:**

Don't be angry. (Saleem, 2023, 8:23).

Scene 8 is one of the most important scenes since it was one of the few times all of the people I spoke to felt the lack of government or other official assistance for migrants especially with language contributed to the fact that they weren't able to communicate effectively with local people after they first arrived in the United Kingdom

*The biggest hurdle I had to overcome ... was I could not speak English at a high level...I did not understand when I was going to be in England...how different it was*



*going to be. No one helped me to understand what was going on. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P24).*

*The way I experienced everything for the first six months was the worse because I kept calling my parents on the phone... I wanted to return straightaway because I don't have confidence in speaking English. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P28).*

*It was impossible for me to speak to English people because I did not understand them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P54).*

In scene 19, the tide begins to turn against John because this is the first time Celia openly defies him he realises how precocious his relationship is with her. Later on in the play The Hot Pot, their relationship ends because they have reached the end of their tenuous relationship.

### **THE HOT POT SCENE 19:**

*The flat. Formed in a circle of unity around the hot pot Celia holds hands with Abu who holds hands with Sieanna who holds hands with Steve and he holds hands with Zandra.*

**SIEANNA:**

This is great, it should always be like this now we can eat from the hot pot and there'll be no trouble...

*John enters.*

**JOHN:**

WOWEEE look at this...no room for me? O.K. I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to wind anybody up. If you want to marry a woman that's your choice, I'm not saying I'm going to change my opinion. I want everybody to know I'm not going to hurt anybody.

*No-one answers.*

**JOHN:**

O.K. Celia?

*No-one answers.*

**JOHN:**

Celia's right, this is supposed to be a special occasion so we're going to enjoy ourselves.

**SIEANA:**

Celia and Zandra are upset John...it might be best you give us some time.

**JOHN:**

Listen to me I live here and it's my place.

**CELIA:**

No I pay the rent so this is my place.

**ZANDRA:**

You go for it girl.

**JOHN:**

Hey you keep out of it.

**SIEANNA:**

Why are you so...rude?

**JOHN:**

What... me? I'm a sweetheart. Just 'cause I'm always telling the truth, I'm the villain?

**STEVE:**

This is like...it's like the rabbit's mad hat party.

**JOHN:**

At least get it right, it's the mad hatter's tea party.

**CELIA:**

John...you go and check your messages, O.K.? You said the publisher was going to contact you today with special news.

**JOHN:**

Okay... okay I understand. Yes one may smile and smile and be a villain, I know when I'm not wanted. I guess I'll check my messages.

**CELIA:**

Thank you John.

*John leaves.*

**ZANDRA:**

You shouldn't put up with this crap Celia.

**SIEANNA:**

It's your flat, you should tell him to leave. I wouldn't want to be alone with that temper.

**CELIA:**

I cannot. Not now he's not always this way. When we first met, he was...sweet he helped me...he was funny and he's very kind. (Saleem, 2023, 19:55).

Scene 19 is one of the most critical scenes it originated from the conversation I had with one person I spoke to when he realized once he arrived in the United Kingdom he had not thought out the process of migration in depth beforehand. I began to construct this scene by showing Celia's growing confidence in her understanding of how to speak differently to John when she is with her migrant friends and ultimately this scene solidifies how much Celia has changed from her initial encounter with John now she has bonded with the other characters eventually she will leave him.

*I was the most scared about talking to Scottish people because I heard their words, their accents were too strong. I was hiding in the flat because I did not know how to talk to anyone who did not speak Chinese. No one was helping me about my problems. The amount of money I had would last me about two weeks so what I did is talk to somebody in one of the local Chinese restaurants if I could have a temporary job. They*

*were the ones that made me have good health about everything because we could speak normally to each other I didn't need to hide anything about myself when I was with them. (Zoom conversations with Anon, P5/6).*

## **CONCLUSION**

I understood how my central character John ultimately ends up isolated from all of the other characters because he believes he's persecuted by powerful nefarious forces he cannot see and he feels extreme pressure of not succeeding in becoming a published writer.

Even though it is not in the play *The Hot Pot* every time John is rejected it solidifies the following idea in his head, I am deliberately persecuted by hidden menacing people who want to ruin me.

At all, times throughout my play *The Hot Pot* I wanted to maintain the central character's explicit belief he is persecuted by unseen forces and since he is seen as the son of migrants, he is projected as a minority. It does not matter if he is with his family he's with his girlfriend he is with other people who are strangers to him even though they are all migrants or the offspring of migrants like him at all times John feels the heightened emotions of extreme oppression from forces that he cannot see and comprehend.

Everything I took from the highly influential playwrights Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, Arthur Miller, Henrik Ibsen, Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett whether they influenced my work directly or indirectly I have highlighted how their distinct styles have helped facilitate my distinctive voice within my unique play.

I had to detach myself from questioning my play –

Is it a realistic play?

Is it an absurdist play?

I believe my play *The Hot Pot* sits uncomfortably somewhere in the middle of realistic absurdist styles, my work has not been produced in the theatre. I have not directed my work

this is the reason I struggled with some of the theories I came across from the playwrights I researched thoroughly.

Even though some of the other playwrights are not included in this section I can say how they produced their work does not make sense to me completely. This is the reason one day if I had a chance to have my work produced in a theatre I would want to direct my work to understand the actual mechanics of directing a theatre play.

The way the six playwrights Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, Arthur Miller, Henrik Ibsen, Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett projected everything in their theatre plays was directed by them. I am an unproven theatre playwright whose play has not been produced on the stage and this is the reason this experience was one of the greatest struggles in my life.

One day I hope *The Hot Pot* will be projected to the audience in a non-traditional theatre manner, I wanted to include realist ideas in my work with a healthy dose of absurdist angst thrown in for good measure.

I knew it is going to be extremely difficult to show a realistic balance within all the characters in my absurdist play *The Hot Pot*, I came to acknowledge in certain situations there's a need for absurdist theatre and at the same time there's a great need of realist theatre. This is why my central character's ubiquitous violent behaviour is tightly wrapped in a realistically absurdist subjective point of view his volatile unpredictable qualities overshadows all the other characters in the play *The Hot Pot*.

In the beginning, before I started the PhD I wanted to create a theatre play which was different compared to any theatre play I came across in my life. The experience I gained completing a Masters in scriptwriting gave me the confidence and understanding of what I wanted to achieve before I began constructing my idea for the PhD.

Above everything, it was my love of dialogue that drew me to writing theatre plays. At the same time as the process began, taking shape when I constructed my theatre play *The Hot Pot*

I began understanding dialogue by itself means nothing without the structure of a well thought out script in order to encapsulate it within the theatre.

Little by little the more time I spent looking at how little research I did with the people I spoke to who came from migrant backgrounds I realized no matter what I want to do with their voices it is not enough research.

In the beginning of the process, I was hampered by the Coronavirus situation and then I was ill I had to take one year out. During that time, I had a chance to reflect on what I created on the first year of the PhD. This was about the theatre play *The Hot Pot* I knew as soon as I began writing the theatre play the most dominant character was John.

At the same time, I wanted to include as many unique migrant voices in the play which I set out to do in the beginning as possible. At that time as soon as I started the second year I realized without having access to more people from different migrant backgrounds in the United Kingdom I would have to fall back on all the research I did on the first year.

This research continued into the second year and by the third year, I knew John is the most dominant character in my play *The Hot Pot*. Many times I had the opportunity to speak with my supervisor about how dominant John was in my play *The Hot Pot*, he suggested I should try incorporating more scenes with the rest of the characters. I explained to him in the simplest terms possible I've never directed a theatre play that means no matter what I'm trying to create on paper I do not fully understand the implications of what it will become one day if it is produced in a theatre.

Every single time I had a chance to speak with my supervisor we discussed my theatre play *The Hot Pot* I started understanding my precarious situation is identical to somebody thrown in at the deep end of a swimming pool when they don't know how to swim.

A few times throughout my thesis I've included the fact I've never directed a theatre play, that means I don't understand how the mechanics of how a theatre play takes shape when it is

put on in a theatre. All I've managed to do is look at the theoretical aspects of creating a theatre play this was exactly the same way I learned how to create theatre plays on the Masters before I began the PhD.

As soon as I was on the third year of the PhD, I understood if I want to incorporate the other characters within the play on the same level as the most dominant character John I would have to begin from scratch. At that time, this was impossible time was against me and then I looked at all the research I did with the conversations I had with migrants from the United Kingdom.

I knew whoever comes across the play *The Hot Pot* if it is produced in a theatre they will be overwhelmed by John, from every single point of view he dominates every single one of the other characters.

Whenever they come across John he is the one who starts to take over the scene, I felt very uncomfortable about this fact as soon as I began reading the entire play *The Hot Pot*. What I wanted to do was change many scenes to incorporate all the other characters so they had the same opportunity to express themselves like John. At the same time, I knew if I begin tampering with the play at this stage, I will have to begin all over again.

I understand these are my shortcomings, no matter how many times I emphasise I have not directed a play this fact cannot change and there is nothing I can do about it now. As soon as I finished *The Hot Pot* play I saw the play in a different way, the perspective my supervisor gave me was invaluable to understand if I knew what I understood by the time I finished my play then I would have created the play *The Hot Pot* in a different way.

This is the way life works for me it does not matter if I'm doing the PhD or not things make sense in a different way by looking at them from a different point of view. This process takes time within the heat of the moment the way I created the play pressurized moments arose for me to make John the most powerful character. In the beginning, I wanted John to be

parallel to his girlfriend. I thought the way I created his girlfriend's character she should be just as dominant as John.

The problem was I deliberately made Celia's character the opposite of John, I did not want to have the same characters speaking in the same voice. This is what I learned while I was constructing the play on the PhD, every single character should have their own unique voice that means if John and his girlfriend seem to be the same on the surface this cancels both characters out.

I return to the fact feeling love towards dialogue is an emotional reaction, as soon as I had a chance to think in an intellectual way I understood the fact is if I could go back to change parts of the play I would make sure every single character expressed themselves in a different way whenever they are around John.

I believe the way John behaved with his parents is probably the most realistically heightened scenes within the play. I don't feel this is a weakness to show how absurdly John behaves in front of his parents, at the same time the limitations I had with the guests at The Hot Pot was the weakest point in my experience of creating the play The Hot Pot.

I struggled with the guests at The Hot Pot I needed additional research from interviewing more people and speaking to a variety of people with migrant backgrounds within the United Kingdom because this would have given more scope.

During some moments, I knew when I was writing the characters who became the guests at The Hot Pot the conflict that arises between them and John is over-the-top. I needed a chance to incorporate other scenes about the way John behaves towards strangers, at that time me and my supervisor talked about how to think of John's personal life with his girlfriend. The way John is rejected by publishers helped me construct more layers to him, this was to show how aggressively he behaves towards nearly all the characters in the play.



At the same time, I knew no matter how I express the character of John he will come across as a domineering man who forces his opinions on everybody around him, this was never my intention. In the beginning it was the opposite I wanted to show how one individual who starts believing they are the minority starts to feel alienated and then they might lash out at anybody around them.

As soon as John starts believing in the play *The Hot Pot* he does not know who his father is and he is suspicious his mother was impregnated by somebody else he has not met that triggered further instability within an already slightly unhinged John.

How I wanted to show the character of John was in this way, it is not just about him classified as a minority within the United Kingdom because this is true. I wanted to show within the play *The Hot Pot* John has become a minority because every single one of the characters he comes across even if he is silent it is like they don't want him to be around them. I believe this is the most successful aspect of my play *The Hot Pot*, whenever I had the chance to express moments within the play John is around the characters who argue with him and then they want him to disappear it backs up my theory of John feeling isolated in his life.

That means in every single way even though John is the most dominant character in the play *The Hot Pot* paradoxically he is the minority in the play, every single character at some point wants John to stop talking and behaving aggressively towards them. This was one way to express how unique John's character ended up, by the end of the play as soon as his girlfriend leaves him John is left in the dark all by himself. At this point, this is the ultimate tragedy within the flawed character of John he wants to get on with everybody around him he wants to be liked and he wants to be a successful writer.

As long as John cannot achieve the burning desires within him he always feel isolated and alienated, this means in every single sense of the word John is the minority character in the play.

No matter what else I thought I was going to construct in the play I believe in the future if I had a chance to direct *The Hot Pot* by then I would have learnt more skills. This is about possibly changing parts of the play in the future, I believe going on the journey of the PhD has made me realize my limitations are as somebody who has not directed a theatre play. That means no matter how much I loved dialogue in the past it is not enough to tackle an immense project like creating a realistic theatre play within the boundaries the PhD when it incorporates the university's strict guidelines.

No matter who it is whenever they have a chance to look at things from a different perspective if they have a chance to spend time looking at something they created in their lives most likely they start seeing the same thing in a different way. This is exactly what has happened to me it is the process of completing the theatre play which gave me the most satisfaction in life. At the same time, I knew in the future if I was to think of constructing another theatre play this time I would need to spend my time on different ways of expressing myself.

Especially about the disparity between characters within the play *The Hot Pot*, it was the most obvious aspect of the major flaws within the play. At the same time, I believe the strongest parts of the play evolve around John. Even though the audience might not like John and they might come to despise him this proves my idea of John carrying something within him which is unexplainable in dialogue.

It is something similar to a menacing dark looming cloud turning up when most people want to see a perfect blue sky with dazzling bright sunshine, this is the way I started seeing what John was by the end of *The Hot Pot*. John believes he is persecuted by forces he cannot see from a young age, every single time he is rejected by humans he lashes out at them. At the same time as soon as his father drops the bombshell he is not his biological father this triggers new levels of loathing within the volatile personality of John.

I hope in the future if anybody was to direct the play *The Hot Pot* apart from me they will understand the limitations of me as a novice theatre writer who has not directed a theatre play.

Anyone can say I know the winning numbers of a lottery after the lottery is drawn, for them to say for definite what the numbers are before the lottery takes place is impossible unless they have cheated.

The same thing happened to me, what I had in my head before I began writing the play turned out to be different to the moment I finished the play. This proved I did not have the winning formula to create a theatre play I imagined since I did not cheat I suffered one of the most gruelling experiences in my life.

My play *The Hot Pot* explores how what one man sees as racially-based repression by Britain's cultural institutions leads to a sense of personal isolation. This in turn leads to an obsession which destroys his relationships and it proves extremely difficult to break.

By examining the story of my central character John and the ethnically diverse migrant community in which he lives, I hoped to illustrate to a wider audience the complexities of the migrant experience in the United Kingdom today. This includes recent migrants and those who are British-born children of migrants.

John believes he is persecuted by powerful nefarious forces which he cannot see. He feels the pressure of not succeeding as a published writer and each rejection solidifies the following idea in his head I am deliberately persecuted by hidden menacing people who want to ruin me.

In compiling this essay to accompany *The Hot Pot* I considered the influences of figures in the theatre whose works resounded in one way or another as I was writing, among them was Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, Arthur Miller, Henrik Ibsen, Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett. I reflected on how their distinct styles helped facilitate my own distinctive voice.

The central question which emerged was:

Is it a realistic play?

Is it an absurdist play?

In the event, I settled on a realisation *The Hot Pot* sits somewhere in the middle of the realistic/absurdist divide. I came to acknowledge in certain situations there's a need for absurdist techniques. At the same time, I want people to find a truth in what I created since it was based on realistic observation.

My interest in the value of non-realism within a play which is by its nature an observational social commentary was sparked by the book *Contemporary British Drama* by David Lane. Lane goes into great detail about the recent success of Asian and Black theatre writers but he feels too much emphasis is put on realism:

*The inclusion of a chapter exploring the work of British Black and Asian writers is an act of conscious separation, and one that offers problematic areas for discussion.*

(Lane, 2010, p.108).

David Lane continues:

*Alia Bano, writer of *Shades* (2009) – one of the first new plays in British theatre to feature the Muslim community outside the world of terrorism and religious fundamentalism – recalls being 'pissed off' with the Royal Court for the title of 'Unheard Voices', a project for young Muslim writers designed to integrate their work into the mainstream. Her response was that 'I felt like there was a whole part of Britain that hadn't integrated with me'. (Lane, 2010, p.126).*

One problem Lane says is white audiences and theatres want ethnic plays to conform to white perceptions of what non-white communities are like and he argues social issues might be better addressed by moving away from the constraints of naturalism.

Lane describes how one social commentary play in the 1990s shifted from traditional forms of predictable realism in British theatre,

*It has been 15 years since ...the Royal Court Theatre in London premiered a new play by an unknown 23-year-old writer called Sarah Kane. The play told the story of a troubled relationship between an abusive older male journalist, Ian, and a naïve young woman, Cate, sharing a hotel room in Leeds whilst the former collated a news story. He was racist, angry and sexually aggressive; she was outwardly timid but showed a willingness to give as good as she got. So far, so realism. At the end of the second scene a soldier burst in, demanded to see Ian's passport and claimed the town as occupied, shortly before a bomb ripped through the entire room and catapulted the play and its characters into an expressionistic depiction of the brutality of war and the worst excesses of human cruelty. "Blasted" with its now infamous scenes of cannibalism, rape and violence – moments embedded in the play's dramaturgy, but causing total outrage – heralded a period of new theatre writing with a distinct flavour.* (Lane, 2010, p.24).

David Lane summarises:

*Even though theatres are beginning to stage a greater number of new plays, British drama still appears to be dominated by the theatrical language of realism.* (Lane, 2010, p.126).

In line with this thought, I wanted to create something different from most theatre plays I had come across recently which were trying to portray so-called realist ideas.

Therefore, non-realism influenced by absurdist ideas played its part in the overall construction of *The Hot Pot*. The problem was my love of dialogue drew me to write for the theatre, the challenge was to blend valid characterisation and speech with a style which incorporated heightened theatrical imaginings.

I knew from the start the dominant character was John, my supervisor advised me to combine my original monologues by John with scenes that gave equal urgency to the other characters and here I drew on the conversations I had during my research with people from different migrant backgrounds in the U.K.

My own background as a writer has not given me experience of the practicalities of theatre production (though an enthusiastic and regular audience member I had never directed a play) so for structural considerations I relied heavily on the influential figures cited above and my supervisor. Following their guidance I now have a mental picture of how *The Hot Pot* might be brought to life on stage and I am excited at the thought it is worthy of production.

At the start of my PhD, I wanted to create a theatre play which challenged what I had seen in previous depictions of the multicultural mix which makes up modern Britain. Hence, the title is *The Hot Pot* and by combining absurdist elements and situating them on a bedrock of observed experiential naturalism I think perhaps I have achieved what I set out to do initially. I hope any future production of the play will add positively to the national debate on how best to show migrants of all backgrounds in the United Kingdom on stage in the theatre.

## **APPENDICES**

### **ANONYMOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH MIGRANTS**

The most useful conversations I had with various migrants took place via zoom in 2019/2020. Along with my experiences with what I saw and heard at the hotpot party, they helped to underpin the characterisations in my play.

The oldest person I spoke to travelled to the United Kingdom from Pakistan in 1960 to work, the second migrant came to study for a Masters in marketing in 2000 and a third left China in the year 2010 because of family issues.

SS

If I could ask you the following question, could you tell me why you became interested in migrating from China to the UK in the year 2003?

M

What happened is something was going on in my private life which I never told anybody before, one day I had to tell my family about who I was but at that time it seemed like the people around me were not opening up about their sexuality and other issues. Because my parents come from China, they have strict rules about things we could do and things we could not do. When I was growing up, I knew I was interested in being with men but at that time, I thought it was something that wasn't going to last for a long period of time.

SS

Did you tell your parents about your preferred choice of partners?

M

One day I ended up having a boyfriend I knew I could never tell anybody because of how people are in China, when my family comes from China including my relatives and my grandparents they would never accept my behaviour so I hid everything from them. At that time on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I decided to gather my parents with some relatives in the apartment

we all shared, it was one of the most difficult times in life because I didn't know how to tell them about my sexuality. I was fearful once I told them about my private life they would not want me to be near me.

SS

Could you tell me what happened next?

M

When I'm doing this interview it is not easy for me to open up about some things in my private life, I remember almost everything that took place that day what happened is my father kept on asking me the same question. If anything is wrong or if there's anything I need to talk about I could not answer him because during that birthday celebration I broke down. I could not speak to them, it took me a long time to open up to my father because I knew if I told my mother the truth she would not listen to me. She would be the one that would be crying becoming hysterical. When I told my father the truth about having a boyfriend, he didn't understand me because he could not stop laughing.

SS

Why was your father laughing?

M

He thought I was talking about, it's like he thought I had a friend as a boy who was close to me. He said there's nothing wrong with that because when he was growing up he had many friends that were boys. Because in China it wasn't allowed to have girlfriends or to walk about with another female openly to say this is my girlfriend he believed I was talking about something else.

SS

Did you try again to make him understand you?



M

I tried my best to explain to him at that time but it became impossible because he kept on talking about other things.

SS

What did he talk about?

M

He wanted to know what I was going to do in the future, he wanted to know what type of life I want to live after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Because in China they see this time period as being important for human beings when they go from being a child to becoming an adult what I tried telling him about my sexuality it all came out wrong.

SS

What happened next?

M

This is when I decided I needed to leave my family because I was in a serious relationship with another man who hid everything about his sexuality from his parents. We both decided we needed to come to the United Kingdom to be away from our families and if anyone in China found out I was gay then I would be in serious trouble with the law.

SS

Once you decided to leave the UK what were you going to do once you came to the United Kingdom?

M

Me and my boyfriend at that time discussed this for a few months. We had to look on the internet about information like what would be doing in the United Kingdom I had no academic qualifications but he had a qualification that was a degree in engineering. He told me if we moved to Scotland he applied for a job that he had been accepted, he did an online

process of interviews and they wanted to meet him to give him a trial period of work. He said he was very confident he would get the job once we went to Scotland together.

SS

What did you decide to do?

M

I agreed everything with him but when the time came what happened is I told my parents I was going to England for a holiday for a few months with another friend. They were the ones who believed everything I told them even though I had been lying about lots of things including my sexuality I decided to tell them a few more lies because I wasn't ready to tell them about my private life. When we were at the airport, my boyfriend changed a little bit towards me.

SS

In what way did he change?

M

He didn't open up and he didn't talk the way he normally did. I did not want to leave my parents and when I was crying I ran from them. Once we arrived in Scotland, we went to live in a hotel for a few days where he told me he knew some people in Scotland where we were going to move. But while we were in the hotel everything changed because he packed his things and left me.

SS

If you were living in Scotland without a job and without having access to anybody else that you knew what happened next?

M

What I did is contact my boyfriend through emails also by phone I kept on calling him but he did not respond. I contacted some of my friends online that live in Hong Kong to ask them

what I should do, they were the ones that told me I should look for a temporary job to find a way to support myself for the short time. They said I should return to China to speak to my parents about the issues that were bothering me.

SS

Did you contact your parents?

M

I lied to them because I can't tell them everything about my sexuality because it's going to be impossible. The way they were brought up in China it was so strict that means anything about homosexuality is not allowed, it is something that is beyond trouble for my family and friends. They don't understand anything about sexuality and they don't want to believe human beings can be homosexual no matter it is a man or woman.

SS

Could you tell me what you did next when you were in Scotland by yourself?

M

I was the most scared about talking to Scottish people because I could hear their words when their accents were too strong. I was hiding in the flat because I did not know how to talk to anyone who was not speaking Chinese, no one was helping me about my problems. The amount of money I had would last me about two weeks so what I did is talk to somebody in one of the local Chinese restaurants if I could have a temporary job. I wasn't there to work this individual told me they needed somebody to wash the dishes and other things in the back of the restaurant. There was no problem for me to work for a short period of time and if I could do the job to a good standard then this person told me they could give me a permanent job. It wasn't going to be full-time where I would have enough money to survive, what I did is go to a local place where I found out I could get accommodation to be rented with some other people that also came from Hong Kong. Once I settled in the new place to live with

these people from Hong Kong I felt healthier because I didn't sleep for about three days and nights before. All I kept on thinking about is what happened to my boyfriend and how can I tell my parents the truth about my private life. There were so many things I kept on thinking about but once I started doing the job in the restaurant everything changed. When I was with other people who came from Hong Kong or China they were the ones that made me have good health about everything because we could speak normally to each other I didn't need to hide anything about myself when I was with them.

SS

What happened when you were working in this temporary job in the restaurant?

M

The manager spoke to me, he offered me a job when one of the waiters was missing to take their place. In the beginning I didn't want to do this type of job because I had no experience but washing things in the back was simple because I had done that already in China and it doesn't take long to learn something that easy. But if I had to learn how to be a waiter that was something else but because I only had a small amount of cash from washing things in the back and because I was working illegally I was paying no tax I knew I needed to accept this job as a waiter. Once I was trained as a waiter it took me a short period of time to learn how to deal with the job and how to deal with the customers.

SS

What happened to you during this period of time when you are away from China? Did you contact your family in China?

M

I kept in contact with them by email and by calling them on the phone but whenever they talked to me about what I was doing in England at that time you have to understand I did not tell them the truth that I was living in Scotland. I told them I was living in London and I told

them so many lives about my private life because I could not tell them the truth about everything that was going on. Lying was something I learned from a very young age that I needed to deceive people about my sexuality in China.

SS

Why did you have to lie about your sexuality in China?

M

I can never tell anybody about these things in China because I knew if I was to tell people the truth then I would be cut off from them permanently. At that time when I told them I was living in London I said I had friends that came here from Hong Kong and even though they wanted to know more information and they wanted to know who these friends were I could not tell them the names because I said this is something that did not concern them.

SS

Did you tell them anything else?

M

When I went back the first time to China I tried again to tell my father about my sexuality but it came across wrong because he thought I was talking to him about being with a girl and he was extremely happy about this when he called my mother. She asked me lots of questions about me being with a girl for the first time and what does she do? What does she look like? Can I send photographs of her in the future or could I bring her to China so that they could meet her? It was a disaster that time but I decided the money I was making from doing the waiter job was better than being somebody in the back washing all the time because I was getting more money and at that time I also was given the full job. I returned to do the same job so I was paying National Insurance and Tax which was important for me because I did not want to cheat the government in the UK by lying about my position in this country.

SS

At any time did you feel like returning to China permanently?

M

This is something I've thought about for a long time, the truth is I did not want to return because I wanted to tell my family the truth about my sexuality. But I didn't understand how I was going to tell them everything in detail because I knew if I was to turn up to tell them about the things I'd been doing in my private life first of all they would not understand anything. Second of all what they would do is turn against me permanently. I knew how my mother is she does not want any of our relatives or anybody else including family or friends to know the truth about the things we do. She told them I went to college and I was going to university, these are deceptions because the way people tell each other things about themselves and their private life it is very difficult for me to understand things like this in China. I did not return to China straightaway, it took me another few months of doing the waiter job to save enough money so I could return to my family.

SS

Once you returned to China how was your relationship with your family?

M

It was almost the same as before because they did not know I was working in Scotland as a waiter they believed I was living alone in London with friends. That I did not do any job they never asked me where I got the money to survive while I was in the United Kingdom. They asked me few questions at that time I contacted my boyfriend by phone and by email but it seemed like he had changed all of his personal details because I could not contact him. I decided I needed to move on from that previous life and at that time I told my parents I was returning for two weeks and this is when they became extremely suspicious about everything.

SS

In what way were they suspicious?

M

They kept on questioning me about the reasons why I needed to go back to London, this was the turning point in my life because I told my father to sit down with me in the living room by ourselves. I did not want my mother there and I did not want any distractions because at that time I opened up to him about everything including my sexuality including the fact I was doing a job in Scotland. I had no friends in London and I was telling them lies about everything in my life. I told him I was going to return to Scotland to that job.

SS

Could you tell me how your father reacted when you told him the truth about your private life?

M

I think for a long time maybe about five or ten minutes he was completely silent, after he left the room I was shaking all over. I was crying because all I wanted to do was follow him but I decided there was no point and what happened next is because I felt tired about everything it had been one of the biggest struggles in my life to open up to my father about all the things I had been lying about I think I fell asleep on the sofa. I can't remember about this but what I do remember is when I woke up my mother was standing with my father and they both looked very different to me. It looked like my mother had been crying for a long time because her eyes were red, after a short period of time when they both wouldn't speak to me all my mother said to me is to leave and never come back.

SS

What did you say to her?

M

I got up off the sofa and I tried talking to them for a very long period of time. I was screaming and shouting at them because I tried everything I could do to make them understand my sexuality was not a choice. I'd always been attracted to boys when I was younger and when I became old I was attracted to men but no matter what I kept on saying to my parents they didn't want to listen to me because they didn't say anything. I tried over and over again because at night time it was one of the strangest experience in my life because my mother stood there looking at me. Also my father was looking at her and then he was looking at me then everything was like a dream because they stood there not saying anything apart from I should leave and never return. What happened next when it was late probably 4 o'clock in the morning I was exhausted I went to bed but I couldn't sleep. I got out of bed and I kept on banging on their bedroom door. I was banging but they never replied to me and they never said anything.

SS

What did you do next?

M

I stayed awake until it was about seven or 8 o'clock in the morning and this is when my mother went to the bathroom. I grabbed her and what I said she didn't want to listen to me. She said I should leave and never return, then my father came out of the bedroom and he said to me the exact same things like there was no reason for me to return to this place.

SS

Could you tell me what happened next?

M

I decided I needed to spend some time away from them so I packed up my things and returned to Scotland to the job as the waiter. At that time within 48 hours when I was in



Scotland I called them on my mobile phone but they never answered me. I sent emails to my relatives and other friends to tell them to visit my parents at their place to talk to them about my situation. What I did they did not respond to me, it was like I was not there son.

SS

When you were living in Scotland when you were doing the job as the waiter where there any other issues that you had to deal with?

M

I was beaten in a nightclub when someone asked me if I was a fag I thought he wanted a cigarette, he punched me many times until I woke up in hospital. In the job when I was a waiter I was with people that came from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan. So that means we talked with each other in our normal language and there was no other reason for me to communicate with anybody else. I was terrified of going out alone when I was sleeping I woke up sweating thinking I was going to be beaten again. I kept on doing the same job seven days a week if I could and when the restaurant manager asked me to do more shifts I would say yes because I wanted to save money. My dream was not to stay a waiter, I wanted to do something else. Sometimes if customers found out I was gay they would leave or refuse to pay their bill, these were mostly Chinese speaking customers. These Chinese customers would angrily ask me if I was gay in Mandarin or Cantonese, no one would help me in the restaurant to deal with being humiliated. I wanted to go to college and study about things that I had never been able to do in the past because I did not want to be beaten for being gay.

SS

How long did you do the job as the waiter in that restaurant?

M

I did that job for about three years, when I saved enough money I decided to move to Newcastle because I wanted to go to a college there. I had made some friends online who told

me if I came to Newcastle then I could live with them and we could share a house. When I applied in the college I had to do very basic English because I had to learn how to speak with more confidence and when I speak in English it is not that good at that time. But later on I started learning more things because I surrounded myself with English people I learnt how to speak English better than before. When I was in college I made more friends and I found out there were some people that were openly homosexual that I could go to clubs and bars and pubs. But some other people didn't like it when these people came from China or Hong Kong and places like that they turned against me.

SS

In what way did they turn against you?

M

They wouldn't speak to me, they sent texts saying I was a dirty homo who needed to die but they sent the texts in Cantonese not English. They also made fun out of me during the class so I went to the people who were in charge to make a complaint but I think it came out wrong because of the way I described everything I don't think they took me seriously. One night when I was walking to the bus stop my coat was forced over my face, then I was beaten for a few minutes. I did not report the beating because I did not see who it was but I did hear them laughing calling me a dick sucker. When I reported things to the college I don't think they understood everything I was talking about because everything the students did when they made fun out of me was not in the English language it was impossible for me to explain it in a way for it to make sense.

SS

What did you do next, I mean did you talk to anyone else in the college about the bullying you experienced in class?

M

Later on I made more complaints about some of the students who were causing trouble for me because they followed me to where I lived they all ran at me with sticks, they hit me a few times but it did not hurt that much. The college staff took these people and me into a separate place where we had to sort out our problems.

SS

Could you tell me what happened after this period of time when you were in Newcastle?

M

All I wanted is to return to China to be with my family. But at that time I had a boyfriend I was living with, he had a good job but I don't want to talk about him because there's nothing I can say that will be of importance except he wanted me to live with him. I decided I was going to do this but when I was living with him he told me he had not told his parents the truth about his sexuality. We talked about our families and even though my English was not good it seemed like he understood me better than most of the English people. I told him about so many things where I had problems in China with my family talking about my sexuality he listened to everything I talked about. He was at least five years older than me and at some point he told me I should return to my family so I could talk about all these problems because it was not good for me to be separated from my family. At that time he explained he wasn't separated from his family even though he did not tell them the truth about being homosexual he said they understood he had more male friends than female friends.

SS

What happened next, did you return to China?

M

I did not return to China because I rang my parents on the phone I tried talking to them about everything but what I've described before is the truth. They did not listen to anything I

told them and my mother refused to be on the phone, it was my father who was listening to me. When I talked for about one minute asking him about their health or asking him other questions he said to me they have no son and then the phone went dead.

SS

What happened after this? Did you try to contact them again?

M

By phone I tried many times to contact them and this is all I did for months. I rang everyday once I finished the college I had a part-time job working as a waiter and all the money I had I would use making phone calls. I also contacted more of my family and friends to contact my parents but lots of these family especially when they were close relatives from my parents side they had completely cut off with me. They would not talk to me and they were not replying to emails and I was so frustrated I did something stupid.

SS

Could you tell me what you did what you describe as being stupid?

M

I'm not going to tell you everything I did apart from I ended up in hospital in a bad state. I stayed in the hospital for three or four days my boyfriend was frightened about the things I was doing to myself. I can't explain these things to anybody because they're too difficult to talk about. Once I was released from the hospital I went with my boyfriend to tell him I cannot contact my parents and I can't talk to them anymore but he kept on telling me there has to be a way for me to contact them. There has to be a way for me to return to them because it's not going to be good, what if something happened to them in the future if they needed my help? Or if something happened to me then they need to contact me? When I called them on my mobile phone their number was disconnected so I contacted some friends to visit them at their place. When my friends went there they refused to see them and they

slammed the door on them. At that time I was so upset about everything I couldn't sleep and I wasn't eating or going to the college because all I kept on thinking about is I'm the biggest disappointment to my parents because they have no other children I did know what else to do. I kept on thinking everything they've done for me I should do something for them in return.

SS

Did you have a chance to talk to your parents at any point during this period of time?

M

It was impossible because I didn't have their phone number I decided to send as many letters as I could. I wrote hundreds upon hundreds of letters and I posted all of them begging my parents to listen to me. I wanted to tell them the truth about myself but I did not want them to hate me. I wanted them to talk to me about everything because I could explain to them why I like boys or men over girls it would take a long time even though in their culture it is impossible for them to accept my behaviour I needed to explain everything to them from the beginning. I wanted them to understand we never needed to talk about my sexuality ever again, I would not talk about these things as long as they didn't want me to talk about them. It was all about me being with them and all about me having the chance to spend time with them because I love them and I care about them. But none of these letters were ever replied to then I contacted more my friends to visit my parents.

SS

Did they see your parents?

M

What they said is it's impossible because they slammed the door on them or if they saw them outside on the streets if they were going shopping or they were going to a restaurant or they were going to any place whenever they moved towards them they wouldn't talk about anything.

SS

What did you do next?

M

What I decided to do was to tell my boyfriend in Newcastle I was going to get a flight to China to visit my parents. I had to do this because I had to see them.

SS

What happened once you got to China?

M

In China I went straight to my parents place and at that time I kept knocking on their door. They opened the door but when my father saw me he completely turned his back on me and he slammed the door. I kept on banging my fists on the door for a long period of time but they would not listen to me. I kept on speaking through the letterbox begging them to listen to me and begging them to let me in because I needed to talk to them. At that time they didn't listen to me and they didn't say a word so I left my details where I was staying at a hotel for the next two weeks. I also told them in the letter I was going to come to their place and sit outside until they were going to let me in.

SS

Can you tell me what happened next?

M

My parents never let me into their place at that time and even now it's been more than 15 years since that time I returned with my boyfriend after we were married in this country legally together we went there to talk to them about our future. But the same thing happened because as soon as one of them opened the door when they saw me they slammed the door on me. I left many letters with them and I kept on talking through the letterbox no other human being will understand my parents will never accept my sexuality, they will never accept I'm

married to a man. All I feel is guilty about things like how I let my parents down and why I have to be in love with boys or men. All I wanted is for my parents to accept everything about me.

SS

Do you believe there will be a chance for you to visit your parents ever again in the future?

M

I hope in the future my parents will accept everything about me but if I could go back in time and change something it would be to never tell them about my sexuality because it caused such a big problem in our lives. When I've been living in England as an openly gay man married to another man it seems like lots of people still don't like this type of behaviour. I've been beaten when I'm alone in pubs and I've been chased down the street, when I came out of a gay bar once I was beaten up by men with hoods over their face. When I am with people in England it seems like they don't care to talk about these things or when I'm with my husband and we are with other people we hold hands and talk to each other. All I want is one chance to talk to my parents about my life and even if I had to lie to them in the future I will say I want to be with a woman and I will marry a woman. I don't know if they are going to believe me but I would take that risk because I want one chance to spend time with my parents. I don't know if that is going to ever happen because I need to deceive them about everything and this is what I hate about my life.

SS

What do you hate about your life?

M

When I am in China I need to deceive people because they don't want to know the truth, when I told my parents the truth it caused us so much pain I should have lied to them like I always did.



SS

Could you tell me why you first decided to travel to England in the year 1999?

LF

Because I was born in China it is completely different to the time I spent in Hong Kong, what people in England never understand about China is at that time there was little information on the internet or through word to mouth from anybody that I knew from my age range about anything outside of China. But I did have family that lived in Hong Kong and this is where I moved at one point. In Hong Kong I read about things on the internet that related to travelling to England.

SS

Why did you want to travel to England?

LF

I achieved a degree in business studies, the subject matter I was interested in studying was marketing. What I decided to do was find out information about marketing in Leeds University, once I found out I could do a Masters in marketing in Leeds University I talked with my family and my parents because they are the ones who encouraged me to go to England.

SS

Did you research any other countries to study?

LF

No because my parents believed one year of studying The Masters in marketing from Leeds University meant I would return to China with the MA included with my degree that I achieved in China. These two academic achievements would give me more opportunities in the future.

SS

Had you ever travelled to any other country apart from China or Hong Kong?

LF

No, I was born in China and this is where I'd spent most of my life. I did not even have a passport or a Visa. I didn't know anything about these types of things so this was the reason why I returned to Hong Kong to speak to my family members. They helped me through the entire process because I was born and brought up in China like I've already said before when you asked me the other question I didn't have enough information about how I would leave China to go to England to study for the MA in marketing.

SS

Could you tell me how you went about researching more information about Leeds University, what I mean is specifically why did you want to go to that university?

LF

When I did the research about doing The Masters in marketing at Leeds University I found out Leeds University had one of the most impressive backgrounds that made it possible about what I wanted to achieve in the future. Because I'd completed the degree in business studies when I specialised in marketing I decided everything I read about marketing in Leeds University would help me in the future to get a good job in China. Or possibly I would find another job somewhere else if I wasn't going to return to China or Hong Kong.

SS

Did you speak to anybody else about your plans to go to England, especially to study The Masters in marketing at Leeds University?

LF

Yes I spoke to some of the students that were in my university, they were the ones who did the business studies degree with me. I got to know some of the female students quite well,

they were the ones who advised me not to go by myself because I would have to live in accommodation with other people unless I could afford to live in a house or flat by myself. These were other things I wasn't aware at that time but there was one girl my age who told me she was also planning to study in Leeds University. But she was not going to do The Masters in marketing at Leeds University, she was going to do something completely different.

SS

What did you do next?

LF

We decided to get together and discuss our plans to share accommodation for that one year. We had to do more research but because we could not access the internet in China easily I had to return to Hong Kong to see my family so I could gather more information.

SS

When you decided to leave China for the first time can you tell me what you experienced when you said goodbye to your family?

LF

That was the most difficult period of time in my life because I did not realise how complicated it was going to be for me because I'm an only child this relates to China's one child policy.

SS

Can you explain more about China's one child policy?

LF

From 1980 (this is the year I was born) families could not have more than one child but during the 1980's rural parents could have a second child if the first was a daughter. My parents could not have another child once I was born even though I am a female at that time

my parents were not classified as rural so they could not have any more children. I had become something my parents believed in more than anything in their life because they told me in China it would be extremely limited the way I would be able to be educated further.

SS

Can you elaborate why you would be limited in being educated further in China?

LF

Especially if I was interested in doing my own business or doing something about politics there were many restrictions in China that the people outside that country still don't know about. This is more than 20 years later and after 1999 I cannot explain everything in detail because it will take me too long. My parents told me because I was born a girl it is more difficult for me to reach positions where men have more opportunities compared to me. Before I left Hong Kong to study in Leeds I moved permanently to Hong Kong.

SS

Why did you move to Hong Kong?

LF

In China when I applied for jobs or further education my parents were brought in to the local council meeting where they were interviewed about why I wanted to keep on studying. I cannot talk more about this because I am restricted by Chinese law to open up about them.

SS

So your parents wanted you to stay for one year in Leeds to complete your Masters in marketing?

LF

Yes this is what they told me before I left, I cried and hugged them for a long period of time at Hong Kong airport because I did not want to leave. But when my friend was with me the girl that was going to share the house with me in Leeds she was the one that was also

crying and hugging her family. Together we talked separately away from our families that we need to make sure we get on the plane and we could not keep on crying because everybody was looking at both of us.

SS

Once you arrived in England especially when you were in Leeds can you tell me what happened for the first month?

LF

My experience in the first month was everything about sorting my enrolment in Leeds University to make sure I knew everything. The biggest hurdle I had to overcome when I reached accommodation was I could not speak English at a high level. At that time I could read, write and understand English to a high level because a lot of my degree in business studies required me to understand the English language to a high level. The problem is in China there was nobody to speak English with, only when I was in Hong Kong with some of my relatives or some of our family friends when we were together did we watch programmes or films in English. At that time it was much easier for us to talk in English but I did not understand when I was going to be in England especially in Leeds University when everybody spoke to me how different it was going to be.

SS

Can you talk more about why spoken English was difficult for you to understand once you were in the United Kingdom?

LF

I did not understand what they were talking about, the same thing happened to the girl who travelled with me because she became very confused about everything people were saying. When I asked her what the problem is and why don't you understand the language these people are speaking when they speak English, she said because the sounds are too low

and when they speak fast compared to how people speak English in China or Hong Kong she did not understand anyone in the United Kingdom. Understanding people was the biggest difficulty I had because when I told the bus driver I wanted to get off at the University I don't think he understood me. It is possible he didn't hear me clearly because we drove past the University and then he dropped me off somewhere else where I was lost.

SS

How did you get to the University?

LF

At that time when mobile phones were introduced I had to buy one of these in England so I could communicate with the other girl on her mobile phone number. She had to come in a taxi to pick me up, it was one of the most distressing moments in my life because when I was in the taxi I realised how complicated everything was going to be and how difficult it was going to be when I did not understand the language. I was very scared about my safety because I didn't understand what the taxi driver was doing when he was ignoring me and my friend.

SS

Did you understand any person speaking English in Leeds?

LF

When I was speaking to other people I believed I was speaking in normal English but when they kept on asking me to repeat everything when I talked to them it all came out wrong I was always scared people were going to hurt me.

SS

How did you feel about that first month when you were in England in Leeds once you are enrolled onto The Masters in marketing at Leeds University? Especially about how you were

treated by the lecturers or by other students. Or when you went into the library or your day-to-day experiences can you elaborate on these matters?

LF

What happened is when I was in class with other students there was only one other Chinese male that I got to know, his English seemed to be stronger than mine because when he was speaking to the lecturer they seemed to understand each other. But at that time when I spoke to the lecturer he kept on nodding or smiling or shrugging his shoulders doing things like that, but he never replied to me so I kept quite. The lecturer told the other male Chinese student to come forward to explain everything to him in English. I remember lots of the other students laughed at that time or they would talk about how difficult it was for me.

SS

When students were laughing at you had did you feel?

LF

I felt ashamed and so inadequate because all the time I knew I could not communicate in English in the way I wanted to but when he spoke to the lecturer or when he spoke to me in front of everybody in the class I wanted to run out and go back to Hong Kong. I knew deep down all of these people must be finding it funny the way I can't communicate in English.

SS

Did you tell any of the students how they affected you?

LF

No because I knew I am doing the Masters course over a one year period of time if I can't speak English and if I can't understand English or if I can't make people understand how I communicate to them in English then it was going to be difficult for me in the future to survive in this country.

SS

What did you do to improve your difficulty in speaking or understanding English especially when it is spoken to you by those people you could not understand?

LF

What I did is outside the lectures I contacted somebody who spoke Chinese and English so I could have lessons with this individual. At that time when I contacted this person it was an English person who said they lived in China for a time so they can speak Chinese and they can understand Chinese but they cannot read or write Chinese. My language is Mandarin so I had to explain everything to them when they only understood Cantonese, this was very complicated because when they were speaking to me in Cantonese I did not understand most of the words they were saying because of how strange their accent was. I did understand their English because they spoke slowly making sure I understood every word they said to me and this is when I realised it was going to be difficult to spend time learning English. But if I spent longer periods of time speaking and listening to English from this individual I would learn better. That is what happened over a period of four months because when I was studying the MA in marketing at Leeds University in the beginning I was struggling. Especially in the first two months to make sense about everything that was spoken in the lectures was almost impossible. But once I got used to speaking to this the individual outside the course then I picked up the language much faster so I could communicate to the lecturer and to other students in English. But I was aware my standard of spoken English was not good enough for me to communicate clearly.

SS

Would you say the first six months of your time in England when you were supposed be doing the marketing in Leeds University was that the most difficult period of time?



LF

That is the way I experienced everything for that first six months because I kept on calling my parents on the phone I sent my cousins in Hong Kong messages online that I wanted to return now because I don't have confidence in myself. I knew if I do not understand English to a higher level then I would not pass the MA in marketing at Leeds University. That meant all that money was wasted, my time was wasted and my parents effort in wanting me to be educated was over. Because I knew if I did the MA in marketing in China in Mandarin then I would understand everything to a higher level exactly like I did the degree at the University in China.

SS

How did you get through that period of time during six months apart from learning English and going to the classes did you do anything else?

LF

With the girl I shared the room in the house we decided to go to other places on the weekends. We went to restaurants, takeaways and when we went into shops this was to find out about how different the life was compared to China. But also we had bigger opportunities to speak English, all the time with people that we came across whenever I saw people that looked like they came from China or Hong Kong I would approach them speaking to them in my normal language to see what they would say to me. Because I realised there were thousands of people that had Chinese heritage that were living or studying in Leeds then I realised lots of these people were struggling like me.

SS

How were these Chinese people in Leeds struggling?

LF

They talked about the exact same things in the beginning whenever they came to this country in England they found it difficult to understand people when they spoke English because they spoke fast. Or they had strong accents or they had different ways of communicating, lots of people I came across in shops, restaurants, takeaways in all of these places they never finished their sentences.

SS

Can you explain more about people not finishing their sentences?

LF

They always spoke in short ways, they said two words instead of saying an entire sentence but this is not the way I learned the English language because it was always about sentences. Everything I learned about how to speak was to say things fully so I can explain everything, whether it's in my language or in the English language. When I came across people when I was in environments where there was nobody that spoke Chinese this is when I realised those people are speaking to me in their language which is English but they were not explaining everything. They did express things so I could understand them. I needed for them to speak slowly and I needed them to explain things to me in a better way. That is why I found it the toughest period of my life in the first six months because of all these issues about the language and about the culture many times when I went into the shops or I went into restaurants or takeaways not understanding the food, the people and everything around me.

SS

Can you give me examples why you found it so hard during the first six months?

LF

Because I wanted to eat the same food I was brought up on when I came across normal supermarkets or normal shops because they didn't sell Chinese food and they did not have

any Chinese things that's when I felt homesick. But I realised there were Chinese supermarkets that I could visit and this is when I felt the happiest because I could buy normal food and I could buy products that come from China this is when I felt more confident about myself. This is when I started believing I will pass this course in the University.

SS

Could you tell me what happened after that first year at Leeds University when you did The Masters, did you pass that course?

LF

Unfortunately I did not pass The Masters in marketing at Leeds University, so I returned to China very upset. I returned to the United Kingdom to tell them even though the total time was supposed to be one year I told them I want to do it part-time so I can spread it over two years. I've talked about this before all the difficulties I was experiencing with all the problems I felt when I was doing the course overwhelmed me. The other girl was different because she told me that she passed her first year on the course she was doing. I can't remember if it was an MA or whatever she was doing she never explained everything to me because she was always doing her work in the library. Or in the house we shared together we hardly talked about these things, when I did not pass the first year even though I was doing the part-time Masters I contacted my parents. I asked their advice about what I should do next.

SS

What did your parents advice you?

LF

They were the ones that told me they can support me in this period of time even though it's extremely expensive to live in England and to pay for the course and to pay for my living this was going to be an investment in my future. They believed if I succeeded in The Masters

in marketing at Leeds University then I could return to China with a qualification that proved I was successful in England. This qualification would help me in the future because this qualification would help me find a better job in China or outside of China. This is all they talked to me about when I was growing up because of all the problems in China from the 1950s and 60s where people did not have freedom and people did not have access to food none of the people were allowed to be educated. Because of the one child policy it was not easy for them to have opportunities be to be educated or for them to have opportunity to learn about things outside their own culture was problematic.

SS

What else did your parents talk about when they wanted you to continue studying abroad?

LF

They said to me everything about the cultural revolution is when they were brought up they had no chance to escape that type of hard life, they knew by the 1990s when technological advancements were going on outside China eventually China had to open up.

SS

What did your parents mean by China has to open up?

LF

Because China's policy of keeping so-called foreigners out in the past now they had to accept if they want to trade with other countries and if they want to deal with other countries they have to let those people in and vice versa had to be true. That meant people like me who were been born in the end of the 1970's had unique opportunities to travel to see the rest of the world. For the first time we could see how people live and how people communicate with each other or how people get on with each other outside China. Because of how cut off it was in China and how difficult it's been for Chinese people I told my parents I wanted to pass The

Masters in marketing at Leeds University. But I did not want to waste their money failing again.

SS

What did your parents say?

LF

They said to me they believed in me I would pass this course and this is why I put my mind on the first year because I had to redo it part-time. I learned more about the English language because I used the internet to find ways to contact other people that spoke English and those who spoke Chinese. Because the person I went to in the beginning wanted more money I told him I wasn't going to pay that money because I found people were on the internet who would do this for free. Because they wanted to learn Chinese from me I could learn English from them which meant mutually we benefited each other.

SS

When you were undertaking the first year of The Masters in marketing at Leeds University part-time how did you feel about your life in England away from your family?

LF

I was depressed because all I ever thought about is my parents, my grandparents, my aunties and uncles and their children are not with me I missed them when I was all alone. I kept on communicating to them on the phone as much as I could even though it was expensive at that time all I wanted was to tell them that I was happy in England. But the truth was I was miserable and I was so upset I had to go to the doctors to get pills for depression because I could not sleep. All the time I kept on thinking about all the bad things that was going to happen to me. All I wanted was to pass The Masters in marketing at Leeds University so I could go back to Hong Kong to be with my family so I could support them. I felt guilty about how much money they were spending on me even when I needed to buy new

clothes or when I needed to buy food or if I needed to do anything it was costing money. I did not have a job so I was relying on my parents to pay for everything from China. I explained to them in the future I was going to repay them and I was going to make sure once I had money and when I had job I would pay them back. Plus I would help them about their life but they told me to stop thinking about things like that, you have to remember I was only 22 years of age at that time and I had no experience of living outside of China and being Chinese everything took over my life about the negative things I experienced.

SS

Could you tell me by the time you finished your second year part-time The Masters in marketing at Leeds University did you pass the course and after that what did you decide to do?

LF

I did pass the second year of the part-time Masters in marketing at Leeds University so I decided I was going to return to Hong Kong straightaway as soon as I could get on the next flight I was going to leave. Because I had to share a house with other non-Chinese people at that time I hardly ever had chance to speak my own language unless I was speaking on the phone to family, relatives or friends. I felt homesick every single moment away from everything I knew in China but everything in my life changed because when I finished The Masters in marketing at Leeds University by chance somebody I knew that worked in a restaurant asked me to take over from them if I could. They said all I needed to do was be a waitress in this restaurant where I would pick up a little bit of money, I felt if I had that money then I could use that money in the future to buy something as a gift for my parents and for the rest of my family.

SS

How long did you work in the restaurant?

LF

When I was working in the restaurant for a few days somebody told me about marketing opportunities for people that speak Chinese as their first language. I found out there was a company that was hiring people that wanted them to be educated to a very high standard in China. If they had a degree in marketing there would be possible job opportunities.

SS

What did you do next?

LF

I contacted this company in Leeds but I realised when the interview was going to take place in Leeds the job was going to be in Manchester.

SS

Can you tell me what happened at the interview and also what happened after the interview was over?

LF

When I went to the interview it was with a woman that spoke Chinese, she was one of the people that was testing how good people spoke Chinese and how much they understood written Chinese. We had to know lots of things about China especially in the Mandarin language because the job that was being offered was to speak to people in China about travel and tourism. I had to market a strategy to explain to people in China how they could travel on planes or how they could travel outside of China for the first time in their lives. Everything was so exciting for me because when I spoke to this woman I was confident about my abilities in the Mandarin language and the Chinese way of living. I also knew a lot about the Chinese culture because I told her I spent 20+ years life in China I knew everything she asked me about. What I said to her made sense about me taking the job opportunity because she told

me she was impressed by my confidence in my understanding about the Chinese language and about my understanding about the Chinese culture.

SS

What did you do next?

LF

She wanted me to go to Manchester to accept the job so I contacted my parents and asked them for their advice. They were the ones that told me it depends how long I want to do this job because if I had work experience in Manchester in England this would help me in the future. Because if I applied for jobs in Hong Kong I could tell them I have work experience with my academic achievements in England.

SS

When you accepted the job when you were living in Manchester doing the job did your life change?

LF

It was such a big change because I'd never been in any pressurised position in my life before when I was in China all the time my parents looked after me, when I studied in school, college and university I always lived at home. The first time I left home it was to live in Leeds to do The Masters in marketing at Leeds University, but I was a student who hardly ever worked except the few days I described before in the restaurant. When I was in Manchester with people in the work environment it was in an office with my own laptop and with my mobile phone I had to contact people on the internet or on the phone to market ideas about travelling all over the world. From the company I represented every single week I had to be part of a team that had to hit targets, if we hit the targets then we would be paid triple amount of money. I would get bonuses with vouchers to spend in shops or in supermarkets and places like that. I kept on feeling too much pressure about doing the job and being away



from my family but every single person that worked in the office also spoke Mandarin like me made it easier.

SS

When they spoke Mandarin how did they make it easier for you?

LF

They understood everything about China and Hong Kong because they were born there and they were recruited from different parts of the UK to work in the office for this company they represented everything about Chinese life outside of China to people in the country who didn't speak the same language.

SS

What did you do in the job?

LF

Even though I didn't understand spoken English properly and I didn't understand any other language I talked to Chinese Nationals about travelling to other countries. This is when I felt when I was doing this job I had confidence in myself because I had belief in myself speaking the Chinese language. I was doubtful about myself if I had to explain things in the English language like if I had to explain information in the English language I didn't believe I would do it successfully.

SS

When you were doing this job was there ever a period of time when you wanted to return to Hong Kong?

LF

I did return to Hong Kong for a holiday for two months and that was the most heartbreaking time in my life because once I was with my family especially my grandparents because of how old they are I realised I needed to be with them instead of living in England.

Instead of doing the job I should be doing a job in China where I could be close to my family. I did not want to leave my family in Hong Kong but I decided there was nothing else for me to do at that time because I signed a contract if I broke the contract and returned to live permanently with my family if I wanted a job I was worried about those people.

SS

What you were you worried about?

IF

If they provided me with references or if there was any occasion where future employers found out I ran away from a job in England without giving them notice and without leaving the job officially then it would not be good for my future. So what I decided to do was promise my parents that I would return to England for a short period of time and give notice to my employers.

SS

Is this what happened when you returned to England?

LF

Yes I gave them notice but something unexpected happened because the woman that was in charge of our team, there was 12 of us working in one team in one part of the office. She decided to move to another job in another company but before she left she hand-picked me to take her job, that meant I was on management level.

SS

What did you decide to do?

LF

I decided to accept the offer at management level because I would have more experience and at that time I told the woman that was in charge of me I wanted to do this job for two more years maximum because I want to return to Hong Kong. She said I could sign a contract

for six months, one year, two years and no matter how long that's going to be it was my decision how long I was going to do the job.

SS

At that time how did you feel about your life in England?

LF

I was struggling in the English language because I barely spoke it in the job we hardly ever spoke English, outside the job we went to the same Chinese restaurants, the same Chinese markets and everything about my life in England was about embracing the Chinese life. The Chinese culture is the Chinese way of living because of how difficult it was to integrate into the way of English people how they live I didn't want to change myself. I didn't want to become like them because I am not them.

SS

How long did you continue working in the job?

LF

When I reached management level I was distressed about my life because I was frightened about everything that was going on in Hong Kong, about my family because at that time working in England away from Hong Kong I felt my parents would be disappointed. Or they would be scared about being by themselves because I'm an only child they had nobody else with them and when my father become ill this is when I gave notice in my job because I had to return to China to work there to live with them to look after them.

SS

When you returned to Hong Kong the total time you spent in England was five years, then what did you do when you were in Hong Kong?

LF

I applied for other jobs based on my experience including my academic qualifications it was much easier for me to go back to that life in Hong Kong because I never adapted to the way English people live. When I did not understand the English culture that is something I regret but at the same time I knew I would never survive in England if I was by myself. I had nobody to rely on because I was living in a small flat by myself at night I couldn't sleep because I heard people outside fighting there was people smashing bottles, swearing and making lots of noise. Lots of times when English people saw me in the street swore at me or they made pig like noises. When I was in taxis by myself I felt in danger because I was by myself. When I don't have anybody to rely on and I do not know how to speak English with confidence this was when I was not sleeping. Even though Chinese culture is different to English culture and Chinese life is different at least I would have opportunities that would give me a good life. At least I could live with my parents to look after them, but if I continued living in England away from my parents who would look after them? Even when my grandparents are much older I knew I would not spend much time away from them so all of these things meant I kept on thinking about making a decision and sticking by that choice.

SS

Do you regret leaving Manchester and England to go back to Hong Kong to live with your parents? If you had more opportunities with jobs or meeting new people and making friends did you regret anything after leaving England?

LF

I regret I didn't spend longer in England because I didn't learn the English language properly. I didn't mix with English people but everything I was doing in Manchester about the job or anything outside the job I was living like a Chinese person because I can't give that up.

SS

Why can't you give up living like a Chinese person?

LF

I am Chinese so how can I change being Chinese? I can't give up my heritage and I can't give up my life in China because I can't give up what my parents have done for me. I've been brought up to be with my family, it is over everything I've ever experienced in my life. Everything I've known is about being with my family so I could never leave them. I had to be with them so I had to go back there, there are many things English people don't do in their lives when it's about family.

SS

Can you give me an example?

LF

How we are brought up is together, my grandparents, my uncles and their children we all live on the same street in the same houses together. When we are together this is how we survive. This is how we keep on living it does not matter if it's right or wrong I don't know anything about that, when I was in England when I lived in Leeds and when I lived in Manchester all I saw about people is they don't care about their families. I'm not judging them, I'm not saying what they're doing is right or wrong. What I'm saying is I can't live like that because I was born in China I was brought up in China all I know is the Chinese language, all I know is the Chinese culture that means I have to return to live in China. All these years I have been happy because I've had job opportunities in Hong Kong and I live with my family I see them every single day. I look after my father's health which has deteriorated a lot in the last few years, he needs me to look after him. My mother needs me to look after her but if I was living in England how could that be possible?

SS

The first question I need to ask you is why did you decide to leave your country of origin?

MR S

There was some English people coming to visit in places in Karachi Pakistan around 1959. These English people were dressed in suits and when they spoke to everybody they made sure they introduced themselves like where they come from and what they wanted. One of these English people approached me, he told me if I came to work in England where I went I would be paid handsomely. I would have unique opportunities in England because there was so much work the people that should be working in England did not want to do those jobs. He told me if I had my passport made which was going to be for the first time because I never travelled to any other country in my life I would earn more money in one year then I would be able to earn in 10 years. At that moment I went to speak to my parents to make sure they understood.

SS

What did your parents say?

Mr S

What they said to me is we want you to travel to England to work but you have to think about how long you're going to work there.

SS

What did you do next?

MR S

The same person I spoke to the first time I had his card so I told him yes I can contact this person because his card had his telephone number. I explained to my parents I had a job so I did not want to go to England or to any other country to work because I had everything I loved in this country.

SS

Could you tell me what happened next? I mean about you making your mind up that you were going to travel to England to work.

MR S

What happened is because I was the oldest child in my family my parents told me nobody else would travel to any other country to work because this was the thing my parents thought about more than anything.

SS

Can you elaborate on your answer?

MR S

They explained they are not wealthy, they do not have land and they do not have opportunities for my younger brothers and sisters. In the future they would end up working this is when I knew if I was travelling to England because I was less than 30 years of age if I could earn more money in one year then I would earn in 10 years in this country. It made sense to me that I should work there. So I could keep on earning money for one year or three years then I would send all that money to my parents to make sure my younger brothers and sisters never had to work.

SS

Could you explain to me what you imagined about your younger brothers and sisters in relation to them not working?

MR S

All I wanted when coming to England in 1960 was to work as hard as I could so I could send all the money back to my parents. Then my parents could use that money to send my younger brothers and sisters to school, then college and hopefully University.

SS

Why did you want your brothers or sisters to be educated?

MR S

Because I never had the opportunity to go to school.

SS

Could you explain to me if you never went to school what did you do at that time when you were growing up?

MR S

As soon as I was five years of age my parents gave me a wooden box with some materials to go on the streets to shine people's shoes.

SS

When did you start working?

MR S

From the age of five years I work, polishing shoes was my life every single day seven days a week in total I made 5p in English money. At that time in the 1940s when I was growing up how many times I told my parents I want to be educated or I want to go to school or I want to go to college and I want to go to university one day all they ever said to me is you can never go to any of these places because we don't have money. Not going to school was my pain when I was growing up because all I wanted is to be educated at school, educated at college and educated at University.

SS

Could you tell me why you cared about education so much?

MR S

I tell you why I cared about education because all the people I saw around me when the British was still in India always the educated people had the best life. They were the ones that



decided everything for everybody in India and they were the ones that drove in the best cars, ate in the best restaurants and they always had the best clothes. They seemed to know what they were talking about at that time because I was not educated and even to this day I am not educated I know I lack skills.

SS

What skills do you lack?

MR S

When I watch TV, I read newspapers or when I hear people talking in English if these are educated people I don't understand what they're talking about.

SS

Can you explain to me in detail what you mean by not understanding what educated people are talking about?

MR S

When I listen to people who are educated in England when they talk to each other I don't understand what they are talking about. It is the same when I watch TV, it is the same when I read newspapers or magazines because lots of the words that are written when it's in English I don't understand what those words mean. When my children were younger I asked them to explain things that was going on in the TV. Many things were written in magazines and newspapers or if I ever came across a word I didn't understand I asked my children to explain to me what these words meant.

SS

How did you feel when you had to ask your children to explain what words meant?

MR S

At that time I felt vulnerable, I felt ashamed I had to go to my children to ask them to explain things to me when it should have been the other way around. I should have been the

one helping my children in learning, but because I lacked education and because I never went to school or college or university every single day of my life this is what I have regretted. I don't care about most things human beings do because what I care about is they have an understanding about their life.

SS

Can you elaborate further?

MR S

If they understand everything they are doing in life it is about fitting into where they are born. That means when I was five years of age I would stand outside the school crying because I want to be inside the school with the other children. But because I did not have any money that was the time when I knew these people wouldn't understand what I'm going through because they are inside the classrooms.

SS

Can you tell me the first time you left your country what you experienced?

MR S

What happened is there was a period of time where I had to prepare my passport and other things with people that were outside our family. They were the ones that came to me to help me understand the system. I'm not educated and about not understanding what was going to happen next at that time all I knew was the way I was living with my family I had my life knowing what I had to do every single day. But when I was getting ready to leave Karachi to go to England the first time I was so terrified I could not sleep at night.

SS

What happened during that time before you travelled to England?

MR S

I stayed awake for about three days in a row, this is when my father sat down with me. He was the one that spoke to me about things that he experienced when the British was still in India. At that time my father explained to me all these things that I'm worrying about are not going to mean anything once I get into the new country. He explained to me the most I should be in England is for about three years because if I get to work there then I would send all the money back to them. Once they had all that money prepared for education and for other purposes relating to my younger brothers and sisters and even relating to their normal lives which should improve greatly compared to before then they would tell me to come back to Karachi Pakistan.

SS

Could you tell me how you felt once you were on the aeroplane flying to England the first time?

MR S

When I was in the aeroplane I was so restless all I did was drink cups of tea that were extremely hot. I remember I burnt my tongue and at that time I never spoke to anybody. Even though I wanted to get off the plane and I wanted to tell the people to stop the flight because I wanted to go back to my family and my friends and my job at that time I did nothing. All I was is silent because I never said a word I never did anything and I can't remember most of the flight because I did fall asleep.

SS

What else took place on the flight?

MR S

I never ate any of the food that was offered to me because I was so impatient and I couldn't stop thinking about what was going to happen in the future. All I kept on imagining is bad things are going to happen to me once I get to England.

SS

Can you tell me what you experienced in the first few months when you were in England and how did you feel when you were away from your family?

MR S

What I experienced more than anything is a sense of claustrophobia, this is a word I've understood from one of my own children when they were younger I would ask them to explain English words to me. I would describe in my language to them to interpret something back to me in English, I explained to one of my children when I got off the plane and I got into a taxi the person that was driving the taxi was an English person. At that time the way he spoke to me I could not understand his accent because it was so different, even to this day I don't know where he was from in England but when he spoke it was so fast I don't think I picked up many of the words. In the back of the taxi I felt very claustrophobic so what I did is give him a piece of paper that had the address on it where I was supposed to meet my cousins.

SS

What happened next?

MR S

Because they already come to England about six months before me I was going to share the same house with them and we were going to live together. By the time the taxi driver dropped me off outside the house once I got out of the taxi and paid the taxi driver I went up to the house that he pointed at. He said to me this is the address written on the piece of paper.

I knocked on the door trembling all over I kept on imagining about bad things because at first I thought my cousins weren't going to be in that house. I thought it was going to be a waste of time because the taxi driver took a long time to go from the airport to this address all I kept on thinking about is how much money is it going to cost me when I have to pay him. Eventually one of my cousins opened the door but as soon as he saw me he didn't look happy, he did not smile and he didn't shake my hand.

SS

What did he do?

MR S

He never said a word because he went straight into the house it was freezing cold, this is when it hit me that I'm in England in the middle of winter I was shaking all over from the cold. Because of the country that I came from when it was so hot all the time once I came to England when it was in the middle of the winter this is when I realised how freezing cold it was going to be. That is when I realised in that house there was no radiators and there was a small heater that was not very powerful. I had my suitcase with me and when that cousin ignored me there was another cousin, he was the one that explained to me I need to get used to the life here. I need to stop thinking about things in the past, everything was happening so fast there was nothing I could do about it.

SS

What did you do next?

MR S

All I remember is there was six of us living inside that small house in the middle of London. At that time what happened is three of them would go to work during the day and then three of us were supposed to go to work once they came back at night. This is how my life began in England, it was always about doing night shifts because the cousins decided

they were going to be the ones that did the day shifts there was nothing I could do about it because they were the ones that were renting the house.

SS

Did you talk to your cousins about changing their schedules?

MR S

In the beginning everything was happening so fast I did not have a chance to get used to England. What I was supposed to be doing next it was all happening without me having any power over anything. This is why I relied on two of my cousins who were talking to me more than the other three and at that time it was like I was there all alone. When I wanted to talk to them like when we had to eat together or we had to do things together those three cousins never spoke to me, they kept on complaining about lots of things.

SS

What did they complain about?

MR S

Bastards claimed I was doing wrong things about going into the bathroom when they needed the bathroom, about washing my clothes when they needed to wash their clothes. Because we did all the washing in the bathroom we had to wash everything with soap and this was the same soap I used on my body they blamed me for using all the soap without paying for it.

SS

What was your life like in the first few months living in London England?

MR S

At that time the first few months when I had to go to the shops the thing I experienced is when English people saw me outside they spat at me, they swore at me and they attacked me.

SS

Can you give me examples of what swear words they said?

MR S

The foreman at work always said Paki, Nig-Nog, Gollywog, Blackie, Coloured Coon, Black Bastard. Mostly he said fucking this blackie, fucking that blackie and fucking everything that related to the word fucking black.

SS

How did you react when people swore at you, attacked you or did anything to upset you?

MR S

Nothing because I did not think about anything except I had to go to work, come back from work and then I would eat, sleep and then wake to do the same thing again.

SS

What other things did you experience during the first months of you living in London England?

MR S

I learn some English from men at work but mainly it is very bad swear words. I can read there were lots of signs outside the shops that said no blacks, no coloureds, no Irish and no dogs allowed in the shop. At that time I could read English but one of the most crazy experiences in my life is when I was in India when the British were there this was the exact same thing they did in lots of places even in the churches. In lots of places where British people used to be the soldiers or the people from the army they had signs that said no coloureds, no blacks, no Irish and no dogs allowed. This was the thing I could not come to terms with in the beginning when I did not understand why the Irish were not allowed in lots of these places like we were not supposed to be allowed.

SS

Why did you care about the Irish being treated like you?

MR S

On the outside the Irish look like English people, but they treat them the same like coloureds and dogs because we should be allowed because we are all humans apart from the dogs. I tried asking my cousins about why we were not allowed in some of the shops or in some of the places like social clubs or pubs or any other place. They told me to keep my mouth shut because this was the best way for me to survive in England.

SS

When the first few months passed did you want to return to your country?

MR S

I wanted to return straight away during the first 48 hours all I wanted to do was return to my family but I decided I could not leave. It was impossible for me to speak to English people because I did not understand them.

SS

Why did you not leave England when you were unhappy?

MR S

Before I came to England we made a plan I was going to stay in England for at least three years because that was our agreement before I left. I knew everything I was going to earn was going to be sent back to my family for my brothers and sisters to have a better education and a better life than the rest of us. This was the reason I never gave up and even though I hated living in England in the beginning when my cousins did not talk to me and when there was nothing to do except go to work return to watch TV or listen to the radio for the first few months all I cared about was speaking on the phone to my parents about everything I was going through. But at that time when it was expensive to call them on the phone or if they



needed to call me then it was the same problem for them. They explained to me the reason I came to England was to make money so I could go back to them they said I did not need to spend money on phone calls. It would be better if I wrote letters to them and if they needed to contact me then they would send letters to me.

SS

How did you cope when you did not speak to anyone about how you lived?

MR S

It is impossible for me to explain to anybody how much pain I went through in the first few months being away from my family because every single moment when I was at work or when I was in that house or when I was outside all I kept on thinking about is my family. I need to be with them and I missed my friends which was a huge number in total. I had over a hundred friends at that time when I was growing up by the time I left that country I knew about 400 friends that I had to say goodbye to individually. It was painful to see how much they were going to miss me and how much I was going to miss them. Even now I remember most of these things more than anything.

SS

Can you tell me how the environment was in the first six months when you were living in England as a migrant?

MR S

At that time all I can tell you is where I went to work because there were so many factories that I could go to work the people they called the foremen were abusive towards all the people they saw who were not English.

SS

Can you explain more about how the foremen were abusive?

MR S

From India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, West Indies or Jamaica it did not matter if these people were Irish, Scottish or Welsh always the foreman picked on all of us to make us suffer. At that time I ended up in a huge argument with one of the foremen in the factory because he kept on picking on me about the food, the clothes I wore and the way I spoke. Anything I did he made he made fun out of just like my name he made fun out of and all the people's names that he said did not sound English he made so much fun out of sometimes he did not stop laughing for minutes.

SS

What happened when you confronted the foreman?

MR S

I told him to shut his mouth and I told him to leave us alone because we need to do all the hard work. What was the benefit of picking on all of us? At that time there was nobody else to speak to and so the foreman was in charge of giving us work, he was in charge of rotating shifts and he was in charge of who worked. So we had to get on with this man more than anybody else, but one of these times when he picked on two men that came from Jamaica I completely lost it.

SS

Why did you lose it?

MR S

Because when they were quiet the foreman was having so much fun making fun out of their skin colour and he was saying nasty things about their noses and he said ugly things about their hair. The foreman did anything he wanted so he picked on those two new workers. At that time I grabbed hold of him around his throat and the two Jamaican men who were

quiet grabbed hold of me. They were the ones that explained to me there is no point in fighting with this man because we will lose our jobs.

SS

What did the foreman do?

MR S

When I let go of his throat he was quite but then he shouted you black bastards, you stinky wogs I will finish you all. You fucking shit faces I will have you back to eating bananas off the trees. At that time I calmly asked the foreman to tell me who is the manager or who was the person in charge because I need to speak to him. The foreman could not stop laughing because he said the manager is not going to listen to you nig-nogs. At that time the words I kept on hearing from most of these people was Paki or nig-nog and because they thought it is normal to make fun out of us they said anything they wanted. On TV there were programmes always making fun of foreigners.

SS

What did you feel when no one listened to your problems?

MR S

I was sick of everything, all I wanted was to get out of that country to go back to the country where I was born because I could not handle the abuse. I could not handle the way people made fun out of me or when they made fun of my name and when they made fun out my culture I wanted to hurt them.

SS

That was another thing I wanted to ask you were there any places that you could express your religion?

MR S

This is a confession I have to make, at that time I did not obey any of the religious beliefs I've come to accept much later on in life because I was working 16 hours a day. I would go from one shift in the afternoon or it was early in the morning about 5 o'clock I would keep on working for eight hours straight with only a small break to have something to eat and something to drink. Then I would return to that house for less than an hour to go straight back out because I decided I wasn't going to follow the rules that my cousins told me about. They were not happy about the way I was behaving, the way I wasn't listening to them so this is another one of my biggest regrets in life. Because I abandoned my religion when I came to England for the first year or so it caused me a huge amount of pain. When I had to confess to my parents I wasn't involved in religious behaviour in England I did not stop crying for a long time. They were the ones that told me to forget about things like this because it was exceptional circumstances for me to be in England in the first place. Not praying meant I must go back to be with my family. I always have bad dreams about not praying when I was working in England, I hate myself for not praying in London.

SS

Can you tell me what happened after three years of living in England as a migrant worker?

MR S

I don't understand.

SS

What happened after that period of time? Why did you end up staying for longer in England when you hated your life as an abused migrant worker?

MR S

I believe this was the most complicated things that happened in my life even now when I think about that period of time it is not easy for me to access that information. Because what I experienced before about everything taking place quickly it was the same thing that happened over and over again. Those five cousins that I shared the house with they told me to leave because they didn't like my behaviour. Nothing else they said to me so I decided to move to another house where there was eight men and all of them foreign were living in a smaller house in London. At that time I was sleeping on a metal bed and it was the most uncomfortable period of time ever in my life. I was crying all the time sending letters every third or fourth day to my family, but they only replied to me by the end of the month.

SS

Why did they reply only once a month?

MR S

They were the ones who told me they needed more money for the education of my brothers and sisters. Also they told me my father was very ill so he needed an operation so they needed more money for that reason. They needed money for other things that I can't remember, in this period of time all I remember is every single conversation I had with my parents when I spoke to them on the phone they told me to spend six more months working in England to send more money back to them. So they could use that money to make sure they never needed to send me back to England. They did not want to send any of their children to any other country in the future. I believed every single word they said to me.

SS

Why did you stay in England for another six months beyond that three-year period?

MR S

What happened is as soon as that six-month period ended my parents told me to stay another six months.

SS

Why was that?

MR S

At that time I was confused because I asked my parents why should I stay in England for another six months? They said the same reasons I mentioned before it was for money.

SS

Could you tell me why you ended up getting married to somebody that you brought to England? I mean was it so you could settle down in England instead of returning to your country permanently?

MR S

By the fourth year because I had no wife or children or anybody else in England I wanted a family of my own. I wanted to have a wife but I did not know if I was to get married in Pakistan would my wife be willing to come here? This is when I realised something was more important to me because if my parents kept on asking me for more money and they wanted me to send money to them if I was to get married then I could settle here for a longer period of time. I thought about the fact if my children were born in England they would have access to education. In England they would have access to health services that are much better, the water is pure here and the food is better here. Everything was better here so this is why I told my parents I want to go back to that country for a short period of time.

SS

What did they say?

MR S

In total it was going to be two months, I would get married to somebody who wanted to come to England to live with me so we could bring up a family to have a much better life than the life I've lived before. At that time it seemed like my parents were willing to accept everything I said to them because they were the ones that told me you should come back to our country to get married here. Then return to England so you can live your life with your family and that is all that happened. It was strange for me to not think about anything else because I thought they were going to say to me you shouldn't live in England because you should live in this country. Instead they agreed with everything I suggested to them.

SS

Once your wife was married to you then she came to England how was it when you were living together?

MR S

In the beginning it was more difficult for her because she could not speak one word of English, she could not read one word of English and she could not understand anybody if they spoke in English. Because she had no education she could not read or write in her own language never mind read or write in any other language. When she ended up in England she was crying to go back to her family.

SS

Why did she stay in England when she was so miserable?

MR S

I was the one that convinced her if we stay here then we could have a better life together, especially with our children because everything I told her in the language she understands it would make it better for our future together here where everything is better. Eventually she

was the one that said she will try her best, at that time we moved out of sharing accommodation with other people to have our own place together away from London.

SS

Where did you travel when you left London?

MR S

I went to Leeds to live there for a few years, after Leeds I went to Sheffield and at that time we ended up in a house next to a woman who was much older than both of us. She was an English woman but she is the person that looked after my wife when I was at work, she was the one that taught my wife how to speak English or understand English words. This is when my wife completely changed because of how kind that woman was and because of how much that woman cared about her she did not miss her family.

SS

Can you tell me if your life in this country has been better or worse than the country you came from?

MR S

All I can say to you is this, I know all of my children have had a better life than I had because they had access to education and all of them went to school. All of them went to college and then all of them went to university this is all I cared about. The way they had access to job opportunities I know if they had been born in the country I was born all their opportunities would be limited.

SS

How do you see your life in the United Kingdom for close to sixty years as an immigrant?

MR S

There is another side of me that is extremely sad because my children don't care about my culture, my language and my religion that I believe in and my wife believes in that means



they care about other things. I know I cannot complain because of how well my life turned out. Many times I keep on thinking back to that period of time in 1960 because if I had defied my parents never coming to England I don't know how my life would have turned out. I would say overall when I've lived in England I have had good opportunities in jobs and there's been some bad people I encountered who see themselves as English. But I've also known nice and kind people that are also seen as English. I would say this is the exact same experience I had in my country because if those people speak the same language as me or if they have the same skin colour as me and if they have the same behaviour as me on the outside on the inside they are completely different to me. This is why I experienced some of the worst times in my life in 1960 when I came to England the first time my cousins were the ones that didn't like me and they were the ones that didn't encourage me about anything. When I struggled understanding the English language I suffered the most.

SS

Do you regret living for nearly sixty years as an immigrant worker in England?

MR S

All the money I earned being in England I helped my family, I helped my brothers and sisters to go to school, they went to college and they went to university as well. I paid for operations for my mother and father. If there was anything they needed for their house or if they needed a vehicle and if they needed help financially I provided this to them. That means I sacrificed my happiness leaving the country I was born for their happiness, this is the exact same truth about my family. I did want to go back in the 1970's because at that time everything was becoming more expensive I realised I needed to work harder than before. I decided if my children are born in England they will have more opportunities provided for them compared to the country where I was born.

SS

Have you seen yourself or the people who live in the United Kingdom change after travelling as a migrant to the United Kingdom in 1960 until the present time in 2017?

MR S

The first thing I remember what some English woman called me on the airport was what you looking at Nig-nog? The other day when I was shopping in the local supermarket in Sheffield doing my normal shopping a young man about aged sixteen or maybe even less laughed at me and then he said what you looking at Paki? I know I have changed so much in all these years I've been living as an immigrant in the United Kingdom but one thing remains no matter where I am in the United Kingdom I hear someone who sees themselves as English say something nasty to my face when I've never said one thing to them.

At the end of the interview when Mr. Mohamed Saleem continued talking I added all his words as an appendage to his interview.

MR S

How fast time goes, being born in India when the British were ruling over us and now I'm living in their country is like a dream I can't wake from. Sometimes I wake up wanting to be with my own family and friends doing things with them. My home city of Karachi is where my heart stays but all these years I've lived in England it's not been a bad life.

## **THE HOT POT**

**By Shakeel Saleem** **Candidate Number: 938676**

### **CHARACTERS**

John – age 35, British born male of West Indian origin.

Ma – age 78, John's mother British migrant of West Indian origin.

Pops – age 80, John's father British migrant of West Indian origin.

Celia –age 30, Female British migrant born of Taiwanese origin.

Abu – age 28, Male British born male of migrant Indian origin.

Sieanna– age 33, Female British migrant born of Polish origin.

Steve– age 26, Male British migrant born of mixed Ghanaian/English origin.

Zandra– age 37, Female British migrant born of Greek origin.

### **INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH ABOUT PRODUCTION INTENTIONS**

The play should have simple staging with seamless scene changes helped by changes in subtle lighting to match the need for a new location or time change. Whenever John talks with his parent's he always speaks in Caribbean English. His speech style changes into formal English in his monologues and when he is with Celia he talks with her in modern conversational English.

In the hotpot scenes, all the conversations are in modern conversational English and throughout the plays, Celia's use of English improves as her time in the U.K. increases.

## **SCENE 1**

*John is alone on stage. A single spotlight shines on him as he stands behind a wooden chair.*

**JOHN:**

I was seven when Pops took me to his castle. This was his shed, it's where he fixed broken things. Pops was so good with his hands he didn't need to measure things, no-one explained to Pops how to get difficult jobs done.

In the shed, Pops pulled out a wooden chair it was just an ordinary plain chair, he points at it and he told me "Son look closely at this chair".

*A light shines on Pops.*

**POPS:**

Son I'm gonna show you magic. Someone has a dream about this chair 'cause I know it ain't gonna build itself. Some fella had to think about tha' chair. They spend time thinking real hard, they needs to understand what's the reason for building a chair and then they make it from pieces of wood. Just like me they break their backs making this chair. What I want you to remember is this, if they can build a chair why not you? If somebody travels to the moon why can't you? If somebody drives a car why not you? If somebody writes a book why can't you? If somebody learns to read why can't you? If they like me they don't know how to read and write, tha' don't mean you can't get a college degree. Why can't you do it 'cause I tell you son they ain't nothing stopping you from building your chair 'cept you.

**JOHN:**

Pops magical words stay inside me forever, they'll go to my grave. He was a great man, a great father and sure recently he's had a few troubles upstairs because his mind begins wandering along confused memory lanes. For me he's always that great man fixing things in his castle.

## **SCENE 2**

*Enter Ma with her chair Pops is silent throughout. He's busy playing with his phone.*

*John ignores Pops he talks to his Mother.*

**JOHN:**

Ma, you know you need help with him.

**MA:**

You want some ginger cake?

**JOHN:**

I ain't hungry.

**MA:**

You want...

**JOHN:**

Ma...I'm gonna make a call to the council to get help for Pops, you know he's getting worse.

**MA:**

SHHHHHUSSSHHH... ain't nobody gonna come to help me in my home, I do everything round 'ere 'cause I look after him thank you very much son.

**JOHN:**

OK...OK listen Ma I've got something important to tell you but you promise you ain't gonna blow up.

You hearing me Ma?

**MA:**

I hears ya'.

**JOHN:**

Good now listen to me I...

**MA:**

I see you...you've lost weight Jason.

**JOHN:**

Maaaa I'm not Jason you know I'm me and I'm John.

**MA:**

Jason you...

**JOHN:**

Maaaa...it's John...come on you know my name 'cause you gave it to me.

**MA:**

I wanted to call you Jason he...

**JOHN:**

I see tha' they gonna take care of him real special...O.K.?

**MA:**

I know tha' now you listen to me. You got something to say to me say it. O.K. I got something important to say to you.

**JOHN:**

Wha'?

Wha' is it?

Spit it out...

**MA:**

You want... a fizzy drink?

**JOHN:**

Oh come on Ma I ain't a kid.

**MA:**

I know tha' so what's the big thing you wanna say?

**JOHN:**

What flavour is the...

**MA:**

Wha' you talking about?

**JOHN:**

The...drink is it me favourite?

**MA:**

Sure is Son.

**JOHN:**

Ma promise me you're not gonna blow up like last time.

**MA:**

Yes sure I be promising.

**JOHN:**

O.K. I've been seeing someone.

**MA:**

You tell me wha' someone means?

**JOHN:**

A girl I mean a woman.

Listen it's been more than six months I didn't wanna talk about it before but...

Ma, can we talk in private?

**MA:**

You know he's not listening.

**JOHN:**

Pops hears O.K. Don't you Pop, eh?



**MA:**

Don't do tha'...

**JOHN:**

Wha'?

**MA:**

Don't talk to him like he's a baby.

He's busy...he's just taken his medication and you know...

**JOHN:**

When did he take it?

*Mother calculates on her fingers*

**MA:**

Let me see it were about three hours ago.

**JOHN:**

Ma he's doped out of his...

**MA:**

He'll be fine.

**MA:**

You were saying six months ago...

**JOHN:**

Yeah...

*The Mother calculates on her fingers she shows him six fingers.*

**MA:**

You're so smart how come you're telling me now?

**JOHN:**

I was gonna tell you before I was worried about some other stuff. It's the pressure from the work, my writing it's all up 'ere and 'cause I don't know what's gonna happen next I thought if I tell you when we're alone it would be best.

**MA:**

Sure I be hearing ya'.

**JOHN:**

Great lets go into...

**MA:**

Maybe Pops should hear this too.

**JOHN:**

No...no Ma all he needs is...

**MA:**

Wha'?

**JOHN:**

More...medication?

**MA:**

You want something to eat?

**JOHN:**

No don't worry about me.

**MA:**

What you talking about? If you've met someone six months ago why tell me now?

**JOHN:**

You know it takes a long time to...

**MA:**

Have you eaten?

**JOHN:**

Yes I mean... No Ma.

Ma, I can't sleep.

**MA:**

You been to them who cures everything?

**JOHN:**

Ma...

**MA:**

Wha'?

**JOHN:**

You got some... ginger cake?

**MA:**

Jason I...

**JOHN:**

Oh Maaaaaaaaa come on don't do this I'm John, O.K.

**MA:**

O.K. I know you want a nice slice of fruit and nut.

**JOHN:**

You're not gonna go ape, are you Ma? If you promise I'll tell you everything.

**MA:**

I promise.

*John gets up he whispers in her ear.*

**MA:**

No...no...no... no...no...no...no...no...no...this...the devil...the devil...the devil...be calling  
for ya...Son you is...no...no...

**JOHN:**

Oh Maaa I knew it.

**MA:**

How did you meet her, where did you meet her...they're not like us son. They be  
different...don't you see it?

### **SCENE 3**

*A dark stage, Celia is crying. She calls for help.*

**CELIA:**

Help! Please...Police! Help!

*Out of the shadows John steps in and then he scoops up her bag.*

**JOHN:**

Shusshhh...It's all right. Is this your bag?

**CELIA:**

Help me police.

**JOHN:**

It's O.K.

**CELIA:**

Help I need police.

**JOHN:**

Lady is this your bag?

**CELIA:**

Yes my bag.

**JOHN:**

Then take it.

**JOHN:**

Where you from? What country?

*No answer.*

**JOHN:**

O.K. Why do you need police?

**CELIA:**

I need police.

**JOHN:**

If you tell me why you need police I will help you.

**CELIA:**

My bag.

**JOHN:**

Your bag is safe I'm not a thief. What's your name?

*No answer.*

**JOHN:**

What happened to you?

**CELIA:**

Something try to...me.

**JOHN:**

What you talking about?

**CELIA:**

They did it.

**JOHN:**

What did they do?

**CELIA:**

My bag I need police.

**JOHN:**

Listen you can trust me.

*Celia takes her mobile phone out from her pocket, she starts reading from the screen.*

**CELIA:**

I understand. No I not trust you.

**JOHN:**

Lady that's not good.

**CELIA:**

O.K. Maybe I trust you.

**JOHN:**

Good. Are you hungry? Do you need to eat? I can take you somewhere to...

*Celia checks her mobile phone.*

**CELIA:**

No eat I need police, something happen.

**JOHN:**

I promise you I will take you to the police station.

**CELIA:**

You not hurt me?

**JOHN:**

If I lay a finger on you...then you tell the police.

**CELIA:**

Yes I need police.

**CELIA:**

Bag is from Mother, men try take.

**JOHN:**

Did they snatch it from you?

**CELIA:**

They... hit me.

**JOHN:**

Who hit you?

**CELIA:**

I don't see faces.

**JOHN:**

If I go to the police station with you I can help you with the police.

**CELIA:**

Are you police?

**JOHN:**

Me... no I'm not the police. I'm called John, what is your name?

**JOHN:**

You must trust me I will help you.

*John puts his hand out to Celia. Tentatively she shakes it.*

**JOHN:**

Lady you have the most beautiful hands I've ever seen.

*Celia quickly removes her hand away from John's hand.*

**CELIA:**

You will help me?

**JOHN:**

Yes if anybody lays a finger on you I'm going to make sure they never do that again.



#### **SCENE 4**

*They ignore Pops, the Mother continues speaking to John.*

**MA:**

No...no...no... no... no... no...no...no...no... the devil...the devil...the devil...

**JOHN:**

I knew it Ma don't start with tha' voodoo bullshit.

*Ma exaggeratedly blows all over John.*

**JOHN:**

This is nuts.

**MA:**

The devil...the devil...the devil...he's got ya... don't be foolish son, why you doing crazy things? You ain't a kid and...

**JOHN:**

I knew it...listen to me Ma there ain't no devil. I knew you wouldn't listen to me. The thing is, the truth is I met her and we've been living together

*Mother makes the sign of the cross over John.*

**JOHN:**

Maaaa don't do this shit, I wanna talk about so much stuff I couldn't talk about tha' stuff before and you...I knew it...the same old voodoo crap.

**MA:**

Son she ain't one of us... they funny looking.

**JOHN:**

Please Ma don't do it...

**MA:**

One day you'll understand, our life ain't the same... where we come from is...you listen to me you don't tell no-one's about this in the family.

**JOHN:**

Who am I gonna tell?

Ma, she's real delicate just like a China doll. She's a beauty just like you and like you she's suffered.

**MA:**

You better be careful 'cause you is gonna end up like him. Yeah you better have a real good look at him.

*John looks at his Father.*

**JOHN:**

I see him and do you hear me?

**MA:**

What do these people know about pain? Son they eat cats and dogs you know the devil tell 'em to eat filthy sewer rats!

**JOHN**

Ma, she eats the same stuff I eat. Remember when you and Pop came to this country, what you went through the racists ripped you to shreds they made monkey noises and they took the piss out of you.

**MA:**

They eat...sewer rats...I'm talking about...sewer rats...they eat 'em...it's the devil he whispers to 'em when they sleep.

**JOHN**

They don't eat sewer...O.K. it's nowhere near as bad as what you and Pop went through.  
Listen to me she's been through bad stuff in this country...me too Ma, me too.

**MA:**

O.K. smarty-pants tell me does she know how to speak like me?

**JOHN:**

Yeah...I mean...sure she knows how to speak to me, with you I'm not sure...O.K. she's learning. The important thing is she understands me. Her English is getting better all the time, the other day I tell her to go to the kitchen to make me some scrambled eggs...and you know wha' Ma?

**MA:**

Wha'?

**JOHN:**

You got any of tha' ginger cake?

**MA:**

You is a good boy, you love your Ma ain't it true?

## **SCENE 5**

*John is alone he directly addresses the audience.*

**JOHN:**

Now imagine an eight-year-old boy with a runny nose terrified of everything. Everything he does and everybody he encounters makes him insecure, at the same time the fundamental paradox is he wants to impress everybody.

He's sitting quietly in class like a church mouse. He hears his teacher, Gasmask they call her 'cause of her ugly mug. I didn't give her the nickname, they did trust me it were the white boys. Gasmask tells the class to write about their weekend and then she wants us to share it with everybody. I scribble furiously in my exercise book like I was a runaway train, I was on fire writing page after page and in no time I filled more than ten double sides like I was possessed. And then Gasmask shouts "now stop writing". I couldn't stop she asks us to come to the front and read what we wrote. None of the others did more than three or four lines, when my turn came I darted to the front because I was so happy. I was reading the second page when Gasmask hisses "you stop reading!" She snatches the book from my shaky hands and then she flicks through the pages. Then she accuses me in front everybody of copying from a book. Oh boy my legs began shaking I kept saying over and over again "I haven't copied nothing from a book, I haven't!" My nose was running so much it dribbled into my mouth and I was on the point of pissing my pants. Gasmask throws my exercise book into the bin and she snarls at me "you go and stand outside the principal's office". Believe me I wouldn't budge Gasmask grabs my shirt and she drags me towards the door like a fascist pig. I started screaming and shouting just like a caged tiger. Shit...I wet my pants it was the most horrifying moment in my entire life, for a few seconds I did not want to be alive. I was outside the principal's office my shirt's ripped open and my dammed soiled underwear is leaking. I couldn't stop shaking like a leaf, what I know now is vile humans are worse than

animals, Gasmask was supposed to treat all the kids the same but that day she singled me out for special treatment and she ruined me.

## **SCENE 6**

*Celia and John are in their flat.*

**JOHN:**

Celia, please listen to me love. Like I been telling you, everything is about my work. The suffering fuels my...I got to be...the shit I've been through it...it...it comes out in black and white. Do you understand me?

**CELIA:**

I understand, yes I do. Today we meet your parents and you meet mine is important for me.

**JOHN:**

Not today, no. The second I get my breakthrough I promise...I promise we'll see them. We'll fly first class...we'll be sipping champers just the two of us.

**CELIA:**

Yes we will?

**JOHN:**

Yes Celia love it's going to take time... I'll crack it don't you worry, we'll get to know each other's families soon.

**CELIA:**

I go back to restaurant to work and I make lots of money.

**JOHN:**

No way you're not going back to that restaurant, those pasty white maggots laugh at you and you know they're laughing at me.

**CELIA:**

John, you wait outside.

**JOHN:**

No way. I saw it, the white fingers wagged at the dark skin people like me and you. And they were laughing, those jackals.

## **SCENE 7**

*John is alone.*

**JOHN:**

At eight years old I wasn't a genius so I had to work out what happened for days. I wrote more pages than all the other kids put together, so why destroy me...? Then it hit me those kids didn't have the same skin colour as me. And then it fitted perfectly, I mean not as clearly as it does now. What I see clearly today is nasty low life monsters like Gasmask are roaming about they deliberately stop me and others from achieving our true potential. Gasmask purposely made sure she stopped me from achieving my destiny.



## **SCENE 8**

*Celia and John's flat, a little later.*

**CELIA:**

Many people come into restaurant they have different skin no one laughs at them, you come with dark skin and you laugh the loudest. You say I speak funny English.

**JOHN**

That's different.

**CELIA:**

All people come to restaurant they laugh and enjoy themselves.

**JOHN:**

I keep telling you the plain facts you don't understand them. Listen Celia they were laughing at you, end of the story.

**CELIA:**

I listen and John...

**JOHN:**

I don't want you to be a slave to white jackals. Decent people come to this country like my folks. They break their backs so their kids go to school, they go to college and they go to university exactly like me.

**CELIA:**

You say you thrown out of university.

**JOHN:**

What! Are you on their side? They make sure we're kicked out for... don't you understand my ambition? One day black people are going to see great things in my books. They're going to witness a miracle and they're going to know my name. What I'm talking about is we...

**CELIA:**

I know about us, that is good John, I would like...could we please do something good together. Chinese New Year very soon we can have party, yes? I can make hotpot, yes? I invite friends from international club.

**JOHN:**

Celia love you keep talking about petty things... I'm talking to you, are you listening to me?

**CELIA:**

Please, speak more slowly.

**JOHN:**

This is important, right? I'm putting a dossier together on white corrupt corporations in this country because this shit is serious. I'll expose the twisted book publishers, the biased online stuff and let's not forget the whiter than white mainstream media. I want the world to see the truth because I want them to know they're stopping talented black people like me from achieving great things and they're stopping my people from seeing my great words. People are desperate to see a black face writing for them...I want to do great things Celia and I can because I have to do it for the black...

**CELIA:**

Yes it's very...

**JOHN**

For the migrants, you know.

**CELIA**

Ahhhhh so you have the migrant now? You have a bad head, yes.

**JOHN:**

I said migrants, not migraine.

**CELIA:**

John...

**JOHN:**

What?

**CELIA:**

Don't be angry.

## **SCENE 9**

*John is alone.*

**JOHN:**

I can't explain this shit unless someone has been in my shoes and let me tell you they're big boots to fill, they're size eleven. I mean if you've suffered the way I've suffered you'll know how deep this shit is because I wanted Gasmask to let me read what I'd written in front of the silent kids. Gasmask and those twisted ones like her stop my writing from reaching the people who need it. What gave Gasmask or anyone in power the right to crush our dreams? So sure I have a slight temper sure I get a little angry then I fly off the handle once in a while and that's not my fault, right? It's them I'm telling you it's all them out there hiding in the shadows who pull the strings of those who suffer silently.

**SCENE 10:**

*Celia and John's flat. Chinese New Year. On one side of the stage is the hotpot simmering on top of a small table. Sieanna, Zandra and Celia are gathered around it.*

**ZANDRA:**

Tell me again what's the hotpot about?

**SIEANNA:**

Yeah I was lost back there...

**CELIA:**

All of you bring ingredients.

**SIEANNA:**

Yes.

**CELIA:**

We take the raw ingredients we put them into the hot pot it is simple.

**SIEANNA:**

Didn't you say you separate them?

**CELIA:**

Yes I will put hard food first and then I put soft food later.

**ZANDRA:**

Like the potatoes and...

**CELIA:**

Yes sweet potatoes go first...

**SIEANNA:**

I brought a bottle of wine just for the ladies.

**CELIA:**

Not for me...

**SIEANNA:**

But you love pinot...

**CELIA:**

Please, not today.

Maybe soon I buy big bottle of champagne.

**SCENE 11:**

*The flat, lighting change reveals a display of Tolkein materials. JOHN is talking to two guests, Abu and Steve.*

**JOHN:**

So you agree with me about the overt racism in publishing?

**ABU:**

Maybe...you may have a point but not everyone is...

**JOHN:**

They send my manuscripts back they don't understand what I'm getting at but they're superficial, man! I tell them "text, con text, subtext" and they say...

**STEVE:**

I'm starving when we gonna eat?

*John carefully pulls out one of the Lord of the Rings books. He starts flicking through it.*

**JOHN**

Listen guys I want to give you a copy of the greatest book ever written.

**STEVE:**

Ah so you do have taste because it has to be The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

**JOHN**

What? No, I'm talking about is the holy grail.

**ABU:**

Yeah I loved that Indiana Jones...not the new crappy ones I'm talking about when Bond met...it's the third one when he...

**JOHN**

Indiana wha'? I'm talking about the most amazing book ever conceived, Lord of the Rings.

*An awkward silence.*

**JOHN:**

Don't be shy guys take 'em they're gifts.

**ABU:**

That's generous mate but it's wasted on me...I'm not into kids stuff.

**STEVE:**

Nor me.

**JOHN:**

It's not for kids, millions of intelligent adults all over the world read this book and look at this...

*John takes his mobile phone out he starts reading from it.*

**JOHN:**

If you look at all the statistics according to...reliable online sources The Lord of the Rings books, movies, DVDs, Blu-rays and other merchandise...see on the socials... the millions of people of all ages love this book.

**ABU:**

Whatever gets your rocks off I'm saying this book was written in Medieval Times when they had no gas or electricity and trust me it's for kids.

**STEVE:**

Abu's right and it's totally Medieval Johnno.

**JOHN:**

Listen buster it's John and by the way who are you again?

*No answer.*

**JOHN:**

I'm waiting.



**ABU:**

He's...

**JOHN:**

Hey Indiana lover I wasn't talking to you, he's a big boy.

**STEVE:**

Hey let's not get into a pissing contest.

**JOHN:**

I wouldn't wanna show you guys up...would I?

**STEVE:**

That sounds...listen I was messing with you. Bored of the Rings ain't so bad if I'm on the piss.

**JOHN:**

Yeah you keep taking the piss and you'll see wha's coming.

**STEVE:**

Whoa there horsey, sorry if I hurt your feelings...I'm Steve and I'll fess up I've never read that book 'cause at school the crafty nerds had it booked all year round.

**SCENE 12:**

*John is alone.*

**JOHN:**

This is crucial stuff so pay attention, The Lord of the Rings is the reason I decided to become a writer. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien is the Great J. R. R. Tolkien, now isn't that a pleasant mouthful? I was 10 years old all alone in the library, that day like most I hid because it was a rough time. A handful of racists in class kicked my sore behind black and blue. They picked on me all the time, they stole my lunch money, they stole my brand spanking gleaming Jordan's and they did things to me I don't want to talk about. I was big but I was afraid if I fought back the way they did I'd be a bully so that day I went through the entire library looking for something to read. It was destiny my fingers ran along hundreds of books suddenly like magic they stop on the first volume of The Lord of the Rings. I slid it out, it was so heavy I nearly fell. I parked myself on a chair and I started reading miraculous words! Here was the perfect world where I saw amazing things I didn't see in my messed up life. As I read the most incredible words ever I escaped all the bad things and I began the same incredible journey like my hero Frodo. We faced all the trials together hand in hand, all the temptations he was forced to endure I suffered with him.

**SCENE 13:**

*Abu looks at his phone.*

**ABU:**

Guys stop the press this is hot off the internet, “*The Hobbit or There and Back Again* is a children’s fantasy novel written by the English author J. R. R. Tolkien”.

**JOHN:**

Ah, so you're the brains of this master class?

I was talking about Lord of the Rings, not The Hobbit.

*John grabs the phone from Abu's hand, he reads the screen and then he hands the phone back.*

**JOHN:**

These online freaks talk bullshit because it’s childish opinions.

*Abu looks at his phone screen and he reads from it.*

**ABU:**

Listen to this John it’s informative, “The Lord of the Rings is an epic high fantasy novel by the English author and scholar J. R. R. Tolkien. Set in Middle-earth, the world is at some distant time in the past the story began as a sequel to Tolkien's 1937 children's book *The Hobbit*, eventually he developed into a much larger work.”

**ABU:**

This is the juicy bit, “both of these books were written for juveniles”.

*John begins to lose control.*

**JOHN:**

You come into my place you better chill and don't diss what I’m interested in, O.K.?

**ABU:**

Let's not get our underwear in a twist, I agree with you 'cause this shit is for the birds, it's all about opinions. There's nothing wrong with the Ring books...

**JOHN:**

About freaking time.

**ABU:**

I'm sorry Bro but they were written for kids, that's all I'm saying.

**JOHN:**

Don't call me Bro...I'm not you're...

*Celia walks in with a tray of drinks, she hands the three men a glass each and John ignores her.*

**ABU:**

Thanks Celia, are you O.K.?

**CELIA:**

I'm fine. How are you Abu?

**ABU:**

Top of the world, I mean... what do we next? I don't know diddly about hotpots where I come from a hot pot is a stew they rustle up in Lancashire.

**CELIA:**

I will tell you later, I'm very happy you have come to my flat to enjoy this day.

**ABU:**

Hey fella you said this was your gaff...

**SCENE 14:**

*In private Zarra and Sieanna talk about John.*

**SIEANNA:**

Wow... see that? Like a volcano erupting...How does Celia put up with him?

**ZANDRA:**

You know what they say?

**SIEANNA:**

No...what do they say?

**ZANDRA:**

Opposites attract.

**SIEANNA:**

I guess you're right she's a sweet angel and he's...

**ZANDRA:**

A beast. The way he talks to her like she's a dumb doll.

**SIEANNA:**

He's like The Hulk.

**ZANDRA:**

Good thing I didn't bring Jo...She'd have kicked his ass.

**SIEANNA:**

Don't think I've met your better half.

**ZANDRA:**

No...I don't think so, not unless you watch cage fighting on ESPN.

**SIEANNA:**

She's a cage fighter!

**ZANDRA:**

I'm kidding, she's a straight laced accountant who's into watching heavy duty caged gladiators beating the crap out of each other and she'd have put that gorilla in his place.

## **SCENE 15**

*John is alone.*

**JOHN:**

Back then I was ready just like Frodo we were ready to be thrust into the belly of fire, I was set to be born again. All I know if anybody says one negative word against The Lord of the Rings and The Great J. R. R. Tolkien I'll be there to defend them with my life. I mean if that's necessary because I love that book, I love the writer and I love everything about The Lord of the Rings. And true love never holds back, right?

## **SCENE 16**

*John sips from the glass while he stares at his mobile phone. Steve takes the book from Abu's hands and then he starts reading some of the words aloud in an antagonistic way.*

**STEVE:**

I a-mar pr-estar a-en. The wo-rld is c-ha-nged. Han ma-t-ho ne n-en. I feel it in the waeter. H-an ma-thon ned c-ae. I feel it in the e-ar-th. Ahan n-os-ton ned gw-ili-th. I smell bullshit in the air. What was once lost now it's not remembered 'cause no one likes stinking shit.

*John snatches the book from Steve's hands.*

**JOHN:**

That ain't funny.

**ABU:**

I disagree, it sounded cool the way he said it.

**STEVE:**

Her at home is into fantasy. She was explaining it to me and like usual it went over my head. It's like they're lost in a weird world, they think about things with no bearing on the real world.

**JOHN:**

You're missing the point, fantasy is better than the shitty reality you love.

**STEVE:**

You know what Abu?

**ABU:**

What?

**STEVE:**

I find talking about his books extremely soothing.

*Steve snores loudly.*



**ABU:**

Hey come on man he ain't gonna dig the piss take.

**JOHN:**

I'm calm if he wants to be play the clown let him, I disagree with his stupid ill-informed prejudiced analysis because The Lord of the Rings was created to show us a world that's better than our crappy world.

*Steve suddenly stops snoring.*

**STEVE:**

Sorry did I miss anything juicy?

**JOHN:**

I wanted to give you both numbered versions, I was saving them for a special...if you're going to continue being negative...

**STEVE:**

Listen mate I appreciate you wanted to give us a book but I'm not into fantasy jazz.

**JOHN:**

Hold it...what does fantasy jazz mean?

**STEVE:**

You know what jazz is...don't ya'?

**ABU:**

Listen, cool it Steve.

**STEVE:**

It's juvenile stuff for sad losers sleeping in their unhygienic nappies...yeah they're zonked out on wide screen versions of Lord of the Rings on their little mobile screens.

**JOHN:**

Don't you dare fuck with The Rings, you low life shithead!

**ABU:**

Come on Bro he was only...

**JOHN:**

I told you...Gupta don't call me Bro.

**ABU:**

My name is not Gupta, I'm on your side.

**JOHN:**

I know who you are it's the same wherever I go. Low lives rip the shit out of stuff they don't understand.

*Steve puts his hand out.*

**STEVE:**

I'm sorry I was...I was...

*John ignores his hand.*

**JOHN:**

Don't you care about what's going on in this fucked up society? People like me yes true Rings fans like me care about what's going on with the oppressed. You take the piss 'cause you're jealous and you don't understand the tragedy of this fucked up...world. I do because I know the world needs heroes...

**ABU:**

Time out guys no point losing our marbles.

**JOHN:**

It was you guys who started the...

**ABU:**

Look, I've never been invited to a hotpot in my life I was looking forward to it. Motor mouth over there...he started it.

**STEVE:**

Yeah sorry guys, I guess I fell out of the bed the wrong way. I came here to have a good time as soon as we stepped in you were going on and on about black people being suppressed, we already know that man 'cause we is black.

**JOHN:**

Say it louder 'cause it's true.

**STEVE**

Yeah but maybe there's something you don't know. You tell him Abu.

**ABU:**

Me...

**STEVE**

Yeah...facts man lay it out.

*Steve nods to Abu.*

**ABU:**

Ummmmm yeah sure...The Lord of the Rings was written by JRR Tolkien, right?

**JOHN:**

Dumb and dumber, course it is and....

**ABU:**

You said he's the greatest genius who ever lived.

**JOHN:**

BINGO and so what?

**ABU:**

How come you don't know the same Tolkein was a white supremacist.

*Silence because John is lost for words.*

**STEVE:**

In the book you worship it's true there are no characters with skin colour other than white.

**JOHN:**

You said you never read The Lord of the Rings so where's all this stuff coming from?

*Steve points to Abu's head.*

**STEVE:**

It's all up there 'cause he's the fact master.

**ABU:**

You claim the writer is a genius isn't that like spitting in the air and then letting it land on your face?

**STEVE:**

So what's next? Live readings from Mein Kampf?

**JOHN:**

What you talking about?

**ABU:**

George Orwell, now he was a real genius because he said all art is propaganda.

**STEVE:**

Damn straight Bro all art is propaganda.

**JOHN:**

This is crap as far as I've seen there's nothing to prove Tolkien was a white supremacist.

**STEVE:**

Just 'cause there ain't no fire that don't mean there's no smoke, eh Abu?

**ABU:**

Yeah it's all about "text, context and subtext" didn't I hear you say this earlier John?

**JOHN:**

I...I...I don't think they used terms like white supremacists when that book was published.

**STEVE:**

Are you going to argue he wasn't a writer of white origin from this great white land?

**JOHN:**

No I know he was...

**ABU:**

When we arrived you went on and on and on about how you're black and all you want is black writers to be read and so on.

**JOHN:**

Look when I read the book the first time I didn't know it was written by a white writer, I was in school I had problems with...I didn't think about his skin colour. I fell in love with the great characters and...

**STEVE:**

And you're in LURVE with a white supremacist.

**ABU:**

I guess it's O.K. 'cause he's living in a fantasy world.

**STEVE:**

Abu that was...

**ABU:**

Perfecto Mondo?

*Abu and Steve high five.*

**JOHN:**

You dirty low lives...I don't wanna talk about this shit.

**ABU:**

Man we don't care about white supremacist writers and what they wrote in the past. If it's something you're into we both respect you dig this writer. We're just saying this type of not so engaging material is for incredibly young people.

**STEVE:**

Maybe you need to think carefully about the white writers you peddle John. If I were you I wouldn't hold that trashy book in such high...

*John stands he looms over Steve who remains in his chair.*

**ABU:**

Hey, hey. We were having fun, guys...let's not come to blows.

**STEVE:**

O.K. tough guy take your biggest shot.

**ABU:**

Both of you calm down. We're disagreeing on nothing, as far as I see none of our families were born in this country. We should stand together we don't need to argue about something not important.

**JOHN:**

All I wanted is to give you a copy of The Lord of the Rings as gifts, what's wrong with that?

**ABU:**

You wanted to give us a book we don't want. If it's something you believe then you have the right to say it but don't force it on non-believers.

**JOHN:**

Only fascists dictate what I can or cannot say.

**ABU:**

That's true and we have the right to disagree with you.

**JOHN:**

Except you don't have those rights in my place.

**STEVE:**

Stop bullying Abu, he's delicate.

**JOHN:**

I'm not a bully!

**STEVE**

Get this I bet if Hitler was alive the socials would go into meltdown listening to him spout the virtues of Tolkien's Unholy Aryan Brotherhood...

**JOHN:**

You say one more thing I'm gonna shove that Nazi shit down your fat gob.

*John grabs Steve with one hand he pours his drink down his front with the other. The three women come rushing into the room.*

**CELIA:**

John...what happened?

**JOHN:**

Nothing for you to worry about Celia, light of my life I just had to get some heavy-duty stuff off my chest. Then oooooopps... I accidentally spilled my drink.

**STEVE:**

Hey at least have the balls to tell the truth John. He threw the drink all over me.

**CELIA:**

Why did you do it John? They are my guests.

**ABU:**

He went ape, we were having a bit of fun.

**JOHN:**

You could have fooled me because I wasn't laughing.

**CELIA:**

You promised me John you swear no trouble.

**JOHN**

I didn't fuc...I mean I know these...losers they got to me. They wore me the hell out... I'm freaking knackered.

**CELIA**

O.K. I know it's your migrant. You go and lie down, O.K. you have a good rest I'll call you when the food is ready.

**ABU:**

He's having a...migrant?

**CELIA:**

Yes sometimes bad migrants hurt his head.



## **SCENE 17**

*Only the women are at the hotpot. John is hovering out of sight.*

**ZANDRA:**

I was looking forward to bringing Jo to the party. She was looking forward to having a well-deserved rest from crunching numbers.

**SIEANNA**

She would have been welcome, wouldn't she Celia?

**CELIA**

Very welcome, yes.

**SIEANNA**

Your man needs a leash, maybe he's got too much testosterone to spare.

*John enters he has overheard.*

**JOHN:**

Who's gonna put a leash on me? I know you said it behind my back 'cause you ain't got the balls.

**CELIA:**

John you can't talk like that. Zandra is my guest. I bring my guests to this party they are my friends because I care about them.

**JOHN:**

And she loves another woman, that's what I heard...right?

**ZANDRA:**

Yes and we're getting married. What about it?

**JOHN:**

For me, a woman can't have a wife it's not natural.

**CELIA:**

John!

**JOHN:**

What? It's a free country.

**ZANDRA:**

You want to explain to me why can't I marry a woman I'm in love with? It's legal, what's your problem?

**JOHN:**

It's against nature.

**CELIA:**

Please John don't do this...

**ZANDRA:**

Celia love why are you with this monster...

**JOHN:**

The question I wanna ask is why aren't you with her...Celia love?

**ZANDRA:**

You're a...b...

**JOHN:**

Yes? Everyone says they want freedom of speech but as soon as I open my mouth you turn on me. All religions this includes all forms of society created by man know two females cannot reproduce.

**ZANDRA:**

And all the shitty societies created by men made the fucking mess we're in now.

**ABU:**

What's wrong with you, man?

**CELIA:**

John just leave her alone.

**JOHN:**

Oh my...jeeeeeeeez you taking her side over me?

**CELIA:**

In my country we treat guests with respect.

**STEVE**

If this woman wants to marry another woman, what's it to do with you?

**JOHN:**

This is my home I say what I like in it and like usual I'm alone, I see that now. What you're doing I mean all of you... is bullying me.

*John storms off.*

**SIEANNA**

Well, he's right about one thing... he's all alone now.

**CELIA:**

I should call his parents.

**ABU:**

Does he have any...

**CELIA:**

I think so... he must but I never seen them.

## **SCENE 18**

*The parent's house.*

**POPS:**

Heh... heh... heh... heh... heh... ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh yeaaaaahhhhh.

**JOHN:**

What the hell was that in aid of Ma?

**MA:**

Shush, he's busy.

**JOHN:**

Doing wha'?

**MA:**

It's all up there...

**JOHN:**

This girl Ma, Celia I care about her, I've spent time opening up to her. The problems I have she listens to them and it's not like here.

**MA:**

I knew it, now's the time to take you back home our people will take care of you.

**JOHN:**

I don't need to...

**MA:**

You hungry?

**JOHN:**

Ma I miss him, I want Pop back exactly the way he used to be and I know he understands us.

**MA:**

Sometimes...it looks like everything is normal, he talks about the old times and then he gets up in the middle of the night. He goes running to the bathroom, the fool he locks the door from the inside. He won't come out I bang on the door until my fists shake and I keep telling him let me in or open the door so I can help him. He's getting worse Jason.

**POPS:**

J...J...J...Oh it's been a long time Jack, it's getting longer and longer and now it's too long. Rum rub, oh yeah we gonna rub tha' rum in me dry pants. Oh yeah yeah... yeah... yeah... J...J...the rum ain't what it used to be 'cause it's dry.

**SILENCE**

**JOHN:**

I told you we got to put him...

**MA:**

He don't listen 'cause he's busy, just like you.

**POPS:**

I found me the...the formula.

**JOHN:**

What you talking about Pops?

**POPS:**

Oh yeah I see it Jack it was Tommy, all those things he did in me pants and I remember where he buried it.

**JOHN:**

Buried what?

**POPS:**

He buried it in his stinky pants, he buried it did Jack.

**JOHN:**

Ma what's he talking about?

**MA:**

I told you he's busy...busy...he's busy.

**POPS:**

He took it from me and then he buried it...yeah.

**JOHN:**

Who's this Jack?

**POPS:**

Ohhhhhhhhhh yeah Jack I never told 'em, I used to see him all the time now nobody sees him.

**JOHN:**

What did he bury Pops?

**POPS:**

Me...

**JOHN:**

Yeah...

**POPS:**

Me...

**JOHN:**

Yes Pops...

**POPS:**

Marbles.

**POPS:**

Oh yeah I had a bag of shiny marbles it were different to everybody's I used to play the kids one day Joseph comes along he dug 'em in his pants. He made a really-really-really big hole in his pants and as soon as he put marbles in his pants we had a fight. He stunk like a sweaty pig I went back to his hole I couldn't see where the marbles were his black hole smelled of shit, it were... were ice cold steaming dog shit.

**JOHN:**

Who's Joseph?

**MA:**

He don't know no-one's called Joseph or Jack and J...

**POPS:**

Ring ring ring ring...

**MA:**

Hey see tha' he knows it's time to take his medication.

**POPS:**

Ring ring ring ring...

**MA:**

NO...stop it, I mean no one's calling.

**POPS:**

Yesterday Jack said you gots to take the stinky medication.

**MA:**

You need anything Son? Cash...ginger cake or a fizzy drink?

**JOHN:**

I'm not a kid Maaaaaa...I could do with a quick slice of ginger cake.

**POPS:**

Ring ring ring ring...

**JOHN:**

What's he doing now?

**MA:**

You're not a kid, go to the shops and...

**POPS:**

Ring ring ring ring ...guess who's callin'...

**JOHN:**

Callin' who?



## **SCENE 19**

*The flat. Formed in a circle of unity around the hot pot Celia holds hands with Abu who holds hands with Sieanna who holds hands with Steve and he holds hands with Zandra.*

**SIEANNA:**

This is great, it should always be like this now we can eat from the hot pot and there'll be no trouble...

*John enters.*

**JOHN:**

WOWEEE look at this...no room for me? O.K. I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to wind anybody up. If you want to marry a woman that's your choice, I'm not saying I'm going to change my opinion. I want everybody to know I'm not going to hurt anybody.

*No-one answers.*

**JOHN:**

O.K. Celia?

*No-one answers.*

**JOHN:**

Celia's right, this is supposed to be a special occasion so we're going to enjoy ourselves.

**SIEANA:**

Celia and Zandra are upset John...it might be best you give us some time.

**JOHN:**

Listen to me I live here and it's my place.

**CELIA:**

No I pay the rent so this is my place.

**ZANDRA:**

You go for it girl.

**JOHN:**

Hey you keep out of it.

**SIEANNA:**

Why are you so...rude?

**JOHN:**

What... me? I'm a sweetheart. Just 'cause I'm always telling the truth, I'm the villain?

**STEVE:**

This is like...it's like the rabbit's mad hat party.

**JOHN:**

At least get it right, it's the mad hatter's tea party.

**CELIA:**

John...you go and check your messages, O.K.? You said the publisher was going to contact you today with special news.

**JOHN:**

Okay... okay I understand. Yes one may smile and smile and be a villain, I know when I'm not wanted. I guess I'll check my messages.

**CELIA:**

Thank you John.

*John leaves.*

**ZANDRA:**

You shouldn't put up with this crap Celia.

**SIEANNA:**

It's your flat, you should tell him to leave. I wouldn't want to be alone with that temper.

**CELIA:**

I cannot. Not now he's not always this way. When we first met, he was...sweet he helped me...he was funny and he's very kind.

## **SCENE 20**

*Celia's memory, on the night they met it's a darkened stage, John is with a phone torch.*

**JOHN:**

I think I know which country you're from...

**CELIA:**

My country?

**JOHN:**

It begins with the letter...C.

**CELIA:**

No.

**JOHN:**

O.K. it must be J.

**CELIA:**

No.

**JOHN:**

Okay the country you are from... ...begins with a capital V.

**CELIA:**

No.

**CELIA:**

You say you know my country I help it begins with letter T...

**JOHN:**

T...T...got it...Tanzania?

**CELIA:**

No.

**JOHN:**

Ta...taji...jikistan?

**CELIA:**

No.

**JOHN:**

Wait...Transl...

*John checks his mobile phone.*

**JOHN:**

Thailand.

**CELIA:**

No. It is Taiwan and I know you are funny.

**JOHN:**

You like funny?

**CELIA:**

Funny is like...funny.

**JOHN:**

I'm a blind owl...Hoo...hooooooooo.

*They laugh.*

**JOHN:**

I do more tricks.

*John barks like a dog.*

**JOHN:**

See, I don't bite.

## **SCENE 21**

*John alone looks at his mobile phone and then he dials a number. There are unheard responses from the other end between his lines.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No I want to know, did you get the last manuscript I sent?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes I understand about that. You said you will get back to me today, you said by text but... the thing is I said this to the other one who was messing me about.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Is this...please get her.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes this is John...the one who...listen to me I keep sending my manuscripts to you people and I know you're not reading them.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I...that is...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Or maybe they're just reading parts of them?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes I'm not stupid. I'm waiting for a full response.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes this is not the point, all I want is somebody...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Heloo...hel...helloo...can you hear me?

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

Can you hear...me now?

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

I hear you, no need to shout.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Who is this?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

So you can...no it's not enough because you keep delaying every single time I'm waiting for feedback. I have to know what's going on. I need to know why you keep delaying. If they're going to go ahead with my manuscript I need time to prepare.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Okay...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Okay, yes you'll contact me within an hour?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I understand but...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Hellooo...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Can you hear...me?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Can you...

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

Can you hear...me?

*John moves a little.*

**JOHN:**

Is there...

*He waits.*



**JOHN:**

Ohhhhhhhhhhhh fuck this bullshit.

## **SCENE 22**

*The three women are away from the others.*

**ZANDRA:**

I don't understand why you're living with him.

**CELIA:**

I love him.

**ZANDRA:**

I mean... just look at him.

**CELIA:**

He feels a lot of pressure, we talk about different things sometimes his head hurts, he changes. The publishers he calls them, then he is angry.

**SIEANNA:**

If I was you I would think very hard.

**CELIA:**

I don't understand.

**SIEANNA:**

How he behaved with all of us, don't you think you should think twice about him?

**ZANDRA:**

I've seen relationships that go bad if one of the people in the relationship dominates.

**SIEANNA:**

Bad, yes like rotten seafood.

**CELIA:**

I don't understand.

**SIENNA:**

I'm sorry I was using rotten seafood as a metaphor.

**CELIA:**

Sorry...this language is...

**ZANDRA:**

Don't worry. When we came here we knew less than you.

**SIEANNA:**

It takes time.

**CELIA:**

John helps me with English. In my country if we don't thank someone who helps it is rude.

**ZANDRA:**

In my country, if we invite people to our home they wait until everyone introduces themselves before they tell everyone how they think the world should be according to...

**CELIA:**

Later he will say sorry. Next time I have a hotpot party I promise you Zandra you bring Jo.

*John walks in.*

**JOHN:**

I hope I'm not interrupting anything tasty.

**CELIA:**

You promise not to be angry.

**JOHN:**

Sorry everyone, it's the pressure of rejection all the time it brings the worst out of me. So sorry, more than anything to you...Sandra isn't it?

**ZANDRA:**

Zandra with a Zee.

**JOHN:**

Zee...I see in this country we say Zed so why the...

**CELIA:**

We accept your apology.

**JOHN:**

Wait Celia love, what did I tell you? You let me finish talking first. OK, sometimes I let loose but what I think is, all of us should be... united. You know we should stick together. You know all migrants sail together on the same...

**SIEANNA:**

Like you stuck it to Abu and Steve?

**JOHN:**

That's not nice, you can't understand how it feels to be out of work even when I'm working. The lack of recognition is something I'm trying to deal with, have you thought of that?

**ZANDRA:**

We all have crappy days so why take it out on us?

**JOHN:**

Maybe I'm a little too sensitive.

## **SCENE 23**

*John walks to where Abu and Steve are standing.*

**JOHN:**

Look guys I was bang out of order. What I said about black lives matters, I meant every word of it. But let's get this straight once and for all The Great J. R. R. Tolkien is not a white supremacist.

**STEVE:**

Sure, have it your way.

**ABU:**

I understand.

*John holds his hand out.*

**JOHN:**

Truce?

**ABU:**

Okay I accept your...

*Abu shakes John's hand.*

**JOHN:**

What about you tough guy?

*Steve shakes John's hand.*

**STEVE:**

The thing is you need to be careful about black lives matters, how you use that stuff might be seen as provocative.

**JOHN:**

All I was trying to have is a little tête-à-tête, how do you like that for sophistication...I got it from a book in a library. What I'm saying is all of us at this hotpot must be affected by racism and prejudice.

**ABU:**

And the converted is listening they know it's time for some honest grub.

## **SCENE 24**

*Celia comes in with Sieanna and Zandra they carry trays, they approach the hotpot.*

**CELIA:**

I want everybody to gather around the hotpot, I talk about why we are here today.

*All of the guests except John gather around the hotpot.*

**CELIA:**

Please John join us.

**JOHN:**

I'm fine here.

**ABU:**

Don't be a drab.

**CELIA:**

John you said...

*John moves closer to Celia.*

**CELIA:**

Thank you John.

*Celia talks she points to the hotpot.*

**CELIA:**

Please, I practised this talk...

**CELIA:**

Yes the hotpot is to celebrate the most important days in our country and in our special way. I want everybody to understand I'm not from China. The country I was born is Taiwan but we celebrate the same special events in China.

*John claps loudly.*

**ABU:**

I thought Taiwan is part of China?

**CELIA:**

No...they want to...what is the word...

*Celia takes her mobile phone out she reads from it.*

**CELIA:**

Yes they want us to ...become part of them.

**SIEANNA:**

By force?

*Celia puts her mobile phone down on the table.*

**CELIA:**

I not study politic.

**JOHN:**

Guys she's not a politician.

**CELIA:**

Thank you very much John. In the country I was born... I want all of us to enjoy the hotpot. I want to show you how to share delicious food.

*Steve puts his hand up.*

**STEVE:**

I don't want to be rude but do we have to become Communists to eat the hotpot?

**JOHN:**

Are you stupid or what?

**CELIA:**

John I don't understand...



**JOHN:**

He's joking Celia.

**CELIA:**

I put different food into the hotpot before it was boiling we add more water into the hotpot, now I want everybody to tell me if they eat spicy sauce?

**SIEANNA:**

Yes please the hotter the better for me.

**STEVE:**

Sorry Celia I can't take too much spice if it's got too much oil in or anything greasy...my stomach suffers...

**CELIA:**

No problem the hotpot is separated into two, one part I put the hot sauce and all the spices are in the other part will be salt and pepper.

**STEVE:**

Great.

**ABU:**

Biggest stereotype ever I know, but the hotter the better for me. Truth is I even go out in the sun without factor...

*Zandra coughs loudly.*

**ZANDRA**

Could you leave it plain for me Celia love?

**CELIA:**

Yes no problem.

**ZANDRA:**

You're an angel.

*Celia puts different sauces on one side of the hotpot she doesn't put anything into the other side of the hotpot.*

**CELIA:**

The hard vegetables went into the hotpot first because they take a long time to cook. Next we put in secret ingredients.

**SIEANNA:**

Sec-ree-eetttt...what are they?

**CELIA:**

We drop in some bugs, little flies, many strong beetles with a scoop of cockroaches and last is the French favourite of juicy fat slugs.

*A shocked silence.*

**CELIA:**

Fresh from Taiwan my mother send me...yes I put the rats in the freezer and the fresh worms melt on ice.

**ABU:**

Celia...

**CELIA:**

Yes...

**ABU:**

You're not serious...are you?

**CELIA:**

No... no I was joking. The worms are not in stock.

**ABU:**

Listen guys I just remembered my new year's resolutions was to lose a few pounds I...I'm on a strict diet.

**SIEANNA:**

I was thinking of turning veggie, I guess now is the perfect time.

*Celia claps giddily.*

**CELIA:**

I was doing a funny joke, is that the right way to say it John?

**JOHN:**

BINGO.

**CELIA:**

Now I have thin beef, chicken, tofu and giant prawns go into the hotpot slowly. I don't put everything into the hotpot straight away. If I put the noodles, the lettuce or soft food they go soft like...

**JOHN:**

Mush.

**CELIA:**

Ahhh thank you John like mushy peas.

**CELIA:**

So in my country New Year is called Lunar New Year and Spring Festival, this festival begins 3,500 years ago. There are many stories, the best is about the beast Nian—nyen he gobble all the livestock, the crops and he enjoy eating people day before the New Year. In our language, Nián mean New Year the age or the harvest. So to stop Nian from attacking people villagers put food at their doors for Nian to eat. It is said a wise man sees Nian is scared of loud sound like firecrackers and red.

**CELIA:**

Village people put red lanterns and red scrolls on their windows and they have red above their doors to stop Nian from coming inside. Crackling bamboo sound is not used they light firecrackers to scare Nian away. In the Wei and Jin dynasties...

**ABU:**

Good story Celia but ...I'm starving.

**CELIA:**

What I want to ask everybody is if they eat meat, prawns, fish and everything I have ready. I want to know if everybody happy to eat this food?

**SIEANNA:**

No problem for me, I could eat a horse.

**CELIA:**

You eat...horse?

**SIEANNA:**

No I was...it's a saying.

**ZANDRA:**

No problem for me but I...

**JOHN:**

I knew it.

**CELIA:**

John...please don't.

**ZANDRA:**

You said on one section of the hotpot you're not going to put spicy sauce but if you don't mind not too much salt on that side for me. Can you put all the vegetables on the side without salt?

**CELIA:**

Yes no problem.

**ZANDRA:**

Thanks Celia love.

**JOHN:**

Don't do it for her.

**CELIA:**

I will do it for her, she is our guest.

**JOHN:**

She's not my guest.

**CELIA:**

She is our guest.

**ZANDRA:**

I'm not trying to...Celia love I...

**JOHN:**

Celia love...Celia love...Celia love...Celia love...you wish she was your Celia love don't  
you?

**STEVE:**

Man that's out of order.

**JOHN:**

She's purposely being awkward to make you do more work, they see you like a slave.

**ZANDRA:**

Slave...get real. I said this because Jo is vegan I'm trying to get used to eating plenty of  
plain veggies.

**JOHN:**

She's taking liberties.

**CELIA:**

John I don't understand...

**JOHN:**

Liberties... even if you're a vegan or whatever it's not essential for her to do all this work for you.

**CELIA:**

John it's not a big problem.

**JOHN:**

It should be a problem, you should not do it for anyone.

**CELIA:**

John I am tired from work this is two in the morning you shout make me fry up...with ice cold beer and...

**JOHN:**

No don't go there...that's private stuff.

**CELIA:**

I say to her... I will put what she wants that's her choice.

**JOHN:**

This is not about choice, it's about deliberately winding me up. She thinks she's superior to everybody. She's calling herself a vegan, a lesbian and she's...

*Zandra starts to make her way out.*

**ZANDRA:**

I'm not a vegan O.K. Thanks Celia love I'm sorry I have to go and...

*Celia cuts Zandra's path off.*

**CELIA:**

No you have to stay...for me.

**ZANDRA:**

He's...

**JOHN:**

Don't waste your breath let her go.

**SIEANNA:**

Why are you so...

**JOHN:**

I say everything how I see it 'cause it's true.

**ABU:**

That's true...

**JOHN:**

See go ahead Bro...

**ABU:**

Don't call me Bro I wasn't agreeing with you. If we all behaved like you we would be...

**JOHN:**

Free to do what we please.

**ABU:**

Celia don't you see this is...

**JOHN:**

She's taking advantage of you.

**CELIA:**

She's my friend.

**JOHN:**

She's taking liberties can't you see it, she's trying to take you from me.

**ZANDRA:**

Are you mad?

**STEVE:**

Mate you're a sick dude...you need help.

**JOHN:**

She thinks she can come into my place and I'm talking about my place, this is my personal space she comes here making demands. She's picking on you to make you do all the dirty stuff and it's to humiliate you. She's white like the rest of 'em.

**ZANDRA:**

Oh my...did you... did you hear what he just said?

**JOHN:**

They heard me. They think they can mess me about. No... those days of me pissing myself getting my head kicked in are over, they don't know who I am today.

**ABU:**

So now we're all white?

**JOHN:**

I'm not saying you're white, I'm saying you side with white people. You ignore the skin colour God gave you and you betray your heritage you've forgotten they made your people slaves. Don't you feel ashamed of sucking up to white people?

**SIEANNA:**

What white people are you talking about?

**JOHN:**

The whites who rule the blacks.



**SIEANNA:**

Are you insane?

**JOHN:**

Celia...back me up here. I promise I will go to your country, okay?

**CELIA:**

You can't talk about my country you know nothing, you won't go to my country you say they talk funny.

**JOHN:**

You're letting this woman walk all over you and if that's the way you want people to humiliate you it's your choice.

**CELIA:**

She's my friend.

**JOHN:**

She's not, she's a poisonous snake.

**ZANDRA:**

Did you call me a snake?

**JOHN:**

Anyone who comes into my place and spouts poisonous stuff like you've spewed is a rattlesnake. This is my place...do you hear me? I'll say it one more time this is my place, my home is my castle and I make the rules in it.

## **SCENE 25**

*The parent's house John is with Ma and a silent Pop.*

**MA:**

Why not move in with us? It's rent free and I'll cook you...

**JOHN:**

No Ma, Celia does all the cooking for me. And no I've made no plans with her about the future because my problems with work or lack of work is a mess. But maybe one day it'll shine brightly. I send my writing to bigots they don't reply to me, if they reply they say my work's not good enough. These bastards won't give me the break I deserve.

**MA:**

You lost too much weight.

**JOHN:**

Ma all I need is a break.

**MA:**

What do you want from me?

**JOHN:**

I want you to meet her and sit down with her, spend time with her.

**MA:**

They're yellow in Korea.

**JOHN:**

You can't say that Ma.

**MA:**

I've seen 'em eating slugs...it's disgusting, it's not human to eat a tiger's...private parts.

**JOHN:**

Stop saying those things, she's not yellow and she's not Korean.

**MA:**

Bright yellow.

**JOHN:**

That's...Ma you're saying racist stuff.

**MA:**

Where she from then?

**JOHN:**

She's from Taiwan.

**MA:**

Tha's what I said, she's Korean. Boy, if you told me you were in love with a man if he's one of us I'd take that over her.

**JOHN:**

You can't be serious.

**MA:**

In love with a man from our county is better than yellow...

**JOHN:**

Just once I want you to listen to me and understand what I'm talking about. You can't say these things to me or have expectations Celia can't be like you 'cause there's no such thing. I want everybody to be themselves. White racists, when they look at my black skin they believe I'm inferior and we know it's not true. I'm a human, not a freaking bum licking nigger.

**MA:**

How dare you say things like this? You said...did you really say bum licking nigger...what will Pops think?

**JOHN:**

He's busy, right? Every time I open up, every time I talk about my life no one cares about these things. Ma, they're never going to give me a shot, they're never going to give me an opportunity or a job 'cause I'm a low life black-bastard.

**MA:**

Don't you ever...don't you never say these crazy words again. You have a mother and you have a... you thinking about marriage now is wrong, what if you tie yourself to the wrong one for the rest of your life? It's not easy son, look at your father and me.

**JOHN:**

Yeah look at you, after all these years you can't even get my name right. Who's Jason Ma? And who's Jack and Tommy and the others running around in Pop's head?

**MA:**

Son there's things about me you can't dream...

You want some ginger cake?

**JOHN:**

Yeah...why not let go?

**MA:**

I'm going out for a few hours, you give him medication every...

**JOHN:**

I know what to do Ma, I'm not stupid.

## **SCENE 26**

*Alone, John talks into his phone.*

**JOHN:**

What...you rejected my work... again?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I'm saying...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No...no...

**JOHN:**

You can't keep rejecting my work. I need to know the reasons for the rejection, you said before you were going to accept my work.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

If you keep rejecting my work you must explain why.

**JOHN:**

I'm calm, I'm listening to you...

*John moves a little to the right.*

**JOHN:**

Can you...

*John moves a little to the right.*

**JOHN:**

Can you...good. Yes what you're saying is always the same things. You enjoyed reading the first three chapters and then you tell me send the rest. I send it and you reject it, why is that?

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Why is that?

**JOHN:**

Yes I'm listening to you. I demand feedback, I know...even though you said you have a policy of never giving people feedback who send work to you...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

I need to know why do you reject my work? I need to understand if this is personal and if this is something to do with my skin colour.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Sure I'll wait go get him...please.

**JOHN:**

Is this...I'm O.K...I need to know the truth.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No you can't stop talking to me in one minute. That's not right... if you send me a poxy email and a text like you always do I can't accept it. You don't explain things, all what I want is to meet the editors and the...

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

No I don't know anything about that.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Yes I know how to read, in theory I read your non-discriminatory policies. But in practice they are...

**JOHN:**

Listen, I spend months on each book and what you have to understand you're destroying my ability to connect with my writing. You keep saying you're going to give me a chance and you're happy with my work. It's always the same story and then you reject it.

*He waits.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...

*John moves a little to the right.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...

*John moves a little to the left.*

**JOHN:**

Hello...are you...

**JOHN:**

Hello...

**JOHN:**

You can't hang up on me like this...

## **SCENE 27**

*The parent's house John is with his father he sits on a chair staring down at his mobile gadget.*

**JOHN:**

Listen Pops you can't ignore me...

*John's father stares down at his gadget.*

**JOHN:**

Listen we're alone I have to ask you something, remember when I was kid you had your belt in your hands and you said "pay attention".

**JOHN:**

I want to ask you about...

*John removes the gadget from under his father's face he does not look up, he keeps on staring down.*

**JOHN:**

I know you hear me so listen Pops I want to know about the marbles and about the past. About Jack... Joseph... Tommy... or the other one you talk about. It's Jason...and who are they? I need to know what Ma has to do with them and what she has to do with you.

*John's father continues staring down.*

**JOHN:**

Something funny was going on between you and your best friend. You were fighting, you were arguing about marbles. What does ring ring ring ring mean?

*Suddenly John's father stops looking down, he looks up.*



**POPS:**

OOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHHH so it were you...do it now and then do it again.  
They... I mean they said ring ring ring ring heyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy I know you because you  
stink.

**JOHN:**

Pops, I know you have secrets so talk about the marbles.

**POPS:**

Ohhhh I see...you're the clever one. Ummmmm...The black marbles be nice and shiny... I  
remember it, I remember the one who played with the marbles said ring ring ring ring.

**JOHN:**

The other man, remember you said his name... Jack ... or Joseph and was it Jason. You  
said it's to do with the marbles and ring ring ring ring.

**POPS:**

Sure I was dreaming about watering the ring ring ring ring. I was thinking about salting  
the ring ring ring ring. I needed me rum. I wanted to rub it on my chest. I kept dreaming  
about the time the TV wasn't working, it was fuzzy she said ring ring ring ring. It was  
snowing on the TV and I couldn't see 'em. I couldn't hear 'em I remember it was salty and I  
remember the water was salty. My feet getting cold on TV believe me they said ring ring ring  
ring.

**JOHN:**

Pops, please don't do this to me.

## **SCENE 28**

*In the flat John returns to the hotpot.*

**CELIA:**

What is wrong?

**JOHN:**

That's it I knew it... it's over. They rejected me again. O.K. No more Mr. Nice Guy.

**ABU:**

Jeeeeeeeeez if that was Mr. Nice Guy I'd love to meet Mr. Nasty.

**JOHN:**

You say that smart-arse crap one more time I'll ... listen you losers get out of my place.

**CELIA:**

This is my place.

**ZANDRA:**

Celia love are you going to let him talk like this?

**JOHN:**

Stop calling her love.

**CELIA:**

John...no John you don't do this today.

**JOHN:**

Get a grip, I have a dream just like MLK.

**STEVE:**

Yeah all loonies dreams never end.

**SIEANNA:**

It's not a dream it's a freaking nightmare.

**CELIA:**

This my place, John you can't talk to my guests like this and you promise me.

**JOHN:**

Celia in front everybody you prove you care about them more than me.

**ABU:**

Listen if I were you...

**JOHN:**

She's not listening to you, I said this is no place for trash like you.

**ZANDRA:**

You...b...

**JOHN:**

Yes?

**ZANDRA:**

Celia love...

**JOHN:**

Not to her, say it to me. You know you want to do it, let it out. You were gonna call me a black bast...

**ZANDRA:**

No I was going to call you a bigot. A foul mouthed... bigot.

*John walks over to the hotpot, he knocks it over everybody moves out of the way. John beats his chest animalistically he cries out like a wounded animal. The guests panic they try to leave Celia stands in front of them.*

**CELIA:**

Please I don't want anybody to leave, I want to say sorry to all of you.

**JOHN:**

Stop grovelling.

**CELIA:**

Stop it John.

**JOHN:**

If I were you lot I would get out of this place now.

**CELIA:**

You can't leave.

**ZANDRA:**

This is wrong, I feel sorry for you Celia love.

**STEVE:**

You need a doctor mate. Celia I'm sorry I have a nervous disposition I have to scoot... *(he leaves)*.

**ZANDRA:**

Celia love I can't take this, send me a text later... *(she leaves)*.

**SIEANNA:**

Me too... Celia I'm out of here... *(she leaves)*.

**ABU:**

Sorry Celia, the guy's out of control. What's his problem? *(he leaves)*.

## **SCENE 29**

**POPS:**

Sure I remember it was cold down there me balls were red hot, then it were ring ring ring ring. I know what number it was, ring ring ring ring, it were snowing and I remember ring ring ring ring, the... I started doing it ring ring ring ring and he was ring ring ring ring doing it with her.

**JOHN:**

O.K. what were you doing Pops while they were doing it?

**POPS:**

Tommy was lighting wet matches he were ring ring ring ring reading when she was ring ring ring blowing on the matches with him.

**JOHN:**

Pops...who's Tommy?

**POPS:**

Sing it now I was ring ring ring ring doing it, he was ring ring ring ring doing it. I was doing it, he was doing it. I was doing it, he was doing it. I was doing it, he was ring ring ring ring doing it. I was doing it, he was doing it. I remember she was ring ring ring ring doing it when I was doing it. She was doing it in...doing it when we were on the ship we kept doing it. Ring ring ring ring, hey you stopped singing? You have the right time? I have to go for a rub down, ring ring ring ring you got me rum ready?

**JOHN:**

No Pops you're not going until you tell me about Jack, Joseph Jason and Tommy.

**POPS:**

Let's sing it ring ring ring ring no...no I remember it were not them. It was him...yeah Singh. Ring ring ring ring Sing, he popped it into her. That's why I got no kids and I knew it... ring ring ring ring you looks ugly like Singh.

**JOHN:**

What?

**POPS:**

Stop singing it hurts, ring ring ring ring give Singh a call, he were injecting his towel on his head to stop it getting wet. He said we can't have kids she jumped in the water and then she was gone 'cause ring ring ring ring the bastard frog Singh jumped after her. No movies after that, she was doing it and he was doing it. I saw my feet and I saw his hairy feet. That bastard frog Singh lost his towel, ring ring ring ring he squeezed his salty marbles the cherries popped.

**JOHN:**

Pops what do you mean you have no kids? Who am I to you?

**POPS:**

Bastards all of 'em ring ring ring ring so you better call the biggest bastard Singh.

**JOHN:**

What's Singh got to do with me?

**POPS:**

Ring ring ring ring ring we call hairy Singh. I kept doing it and then he kept doing it and then he were in her tummy where it was the... ring ring ring ring just call Singh he's gonna die.

**JOHN:**

I'm begging you Pops, just this once tell me I'm your son.

**POPS:**

Don't you get it? Ring ring ring ring call ugly Singh. I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...You...it...she...shiny marbles. Do it ring ring ring call old Singh.

**JOHN:**

Pops please, I'm not ugly...I'm like you and Ma, you're not ugly.

**POPS:**

Now you got it we sing it in the morning we sing it in the evening, ring ring ring ring you call Singh...he ain't home he went swimming for the towel now he's gone. It stinks you gonna wipe it or not 'cause I got another one cooking?

### **SCENE 30**

*The flat the guests have gone. John and Celia are left. Celia is staring down at the ruined hotpot.*

**CELIA:**

Why did you do it John?

**JOHN:**

You know why...

**CELIA:**

Why are you so mean to everybody? They were my guests, I wanted them to enjoy today.

**JOHN:**

You were against me.

**CELIA:**

No John this is not true.

**JOHN:**

You attacked me.

**CELIA:**

I did not say anything bad to you and you...got mad.

**JOHN:**

Yes I was mad. They were saying things like I'm a black bastard behind my back, they know exactly what they're doing and you...Judas you stabbed me in the heart.

**CELIA:**

I and they never say things about you because you are black.

**JOHN:**

Just because you didn't hear it doesn't mean they didn't say it. I am black I'M FUCKING BLACK but am I pure black? Yeah yeah, ring ring ring ring call Singh... check it out, I know.



**CELIA:**

What are you talking about John?

**JOHN:**

I'm talking about betrayal, you and...ring ring, just call Singh.

**CELIA:**

What does ring ring ring... mean?

**JOHN:**

If Pops is right, ring ring means I'm a half breed ugly mutt.

### **SCENE 31**

*John is alone.*

**JOHN:**

Be careful folks now we enter Dante's descent through blistering hell. He reserved The Ninth Circle for the lowest furthest from heaven because it's for the premeditated sin of treachery, he knew the people who betray their loved ones, their country and their God all roast in hell together.

**JOHN:**

The rats are leaving this sinking ship so I have little time. The greatest gift for humans is the power to communicate through languages. Language is everything to me so why is it hard today? I've never understood why that fossil Shakespeare is performed all over the world when the language is outdated, impenetrable and arcane.

*John stops he takes out his mobile he reads from it aloud.*

**JOHN:**

According to the Oxford Dictionary the word arcane means known or understood by a few. Also requiring secret knowledge to be understood, as in mysterious esoteric languages that few understand.

**JOHN:**

They call Shakespeare a genius of communication, yet 97 percent... that is a generous slice of what he's written nobody understands.

**JOHN:**

The man I call my father has lost the ability to communicate in English. My mother's distorted English is unreliable and the woman I love doesn't understand me. And now I...I can't control myself. I know I'm up shit creek without a paddle.

**JOHN:**

Maybe the Bard is right. My kingdom for a horse would come in handy right now. Or perhaps something from The Merchant of Venice since those I cannot reach speak like Shakespeare's "infinite deal of nothing" and when I speak my truth they hate me.

**JOHN:**

I'm no hunchback but this villain says...excuse the dodgy pronunciation we've established this stuff is arcane... "Thus I clothe my naked villainy with odd old ends stol'n out of holy writ and seem a saint, when most I play the devil".

**JOHN:**

Enough... this half-breed is out of treacherous words.

## **SCENE 32**

*The Flat mid conversation.*

**CELIA:**

...yes I know about genies I understand them.

**JOHN:**

I wasn't talking about a genies, I was talking about genius. You know like Mozart...  
Tolkien...if I have my chance maybe it'll be me.

**CELIA:**

Genie yes the boy finding the lamp. He rubs it and he has three wishes.

**JOHN:**

What are you talking about?

**CELIA:**

In Taiwan he has four wishes.

**JOHN:**

Trust me I will be successful and when I am we'll go and see your parents.

**CELIA:**

In Taiwan we cannot talk like you in front of the old ones. We are quiet because we  
respect them.

**JOHN:**

Is that why don't you let me talk with your family when you're online zooming with  
them? Or is it...Are you scared of showing them a black face?

**CELIA:**

No it's not that, it is not how you look.

**JOHN:**

It's like I'm talking to myself. If I'm talking why don't nobody hear me?

**CELIA:**

I hear you in the hotpot, they hear you too, but you don't want to hear us.

### **SCENE 33**

*Celia and Zandra are in separate spots on their phones.*

**ZANDRA:**

You mean you already knew, at the hotpot? Why didn't you tell me?

**CELIA:**

I wasn't sure. I need to see the colour's on the strip change. Now they have changed it is true.

**ZANDRA:**

Have you told him?

**CELIA:**

Soon. Today, perhaps.

**ZANDRA:**

Celia love, he's not fit to be a father. You have to leave him. Listen we have a spare room it's a little small, what the hell you come and stay with us.

**CELIA:**

No. I have no-one else here and I have family who...I don't know what he will do.

**ZANDRA:**

Will he hurt you?

**CELIA:**

No...Not like that.

### **SCENE 34**

*John and Celia are in the bedroom.*

**JOHN:**

This is...it can't happen. You were supposed to be taking the pill.

**CELIA:**

I throw all the pills in bin. I read online pills are bad for health. I want to live a natural life.

**JOHN:**

I told you I would look after you. But just you and me, understand? I look after you and you support me. This is...I'm lost for words.

**CELIA:**

The word is simple. It is "baby" John.

**JOHN:**

And what kind of baby would that be? Half plus half and then half it again?

**CELIA:**

It is a person John. A baby is a gift it is a miracle.

**JOHN:**

I promise when my writing hits the world you won't need to worry about nothing...woman are you listening to me?

**CELIA:**

The publishers do not like your writing John. They say it is not good.

**JOHN:**

What do those white dickheads know? They stand between me and my people. OK. I don't need them. If the mainstream media won't have me I'll do it because like a deadly rash I'll be an online influencer for rejected people...and then the publishers will come crawling

on filthy knees like disease spreading rats. When I'm the king of influencers on socials all the intelligent ones will see my head glitters in a crown of thorns made from love.

Yeeeeeeeeeeaaaah hahhhhhhhhhh Celia, I'll be raking it in with both hands. Think about it isn't this nuts I ain't paid for a lottery ticket and I've hit the jackpot.

**CELIA:**

I don't understand you.

**JOHN:**

Say that again...

**CELIA:**

I don't understand you.

**JOHN:**

What do you mean you don't understand me? I taught you this language so why don't you...I told you from now on you can't do this to me...not now I've the winning Euro numbers on my magic fingers.

**CELIA:**

John you say all loonies buy lottery tickets because they never win.



### **SCENE 35**

*The International Club Celia Abu Sieanna Steve and Zandra sit on chairs they're deep in conversation.*

**ZANDRA:**

Shall we stream a movie? You'd like that Celia, eh?

**ABU:**

Nothing like a good old tear-jerker.

**STEVE:**

Home Alone gets me every time.

**ABU:**

An oldie but a goodie.

**SIEANNA:**

Stupid of them to leave that kid...

**CELIA:**

Please tell me friends who is the one who is home alone...

**ZANDRA:**

It's a comedy about...

**STEVE:**

No...no Celia love it's the most heart breaking movie about...

**SIEANNA:**

A young boy left at home...

**STEVE:**

ALONE.

**SIEANNA:**

While his parents go away on holiday.

**CELIA:**

This is cruel why do they leave a child...

**ZANDRA:**

Enough guys, for Celia's sake let's go for something more upbeat.

**SIEANNA:**

Yeah. A musical maybe.

**ABU:**

Good idea. It's lovely to have you with us Celia. You relax.

**ZANDRA:**

Home Alone a tear-jerker? What are you made of Steve, butter?

### **SCENE 36**

*John has a can of beer.*

**JOHN:**

Celia this beer's warm. Where did the ice-cold cans go?

**CELIA:**

You are drinking too much John.

**JOHN:**

I know how much I can hold, trust me.

**CELIA:**

But I don't, I mean sometimes I don't trust you.

**JOHN:**

You have to we have nothing else but trust.

**CELIA:**

I do not trust you because I cannot believe you. You say white people stop you from success but it is just words, you prove nothing.

**JOHN:**

I don't need to prove anything because I know it and I know I love you. You know that and I can prove that.

*From his pocket John takes out a small bottle he shows it to Celia.*

**CELIA:**

What is this...?

**JOHN:**

It's like the ending of that play you've been studying in English class, you know the Shakespeare one.

**CELIA:**

Romeo and...Juliet?

**JOHN:**

Yes Celia if you don't trust me if you don't believe me I'm going to take these pills. Say you trust me, say you want us to be together then I won't take them.

**CELIA:**

I loved you John I care about you. But you don't take me to meet your family, you don't want a family with me so I go without you.

*Celia walks past John, he grabs her.*

**CELIA:**

Let go my friends say you hurt people. They say you are a beast, you are rejected by people you do not see.

**JOHN:**

If you walk away you're responsible for what happens to me.

**CELIA:**

No I won't be responsible, John I'm telling you for the last time...

**JOHN:**

Celia you have to stay with me...All I'll do is work hard, no matter if I push trolleys in a supermarket I don't care about making it as a writer.

*John puts the bottle under his mouth.*

**CELIA:**

What are you doing?

**JOHN:**

I'm going to count to the number three and if you don't want to be with me and you walk away I won't walk again.

**JOHN:**

One...

**CELIA:**

No...you can't do it.

**JOHN:**

Two...

**CELIA:**

Please John you must stop it.

**JOHN:**

Three.

*John moves the bottle towards his lips Celia slaps the bottle away and they hug each other and they kiss.*

**JOHN:**

You know what they say in China if you save a person's life?

**CELIA:**

You are responsible for that life yes I know.

**JOHN:**

So now you have to do one more important thing for me.

Give me your phone.

*Celia hands the phone to John, he dials a number and then he hands it to Celia.*

**JOHN:**

On that number somebody is going to talk to you, after they talk to you they're going to want your details and they will want you to make an appointment to take care of your big problem.

**CELIA:**

What is my big problem?

**JOHN:**

That big problem inside you I want you to take care of it, so it is just you and me Celia. No-one else. I know you will do this for us Celia. All you have to do is make the appointment with some clever people and they will take care of everything. I promise you I'll be with you I will hold your hand and you don't have to worry. I will be different, you will be different we will have a table for two forever.

*Celia puts the phone in the air her hands begin shaking.*

**CELIA:**

No I can't do this John we must share table for three.

**JOHN:**

Yes you can, you can do it and you must do it.

*Celia puts the phone to her mouth she talks into the phone.*

**CELIA:**

Hello yes...

*She flings the phone aside.*

**CELIA:**

No!

*Around the side of the stage the hotpot friends emerge from the shadows.*

**ABU:**

No.

**STEVE:**

No.

**SIEANNA:**

No.

**ZANDRA:**

No she won't do it because it's her choice, not yours.

### **SCENE 37**

*John is alone.*

**JOHN:**

The most precious thing I know about all living things is their time, I'm talking about how much time we have is extremely precious and this is why I want to take some of your precious time to listen to me. I'll hold my hands up in the air I admit I've done bad things that does not mean I'm a bad person, as far as I know all humans do bad things. If they haven't I'll give them the stones and believe me these won't be pebbles they will be heavy duty rocks. It's something to do with perspective, from your point of view it might seem the way you see me is a bad person and from my point of view I could say the same thing about you. This is something to do with genius like Einstein and people like that who are a million times cleverer than me. I know I've never been a clever person, probably I'm the opposite in most things and I don't want to talk about these things anymore. They make me see how tiny I am, from a certain perspective I'm no different to an ant who scurries along dedicating its life to the lazy queen. That's all it does day in day out at any time a larger creature comes along to crush it, the insignificant ant can't do anything to protect itself. This is how I feel most of the time in other moments it's the reverse, I know at any time I could step on an ant to crush it and this depends from my perspective sometimes I hate ants at other times I don't mind them.

It's obvious this lonely sad broken man is no Shakespeare, he's no Dante and hell he's no Tolkien. All my life I dreamt of building my chair, that's what the man who I used to call Pops told me while he whipped my ass. But it has to be my chair, one day I'm going to make a perfect chair and if I'm alone then I build it on my own. So hear this white blood-spattered hands of unholy oppression, stay away from me 'cause you won't stop me from building the finest chair the world has ever seen. No it's not a poxy chair it's a magnificent golden throne,



I'm gonna be on top of the world and then I'm gonna shout..."I made it Ma! I'm on top of the world!"

*Lights up on Ma and Pops.*

**MA:**

Hey who you talking to? You still dreaming...shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhush...you better be careful son 'cause you is gonna end up like him. I know you're hurting and I know you're hungry son so stop messing about like the old days. It's time to grow up...be a man listen to your wise old Ma 'cause she knows you need a nice slice of ginger cake with a cold bottle of orange fizz. This time make sure you bag your dirty undies, last time you left them hanging... on the landing.

*Only John's exasperated voice is heard in the distance.*

**JOHN:**

Maaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa...

END OF PLAY.

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