



"We see people's lives being destroyed, resulting in displacement and the resentment against refugees who flee those war zones. I had to deal with these issues and this is what I did".



Interview with Rukhsana Ahmad

From Kabul to Kunduz TUE 8 MAY & SAT 12 MAY 7.30PM

Award winning writer and founder of Kali Theatre company, Rukhsana Ahmad speaks to Kali about the upcoming first public showing of her fantastic new play *From Kabul to Kunduz*, how much progress has been made by women and human rights...

Q. What inspired you to write *From Kabul to Kunduz* in particular?

Having experienced two short but brutal wars between India and Pakistan, both of which touched me personally, I became a peace lover early in my life. Wars extract an unacceptable cost in both human and economic terms. I absorbed the passion of CND marches in the early 80's and the powerful sense of a mass movement that caught so many of us as we marched against the Bush-Blair-War in hopes that we would have an impact. It's a tragedy that we were not heard.

But I did not feel ready to write about war until about a year ago, when Helena Bell invited Nadene Ghouri to lead an "Inspirations" session for Kali writers. It really did move and inspire me, sparking off the story of this play in my head. It's not directly about war but it captures my revulsion for it.

Every day we see horrific images on our TV sets of wounded children and civilians, of cities laid to waste, of the devastation of infrastructure and people's homes that forces them into exile...Watching the resentment against refugees who are driven from war zones to our shores in search of safety, I felt I had to attempt this story, however, difficult the challenge might be. And it is, indeed, tough.

Q. Are the characters based on people you know?

The two main protagonists, the female politician, Raabia Durrani, and the refugee, Saeed, are inspired by two real life stories

that Nadene told us that day. Both my characters relate to their originals very loosely. They're inspired by images and memories planted by books, novels, films and news reports about the Afghan war and memories and stories of real people in parallel situations, but they are fictional. To make them credible and to relate them to the situations depicted in the story you fuse them with imaginary traits, embedding thoughts, impulses and emotions in moments that you intuit or invent for them. Story makes character, but characters are the dynamo of a play. They drive the story.

Q. What would you like to communicate to the audience through this play?

The awful tragedy of war. I want them to know that behind the glory, behind the patriotism, behind the noble motives that each party claims, are all the darker, sadder truths, the conflicting interests of warring nations and state machineries, the lies and the losses. The deaths of young men, women and children, the devastation of cities, of homes and family life, often the loss of childhood and the youth of an entire generation add up to an unacceptable cost.

Q. How relevant is the season of WAR plays today?

It is utterly and totally relevant right now. While the proxy war in Syria plays out on our TV screens, the ashes of the Iraq war are still red hot. Iran, Yemen and Turkey all seem under threat and are also embroiled in regional conflicts. North Korea is set against

the South, which is regularly primed by the US. China is puffing up its feathers and Russia appears to be spoiling for a fight too. All in all, the world has become a highly volatile and dangerous place as a result of deep state connivance and conflicting agendas pursued by nation states that stir up naïve and false assumptions in the polity about their own status and power, encouraging a worrying and dangerous readiness to throw away peace.

Q. You set up Kali a long time ago... how much progress has been made in highlighting ethnic minority women's voices in the world of theatre?

Kali has had a significant impact on the scene but we are still fighting the structural barriers and inequalities of gender, class and ethnicity. I see our success as a true parallel of the successes achieved by the Women's Movement of the 80's. There have been huge gains but there's still a considerable way to go...

Q. The WAR plays season is linked to the 70 year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... any reflections?

A lot of hope was invested in the Universal Declaration of human Rights when it was adopted seventy years ago. It is heartbreaking to see flagrant violations of those rights and principles in the 21st C. Wars affect entire nations and countries – they always lead to a suspension of human rights by the governments that are invaded and, of course, invaders trample over the rights of their victims without acknowledging this. They deliberately target civilian lives, destroying medical facilities, educational and civilian infrastructures, energy provision and, as a result, people's livelihood and futures. Destruction that is just casually summed up in the cruel phrase: collateral damage!

From Kabul to Kunduz will be directed by Helena Bell