



# **EXODUS | RESOURCES TRANSCRIPTS**

# EXODUS | ANNA AND ARYANA

So she enters, she's on a Dover Beach and about to have a photo shoot and she's Home Secretary and at present but she's got her eyes on the top job of being Prime Minister and so everything's kind of aimed to really put her in the best light the whole aim of that Dover photo shoots were also going to announce a new initiative that we've come up with and we're going to have an interview with a journalist on a train enter Anna

I am the journalist on the train and I work for The Times and we meet Toby we meet Toby when she's literally just met the Home Secretary and they're not expecting her because they're expecting a man called Scott that was originally supposed to be doing the interview I very last minute have come in to replace Scott because Scott has been sacked so yeah they're very much like who are you? and I'm like I normally do the makeup column but today I'm here to talk about politics.

It's weird because I mean you kind of find out you have the job but you don't know who's in the cast before you get to rehearsal room so it's kind of very private time and you taking your personal thoughts and like your very personal way of thinking oh how is this character but it could completely change when you get into the room when you realise what the themes and the the like the genre we're creating this cast because you create it as a word playing against yeah your role within the yeah within the company so I think it's like being really reactive is quite an important part of being into the room so as much work you might want to do on your character beforehand it's more sort of research generalised research of like into the world of politics I suppose for this play you definitely needed to watch a good few videos of politicians and just like kind of listening to podcasts about the current climate and the current Home Secretary and then when I got into the room it was like oh wonderful so like Debbie's vision. also curated that was kind of like really loud and like just fun which I might not have been a drama school teacher once said to me at RCS, he was like acting what we teach you at RCS is it's not about putting on the coats it's about taking off the layers so I always think if I was in this situation I was a journalist I was at The Times I got put on last minute to an interview that I really wanted and then I had to say these lines how would I say it so that's the angle I go from it's quite wonderful to see how everyone also works in a very different way within our cast yeah and it was really great as well because our characters are so different anyway so their worlds are so different so they would be working in a different way and and then how we could be really cohesive as well but yeah so many different like styles in the same room and I think that's something that Debbie found as well because I think as a director you need to hone in on what what makes that actor what clicks for them but you're changing it with every single actor and I think in our room that was really obvious because we're all so different yeah and talking about the process as well like Debbie in the initial stage has got to do those with improvisation sometimes they were kind of like solo or in your physicality and then sometimes like we're meeting our character actors in a private moment and do you remember where yours was was in your private moment? Mine was like really low but you're in your flat you and you just come back from it's on a flat in London like I said I've just I've just come working from The Times I'm at a job I don't really like and had like sad music on and was like and a box room like having a glass of wine like crying I think yeah not that you ever see that side of Toby Tucker on stage but it definitely helps get the depth and then my character was in like a hotel room uh just having a little practice for a speech yeah yeah yeah but I think that was really useful because it kind of got us all looking into each other's world as well but also and it was really great to to get you in your your body of that that character as well and like

Yeah lots of processes were kind of like improving without the script yet and was really useful before we sort of dived into it and that makes you really really know a character if you need to use your own words because the piece is quite political and the current climate also kept changing and yeah we definitely were touching base with British politicians and looking at and also British journalists in a way yeah so kind of just looking at how they present themselves in when they're talking to the public

and they want them on side how they're presenting themselves and when running for an election as well and it's really interesting to see those little quirks and I also kind of looked at the Home Secretary as well just looking at her little mannerisms and which I find absolutely fascinating because she's an Asian woman who is an immigrant and who's then spouting stuff that wouldn't allow her own family wouldn't give rights to her own family so I thought that was like super interesting like just delving into how she's how she started off her career and the interviews from that period to current climate and we put it on it feet in very early stages really quickly which was lovely because one of my fears as an actor is you start off in rehearsal you do text work and and you're behind a table and you have that safety behind the table it's all vocal and then also it's stand up and you're like I don't know what to do with my body my physicality and you forget how to work like your hand you're like do I always do my hand like this and then you're like how do I write you're just so aware of your body in a way that you as humans aren't and so getting up really early like took away because you were doing it and I also realised we we did so many runs of it because it's like a marathon isn't it there's loads of like obviously because it's a farce there's loads of like opening doors this scene this store and I think for everyone it was to get the pace of it to understand what scenes needed to be (clicks fingers) and what scenes you could take more time with where you actually need to give the audience a minute to breathe so I think that early on if we got to like right before tech and then and then ran it it would be like it's all wrong it's all wrong we need to go back to the drawing board so yeah that and that's something I've not done in any other play yeah I've never been in a situation where I was like oh I actually feel comfortable knowing those little details usually you're like you do your standalone scenes and you don't sew it together until like a lot later and then all of a sudden it all becomes about props and where you're supposed to be which side and entrances and it was like we just felt really...well I just felt really comfortable not scary yeah Uma actually started writing this in 2018 and so the world was very different and and it's not until we're in rehearsals where everything..you couldn't make it up like like it was almost like people said like a documentary was happening when we were in rehearsals and we were like and I think it's like the script didn't change but actually sometimes with current events that have happened as well it's like the way that we play it might need to be more sensitive to the audience's reactions and because it has a different meaning now because there's some lines in it about the prime minister and being on the last legs and actually that was happening and has already happened now so it's like it means different things.

I thought it was the biggest change was actually when we were doing the show and then the new prime minister had been selected and all of a sudden as I was talking about the Prime Minister as a he I was like oh it's not true anymore it's not true because it's not a he anymore because it's a she and I was like oh it doesn't need to be real it doesn't need to be it's just written but I definitely got the like oh it's been real this whole time until now and we've had to do the crossover of the real life events which means we need to take the audience on that crossover as well.

The best writing touches on where you've got a really dark moment but then the writer also makes you laugh and I think the moments of the piece also juggle like constantly with what reaction you're having at the time and I um I actually think when it comes to the comedy of it, playing it straighter the darker the moment is, the more comedic it'll be well if you were if we were trying to play it as clowns in that moment you'd lose it in a dark moment but I think Anna's word of delicious is how I find like writing that really gets you because you realise the truth in it.

Well once I get thrown off the train, once I nearly die and but when I come back on on top of the train, I've got a moment with Phoebe Bernays where I basically find out I've always been on the back foot that I was never going to win, the story was never going to go out and she offers me a job that's then with their party and would be totally life-changing but I think in that moment that's Toby's key moment because it's it's where she gets tested most because she's she's talking the talk the whole time and then in the end she, she says she's interested in this job that she's totally against and against the party and against these people and literally, literally going to work under her her attempted murderer do you know what I mean, I think that's the point and probably it's quite hard because in a

farce obviously there's really really serious moments and especially in this play and I think that one for me is where where the farce goes out the window, where I'm where I'm no longer playing the game I'm no longer in a comedy and I'm and I'm just telling my- Toby's truth- Toby's character's truth.

That was my favourite moment when I read the play and I think it's just because you realise for all of humanity that even in that situation you might you'd probably do the same because you cannot win with the powers and then I think it's really clever of Uma to then put the footage in at the end and because when all is lost actually as a community there is power and so yeah that was when I read it that was my absolute favourite moment.

So the key moments for Asiya Rao would start off with a baby washing up on the coast of Dover and because that's the first time that I need to be prime minister is rocked and the reality of that actually happening might not, so she's really clutching on to the possibility of that and the more events that happen and the likelihood is like getting less and less and as is really trying to hold on tight and her special advisor Phoebe as well they are literally like grasping for it and it's slipping through their fingers of all possibility and so the next moment that's really quite big for Asiya is when she connects with the baby so she has a little bit of a, the baby bites her nipple off but in a weird way as destructive as that might seem actually brings out the humanity in Asiya maybe through a weird dream but um she actually connects to the baby and that child and doesn't see it as not a human and just a refugee, she actually sees it as a baby and hers and she really gets protective like looking into its eyes like it's big beautiful eyes we keep mentioning and it's like suddenly she realises that that human is like, she needs to protect it and however running through all of those lines that's happening at the time is still her need to be prime minister that is huge in her life and then you've got this baby that would mean that couldn't happen. Her and her special advisor constantly covering up things that might unveil it but at the end they have to well they make a decision to throw the baby out the window because that's her only chance of being prime minister and in that moment she decides that actually this life is worth anything she shuts down her humanity at that point to be prime minister so in a weird way with politicians as well there's so many yeah things they'll say where you're like I don't know if that's really you or if that's just because you need to be where you are and and you're spouting that to for the people to like you or to get a reaction and I know Priti Patel was talking about the death penalty and I was like did you do that just to elevate yourself to public consciousness that you are you're there and like people see you and it's or do you really believe that yeah it's it's crazy and then the next moment I think was quite key is after Phoebe gets rid of Toby as well that completes any problem they had and all of a sudden everything she's dreamed of is possible and we kind of leave on a really bleak note of that she given this kind of complete ruse to the public of like presenting herself as this the perfect politician when we've seen all of what's happened.

Its quite hard because it's such a small cast, there's only four of us so you get time with everyone so like I get time with every single person because I think me and your relationship is really really important to me because I need to get the story I need to talk to you to be honest can't really be bothered with Phoebe Bernays, I'm like just like me to speak to the home secretary please and I need you also because I need you to write good things about me so it's ah this weird, we've got our like kind of understanding yeah we don't really like each other but then because we really keeps coming in it creates this it creates this relationship with Phoebe that I that I'm not wanting really so that becomes strong your mum coming in like as Manjula Aunty, Toby finds a bit of humanity and Manjula Aunty who obviously of course underneath is Haben Haile but when when she starts talking about Asylum policies and stuff like that and like oh we agree on that so that creates a strong connection but I think I'm probably because I'm not in on the game that you three are in on, I'm probably quite separate so I've got about an equal relationship with everyone I'd say but I'm I'm the outsider I think in terms of and Momo I don't really care about to be honest couldn't care less because it's just your kid and I'm like great story like I don't that's all I know

Yeah the same because it's such a small cast actually every character there's a relationship and

Asiya is needing them as well as like Phoebe and her are like completely coexist because they both like need each other like Asiya relies on her so much to tell her what to do what she's thinking, she just completely manages Asiya is almost like a puppet to Phoebe but also Phoebe needs Asiya to be the front face of that I also think they've got like a well we did the whole back stories but like there's a real history between them but at the same time it's always been work related so I I would I think they would both sell each other out and put each other under the bus if necessary and I'm sure there is cold to be able to do that working relationship, it's working but yeah throughout the whole show they yeah I'm gonna say have each other's back which is terrible word to say for all the horrible things they do but they really are solving each other's problems and even though Phoebe is really doing in the absolute sense of it where every issue she's yeah Asiya is her absolute puppet so Phoebe is really competent and cut the whole piece of solving the issue and like getting the reality of being prime minister closer and closer and again with journalists as a politician a journalist so annoying to me but at the same time I need to present myself or Asiya needs to present herself in a way that you're gonna write in a positive light and for the public and then Habiba's character Haben, I never meet her as Haben until the end and have no idea about Haben being a refugee but just as my mother as much as I'm hating how loud and wrong the costume is and how she's presenting herself as an Asian woman instead of being really British which is what Asiya really wanted, you don't call yourself Manjula Auntie no let's take away this we are British and and she's crazy I still need her because I need the journalist to buy in to that we haven't just that she is my mother and I'm a good person so and then Momo like I need Momo because again to start with I actually need Momo to just be quiet and not make a fuss but actually towards the end I think I realised that nobody there's no love for Asiya in her world and yet this baby is the first thing that's giving her that reaction and like giving her those feelings so for the characters you do plot I'm putting on the front I'm not putting on front because the show moves so fast your thought happens on the line like and the lines have been really speedy so that's why like particularly as well with Toby is like playing a game but then having to believe the next line but it's happening at such speed you don't have much time to go oh I'm going to show the audience that I'm actually going to do something sneaky here because you need to keep on talking so you need to trust that they get it yeah that they're getting what you're doing and everyone, it's quite athletic it's athletic acting in that sense because it's like yeah when you actually look at what or like all the other actors like yeah Anna's doing in like Sophie and stuff it's like every line you are in a different place yeah and which has not happened to me in a show before I've had really slow reactions like you get to ease yourself into like where you're going. I think what's so interesting about the characters Uma's written as well is like they're not likeable well most of them are not likeable yeah and I can be out in the audience and you know the audience hate you and like from the beginning it's like and they might turn in certain scenes but their attitudes constantly flip as well but you know when you're like some days the audience are like actually you know finding you funny and then like other days it's like you're just bombing.

# EXODUS | DEBBIE

I've got a really long relationship with this play which a lot of people maybe don't know about new writing that you end up actually working on something often for years even though this play feels incredibly modern and it is and it's sort of laughably up to date it's actually been around for a long time and Uma began writing it I think in 2018 and in a sort of 2020 I read a draft of it and it was really electric and really precient even then I absolutely love Uma's writing I knew her past work and so we began talking about that play at that point I then directed another piece of hers for audio so we got like a little bit further into our relationship as writer and director so I understood her style her politics where she's coming from and then down the line NTS picked the play up and they came to me and were like could you develop it so developing a play means in any way getting it to the next draft so that could be improving the story it could be making the characters richer it can be cutting it, often it's cutting, it can be rearranging the story it kind of depends per play so with this play um the first time we got together we did a research and development which means you have we had three days in a room with some actors and we went through the whole play bit by bit in detail and worked out the story and the plotting particularly because it's a farce and farce has to set and set up something with a seed pick it up later on tie it back in flip it on its head and then bring it out the other end again and so it takes a lot of meticulous planning and plotting so that first R and D we did that and we left Uma with a load of notes and ideas and she went away worked the script developed it even more and then we did that again we did another three days with actors and this time it had moved on massively far there was a whole new element of Opera in it the image of Britannia had entered the play - lots of changes and things had twisted and turned in it and that one was about honing it down to rehearsal draft so then again there's another set of notes so it's a lot of reading a lot of what do what do I think trying to articulate it trying to give it to the writer in a way that's useful and actionable because it's not very actionable if you like um I just didn't like act three you know you've got to be like in act three could we move this section because I think it'll impact the next section a bit more a lot of that before actually the start of rehearsal and then there's the whole section where you start to work out if this text is going to become 3D and a production who do we want around us to build that and so me and the writer put that put the team together put the cast together Uma came to London we saw actors we saw videos of actors all of that and that's all in the build up to the day we actually start rehearsal and everyone's in the room.

My process through rehearsal is based basically I think of it like research almost like so I'm a bit like a scientist where the first thing you do is read the script all the way through and you break it down into units because if you just jumped up and started doing what you felt you might miss stuff that's the real truth if we go you know with our assumptions we're going to miss accuracy we're going to miss that opportunity so going through the script bit by bit and starting to establish all the backstories the relationships starting to establish what people want so that you can get the action that's underneath lines but I'll also spend a lot of time getting in those early weeks getting on our feet quite quickly because I had a question about how does this set work how does a set that that changes and spins how can the actors utilise that to maximize it what do we do when there's a bag that's like this sort of bomb prop that's always about to go off how do you physically react to something like that what style is it you know the tone of the play is one of the hardest things in it it's got serious it's got absurd it's got silly so we would do a lot of exercises related to those specific questions So it'd be things like using a bag prop and finding 100 different ways to do something with it and what happens if it's full of gold but what happens if it's full of bombs you know and how do we treat it and how do we pass it to each other it starts to give us like a palette that you can choose stuff from and the other thing is lots of character work so doing like improvisations and backstories actors playing the characters on their own with a soundtrack that really means something to them so you can start to find a what they're like but also what you're not seeing because a lot of you know on stage action is in the way that humans behave in life is actually driven by something you don't see that's happened underneath and so I like to spend a bit of time on that as well even in a high style comedy I think

that's really important I guess in this there was a lot to do with being on action at sort of five times the normal speed of humanity because you have to go this person's come in I've reacted to this person something's fallen from above I pick it up I make a joke I exit and that level of like almost like high precision choreography of thought if that makes sense I think this thing I look over there I think the other thing and we we found a few ways to get into that a big thing for me is just using a ball so that everything is active so you know when you are when you don't have something to to bring your focus and action on it can be kind of a little bit loose but as soon as you bring a ball into I have to take that ball and pass it to you because this is on you I know I have to get it back and then it's got an intention to it it's really simple super simple but it really works a lot of uh like detail coming from like Jack Le Cox practice it's like a clowning practice um which is to do with precision of movement everything has a beginning middle and end and again that stops things being loose or like the energy going a bit like oh if you have to have a beginning a middle and an end it gives it a precision and a comedy that you can time so finding lots of really like punctuated gestures.

Two main challenges in rehearsal the first challenge was how to represent a baby because the core of this play is about if you're the person with the most amount of power over immigration policy in the UK faced with the truth of what you're doing which is a baby washing up next to you what do you do and what do you choose to do however the reality is that's a baby washing up on stage you know if you think about actually anything near the reality of that it's deeply disturbing it's definitely not a good night out at the theatre it's not funny so how do you do this as a comedy but keep a baby washed up on stage so all through rehearsal I'm sure stage management would be... were not thrilled by this because I would not decide what the baby was and because we kept trying different things we tried a very realistic baby at one point really disturbing not good and we tried a giant fish I think at one point we tried like a lump of sea fabric and we went over in the houses and actually what I really knew all the way through was that it just couldn't be representational so it couldn't really look anything like a baby because it just brings out all your feelings in a way that actually isn't useful we shouldn't be worrying about the baby we should be worrying a lot about the people in power who are creating dehumanising policies that we are laughing at so to bring the focus off to them we eventually got to the point the baby is a like lump of fabric that looks extremely not real and it's all about the sound so it's actually got a tiny speaker stuffed inside a fox puppet I believe which is covered in like maybe grains of rice I think it's quite it's quite a feat of prop building so it's a lump of fabric that cries realistically but it doesn't look realistic and then that allows the comedy to flow the other challenge was just that the world outside the rehearsal room was doing all the things that were in the play so there was you know it's about a Home Secretary it's about a South Asian female Home Secretary it's about a leadership race because the prime minister is in trouble all of those things happened through rehearsal and it was a bit like the world was kind of like getting ahead of the play we were trying to make a farce but actually the outside world was so absurd and what that does is it changes how you calibrate how the play lands it's really different if it's a total fiction about a fictional prime minister whose party is you know trying to oust him to get ahead when the actual prime minister is going through that outside you watch the play differently as a totally different meaning and so me and the writer every day we're going what does this mean for each of these scenes and do we change anything and do we do we change a line to make it to lean into it do we try and step away from it so it's clearly not you know we're not talking about Boris Johnson we're talking about some other prime minister um so going through all of that to find the version that still makes the point we want to make but somehow was essentially by the end of a documentary which was really really tricky actually but it turned out really in the end sticking to our guns was right and the script didn't really change that much but we the actors maybe slightly shift how they perform things to go with the audience.

I think the key themes are power, corruption - who's allowed to be... who's allowed their full humanity and who isn't, immigration - obviously but also systems that dehumanise people which all sound really dry but I think the play through absurdity is pointing at these really serious themes but each of those shows up in every single character Uma also spoke really beautifully about the status of being an outsider all four of these characters even the you know very privileged conservative special advisor

character are in some way an outsider you're watching four outsiders kind of circle the Ivory Tower of Power and never really be allowed in so that so yeah outsidersness so I think you could probably see the theme of power best realised through when the character Phoebe strong arms the character of Haben into doing a monologue about how she thinks an eye a wall of radiation is a good idea which obviously she really doesn't however Phoebe exerts her power over her by reminding her that her immigration case is in her hands so she better do what she's told and that level of sort of being backed into a corner of not having a choice of one person having all of the power and the other not shows up in that moment. I think you see it again later and this is more to do with corruption where Toby are hopeful you know working class Scottish journalist in the heart of power in Westminster at the very end you know she's got no hope the thing she was trying to do it's been deleted and she has been thrown off a train it's been a bad day Phoebe offers her a job it's really surprising you think she's going to be like you're done get out of here but actually she does the worst possible thing and offers her job and a way out of her debt and I think there was heartbreaking scene in the play is when she asks are you interested and Toby says I might be because that's how things become what they are now everyone who's got a principle and a backbone gets chipped away at because it costs to have principles you know it's really easy to say she shouldn't have done that if you're comfortable and you've got money and everything's easy but actually I really understand why she sells out but watching someone sell out and how they get chipped away and broken down to that moment that's one of the most important moments in the play for me.

So there's a few key relationship points so Phoebe and Haben kick off after one night stand so that's quite a key relationship point and of course that gets reversed really quickly in that Haben gets hired to play an actor for Phoebe and of course that's that parodynamic is then you know really like flipped from being the one night stands who you know she didn't want her number to being actually a really important aspect of this campaign going well so that's a really like delicious thing that you know the actors can play with and underneath those scenes where you've got Habiba having to be both Haben but also Manjula Auntie you know that they've had a one night stand last night so that dynamics under there the whole time. Asiya and Phoebe which is the Home Secretary and her special advisor is a really great quite classic farce relationship where it's a bit master and servant except that the servant is much more intelligent and cut-throat than the master but it's still lower status and you can tell that they've been together for a few years they know each other rub each other up the wrong way but also that they use each other they're in a bit of a devil's bind Phoebe's the best special advisor you can get and Asiya is maybe the top choice for prime minister because of quite cynical reasons and so you're watching two people who are quite a transactional dark relationship there and then you've got Toby who's the sort of newcomer to the group she her relationship to them you might not think that's a personal relationship but it is a relationship to a public figure so in the same way that we all know any MP who's particularly high up we think we know them we've maybe got an impression of them so she comes into that room and meets the Home Secretary you know that's quite a moment and then of course that gets flipped because she starts being absolutely insane and really erratic and you know quite disconcerting and then her mum comes in and the mum is really unexpected so again you've got a relationship there that everyone thought you know Toby thinks it's going to be formal respectful informative ends up being completely ridiculous so there's a lot of key relationships points not only in forming them but then flipping them which is you know as a good farce should do.

Well with this set we originally in the stage directions it's quite simple in that it's one train carriage and another corridor and that's it that's all there is and I wanted something that offered a feeling of what it was like to be in this world which is that it's relentless and there's a lot of spin you know it's a spinning set and things appear that you don't expect you have to deal with them and then they flip on their head again and so Elise and I went through looking at what's the functionality of space that can do that as well as just give us like you know a train table because a lot of it takes place there we coupled that with a theme that we're looking at which is of artificiality and construction in a way what this whole play is about is about a build up to a speech a political speech at the end so it's a bit like



pulling back the curtain in Oz and seeing all the inside machinations that happen before you see the very polite you know polished finish and before that there is just a host of nonsense and complication and a lot of corruption before that's that's what you're getting to see in this play so we wanted to emphasise the sort of artificiality and the construction of it partly to expose that but also to say that that can be deconstructed if you can see how things are constructed you can maybe see how to like tear them apart and change them so we wanted a reminder of that through the place that led us to something that was like really highly coloured quite quite almost cartoony slightly it's kind of too heightened it's a bit day-glow you know it meant that we used a lot of collage and a video design that emphasised everything had been a little bit too constructed and designed and arranged but also something that's spun and broke down actually and ends up looking kind of quite surreal and like a bad dream at several points and then at the end really shifts and does something completely different the play at the end almost changes form it's like a totally different play a really simple clear message and video plays at the end so yeah it was a very alive electric set with lots of movement they needed to thematically remind you underneath that this is all a bit of a game under it that you can undo

The footage of Kenmure Street at the end... this play could end before that and it would be really bleak like really really hopeless and actually we had discussions about how it should end in terms of that and you know there is a there is a sort of maybe a version of it where it ends there and that's we all agree things are things are grim aren't they that's bad you know but actually that's not true like there is that there's a even deeper more important truth which is about unity and action and what can change these things but we the whole thing we were stuck on like Uma and I for ages was how do we offer that to an audience especially once they've watched this play like what's the offer and it seemed like the play had to almost stop being a play like we had to be like we've done this farce for you but we're also living this farce aren't we? like this is a choice so let's look at something that was real when Unity happened when the people united and this it is possible to stop this stuff like it is possible to take action and at one point we looked at a montage of resistance, different protests but that felt too easy as well it felt like look at all these like you know happy successful protests it's so easy just rise up and it's not it's not at all easy it's not getting if anything harder in the UK whereas Kenmure Street was this one singular moment that's in the collective cultural consciousness especially in Scotland of a moment of resistance that worked and the human result of it we saw it you know the two men came out smiling you know like ready and didn't matter about the like circle of police around it because a bigger circle was the community and the unity and eventually we realised that just showing that simple truth was the answer to the whole rest of the play and every three minute the answer to power to corruption to immigration is about community and unity so we we show it we just have people chanting underneath as happened there and the goal of that with the audience is to offer not a simple solve not a get out on the street it's going to be okay but to go um we can do hard things and we can do them as a community and when we do when the people do unite that is a greater power and it always has been and always will be no matter what we're being told right now so the hope is that it offers some feeling of possibility change and a little bit of action.

# EXODUS | HABIBA AND SOPHIE

For Phoebe she's about to she's about, she's a special advisor to Asiya Rayo who's the Home Secretary they're about to just hit the ground running with a big campaign sort of revealing this big project with an interview and a photo shoot in Dover and it's all promoting this project womb and and so it's like it's a incredibly important day but the night before, we just hook up in Dover we don't know each other we've just like met, hooked up and woken up very hungover.

Right place at the right time kind of woman, yeah because it turns out I'm exactly what she needs.

Yeah, yeah, yeah at the time it's like just blowing off some steam but actually I absolutely need this woman for the day yeah to not to fall apart yeah.

My character is kind of a limbo because she has just arrived in the UK and has no one essentially and finding Phoebe was probably the only real connection she she's felt in a while, learning that she's in need of her for this job is like exactly what she was looking for, it's probably like too good to be true.

I did two readthroughs like sort of just sitting at, sitting a table, table work with the script just, just a drama, with doing dramaturg on it like asking questions, so I did two of those and I loved it I fell in love with it pretty immediately and I was like I really wanna, I really want to be part of this, got the part in the weeks coming up to starting rehearsals just kind of- I'm, I, I'm a bit of a like nerd I actually do work like really hard whether it was a school or like, so I I like was reading it and reading and reading it and thinking about all the questions and the things that I didn't quite get about the character or like coming with like physical options or watching farce and like looking at a lot of interviews with like people like Dominic Cummings and stuff like that seeing how they answered questions and what their general way of being you know in the world was. Came with lots of things I could offer but was prepared to not use any of them like yeah just some, a toolbox to play with and then and then you just scrap it if you need to that's what I did I was thinking in terms of comedy I was thinking about John Cleese a lot and like in *Faulty Towers* and how he uses his body to convey varying degrees of stress and then obviously like the way people who are like special advisors or politicians how they the the formula for how for avoidance and the formula for avoidance and accumulation of power and how you hypnotize people to do what you want them to do and like watching people do that in interviews was really useful because I want to show I wanted to like come in and show that up big time like show the mechanisms of it seems really like a running theme like I really want to like hold the curtain back to that kind of stuff and be like it's they all do the same thing it's a formula you know which everybody knows but yeah just to do that in this.

So I wasn't doing any acting until now I was reached out to by Uma the writer so she sent me the script and instantly I was I felt it was a very personal endeavour because this play, it felt like a very important play and I had recently become much more aware of how responsible I feel as a human being because I'm an educated woman who's not from the UK so, just I just came into the project with just the excitement of working on something important yeah just it just felt exactly what what I needed to be doing yeah. I just draw from personal experience because I came to the UK I have friends who've claimed Asylum. In terms of Manjula I think yeah I think she's the future me.

I thought Debbie was really it was a really smart move like quite early on when she made us do that run she just made us get up and do the show in front of NTS staff members it was really early on we hadn't even, we'd just been around the table haven't we yeah- I was on Zoom though-

Yeah yeah so I was acting with the screen but like that was that was actually brilliant because, you know I think I just think it was a really smart move because it made us like just have to get up and do it and it broke through the fear barrier and it was like well whatever happens in the next four weeks

just if you get up and are brave and do something you can do it and then obviously that what I liked after that was we just went through it in like pencil sketch so there was no preciousness about getting moments right immediately it was more just the flow of, of the farce and the shape and the arc and then did it again and it was as like a bit more kind of it was a bit more detail and then going through it again with more detail and then it came to the real intricacies of farce and how you how you land a laugh and like right down to the repeat, repeat, repeat kind of vibe so I really appreciated that in rehearsals yeah that structure of moving through the days there were moments where there was a lot of emotion in the room wasn't there?

Yeah there was a lot of anticipation around like before Boris Johnson resigned we were already kind of yeah there was a lot of anticipation in the air we felt a lot of like turbulence already when we were still working on the final speech on Asiya's final speech, yeah there was a kind of a tentativeness around the the boldness of it because Uma rewrote Asiya's speech and it was very straightforward kind of delivered in a way that was just like a politician would and I just I was there saying you know what like this is too too safe I feel like you know the the epitome of privilege is where we are right now because where I'm from you speak or shut up or die essentially so it's like guys this is where this is where change happens this is where you do it because no one will get killed, yeah I just I just got really riled up because the epitome of privilege is to be able to speak and not have to suffer any consequence.

Yeah I think Haben is the speaker of morality I would say I think she's the on on the scale I think she's the most moral, yeah it's a oppressed truth, yeah the most time I'm, I'm like living it is when with, when the with the reveal with the baby and it apparently being Asiya's and I'm just watching all the lies being told and I can't say anything yeah that kind of sums up the.

Like oh yeah like Phoebe Bernays is the archetype the absolute embodiment of privilege, of white privilege of someone who has been brought up in a like old money household you know just witnessed you know if you're in certain circles that buddy mentality you know you'll be all right we're just you know so she actually profits from this profit this project womb being put into place because her family are like pioneers of British engineering so they're going to get all the money for building this wall, she represents just that just how many people just shut off a part of themselves, block it off and then climb to power and do that by repressing other people and causing other people pain.

As long as Toby is not around I'm being truthful, yeah I think yeah she's the only one I'm performing to.

Layer upon layer important layer of deception like holding all of the info just trying to keep all of the helium balloons from flying around right just like get through this get the mission accomplished the only time I think the mask slips is when she's taken the, she's taken the diazepam and she's like, you know everything's just win-win-win but what's the point like, what is the point what was on the other side of this, what would actually happen if we just stopped doing this, being in the machine and in that moment it's not even because it's such a quick because it's such a fast play, but if it was like more of a real if it was slowed down a little bit, that moment she starts to think about it, and it, and it starts to potentially unopen that door that's there that's got all of the feelings inside it and she could have an absolute, she could fragment and have a complete breakdown in that moment like but then she shuts the door she has to wear without to shut the door she's just got enough of her brain with the diazepam kicking in to just get some coffee instead, and yeah, yeah when you've been on that that train physically and metaphorically for a very long time um staying on it seems to be the best option rather than facing who you are and what you've done.

The master key has to be Asiya, because she's my ticket where it's simpatico, we need each other we've we're one conglomerate mass and she's the, she's, we're the two-headed monster so I need

her yeah. Yeah, I would say Phoebe is my key because yeah I'm at her mercy essentially if I were to survive.

One I can think of is when I make a whole speech about how great this country is and then you let me know that I'd be in trouble if I don't yeah do what I'm told and yeah that, that is it is that's that's a key moment for me for my experience coming to the UK you're so quickly disillusioned with uh how you know, because the speech you know about how this country is a beacon of light, this is how people think of the UK, this is how I used to think of the UK ,

People are free to be the genuine authentic self.

I still I do, I do- everything around that you know in the speech I'm like but but the free to be your joyous authentic self definitely is is something that people here I think forget, and yeah so that's a really important thing yeah. I've got I mean I've got to say the baby you've got to say finding the baby and then also chucking the, chucking the baby out the window that moment again if that was if there was more time that is that is like physical illness so unable to feel anything but like Phoebe would be throwing up in the toilet like, if Toby hadn't come in just that physical the physical reaction but the cover-up continues and the train keeps going, yeah but there's tons of moments but I guess the ones to do with finding Momo and getting rid of Momo and then the almost breakdown.

I can maybe also for me laying out all the conditions, I think that was a it's an important thing because not many people get the chance to yeah just yeah and give it to them.

# EXODUS | UMA

I would describe Exodus as a farce probably a subversion of a farce in kind of in the tradition of Dario Fo the Italian playwright or maybe Joe Orton, kind of those were big influences on me subvert the genre of farce to explore like contemporary politics particularly British immigration and Asylum policy and maybe more specifically how good the tragedies of Asylum Seekers are being utilized to consolidate political power in this particular moment in time and the kind of cynicism of that.

I think in 2015 that was the year that, as you started noticing like a lot of the imagery around migration, the migration crisis was in the news cycle almost constantly and it there was just images constantly pouring in and I remember just being on the train a lot in around here in Glasgow and, and the Metro would just be covered with images of people and you know David Cameron had referred to these people as a swarm and, and there was like the you know the life jackets the boats and, and it there was something very I felt you know there was something that shifted in the way that we perceived people the, the threat level being played up and which you could see like you know has led to certain very like momentous political decisions being made and so yeah and I, I think that yeah there is something the the actual the idea sprung into my head of like the kind of biblical image of you know Moses and the baby in the bull rushes and that story being in the coast but I also had this like more cynical question of like genuinely if the right of the Tory party politicians were in power and they were doing some PR on the Dover coast and this baby washed ashore that would threaten their narrative what would they do with it and there were a few scary moments quite early on in the when knowing this play was going into production and Priti Patel announced this Rwanda plan and you know that where you, you've written something and the reality is rapidly catching up with your cynicism and, and so juggling and negotiating that but the essence of what happens and I suppose what happens in these political situations is you know people the, the dehumanization of another person and being able to do that and that process of that psychological and political process is probably has its own timelessness so I wanted to try you know and yeah I think I think there's a bit in in our culture being the fear of being too on the nose but you know we can't you, sometimes you just have to address what's going on directly and you know I don't know I would disagree that you know there is always a problematic to be on the nose.

So I initially started in writing or writing sketches for this show in 2018 I think this around the start of 2019 and National Theatre of Scotland put out a, as they do a series of residencies called starter residencies and and they put a female political comedy writing one which I was very daunted to apply for and in fact applied for another one and one of the staff member said you should definitely apply for the political comedy one you could kind of choose and shape how the residency could best fit your your practice and I asked for a bit of dramaturgy so Rosie Kellagher who spent quite a bit of time, just a series of kind of deadlines for me to get through to a full draft of the play and Rosie has read countless drafts of this play which is quite a feat of endurance but yeah so that was incredibly helpful and then at the end of the process for that residency NTS decided to commission the play and that was delightful and then this was all during covid time and yeah it tried the end of the during that commissioning period they decided they wanted to go ahead and produce it which was a huge shock, I was like are you sure but yeah it was just so delighted and yeah it's been a great process so yes it's kind of like having an idea and realising the idea is something that you want to write and then I think for me I always think there's like a there's a time that you have to get right when you have to write the play so it's like you have the idea, you identify to yourself this is an idea that I'm going to write and then you have to get the timing right of like, when you actually do it because you do it too early, you're just scraping for it and if you do it too late it becomes quite stale so you've got to find the time in your schedule to just go and write the play and the gestation periods important your kind of carrying it about with you and starting to be a weirdo and talk to yourself and chatting to your pals and writing things on your hand randomly and they're like what's wrong with you, trying to be a playwright.

Yeah Debbie became attached to the project and I actually I knew Debbie from the Traverse Young Writers group, 14 years ago when we were kind of spotty kids like and we were both in the same Young Writers group at the Trav and yeah so she came aboard and yeah the rehearsal first started in July the Tory leadership contest was announced like the first week of rehearsals an interesting moving into the rehearsal period everything becomes practical and so it's like what works and what doesn't so that was that was an interesting decision, I feel like with comedy like you can write beautiful things but does it work and does it land and so it you know it becomes very important with the director if like you know, Debbie knows if it's if it's you know if the beats are going on too long then she's right, I'm wrong and the beautiful sentence must go and the realization that it's going to be on in front of people is like maybe it sounds obvious but you don't think about that really when you're just writing on spec for yourself. Someone said to me like you know like putting a play on is always a traumatic process and regardless if it's great or if it's terrible it's like there's a there's just like a bit of it's just a bit of traumatic experience and I think it's a good way to look at it I mean it's like it's what you do it's what you love doing and you I love the collaborative aspect of it is amazing and I'm seeing an audience come in and you know if for some people to resonate with it is like you know what you do it for and what drives you but it's also terrifying and horrific and like a mix of things.

A farce felt like it reflected the pace of what was going on in, in contemporary politics at the moment and in I think when you think of like the Basil Faulty character there's this like strong drive, a singularity a singular drive to to do something in this case in Exodus it's like to save face and and at all costs, at what cost will we you know to succeed to obtain political power and so that's really that was really compelling because it you know there's no there's no complication nothing will making you know these characters are so much like you know and some contemporary politicians so it's just the aim to stay in power is so undiluted and anything that gets in its way will be solved by whatever means necessary and so that's quite compelling and I felt like that was an interesting thing to play with.

It was Joe Farrell academic, he wrote he was one of the translators for Dario Fo and he wrote a lot about he wrote an essay called the politics the farce which was really influential for me right in this play so through him I learned quite a lot about Dario Fo's thoughts and he had this idea that like that you know laughter can be cathartic or a laughter can also consolidate rage and injustice and that it doesn't need to be those things don't need to be mutually exclusive so I hope that like you know people that it yeah people that feel that the moment that we're living in is, we could do better as a body politic feel galvanized and feel some shred of optimism and also rage.

The theatricality of politics is probably a big theme for you know I guess sometimes you think there's it's so rare these days that you hear politicians speaking and the ones that do you, you know when you hear politicians speaking and meaning what they say and you genuinely feel like oh this person is expressing no genuine views like the the rarity of that in this particular landscape is, is quite saddening and I think there's this kind of the showmanship of of the whole political landscape it was a big theme because they're all female identifying characters it was interesting to explore how those identities fit into that landscape.

I would say maybe that the process of the decision to throw the baby out the window and that being the logical conclusion to this situation that these people find themselves in or that Asia and Phoebe find themselves in and the the speediness of the decision to put the baby in the handbag that always feels yeah, that was the initial question that I thought about and it motivated me to write the play that was it, yeah, instinct.

# EXODUS | ALISA

I first time read the script about, in about February which was roughly five months before my final presentation for Exodus. My first reaction to it was just a sheer joy and and questions how how on earth this could be done in theatre and, and what it, what is it.

It felt like a massive, very exciting puzzle which we need to put together we sort of understood right away that what's needed is something incredibly vivid a special kind of world where we can shift the reality ever so slightly and make this transition between what we think is normal and then when the story progress, how everything just sort of goes absolutely mental and the real world is disappearing into this technicolour universe of madness.

From the very start Debbie and I were talking about David LaChapelle the photographer, we were talking about specific music videos we both enjoyed and it was a lot of Pop Culture mixed with a lot of Fine Arts as well. I kept on thinking about massive Renaissance painting or a Biblical painting where everything is just so very stylistic and frozen in time and very, very proper but mixed with absolute camp and absolute just explosion of colour and explosion of everything, so we sort of landed up in this as the as the base for design and yeah and then we started thinking about yeah all sorts of practical ways.

For me when I first read the text as well it was apparent that it can't be static there needs to be some movement from the get-go because we do change quite a lot within the train sequence and everything is, everything is a whirlpool and I was thinking about how it's almost like a carousel and it's almost like very much sort of there always running around this train and it's just quite a lot of the movement there so that's why I kind of from, from those ideas the idea about having a bit of a revolve or like revolving platforms we went through a lot of practical chats, conversations about how we can make a revolve green it's quite difficult but we had a fantastic technical team on the show, properly just a group of wonderful people who worked so hard into making this into what it is and I cannot believe that what we've requested what, what request what I've designed what was showed in May when I presented my final card is actually what we're sitting on now a lot of work has been done by a set building company and from all of the technical heads of the technical departments NTS and technical stage manager who's been touring with the show because it's insanely difficult, it's insanely difficult to make it on a green and it's insanely difficult to make it travel and fringeable as well so it's all of those different challenges up in one so it's not just green but it's Fringe and it's also tours in Scotland to some of the tiniest places and some of the bigger places before we lands at the Tron yeah so it's been a lot of making dots and joining the lines there.

So rehearsal period is really when we were very fortunate to get the set on the second week of rehearsal, which was fantastic because we could see how we can adopt it and I think from having the set with us throughout the time there were a lot of kind of just piecing things together in terms of the scenic for me for example I've reworked couple of bits on the other on the other side of the sides I've adjusted some colours so I think that was just looking at the set, looking at how everything's working thinking like maybe I want a different colour here, maybe different colour here and then just constantly having a conversation with Debbie into how the revolves are working and just thinking about okay when do we stop revolving, what the stage manager does and when does the cast take over when do we revolve, how, like what's the dramaturgy there what's the what's the, what's, what's the design elements within that movement trying to think very intelligently throughout that yeah yeah there were a lot of responding to what's been happening in the room too.

We were faced with quite a lot of very interesting challenges like the show from the get go we knew that the show must be green so it must follow the rules of the green book. The Green Book is a wonderful initiative across several larger and smaller theatres in the UK and it's a sort of a program

agreement to create theatre more sustainably, to avoid waste, to promote collaboration between theatre, exchange of materials and there are several steps you could do and several sort of points in percentages you can achieve to make your show sustainable and what took it upon ourselves to achieve is 75 percent or above of everything of all the materials and everything across departments to be sourced sustainably or has a previous life.

Those chairs came from the Tron theatre, I've picked them up, I had to clean them up and I had to reupholster them I know that this so we've got blind behind it and the blind construction came from an absolutely random person of Gumtree who production manager Elle Taylor had to meet at silly o'clock in the morning somewhere very very remote and it's been a running joke throughout. I know this was this is a thing from a proper train and that's been reused, all the woods came through Pretty Scenic who are our set makers and I think some of it came from Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, there were lots of it from NTS as well- the truss is from NTS yeah I think everything everything is here is reused I know the plastic we use for the light boxes which is behind me is a very special sustainable plastic which again our production manager was so proud she managed to find it so yeah we wanted to get plastic from somewhere where it's been used before but that was impossible so she got the best the second best option after that, to work green there's a lot of opportunities there because you are as a designer really looking at looking at your, your dissecting the design and seeing how you can make things smarter and better and what is needed and what's not needed and yeah how you can, how you can use better materials not use so much plastic and it's really difficult to have that from from the beginning because as designer we're always encouraged when I studied design I was always encouraged to dream big and then scale down to what you are to what you can achieve but I think working green it's it's a little bit different so you do dream big but you dream big with kind of sustainable thoughts in mind and I think the main thinking about Exodus, the main difficulty was because we needed for this beast to rotate and be weight bearing as well and in the real kind of outside of the green book we would have done it with steel and that's how you can prove that everything is very safe climbable weight-bearing will rotate like a charm will fit everywhere but sadly steel is not very sustainable and sustainable steel is not weight bearing so it was a little bit of kind of a journey to figure out how that works but that didn't stop us, thankfully.

In terms of the tour so we have to look at what's the smallest venue and what's the smallest door so to make sure that the, the biggest panel I want to be solid can still fit through that door I know that this panel here of the of the train I know that lemon tree get in at the lemon tree theatre is the smallest door of our tour so I had to make sure that the the diameter of it could fit through that and I remember I had a conversation with Elle and I did chop some off in my design before we started construction just to make sure that that's that's achievable but to me that's beautiful because if I know that this this is this is a challenge and this is happening, I can already adjust my technical design thinking and I can tweak the model and I can make the size that it needs to be it's really joyful to be able to solve that yeah and in terms of the Fringe, that's just I as a designer have much less of an overlook and it's rather than technical stage manager whose job is to put Fringe up and down and for Exodus it was Malcolm Stephen and he's fantastic and we've always like we had a conversation with him about, I've shared designs with him and I've asked is this okay, are we within 45 minutes change over time he's like yeah that's fine that's okay but you're pushing here and you're pushing here, so it's just it's just a conversation with with him and with NTS as well and I'm more tapping into their knowledge as a designer and sort of hoping that what I give them fits well but throughout the process we've been checking in and every time it was like whoa this is a little bit too tight, I was thinking about okay how it can be done easier. From the white card into the final design meeting we had one of the bigger shifts in design which was we lost the timber base for our set and we've adopted the truss construction and that was directly answering the turnaround time because it would have been quite difficult to construct everything construct the frame with the timber and make it safe and weight bearing but I think the truss that saved all of the issues.

So what we see here, what we've got here is a truss-based construction with two doors on the sides



and then two revolving panels and because we do jump a lot from place to place I had to think about how I can facilitate some of the earlier scenes which are quite more normal than when we land in the middle in the massive sequence in the train, yeah so at the moment we're saying this is the train part, train, train side of the smaller revolve and at the back we have side which is mostly painted in a very pastel lovely pink and this one is the crazy side this one is the technicolor madness side and yeah at the at the very, at the very beginning when we had the intro we always talked about using a lot of uh projection design and we thought that the interesting would be largely projection and from the very very beginning it was a thought that whatever, however we're starting with the design and however we're starting with the set it needs to be projectable on everything so that's sort of that's the reason why there's a lot of pastel pink on on that part of the set is to make it easy and projection friendly and then here I've just allowed myself to run a bit loose.

In terms of the scenic for the set and colour for the costume I had an idea of the you know when you have old TVs back in the day when it didn't have a signal they projected this image with all the block colours and the black and white patterns so I thought about that as a kind of a response to when the reality slightly breaks within the play It's almost like the matrix is a bit broken and you're getting this kind of hint of the that's it's not right is it like the flowers are green and the sky is purple you know like it's just it's not right so think a little bit of that thinking has traveled to scenic and the costume as well not a little bit, a lot of it and everything it is quite, it's not realistic nothing is realistic here like would you have train chairs but everything else in terms of the colour is very pushed up and it's very very much yeah like a technicolour dream nightmare yeah so I enjoyed the kind of the blurring the line between the reality and caricature, and in terms of the costume for the characters that was the same I really wanted block colours really wanted bold, bold shades and kind of not shying away from anything which is a little bit too vivid I've really wanted Asiya Rao to be in a royal blue, I really wanted her to have a pussy bow blouse which is pink and I thought that's fitting quite a lot with what I've done with the set and yeah everything just everything just interlinked as I was colouring this, and I was colouring the costumes I was thinking how it can all work together as an ensemble with the set and yeah it was it was a it was a great great pleasure to do that actually.

From the beginning Debbie and I talked about using a lot of height and she was really keen on having a video projection and I think for a piece like that I was very on board as well from the get-go because it did feel like to add to that universe we're trying to build we need a layer of kind of animated reality on top, whatever that is when we were thinking about this is a construction kind of the idea of a screen came came right away and it was very natural and having this massive screen on the top and it yeah it felt it felt quite natural to have that as as part of it.

I think I was probably do a bit more contrast between the real world and what is perceived as a normality at the very end into what is madness and how how it all shifts and how it all like dissembles in between our like in front of our eyes yeah more thinking about that but at the same time you know I'm also would be very curious to talk to Debbie and think you know okay like if we would do it differently what would we do, you don't design in a vacuum you always design with your team and you design with your fellow creatives and the house and it's all just such a collaborative job and I think in that moment I'm really happy with everything what happened and everything we've made here.

















