

ADG Europe and TNT Theatre Britain present

## **My Sister Syria**

written and directed by Paul Stebbings  
**A spy thriller set in war torn Syria and  
on the refugee routes into Europe.**

### The basic structure of the play:

Part one a British NGO worker (Amnesty International equivalent) - compromised by security services goes into Syria to bring to safety a democrat (Free Syrian Army) female General who is being threatened by Assad /the Russians on one side and ISIS on the other. This person is killed but asks aid worker to promise to rescue her son. Despite being abandoned or betrayed by Western security services the aid worker rescues the son by tricking the Security Services and getting the young man over the border.

Part two is the journey with other refugees through Turkey to Germany with smugglers, capsizing rafts etc. and eventual arrival in Europe.

The disturbing twist is that the saved youth has been radicalised by the experience - not to be a terrorist but to views that are not liberal / tolerant.

This would form the basis for a post show discussion.

### **Synopsis**

An underground train in London, a man attacks a Moslem woman and tears off her hijab. Another woman named Rachel confronts the man and is nearly beaten up. She is brave but carless.

Rachel is a British aid worker. The next scene's are in her office. She raising money for Syrian refugees and establishing networks to help them escape. She establishes contact with an organisation in Syria that opposes Assad, (part of the Free Army). She is in regular communication with the (real person) Razan, a human rights lawyers inside Syria. Then Razan is kidnapped during a skype call to Rachel. After a press conference to highlight the kidnapping, Rachel is approached by a member of the British Secret Services (MI6) and asked to go to Syria to bring out a special individual. This is the only female General in Assad's army, who defected to the opposition. (Documentary fact) . MI6 want her as a possible rallying point for a pro-West secular opposition now that the Revolution is being taken over by Islamist radicals allied to Isis. But this General will not trust the Western military. She has said that she will only trust a neutral person she knows, and above all a woman - the aid worker, Rachel, is the only answer. Under emotional and personal pressure Rachel agrees to go to Syria and use her refugee escape route and the assistance of MI6 to get the General (Fatima) out. She does so on condition that MI6 help to secure Razan's release. The agent agrees.

The Next scenes happen in and around Syria as Rachel goes into Syria using a cover as an aid worker and with great difficulty reaches the General named Fatima. This is a modern Heart of Darkness, a journey into a Hell. The journey is lightened by the hospitality of Syrians, the bizarre modernity of life in the

warzone, with mobile phones and rock bands but also the increasing dread as she nears the hiding place of Fatima. The Free Army and its secular, democratic ideals are under double assault from the vicious Dictator Assad and from the brutal Islamist militias.

Rachel's guide in Syria is a Free Army volunteer called Safid, a key figure in the play full of contradictions and wild changes between hope and despair. The General Fatima who they try to reach is an Alewite so mistrusted by the mainly Sunni opposition to Assad. The General also has to struggle with both the conservative and Islamist distrust of powerful women. Her circle of possibility and influence is narrowing. She is tolerated for her expertise in tactics and training but every day is more dangerous. Eventually Rachel reaches the General but with Russian bombardment and Isis soldiers flooding in from Iraq, the situation is getting worse. Rachel tries to organise Fatima's escape but it becomes clear that Fatima never wanted to leave Syria or escape the death she feels will make sense of her life. Fatima is drawn to Sufi mysticism and Rachel gains an understanding of this open and tolerant form of Islam. Fatima is herself full of contradictions and anger with the West for what she sees as the betrayal of the Arab Spring. She can be cruel and brutally informs Rachel that Razan is dead, murdered by militants. All Fatima wants now is for Rachel to take her teenage son to the West. That was the reason for everything. Rachel reluctantly agrees to take Hassan to Britain. She expects MI6 to help her but finds they pull all support as soon as they hear they will not get the General. Fatima reveals that she is wounded and elects to walk East to her death even as Rachel and her son travel West.

The third act follows Rachel and Hassan on their typical refugee Exodus. They are smuggled into Turkey then across the country then on small boats to Lesbos and through the snows of Greece and on a lorry through the Balkans to Germany. They are fleeced by People Smugglers and abused by border guards and pelted with stones by hostile locals. But they arrive in Munich and some kind of safety. The journey would have been easier had Hassan not been so quiet, this seems like resilience and courage but there is a failure of communication between him and Rachel, which she puts down to language but is in fact deeper. When she celebrates his escape he turns on her and speaks of the faith and Syrian identity that make him reject so many of her liberal and tolerant values. He is not a terrorist, loathes Isis, but his values are not Western or secular. Upset and alone Rachel reads the poem that Fatima gave her, a Sufi poem of acceptance and hope.

Paul Stebbings is the author of recent historical plays such as THE LIFE & DEATH OF MARTIN LUTHER KING and THE GHOST OF ILLIAM DHONE. He has worked and travelled widely in the Middle East. The cast are British and of Middle Eastern origin. English is the chief language of the production but Arabic will also be used. The form is that of a thriller, and despite its dark and complex themes aims to be a popular and accessible piece of theatre, indebted to the fine film APOCALYPSE NOW and the novel that inspired that film: Conrad's HEART OF DARKNESS. A musical score has been created by composer John Kenny that combines classical and modern music from the Middle East and is influenced by recent Sufi Dance music including elements of rap and Hip hop. We believe this production will contribute to a greater understanding of one of the most urgent and unsettling issues of our time, while at the same time creating a thrilling drama with a wide appeal. TNT's style of action packed physical theatre blended with serious text is particularly suited to this theme. We look forward to seeing you in the theatre.

Paul Stebbings August 2017