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Honour: An Open Letter to ITV

10th October 2020

Dear Polly Hill, Head of Drama, Keeley Hawes and Michael Duff at Buddy Club and Ade Rawcliffe, Head of Diversity

We write regarding the recent broadcast of the true-crime drama *Honour*, which premiered on ITV on 28 and 29 September 2020. We first wish to state that it is tremendous to see such a compelling, high-quality, widely publicised dramatisation that brings the entirely preventable 2006 murder of 20-year-old Banaz Mahmod back under public scrutiny. We welcome the chance to understand the complexity and context of her young life and the lives of those most affected by her death, through the powerful and wide-reaching scope of expertly made prime time drama.

However, we believe this program was a missed opportunity, as it plays into the “white saviour” narrative: white women “saving” brown women from “dangerous” brown men and reinforcing racialised tropes surrounding the term “honour killing”. It ignores and further silences a key constituency of TV talent and viewers: the women and men from the communities of colour who wish to see themselves and their lives properly represented on television as fully human, and it does so in the following ways:

First, *Honour* focuses on Detective Chief Inspector Caroline Goode of the London Metropolitan Police, and her investigation of the crime. While this is undeniably an integral part of Banaz’s story, it means that Banaz’s life and her relationship with her sisters and Rahmat Sulemani are overlooked. Instead, the audience is only privy to the immediate events leading up to Banaz’s death. There was so much more to this beautiful young life—cut short by heinous violence—that ITV could have examined, but did not.

Second, behind the camera the show fares no better. Its executive team, Producer Liza Marshall, writer Gwyneth Hughes and Director Richard Laxton are white, missing an important opportunity to gain expert perspective from the many women of colour who have worked tirelessly in television and on this issue for decades.

Third, throughout the programme, Iraqi Kurdistan is presented as having barbaric values, as if the issue of honour-based violence had never been addressed there, whereas the UK is depicted as enlightened. In reality, significant work has been conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan to challenge violence in the name of honour: laws have been passed, policies have been implemented, government funding has been provided and education has been undertaken. For example, consider the first ever research into 'honour'-based violence in relation to Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish diaspora, which highlighted Banaz's case (<https://www.waterstones.com/book/honour-based-violence/nazand-begikhani/aisha-k-gill/9780367599058>).

We hope that, in drawing this to your attention, we can spark a constructive conversation about the ways in which such issues are handled in the future.

Many of us who have signed this letter work in television, film and theatre, and continually face barriers when it comes to accessing the prime-time privileged roles that working on such a drama would have brought. Our voices would have, and could have brought much to its making. Many of us also work with women and girls for whom such forms of "honour"-based violence and related experiences of forced marriage and coercive control are very real. For years, many of us have been providing critical support services for these women and girls; we have also been involved in assisting prosecutions, training and advising the police, and engaging in action-based research to address systemic and structural intersectional forms of inequalities in society and the criminal justice system.

We see heightened awareness of honour-based violence as a positive step in the fight against it, and are heartened to see ITV engaging with this issue—but we also believe that, as stated in a recent article by Gill and Walker (2020), identifying this type of violence as "cultural" is deeply problematic—it not only perpetuates the "white saviour" narrative, but promotes the false assumption that honour-based violence is considered acceptable in some cultures or traditions (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/978-1-78769-955-720201014/full/html?skipTracking=true>). In its framing of Banaz's story, *Honour* reinforces these cultural misconceptions.

We live in a time of enormous change, awareness-raising and anti-racism progress, accelerated earlier this year by the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and by the Black Lives Matter movement. The key issue here is the importance of representation: who gets to tell the story, who writes, produces and directs dramas and films about the lives of women of colour. The arts and entertainment industries are critical to how we see ourselves as a society—as a result, they should accurately capture the shifts we are currently experiencing so that we can all keep moving forward and achieve real and positive change.

We hope that when commissioning programmes in the future, ITV will consult expert women of colour. We exist and we are here. We are available to talk about the issues we raise.

** This is an open letter, which we intend to publish on our websites. We welcome the opportunity to publish any reply we receive from you.*

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The list of signatories includes:

1. Indira Varma, Actor
2. Anjali Mohindra, Actor, Writer
3. Sacha Dhawan, Actor
4. Preti Taneja, Writer and Lecturer in Prose Fiction, Newcastle University
5. Pooja Ghai, Freelance Director
6. Indhu Rubasingham, Artistic Director, Kiln Theatre
7. Tanika Gupta MBE FRSL, Writer, Playwright, Director
8. Mina Anwar, Actress, Director
9. Prasanna Puwanarajah, Actor, Writer, Director
10. Stephanie Street, Actor, Writer, Director, Chair of Act for Change
11. Rafia Hussain, Producer
12. Jassa Ahluwalia, Actor, Writer, Filmmaker
13. Mona Arshi, Poet, Honorary Professor in English and Law, University of Liverpool
14. Sweety Kapoor, Creative Producer, Curator, Freelance
15. Ghizela Rowe, Managing Director at Audio Book Radio
16. Nikita Gill, Poet and Writer
17. Emteaz Hussain, Playwright and Poet
18. Suki Dhanda, Photographer
19. Paul Bazely, Actor
20. Shobna Gulati, Actor, Author, Choreographer
21. Shaheen Khan, Actor/Writer
22. Yasmin Wilde, Actor
23. Vineeta Rishi, Actor
24. Kobna HoldBrook-Smith, Actor
25. Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, Playwright and Screenwriter
26. Dr Shehnaz Suterwalla, Writer, Critic, Cultural Theorist, School of Arts and Humanities, Royal College of Art
27. Chetna Pandya, Actress, Director, Producer and Creative Advocate
28. Tina Gharavi, BAFTA, Sundance nominated Director and Screenwriter
29. Hannah Khalil, Playwright and Screenwriter
30. Jo Tyabji, Freelance Director
31. Goldy Notay, Actress
32. Rani Moorthy, Artistic Director, Rasa Productions Ltd
33. Ishi Khan, Performer, Writer
34. Zlakha Ahmed MBE, Chief Executive, Apna Haq
35. Gurpreet Virdee, Director of Operations and Development, Women and Girls Network
36. Umme Imam, Executive Director of the Angelou Centre
37. Ms Nadifa Mohamed, Lecturer in Creative Writing, Royal Holloway, University of London
38. Dr Nazand Begikhani, Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Bristol
39. Dr Geetanjali Gangoli, Associate Professor, Durham University
40. Dr Pragya Agarwal, Behavioural Scientist, Writer, CEO of 'The 50 Percent Project'

41. Yasmin Khan, Director, Halo Project
42. Angelina Rodrigues, Executive Director and Co-Founder, A & B Rodrigues Consultancy
43. Professor Orla O'Loughlin, Vice-Principal and Director of Drama, Guildhall School of Music & Drama
44. Neil D'Souza, Actor, Writer
45. Tony Jayawardena, Actor
46. Gurjeet Singh, Actor
47. Seeta Patel, Choreographer and Artistic Director of Seeta Patel Dance Ltd
48. Professor Avtar Brah, Birkbeck, University of London
49. Dr Samia Bano, Reader in Law, SOAS, University of London
50. Saika Alam, Lawyer, Huggins and Foskett
51. Kuljit Kaur Mann
52. Mutale Merrill, CEO, BAWSO Women's Aid,
53. Shahien Taj, CEO, Henna Foundation,
54. Shavanah Taj, President of the General Secretary of the Welsh TUC
55. Maria Constanza Mesa, CEO, Women Connect First / Menywod Gysylltu'n Gyntaf
56. Huda Jawad, Faith/VAWG Coalition and Standing Together
57. Alishya Dhir, PhD Researcher, Durham University
58. Rajinder Kaur, PhD Candidate, Liverpool Hope University
59. Monica Majumdar, PhD Candidate, Queen Mary University of London
60. Vinny Kapoor, Dentist
61. Karen Kapoor, Financial Advisor
62. Shreya Hyde-Smith, Director, Invista Ltd.
63. Dr Sanah Ahsan, Poet and Community Psychologist, Salamons Institute of Applied Psychology
64. Steve Chandra Savale, Music Artist, Co-Founder Asian Dub Foundation
65. Ishani Chakravarty, Singer, Songwriter, Producer
66. Dr Rakhshan Rizwan, Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Comparative Literature, Utrecht University
67. Dr Pathik Pathak, Faculty Director of Social Entrepreneurship and Director, University of Southampton
68. Wendy Scazzaro, Agent, Felix de Wolfe
69. Yasmin Whittaker-Khan, Playwright and Co-Founder of Insaan Club Culture
70. Anu Kapoor, Immigration Lawyer
71. Nicola McCartney, Reader, Writing for Theatre and Performance, English Literature, University of Edinburgh
72. Sarah Green, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition
73. Sara Kirkpatrick, Chief Executive, Welsh Women's Aid
74. Nicki Norman, Acting CEO, Women's Aid
75. Professor Liz Kelly, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University
76. Professor Emerita Gill Hague CBE, Professor of Violence Against Women Studies University of Bristol
77. Professor Pamela Cox, Head of Department, Department of Sociology University of Essex
78. Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Assistant Professor, Durham University
79. Dr Miranda Horvath, Reader & Associate Professor in Forensic Psychology, Middlesex University

80. Lorraine Radford, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy and Social Work, UCLAN
81. Professor Jo Aldridge, Professor of Social Policy and Criminology, Loughborough University
82. Dr Olivia Smith, Lecturer in Criminology & Social Policy, Loughborough University
83. Dr Helen Monk, Liverpool John Moores University
84. Dr Emma Katz, Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth, Liverpool Hope University
85. Heather Cole, PhD Candidate, De Montfort University
86. Dr Louise Livesey, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Gloucestershire & Co-Convenor British Sociological Association Violence Against Women Study Group
87. Anna Bull
88. Dr Julia Downes, Lecturer in Criminology The Open University
89. Dr Charlotte Bishop, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Exeter
90. Prof Catherine Donovan, Head of Department, Department of Sociology, Durham University
91. Dr Josie Phillips, Assistant Professor, Durham University
92. Dr Kelly Johnson, Assistant Professor, Durham University
93. Dr Hannah King, Assistant Professor, University of Durham
94. Dr Michaela Rogers, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, University of Sheffield
95. Victoria Holt, PhD Candidate, University of Roehampton
96. Colleen Moore, Deputy Head of School of Humanities & Social Sciences Anglia Ruskin University
97. Dr Jo Woodiwiss, Reader in Sociology, University of Huddersfield
98. Dr Lula Mecinska, Lecturer in Criminology and Policing, University of Cumbria
99. Clare Walker, Domestic Abuse Consultant, Clare Walker Consulting
100. Dr Jamie Bird, Deputy Head of Centre for Health and Social Care Research
101. Margaret Pope, Director, Crossfit, Shoreditch
102. Ollie Britton, Fashion Designer
103. Leigh Morrison, Designer
104. Craig Robertson, Sculpturer
105. Sarah Litton, Yoga Teacher
106. Dr Kathryn Dyt, Environmental and Cultural Historian, Institute of Historical Research
107. Jessica Brewster, Director, Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury. Founder of Theatre Deli
108. Ailin Conant, Artistic Director Theatre Témoin
109. Helen Jeffreys, Executive Director and Joint CEO, Tara Arts
110. Min Clifford, Minamon Film, Creative Producer and CEO
111. Mark Price, Agent, AHA Talent Ltd
112. Will McGowan, Lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University
113. Joshua Davidson, Writer, MD Night Zookeeper (Sky)
114. Dr Susie Jacobs, Reader (Emerita) in Comparative Sociology/Hon. Research Fellow, Manchester Metropolitan University
115. Susan Edwards, Professor in Law, Professor Emeritus, Barrister, Expert Witness (MEWI)
116. Shelly King

117. Dr Tom Cornford, Senior Lecturer in Theatre & Performance, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London
118. Laura Kressly, PhD candidate, RCSSD
119. Rebecca Boey, Actor, Writer
120. Aaron Lee Lambert, Actor, Agent, Creative
121. Chris Fung, Actor
122. Raj Ghatak, Actor
123. Lucy Sheen, Actor, Writer and AD of Foundling Productions
124. Nyla Levy, Writer, Actor
125. Mark Ota, Actor
126. Matt Lim, Actor, Writer
127. David Rapp Supporting Artist Representative Equity Screen and New Media Committee
128. Siu-see Hung, Actor
129. Daniel York Loh, Writer, Actor
130. BEATS, Advocacy group for British East & Southeast Asians in the Screen & Stage Industries
131. Mingyu Lin, Director
132. Ali Zaidi, Writer
133. Cindy-Jane Armbruster, member and former Vice Chair Equity Deaf and Disabled Members Committee
134. Jay Oliver Yip, Actor, Director, Writer, Producer
135. Nyla Levy, Writer, Actor

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