# Author Ibrahima Balde denied UK visa despite play premiere invitation



Ibrahima Balde, a critically acclaimed author whose memoir, *Little Brother: An Odyssey to Europe*, has resonated with audiences worldwide, was recently denied a visa by the UK Home Office. This decision prevents him from attending the premiere of the play based on his memoir, which is set to open at the Jermyn Street Theatre in London. The production is an adaptation by Timberlake Wertenbaker, a notable playwright renowned for her political narratives and whose past works include the Tony-nominated *Our Country’s Good*.

Balde’s memoir details his arduous journey as a refugee, searching for his younger brother Alhassane, who had fled their home in Guinea in hopes of finding better opportunities in Europe. The memoir has been met with critical acclaim, leading to Balde's opportunities to engage with influential figures such as the late Pope Francis, reflecting the profound impact of his story.

In a letter dated 13 May, the Home Office expressed doubts regarding Balde’s intentions to return to Spain after the performance. Specifically, it noted: “Any future UK visa applications you make will be considered on their individual merits; however, you are likely to be refused unless the circumstances of your application change.” This response has sparked concerns regarding the UK’s immigration policies, particularly in the wake of increasing pressure from nationalist political factions.

The Jermyn Street Theatre, which organised Balde’s trip and planned for him to be hosted by Wertenbaker during his stay, expressed disappointment, framing the refusal as a symptom of the UK government’s escalating restrictive stance on migration. In its statement, the theatre emphasised that the denial of Balde’s entry not only diminishes the cultural experience for UK audiences but also neglects the urgent conversation surrounding migration narratives.

Wertenbaker stated that this refusal illustrates a troubling lack of trust in someone who has already faced considerable hardship. She argued that the staging of *Little Brother* is crucial, asserting, “We must never forget that the stories of migrants are human stories.” Her comments underscore the cultural significance of allowing authors like Balde to share their experiences and inform public dialogue about migration.

Balde himself expressed his dismay at the Home Office's decision. “This is my story but also the story of many others who have undertaken the same journey,” he said, highlighting the collective struggles of refugees. His disappointment resonates not just as a personal loss but as a broader commentary on the barriers faced by those whose lives are characterised by migration and the pursuit of safety.

The situation has sparked international concern, particularly among those advocating for migrant rights. The publishers of his memoir, Scribe Publications, released a statement urging reconsideration of the visa decision. They expressed their belief that Balde’s voice is vital in keeping the discourse surrounding migration relevant and visible, particularly at a time when such issues are often met with hostility.

This incident reflects broader tensions within UK immigration policy, where stringent regulations frequently clash with humanitarian concerns. Critics have pointed to recent shifts in rhetoric from various political figures, including the Prime Minister, who recently suggested that Britain risks becoming an “island of strangers.” Such statements seem to echo sentiments prevalent in far-right circles, raising fears about a narrative that dehumanises migrants and refugees.

In the face of these challenges, the call for Balde’s visa to be reconsidered continues. Advocates argue that the interplay between art and migration narratives is essential in fostering empathy and understanding in societies facing chronic divisions. As *Little Brother* prepares to take the stage, the hope remains that Balde might still participate in sharing his invaluable story with a new audience, thereby enriching the cultural landscape of the UK.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir)

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1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/15/author-ibrahima-balde-denied-uk-visa-to-attend-premiere-of-play-based-on-his-memoir> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
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