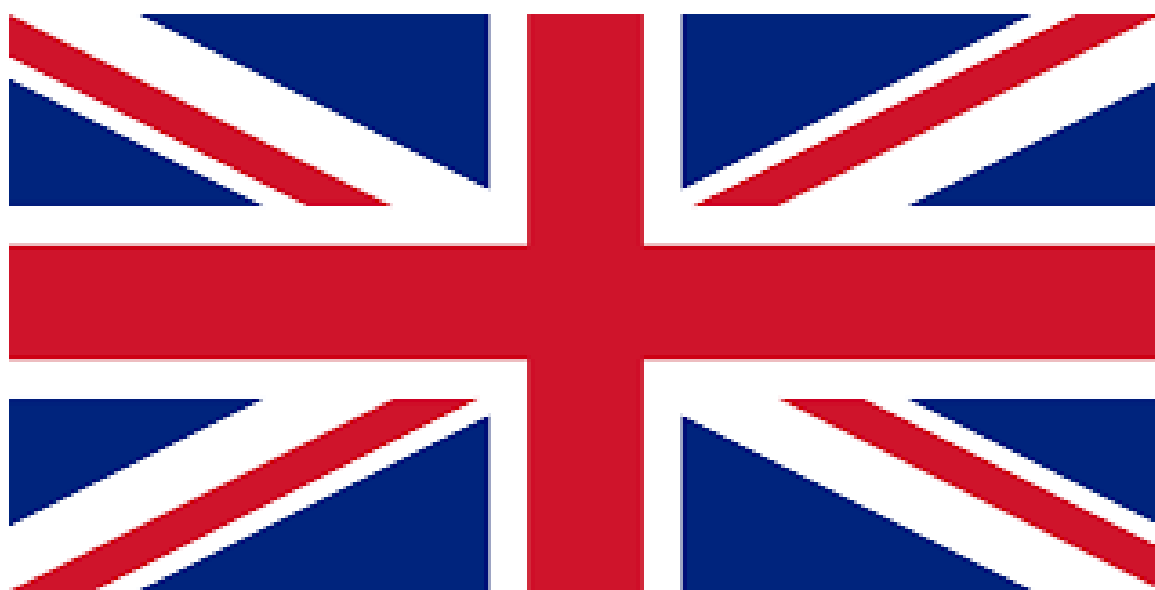# Am I the "IT" in BrITish?

July 2019

Exhibition Booklet

Curator: Dr Jo Shah, SFHEA

Curator Bio

I am an interdisciplinary researcher whose work aligns with the sociology, media education, and policy fields. My research explores themes of social inequality and the positioning of lived experience within broader contexts. I am also engaged in scholarship and knowledge exchange through critical discourses on film, media/ education, pedagogy, and identity.

Outside of academia, I am an engaged artist who uses video, photography, poetry, and digital technologies to explore themes of diaspora and post coloniality, through the work of Turquoise Bee and the 10 spoken words collective.

My research and practice sit within the Social Performance Network, which I founded in 2018. **The network aims to function as a platform where the counter narratives can be heard so that we may begin to develop conscious and holistic understandings into social performativity and to subsequently, make informed choices on how we engage with our social worlds and hence, potentially challenge societal positioning that are stratifying, limiting, or biased and negatively impact on our everyday lives.**

Unpicking the Art, Practice, and Pedagogy

The Social Performance Network is a research and practice orientated network that curates art and discourse on concepts of social performance to facilitate holistic understandings of the social world, and a reimagining of our place within it."

The *Social Performance Network* is the final concept to have emerged from my teaching exposures and research in to individual positioning within social contexts. These aspects to my work can be clustered into the following areas of focus:

Over the course of a fifteen-year teaching career, I have encountered many *stories.* Stories of institutions, staff, and young people caught in a praxis of social policy percolation and enactment. To a large part, the narratives that I have encountered have often related to the relationship between factors such as race, class, gender, and a lack in access to educational and employment opportunities.

These observations initially brought me to my PhD research which specifically focused on a lack of individual agency and voice from the policymaking process, to explore the possibilities of social stratification and subconscious enactment of socialised identities. The study also explored whether young people's educational and employment trajectories were pre-destined and representative of how they were expected to 'perform' in society, post-education.

As a media and film lecturer it is perhaps inevitable that my points of reference are largely from the cultural studies, sociology, post-structuralist, critical studies, and post-colonial paradigms. Using these frameworks, I have often interrogated the nature of media representations and how these connect to broader socialisation.

There is a notable omission in media representations that reflect the full breadth of British society. As Hall (1981) has argued, a hegemonic dynamic exists, through which fractions of society are purposefully omitted from mass media forms and/or negatively stereotyped. These explorations have led me to question what can we learn about socialisation and connected dominant ideologies by studying media representations?

Where is the individual in it all? When conducting my PhD research in to educational policy percolation and impact, across a nine-year qualitative longitudinal project, I traced educational practitioners, teachers, managers, and students to ascertain the impact of policy on the lived experience of individuals. During this time it became increasingly clear that there was a notable omission of individual voice in educational and policy research. My research in this area continues to inspire further work and I am currently working on a number of small-scale research projects that use person centred methodologies devised during my doctoral studies to focus on the positioning of the individual within broader social frameworks. My work in this area is motivated by wanting to situate lived experience within the praxis of socialisation.

Bringing these strands of my work together have brought me to the conclusion that we often 'perform' socialisation in conscious and subconscious ways. Whether we are 'performing race', enacting policy in educational contexts, or responding to media representations.

This network aims to function as a platform where the counter narratives can be heard so that we may begin to develop conscious and holistic understandings into social performativity and to subsequently, make informed choices on how we engage with our social worlds and hence, potentially challenge societal positioning that are stratifying, limiting, or biased and negatively impact on our everyday lives.

REFERENCE

Hall, Stuart; P. Scraton (1981). "Law, Class and Control". In: M. Fitzgerald, G. McLennan & J. Pawson (eds). *Crime and Society*, London: RKP.

Network Mission

The Social Performance Network is a research and practice orientated platform that aims to extend focus on issues surrounding socialisation and its "performance" and enactment in social world contexts.

Working in association with academics, artists and practitioners from the Arts, Humanities, and Social Science disciplines, the network aims to open up critical conversations and practices that interrogate and reconceptualise the social world, our place within it, and subsequently the processes that lead to our self-identity formation.
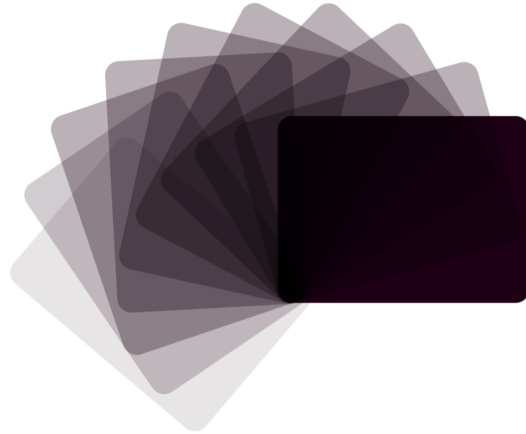
Performing Race

ROYAL CENTRAL
SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

'Performing Race' at CENTRAL

On Friday the 30th of November 2018, former Crown Chief Prosecutor Nazir Afzal OBE chaired *Performing Race* at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London.

In response to the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois of *race* as a *social construction, Performing Race* brought together sociologists and artists with expertise in racial discourses to discuss race and its social positioning from different perspectives. Comprising academics and intellectuals who represent racial counter-narratives, the event explored the concept of race as a social performance.

The event's Chair, Nazir Afzal OBE, has been described as 'the authentic voice of British justice' by the New York Times. He was Chief Crown Prosecutor for NW England and formerly Director in London. Most recently, he was Chief Executive of the Police and Crime Commissioners. During a 24-year career, he has prosecuted some of the most high-profile cases in the country and advised on many others and led nationally on several legal topics, including violence against women and girls, child sexual abuse, and honour-based violence.

Speakers, including Professor Kehinde Andrews, Dr Christine Checinska, Dr Shona Hunter, Dr Karamat Iqbal and Dr Michael McMillan were invited to give

twenty-minute papers outlining their unique perspectives and areas of research ranging from *Performing Race as an Immigrant* to *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century.* Following these presentations, Nazir Afzal OBE chaired an open panel discussion and audience q & a surrounding the themes discussed.
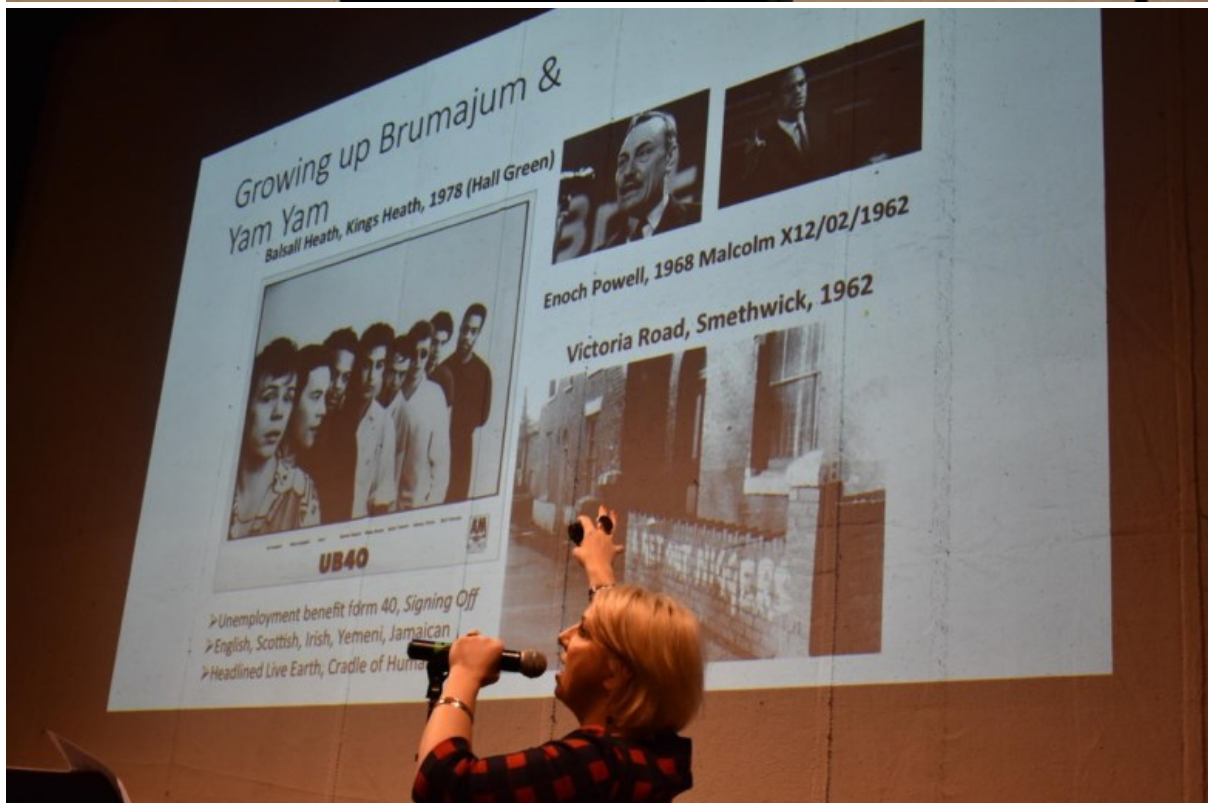
The Performing Race event was a culmination of five years of *bloodless* sweat and tears pursuing funding and establishing networks. To see the idea come to fruition, five years on from when I had originally proposed it (in its embryonic stages) to the Assistant Dean, was overwhelming.

The underpinning ethos of #PerformingRace (and the Social Performance Network since) was to provide a platform that facilitates the articulation of multiple perspectives on a single phenomenon. To challenge social binary narratives by enabling spaces and agency for those that are on the outside, subsequently bringing nuance to the conversation.

I will always feel incredibly proud of #PerformingRace for opening up a conversation that brought together nuanced perspectives and lived experience of race, while connecting the arts and sociology. The event led me to engage with deeply difficult personal truths to make sense of my own positioning within the broader context of nationality, race, and belonging – and prompted me to ask...

Access the full video for 'Performing Race' at Central here: https://social-performance.academy/blog/performing-race/

Does *my* Melanin determine *my* Britishness?

We cannot decolonise until we acknowledge and understand our colonial pasts and the whitewashing of British history. In recent years, contemporary British identity appears to have become synonymous with whiteness and the histories of Empire have become slowly omitted from national consciousness. The nuanced and often difficult narratives of Empire that live as legacy in many facets of British society, are now replaced with binary narratives of white and black, immigration leading to white English poverty. Complexed identities and contexts reduced to a simplified and bigoted narratives of difference and colourism.

So if ones identity is reduced to the pigment of their skin then what of those post-colonial subjects whose ancestries are embedded in Britain? What of their rights and access to a British identity? Are their familial contexts that were so intrinsically linked to Empire expired, with Empire? Did those identities become lost with the loss of the commodification that came from their countries of origin once ruled by Britannia?

I ask these questions in sight of my own complexed post-colonial identity. As someone born in this country but too often addressed by the word "Paki" or asked where I'm *really* from.

Performing Race Keynote
Dr Jo Shah
30th of November 2018

Hello everybody! Thank you for coming and welcome to Performing Race. I'm Jo Shah, an interdisciplinary academic here at Central and the curator and organiser of this event.

The event tonight aims to extend our perceptions of race and access to racial counter narratives that are often omitted in favour of a binary dominant discourse that is reductionist and over simplistic in its representation of race.

It is perhaps impossible to introduce an event of this nature without providing some context in to the impetus for this research which links closely to my own diaspora and negotiations of a British identity against a landscape of melanin and Empire.

This is me aged five. This image is significant as it demarcates a period when I first became racially conscious through the unconscious bias of a friend. We were planning out some imaginary play. My friend, let's call her Rachel, was always the princess. This time I wanted to be the princess. When I asked her if I could, she vehemently refuted the idea informing me that 'I was the colour of mud and princesses didn't look like me'. Devastated, I insisted and fought back, while slowly realising that I was the colour of 'mud' and therefore different. Brightening up, Rachel had an idea, "I know' she said, 'you can be mogli!' - 'I don't want be mogli' I cried. 'Why not?' she responded 'He's a hero' … 'but he's not a princess" I said through silent frustrated tears.

Flash forward some years and we are in Thatcher's Britain. A working-class person of colour is the scape goat for all white working-class problems, a narrative played out then, and a narrative played out now? The term 'Paki' becomes a familiar word compounding that initial difference felt, aged five. I

wish I could say that in 2018 things are better, different, but sadly not. History seems to be repeating itself and as in the 80s, neo liberal ideologies appear to domineer - and on a personal level, I still hear that word used against me, perhaps not as often as in Thatcher's Britain, but enough to be reminded by some, that I do not belong.

But not all racism is vocalised in such crass and obvious ways. Sometimes it is inherent in our systems, structures, beliefs, value systems, and social ideologies. It can even be argued that more often than not, we do not even realise how much of these damaging cancerous* attitudes have affected and continue to affect our society.

My initial experiences of racism prompted me to delve in to my past histories so that I could locate an identity that was accepting of me. That didn't other me based on the pigment of my skin or my country of origin. As I delved deeper in to my past I became increasingly and uncomfortably aware of the deeply seated connections between me and Britain that could never allow me to disengage in favour of another, less othering identity.

My journey in to my past brought me to this man. Major General Sir Malik Mohammed Umar Hayat Khan. A soldier of the Indian Empire, one of the largest landholders in the Punjab, and an elected member of the Council of State of India. A member of the Governor-General of India's Imperial Council from 1910 to 1944. A man that was attached to the 18th King George's Own Lancers and later the 19th King George's Own Lancers and an honorary extra aide-de-camp to **George 5th**, **Edward 8th**, and **George 6th** - and my great, great uncle.

National Portrait Gallery

ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCE DELEGATES ARRIVE IN LONDON : THE BEGUM SHAH NAWAZ, THE ONLY WOMAN DELEGATE ; WITH COL. NAWAB SIR UMAR HAYAT KHAN (LEFT).

A number of delegates to the Third Round-Table Conference arrived in London on 'November 19. They were met at Dover by Mr. F. A. M. Vincent. Among them was the Begum Shah Nawaz, the only woman member of all three sessions of the Conference. She stated that she hoped to help to do great things for India. Conditions, she held, were improving, but there was need for much further advance.

And then, to this man, his son and my great uncle, Sir Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana, who served as the Unionist Premier of the Punjab between 1942 and 1947.

Khizr Hayat Tiwana
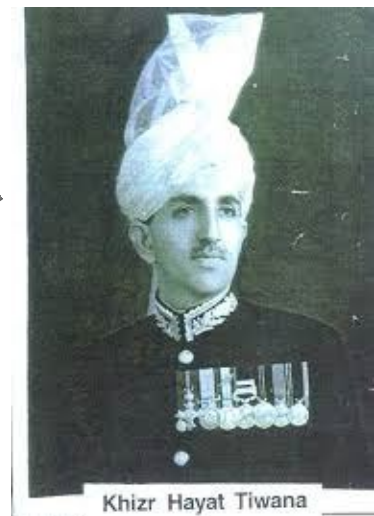
And to my grandfather, who was a Captain in the British Army and fought in Burma during the second world war.

These findings brought me to a long list of ancestors whose identities were intrinsically linked to Britain and Britishness. My country had lied to me, betrayed me by erasing the brown and black, by erasing Empire and the imperial subject as if it all had never happened. And where were these erasures? In the curriculum? Yes, in our history? yes, in our national consciousness? Yes. The omissions were everywhere. So, where did I sit? As someone born in this country from an ancestry of British subjects. Well, I sat in a little box, entitled "Paki", nothing more, nothing less.

British nationalism is not inclusive. In 1966 Enoch Powell made a speech now entitled Rivers of Blood which forewarned the nation against multiculturalism.

My father and many like him that had come to this country in the early 60s on British passports and as British subjects experienced the backlash from rhetoric like that presented by Powell at the time.

In 2018, Britons of colour like me face a more subtle but still painful backlash from similar rhetoric presented by some mainstream politicians of today.

But I ask, in the context of Empire, wasn't Britain always multicultural? How can the imperial chapter continue to be ignored when discussing race in Britain? Why is Britishness now exclusive to the point whereby the colour of one's skin defines their rights to their nation?

It is this diasporic journey that brought me to take back with pride what had been taken away from me and to say that my forefathers alongside many other black and brown forefathers gave blood, sweat, and tears to the freedoms we enjoy today. That my identity exceeds the pigment of my skin. That I make my identity on my terms and I exercise my rights to citizenship to

criticise my country if it is letting me down by creating systemic and structural barriers that prevent me from my rights as a British national.

Tonight, is about **bringing together the counter narratives that consider the nuances of race. A platform through which intellectuals specializing in different aspects of race to share and discuss their ideas, research, findings, and autoethnographies. To enable a space where these ideas can come together outside of the framings we often encounter as mass audiences that perpetuate hegemonic dominant ideologies surrounding race and agency.**

Without further ado, I would like to hand over to our fantastic chair, Nazir Afzal OBE who will be chairing tonight's event and inviting each speaker on to the stage to deliver an oral paper that will be followed by a Audience Q&A and panel discussion. This will be followed by a drinks reception in the canteen on the second floor.

I hope you enjoy tonight's event and I thank you for coming.

DISORIENTING RACE: RE(LATIONALLY) CHOREOGRAPHING RESISITANCE

The network has continued this work throughout 2019, and most recently was part of the Disorienting Race (#DisorientRace) event at Leeds Beckett University, that was a follow on from the Performing Race event.

Hey, you,

Do you see *me*?

Do you want to see *me*?

Do you care to know who *I* am?

My identity exceeds the pigment of my skin …

Hey, you,

I am not one dimensional

I am not one dimensional

Inspirations

Imam Ali A.S

Alī, in full ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, (born c. 600, Mecca, Arabia [now in Saudi Arabia]—died January 661, Kūfah, Iraq), cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and fourth of the "rightly guided" (rāshidūn) caliphs, as the first four successors of Muhammad are called. Reigning from 656 to 661, he was the first imam (leader) of Shīʿism in all its forms. Alī is known within the Islamic tradition by a number of titles, some reflecting his personal qualities and others derived from particular episodes of his life. They include Abū'l-Ḥasan ("Father of Ḥasan" [the name of his oldest son]), Abū Turāb ("Father of Dust"), Murtaḍā ("One Who Is Chosen and Contented"), Asad Allāh ("Lion of God"), Ḥaydar ("Lion"), and—specifically among Shīʿites—Amīr al-Muʾminīn ("Prince of the Faithful") and Mawlāy-i Muttaqiyān ("Master of the God-Fearing"). Except for Muhammad, there is no one in Islamic history about whom as much has been written in Islamic languages as ʿAlī. The primary sources for scholarship on the life of ʿAlī are the Hadith and the *sīrah* literature (accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's life), as well as other biographical sources and texts of early Islamic history. The extensive secondary sources include, in addition to works by Sunni and Shīʿite Muslims, writings by Christian Arabs, Hindus, and other non-Muslims from the Middle East and Asia and a few works by modern Western scholars. However, many of the early Islamic sources are coloured to some extent by a bias, whether positive or negative, toward ʿAlī.

Source: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ali-Muslim-caliph

Be like the honey bee, anything it eats is clean, anything it drops is sweet, and the branch it sits upon does not break.
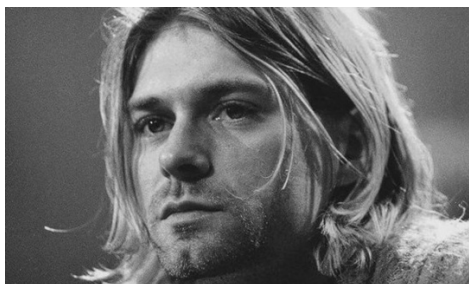-Imam Ali (AS)

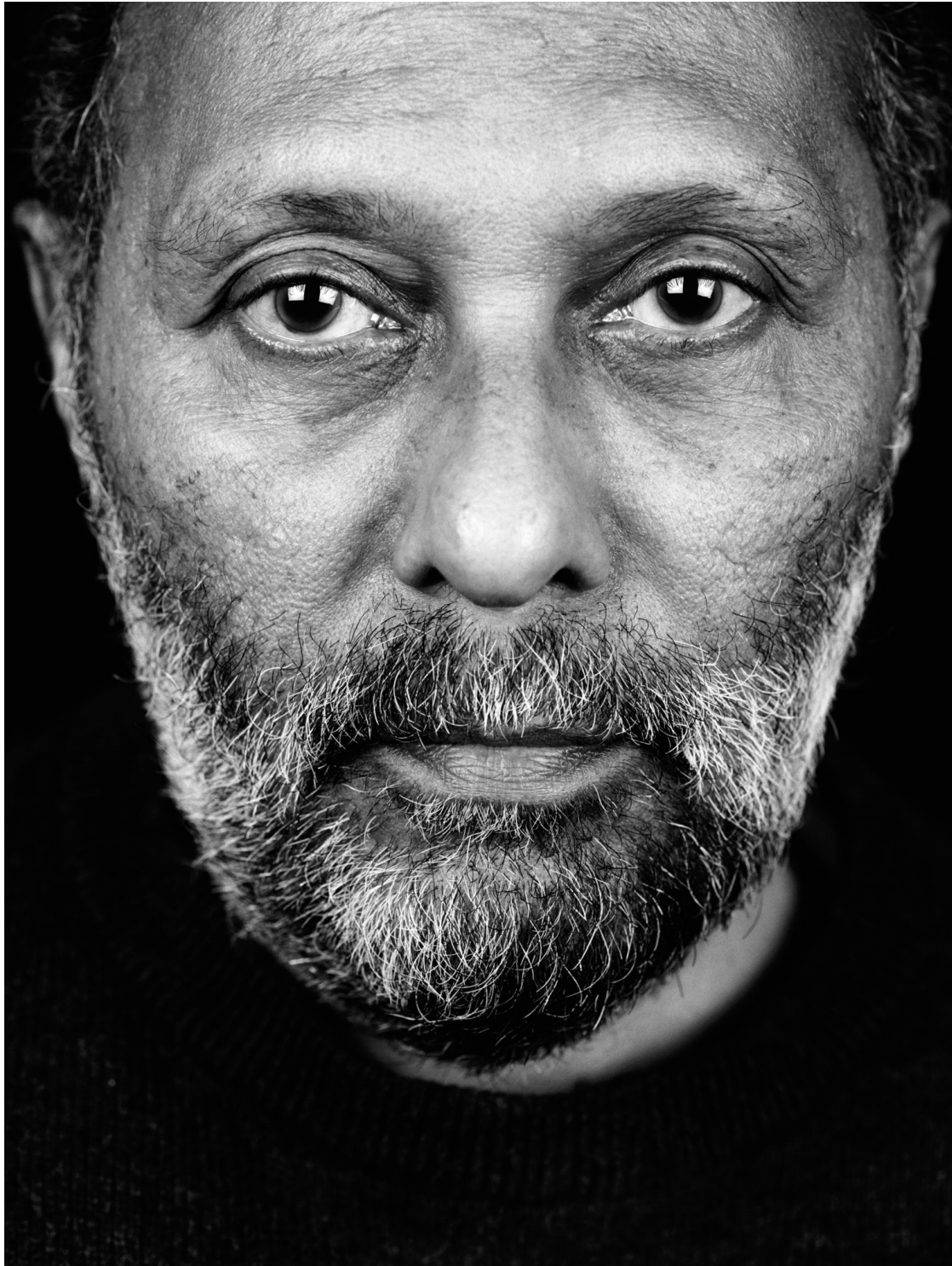Sufi Musician and Humanist, Abida Parveen

Musician and Activist, Nina Simone

Grunge Musician, Kurt Cobain (from the band Nirvana)

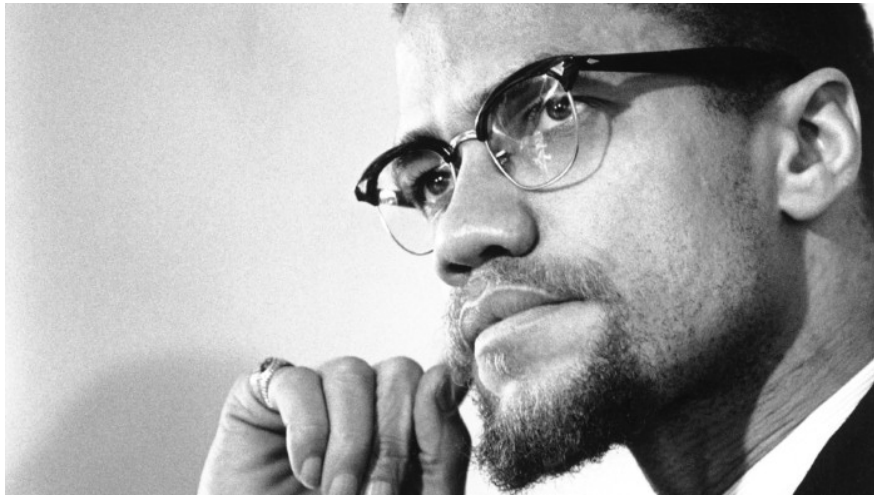Picture Credits: Google Image (used for educational purposes)

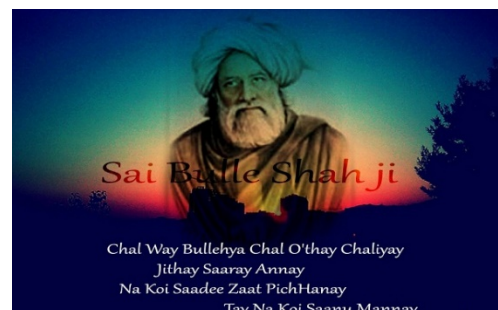*"There is no understanding Englishness without understanding its imperial and colonial dimensions."* Stuart Hall

Musician, Jimi Hendrix

Black Activist and Muslim, Malcolm X

Actor and Director, Martin Scorsese and Robert DeNiro

Muslim Sufi Saint, Bulleh Shah

Picture Credits: Google Image (used for educational purposes)
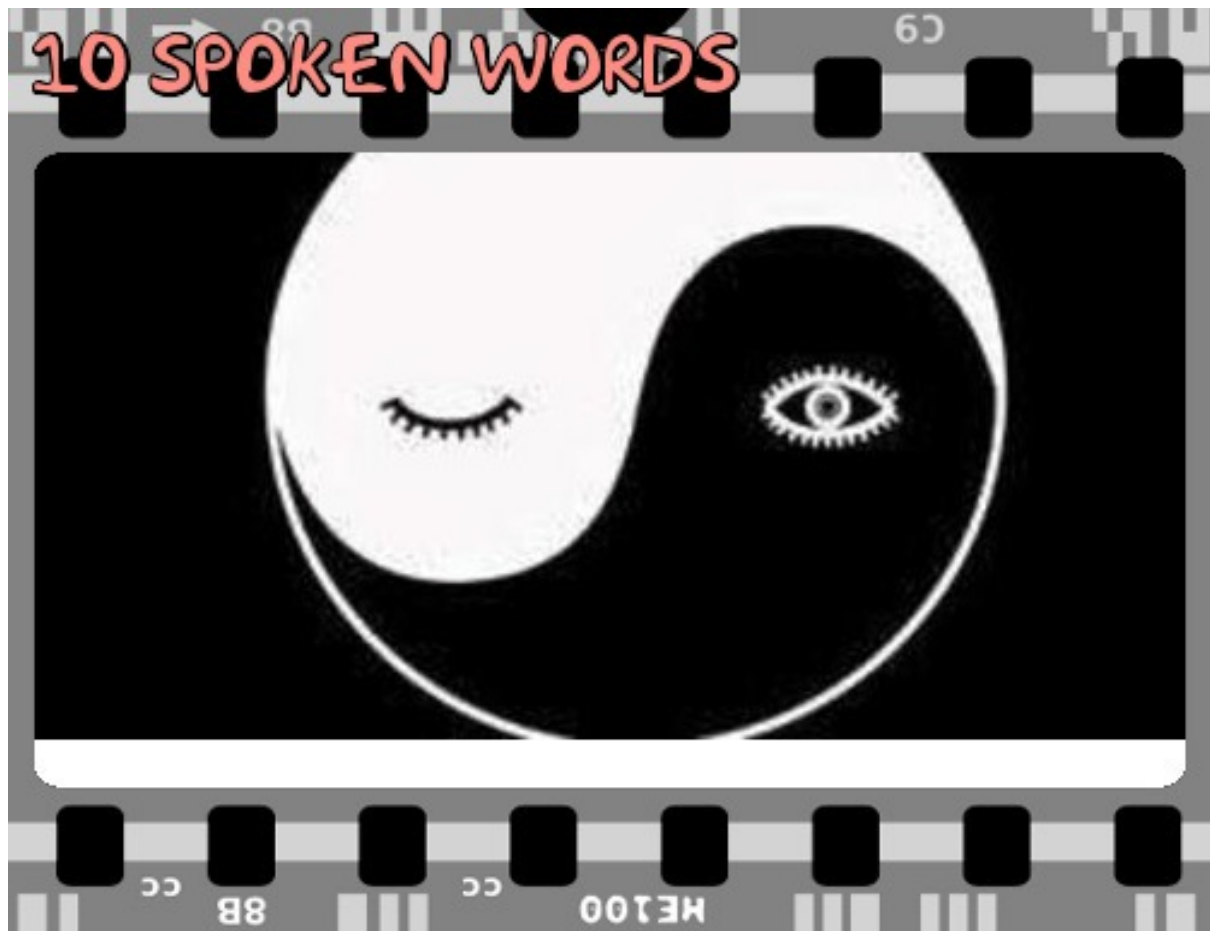
Artistic Expressions

Photography

TURQUOISE BEE

Exhibited

Music Improvisation Collective

10 spoken words are:

Benedict Quetzal: Music
Jo Shah: Writing/Vocals
**+** Invited Artists

10 spoken words classify their work as **art activism**. They have been creating improvised music and spoken word focused on issues of identity, diaspora, belonging, and social inequality since 2015. They are currently featured in the Social Performance Network *Desocialisation Through Art* #desocialisationthroughart series.

Track: *Pick a Stanza*
Link: https://social-performance.academy/10-spoken-words/

Racism through Omission

I am me, I am you, I am Britain, it's not new, it's always been this way.
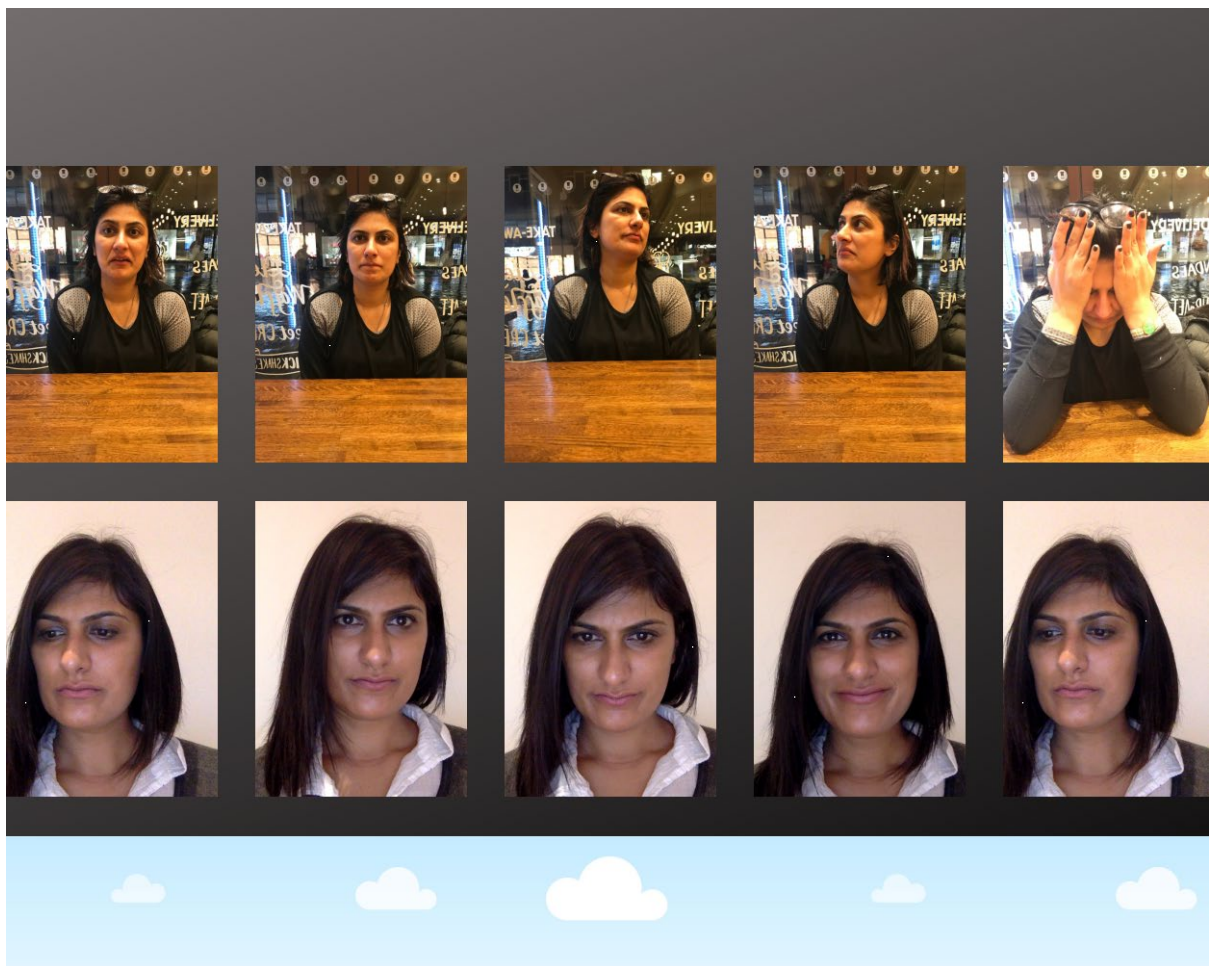
This curation has been hosted by the UAL *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum, Perspectives on Higher Education* movement (https://decolonisingtheartscurriculum.myblog.arts.ac.uk)

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Rahul Patel, Lucy Panesar, Central Saint Martins Library, and the *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum, Perspectives on Higher Education* zine and movement.

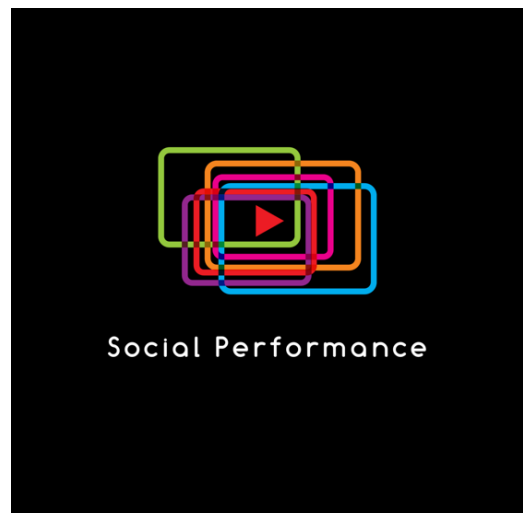For further information on Dr Shah's practice and research, contact her using the details below:

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