

Dyslexia-friendly Transcript for Discover Central S2 Ep1:  
*Dr Javeria Shah and Dr Shona Hunter*

HOST – SCOTT BELLAMY  
GUEST 1 – DR JAVERIA SHAH  
GUEST 2 – DR SHONA HUNTER  
GUEST 3 – MONICA BECKLES-STRACHAN



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*[theme tune plays. SCOTT starts speaking]*

HOST - SCOTT BELLAMY:

Welcome to Discover Central, the podcast that gives you a behind the scenes look at the life of students, staff and alumni at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. I'm your host, Scott, and welcome to our second series.

*[theme tune fades out]*

As we embark on a new academic year, we'll be spending the next six episodes introducing you to members of our community. We'll be learning about some of Central's world class research and the innovative new teaching methods our academics are pioneering, exploring projects focusing on environmental sustainability, and catching up with our alumni in the industry. And if you're planning to audition with us this year, you won't want to miss our special audition episode, where we'll be speaking with members of our auditions team and current students who've been through the process firsthand and can give you tips on getting the most out of your audition with Central. Today we'll be speaking with Central's Dr. Javeria Shah and her

research collaborator from the Center for Race, Education, and Decoloniality at Leeds Beckett University, Dr. Shona Hunter, who will tell us more about their upcoming series of events, Black History Interruptions. We'll also hear from Central's Student Union Black and Ethnic Minorities Officer Monica Beckles-Strachan. Javeria is Central's Inclusion Specialist, the Programme Leader for the Learning Center and a Lecturer on the MA Acting for Screen course, and the founding Chair of the School's Global Majority Staff Network. A sociologist with specialisms in visual and social cultures, Javeria is a visiting academic at a number of other institutions, including the Center for Race, Education, and Decoloniality at Leeds Beckett University, the University of Winchester and the University of Arts London. Outside of Higher Education. She is an engaged activist and artist and the founder of the Social Performance Network. Shona is a reader for the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University, as well as their Programme Director for Research Degrees, and a member of the Center for Race, Education and Decoloniality. She has been writing, teaching and researching into the social, cultural and emotional politics of the state for nearly 20 years, holding academic posts at the Universities of Birmingham, Lancaster and Leeds, along with visiting positions at the University of Sydney, Australia, Mannheim, Germany, Cape Town, Rhodes and currently in Johannesburg, South Africa. Hi Javeria and Shona!

**DR JAVERIA SHAH:**

Hi Scott, thanks for having us.

**DR SHONA HUNTER:**

Yes, thanks for having me, Scott.

SCOTT:

So, let's get started. Tell me, what were each of your paths into academia and what are your specific areas of research?

SHONA:

So me, that's Shona, my kind of path into academia was relatively traditional in that I kind of came straight from my undergraduate through postgraduate degrees, but I was positioned in a policy context. So I started off in a school of social policy and social work, as it was then. I had a really interdisciplinary education: undergraduate degrees at Birmingham, which is where I was at the time when I first started out, were very interdisciplinary. So I had lots of insight into the relationship between culture, economics, the state, social history, psychology, all of that sort of stuff, and became really interested in issues of power kind of quite early on. That very start of my career took me to quite interesting sets of questions, I suppose, around how power produces itself, not only in formal spaces, like in the context of the state, but in informal kind of context. So in the school, in the medical center, between friends, peers, and all of that sort of stuff, because I'm interested in power. Because I adopt a feminist and critical race perspective on those issues, I very quickly started to become interested in kind of white masculinities. And really how we understand power ideals in the context of the global colonial. And that took me 10 or so 12 years now ago, maybe, to setting up the White Spaces Research Network, as it was then when I was at the University of Leeds. But that's developed into a much broader public intellectual project called White spaces.

JAVERIA:

There's lots of parallels between, Shona, you and I, aren't there? I think that's probably why we get on so well. So I also come from an

interdisciplinary background. My original background was film and television and media, broader media, actually. So I had quite a diverse portfolio career in the media industry, varying from expat publications, doing assistant editorships on those right all the way up to working as a freelance nonlinear video editor. I saw the transition from analog to digital, giving a little bit away about my age there. So yeah, I had this background, very diverse background, but I started working with probationers and mentoring them through video projects, and that's what sparked my interest in education. So I made the transition, in the early 2000s, to education. And I taught in the further and higher education sectors for quite some time. But yeah, I had a really broad portfolio of teaching that I was doing, ranging from media and film, to teacher training. I became very interested in lived experience, individual voice, and how lived experiences can be shaped by the state, and how our identity formations kind of feed into the way that we interact socially, and how that that sort of comes from cultural, societal and environmental family contexts. I embarked on a PhD, as I was teaching in FE, and it was non-funded, it was all off my own back. And it was interdisciplinary. So sociology, social policy, and maybe education. I am now an interdisciplinary academic. And I specialise in those three sort of broad areas. But I'm specifically interested in socialisation, identity formation, and situating lived experience within that practice.

SCOTT:

What was it that brought you to Central?

JAVERIA:

So I actually came to Central off the back of the teacher training side to what I was doing. And I originally was pathway leader for the PGCE Media Studies at Central many years ago, around the sort of Gove period of

education policymaking, and it was really interesting, actually, because I was finding that there were parallels between my PhD at the time and my own lived experiences. And it all just came together so interestingly. They just showed how quite often our lived experiences can come out of that, that sort of rhetorical way of looking at things. So that's how I ended up at Central, and then my work at Central just kept progressing and going into different directions in ways that were just complimentary to all the different strands of experience that I'd accumulated in the education sector, and also the research that I was doing at the time. So I've been Learning Centre manager, I am currently Programme Leader for Learning Skills. I have been teaching on Screen Studies since 2015. And that's Amanda Brennan's area, the MA Acting for Screen. It's a wonderful course if you guys are interested, by the way, I'm sorry to plug, but I have to plug, please apply, because it's great. And I'm also currently Inclusion Specialist for Central, it's been really wonderful to be working in a space which recognizes your strengths and your skills and your experience. And that you're not sort of stuck, if that makes sense. You're able to be quite fluid. So I've been quite fluid,

SCOTT:

...And certainly very busy, from the sounds of it, as well.

JAVERIA:

Yes, definitely.

SCOTT:

As you've just mentioned, you're involved in numerous different areas, from lecturing to the Learning Centre, and obviously your work as Central's Inclusion Specialist. Maybe tell us a little bit more about some of those roles

and what they entail and, and maybe the impact, I guess that they can have?

JAVERIA:

Sure, well, I'll start with inclusion role, because it's something that's very close to my research, to my heart, and to my own lived experience as a melanated woman. I've just been really excited to be part of the journey that we're currently on as an institution and to have some sort of inclusion in the way that that's steered and led, working with colleagues, fantastic colleagues. One of the criticisms we often have with inclusion is that it's a box ticking exercise. And what I love about what we're doing at the moment is that we're consciously challenging that narrative. And we're trying to lead inclusion in the Conservatoire sector and the HE sector in the best way that we can, and that involves a lot of self reflection, and working together, having difficult conversations, and we are engaging with that. So I've been really excited about bringing in colleagues and friends and comrades from the anti racist scholarly work that I do outside of Central into this narrative. And so we've had Dr. Muna Abdi recently who's been delivering all of our mandatory training for staff and for students, which I've been really excited about. And yeah, so the inclusion side of it, it's quite composite, because we're trying to bring together all the different aspects of what we do as an institution towards a culture that fosters inclusion, but also fosters a genuine commitment to decolonizing. And and to working together. But also, we're conscious that we are dealing with some quite problematic national narratives as well. So it's a challenge, but it's an interesting challenge. Screen Studies I've already mentioned, it's my passion because I come from a background in film and media, as I mentioned before, so it's really lovely to be able to remain connected with my original discipline. I just love the students; every year we have a bunch of such talented students who go on to make brilliant films and you know, which do their rounds on the festival

circuits and beyond, I feel such a pride. And again, as a teacher, I just feel such pride that our students are achieving in that way, it's just so wonderful to see. And then Learning Skills is a really interesting bag, because it's learning development for the full student body. Through the programme, I'm able to access all the programmes, and the potential to access all the students is there as well. So that's just a really lovely way to stay connected on a grassroots level to the institution. It is a lot of work, you're right, but it's work I enjoy. I do very much love being part of the community and having these different ways of engaging with the community,

SCOTT:

It must be really rewarding, being able to positively impact members of the Central community in so many different ways, as well, with those various roles. So, so thank you so much for sharing that. With us bringing Shona back in, maybe you could tell us a little bit how the two of you met. And when you first started collaborating?

SHONA:

Yeah, well, I think it's quite interesting. Actually, I was just listening to Javeria there again, and I always forget how much we've got in common. I mean, and I think part of how we first met was through those commonalities, actually, around teaching around learning and obviously around anti racist practice. So I was presenting down at a conference at the University of Hertfordshire. And I think that was in like, 2013, do you think? Yes, it was, and I was presenting there, around the White Spaces work. And so yeah, I was doing a workshop and Javeria was there. I actually remember ,kind of, first meeting you , I don't know, there was a really strong connection actually wasn't there?

JAVERIA:

There was, there was. So I should really say, what really impressed me about Shona in this workshop, I knew a little bit about critical race theory, but I hadn't really encountered an explicit focus on whiteness, especially in an Inclusion Conference context to date. That's what drew me to the workshop in the first place. And I think now we're in a culture where whiteness concepts are quite openly discussed and talked about and understood in the spirit that they meant but I think when Shona was doing it, especially in the context of this particular workshop that lexicon, that language, that literacy just wasn't there. So there was a lot of fragility, there was a lot of defensiveness. And the way that Shona managed that situation, managed that energy, was just with so much poise and dignity and criticality, she was very unapologetic, which, you know, hats off you Shona, I was so impressed. But then also, just standing tall, you know, in the face of it and saying, "No, actually, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is...". And trying to have a critical conversation. So I was just really drawn to that approach from Shona. And also just the content of the workshop was really interesting to me as well.

SHONA:

From that point, we were in touch, weren't we, and trying to find ways to kind of connect and work together more consistently. One of the things that I think's, really has always been important for me around the connection between Javeria and I, is that - these multiple kind of connections to different aspects of the education space that we've had. So I was based at the University of Leeds when when Javeria and I first met, but I'd been working on a really large scale, probably the largest scale project at the time that I was working on it at the University of Lancaster, which looked at the barriers to Black women's and Black people's entry into leadership positions, right across the learning and skill sector. And so Javeria's and I's kind of relationship to



parts of FE, parts of work based learning, through those kind of multiple connections to what it means to be an educator, who deserves to be educated, and what the relationship of education to radical practice is. And I think, if I would say, as well as our nuances, obviously, we have our own points of view around race education, decoloniality. But we do have a real commitment to nuance and understanding nuance not as something that is problematic for creating institutional interventions around racism and inequality and social justice, but as really kind of important to enabling the creation of a space for conversation where multiple people can come in and engage where they are really,

SCOTT:

That brings us really nicely to, you know, looking at Black History interruptions this year. Tell me a little bit first, maybe, about how the idea for Black History Interruptions first came about.

JAVERIA:

Okay, so outside of the academic work and the educational work. I've been an anti racist activist for over 20 years. It used to manifest in more traditional formats of protests, so going out to the streets trying to intercept EDL marches and so on. And then over time that changed and became more scholarly. As part of that I have felt a very strong commitment to trying to sort of shift the discourse when it comes to concepts of race and memory, national memory, social memory, historical memory, and so on. So this idea of Black History Interruptions just really emerged from that work that I've been doing for quite some time. I, myself, as I mentioned, in the Performing Race keynote back in 2018, embarked on a journey of self discovery, looking into my own ancestry and my own background, and I discovered that I had a line of very, very quintessentially British ancestors who were classified as colonial

subjects but nonetheless, were about as British as you can get. And that just opened up this whole, I guess, insight for me in many ways, that things are not segregated, we're often segregating things based on sort of racialisations, and so on. So I wanted to challenge that, I wanted to challenge this idea of a segregated model of history, you know, we don't have white history and Black history, we just have history. We might have a white lens to understand certain historical context, we might have certain nationalistic positions to understand certain historical contexts, but we fundamentally are all just living life and having a shared history here. So Black History Interruptions is ideologically interrupting the concept of a Black history being separate to history, and argues against this concept that you need one month a year to celebrate the contributions of Black communities and individuals to our history. And it does so through events which could be framed as interruptions. So for example, last year, we had Nicola Rollock, we had Kehinde screen, his *Psychosis of Whiteness* film with Eugene Nulman. We had Tribe Arts come in and do your range of workshops, we had spoken word artists go over to lead. So we've been putting on a range of events. The way the collaboration began, was that because Shona and I work quite closely together on a range of different conceptual work, I sort of ran the idea by Shona, I was like, "Okay, this is what I'm thinking: Black History Interruptions. It should be collaborative." Because again, that's another model that's just very rarely done, where two universities as far apart as the north and the south will get together and do things which are co-located and which are available to all students and colleagues. I said, "Let's articulate some of the stuff we talked about. Let's collaborate." So we did, we collaborated last year, and we put on a co-located program. And it worked really well. We loved what we were able to achieve from that. And we wanted to carry on. So this year, we're in our second year of Black History Interruptions.

SCOTT:

You mentioned a couple of the events that were held last year, what kind of events this year are on and, I guess, how can people attend those?

SHONA:

So I'm really excited about the event running on Monday, the 26th of October online at 6pm, which is the Leeds part of this year's program. It brings Speak Woman Speak, which is a Leeds based woman led collective theatre production company. And it focuses on Soledad and Betto, which is an amazing piece of performance theatre, which focuses on the histories of two women, one located in St. Kitts as a one woman slave revolt, and one based in Spain, in Franco's Spain. So different different time frames, but the importance of that piece really is about the way that these two women's histories are interconnected. So there are multiple sorts of interruptions in the way that we're thinking of interruptions in the context of Black History Interruptions, in relation to thinking about who holds the agency in relation to history, who resists. So we learn a lot about individual women's agency, and the relationship between these women's stories and their resistances. And then we get to talk to Leah Francis and Carmen Martorell, who are the two women who run that company. So it's going to be brilliant, I can't wait. Great - collective watching, collective engagement!

JAVERIA:

The Central event as part of Black History Interruptions is going to be an African storytelling online workshop. I'm so excited about this particular workshop because it's been about a year in the organizing and sort of materializing of it. So pre-COVID, the idea was it was going to be a face to face workshop, and we're going to have this facilitator come in a lot more for us as well. She's a Griot. So for those of you that don't know, a Griot is the oral

history keeper of an African village. So they keep all the oral histories and keep those sort of going so that the ancestral knowledge is not lost. My apologies if I've not described that properly, I'm paraphrasing a lot here. But that's the gist of it. And we've got a real Griot, Chinyere, whose work I encountered when I was undertaking a diversifying leadership course, which was a Higher Education Academy course. And I was, I can't explain the feeling I had at the end of this workshop. It was, it felt like a spiritual experience. If I'm honest, I felt energized. I felt at one with myself. It was a wonderful experience. And I wanted to share that with the Central and the Leeds community, actually. So we are currently on Eventbrite, it's bookable via Eventbrite, as is Shona's event.. This event has currently sold out, but we are operating a waiting list. So if anybody's interested, please do join the waiting list. If you are signed on, and you can't make it anymore, please do give your ticket up because there are quite a few people wanting to participate. But yeah, I'm really excited because it's so much in the discipline and the ethos, obviously, that the idea of histories is who tells them, how they're told who owns that. And to have that in the framework of an African Storytelling Workshop delivered by a Griot, I think it's just very aptly capturing Black History interruptions.

SCOTT:

And you mentioned that people can sign up through Eventbrite. But is there a particular place? They can get information about both events?

JAVERIA:

Absolutely, they can go on to the Central events page on our website, and they will be able to access links to both events.

SCOTT:

Fantastic. So yeah, that's [www.cssd.ac.uk](http://www.cssd.ac.uk). Fantastic. Well, it sounds like it's a brilliant programme of events; Javeria and Shona, What's next for you both? What else are you working on currently?

SHONA:

Ok, so we've always got a lot on! But in terms of immediate kind of writing projects, I'm co-editing with a colleague of mine who's at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa the first Handbook of Critical Whiteness Studies that's being published by Routledge in the end of 2021, beginning of 2022. So Javeria is writing a chapter in that book for us, along with 35 other people from all over the world. So people can find out about that on the White Spaces website. So that's kind of part of that. And then I've got lots of different individual bits going on, lots of art stuff and a performance piece that I was supposed to be putting on at Leeds prior to the COVID business as part of the Leeds International Festival Fringe. So lots of different things. And I suppose one of my speaking events that's coming up most soon is at Birkbeck or, not at Birkbeck as it's virtually obviously, and it's the it's for the policy ontologies series of events. People can find out about that at Birkbeck. That's on the 12th of November. So various bits and lots of other stuff. And me and Javeria have got loads of other things to do.

JAVERIA:

Yep, totally seconding that, loads of other things to do! I will continue working alongside my work at Central, I will continue working on the Social Performance Network's profile, and the work that we're doing through that network. So there are quite a few events in the pipeline, watch this space. We launched a podcast series called Off Script, off the back of Social Performance Network, which I'm really delighted about. We've had a really

strong first series some wonderful guests, including Professor Mark Anthony Neal from Duke University, and Nels Abbey who wrote how to ... "Think Like a White Man", sorry. So, really excited about this podcast. So please do keep connecting with the Social Performance Network and the work that we're doing. Also, I've been asked to speak at a Women Theatre Justice event, which again, is virtually happening, but it's essentially Leeds University. And it's a collaboration between Clean Break and Slung Low, and they're working in conjunction with Women Theatre Justice. So I'm really excited. That's on the 11th of November, at six o'clock, and then that's bookable via Eventbrite, I'm also participating on the Sustainhood Ecology Project, which we recently were selected for at Central by the Being Human Festival. So I'm really excited about that, and working on that. And I've also been in consultations with Parliament on the support of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic researchers. So lots going on outside of Central. And then in Central, I shall continue with the inclusion work, Screen teaching and learning development. But also, something I forgot to mention, and I should really, really mention, is the Global Majority Staff Network. So being a founding chair of that I'm just really excited about continuing work with that Network. And if you are one of our melanated community members, please do join us. We do lots of really fun things, are planning on doing lots of really fun things, like going to galleries, watching films, having conversations, having chats. So I know we're a little bit limited with COVID at the moment, but we're persevering and we're trying, so do join us if you're interested and information can be found in staff newsletters.

SCOTT:

Fantastic. Thank you so much for that both. And thank you, both of you for speaking with us today. That's been absolutely amazing to find out about everything that you're doing. And of course, those events that we talked about as part of Black History Interruptions. Javeria did just, of course, touch

on her work as Inclusion Specialist at Central, and as the Founding Chair of the School's Global Majority Staff Network. I'm also excited to introduce you to the Student Union's returning Black and Ethnic Minorities Officer, Monica Beckles-Strachan, who has more information about the SU's programme of events for the coming year, and how students can engage with the Students Network of Colour.

#### MONICA BECKLES-STRACHAN:

Hi, everyone. I'm Monica, Monica Rose. I am a BA Acting CDT - gotta rep your class, gotta love your class, guys - third year. I'm also the casually known as "BAME Officer", the Black and Ethnic Minorities Officer... Sub-note: there have been talks into getting this name changed as, myself and others now feel that we are no longer the "minority" but the Global Majority. So yeah, watch this space, watch the space thing, big things are coming, change is still imminent. Coming into this year, I think for everybody has been such an eye opener. So I'm hoping to raise your spirits, lift your spirits a little bit, as we all transition on to this beginning of your academic year for some of you, the middle of your journey for others, and the end of your journey for some as well. Firstly, happy Black History Month, everyone! Gosh, yeah, feeling really, really, really excited! Because at the end of the day, I mean, we're all struggling with the pandemic of COVID, but I think it's really important that we try to keep raising our awareness, keep lifting our positive inputs and our creative direction within the arts. So, normally, I would roll out a series of events as I did last year, as this is my second year in the role as BAME Officer. And unfortunately, because of COVID, we were unable to get people together this year. So I've been rolling out a lot of my workshops online, on Zoom classes, and they've been fantastic. Just to name a few, some of the ones we've had this year we have had the Freshers Event, 2020 Vision, curated by me, thinking about things differently. It's been fantastic. I mean, I wasn't expecting the turnout that we've got. But I was overwhelmed

by it. And I feel super proud to be a part of that process and helping people to articulate how they feel as artists going into this post COVID future that still has got so many uncertainties for all of us. So that's the first thing. The second thing is I will be running my campaign in the spring term, so look out for that. We also have the first official, Afro-Caribbean and Caribbean society that will be opening up soon. So that's fantastic, fantastic news about that. And yeah, we're gonna continue to roll out these workshops for all of you to get involved in as we continue on this academic year. I think it's really important that we stick together, and we make a real effort to consciously get involved in these workshops, because they're so beneficial for us to get together as a community, for us to be involved in everything that's going on with Central, and to keep these conversations happening so people don't think that this is just a one off thing and it goes away. And then we forget about it. No, these conversations are going to keep taking place. Radical changes are going to keep happening. Structural development is being rolled out. Curriculum change is happening. And I think that if we keep these things on the forefront of the topic of conversation, and we never become redundant or irrelevant, you know, we maintain to build structures that we can all get behind. And I think that's really one of the beautiful things about this role and why I love being on the SU. I've also been made the new Student Ambassador for Race and Equality, which is an honour, so stay tuned for hearing about more things to do with that. The Student Network of Colour will be rolling out events this year, so please get involved with our Facebook page and our official Instagram page. And please don't hesitate to hit me up. Thank you for listening and sending you love and light, love and solidarity. Thank you.

*[theme tune starts, crescendo at Scott starts talking]*



SCOTT:

Thank you, Monica. And if you're listening to us at home, thank you for joining us for Series Two of Discover Central. We hope you'll join us for our next episode. But for now, from all of us at Central, take care and we'll see you next time.

*[theme tune ends, diminuendo]*