##### THE CHORUS: An audio experience

**1.**

##### EDDIE

Naturally, you're curious. You want to know who I am? Do you want to know my secrets?

##### SHARON

Dark eyes. Some people even call them black eyes.

##### ELEANOR

Quite dark. That's something I think I naturally have, but my sleeping patterns probably don't help that.

##### MEL

Very dark brown, almost black.

##### DENISE

The shape of my eyes is like my mother's. But the colour isn't, because my mother had quite blue eyes.

##### KERRY

I see my daughter in my eyes, although she has my father's colouring. I see my son in my eyes, though he has my mother's colouring. I have neither.

##### EDDIE

I have my father's silence...and my mother's laugh.

##### LINDA

Ghosts from mirrors. Now it's my old father's mouth which opens with my toothbrush every morning.

##### EDDIE

What do you see?

##### MEL

Dark skinned. Coloured. Black.

##### TOQUEER

My dad was born in Kashmir, so I'm like kind of half Kashmiri, half Pakistani, born in Britain.

##### DENISE

I'm British, born of British parents, both of whom were born in Birmingham.

##### KERRY

My ancestry has over a thousand years in Wales, Scotland and England. Does that make me more British than someone, let's say, arriving with Windrush? I don't think so.

##### EDDIE

Nigerian, Ghanaian, Portuguese. Oh, and don't forget British.

##### ELEANOR

 As pale as milk. And I'm quite often the palest person most people around me have ever seen.

##### LINDA

It's boring to be British. English especially.

##### ELEANOR

 Because it's not something that you can take pride in.

##### GORDON

I'm just English, back as far as I can see.

##### SHARON

Of African descent. Barbadian, Portuguese, Scottish, Native Indian and British.

##### JANE

I'm English. Pinky-beige.

##### MEL

If I had to tick a box, I am black British.

**2.**

##### SHARON

Yeah, yeah, it's only because his skin's a different colour. I mean, he wasn't doing anything, he was just walking along the streets coming home. You know, so it's just presumption of what they think he might be up to. Most of the time I said 'Don't argue with anybody. If you don't start anything, at least you got the upper footing, and you can say you didn't start anything. But the minute you start saying something and doing something, then, you know, it always leads on to something else.’

##### ELEANOR

You know, when they teach you in school about Nazis and fascism and the fight for women's suffrage, all the battles throughout history that have been fought, and you listen to your teacher and you think, ‘How the hell was this ever allowed to happen? How did people stand by and let fascists kill people, inflict genocide, pain, misogyny, racism, homophobia?’ And you say to yourself with a bit of a smirk, ‘I would have been on the right side of history’. And then you go out into the world and you watch things happen. And you can't do anything.

**3.**

##### EDDIE

What do you see?

##### LINDA

Another city, somewhere in the US. Upwards of 30 policemen in full riot gear, armed, helmeted, shielded, encased in heavy black leather, plastic, bullet-proofed in the heat of a summer's day. They form a line facing a young black woman across a tarmaced space.

##### MEL

She stands there in a backless sundress. Onlookers in their short-sleeved shirts.

##### TOQUEER

She's looking straight ahead. Really cool and calm and collected.

##### EDDIE

She’s quite still. Focus. Serene. Head up, back straight.

##### MEL

She looks defiant and proud to be representing the cause.

##### ELEANOR

She knows what she's fighting for.

##### LINDA

She wears gold jewellery. Chains around her neck and a heavy watch hanging from her wrist. A crack in the tarmac behind her could be mistaken for a chain.

##### ELEANOR

There are people watching in the background, standing at a distance.

##### EDDIE

Newspaper reporters.

##### MEL

The air is filled with the anticipation of a showdown.

##### SHARON

But she's just standing there looking sort of motionless.

##### LINDA

Hands in front, palms up.

##### ELEANOR

She is a statue.

##### LINDA

She looks straight ahead at the two policemen running towards her quickly in case she decides to - what?

##### MEL

The thought was just in my head. And now I'm standing in the middle of the street facing off with the police.

##### TOQUEER

With their full body armour, their helmets. Robocop.

##### KERRY

Very secure riot gear and protective gear, but with no insignia at all.

##### LINDA

She doesn't move, stands firm, as the police, each easily twice her size in their black armour, close in. Arms outstretched towards her.

##### TOQUEER

Stay back, stay back, stay back. Don't go forward. Don't go forward. Don't go forward. Can you really trust the cops?

##### MEL

I have to take this stand. Enough is enough. I am tired of seeing my black brothers murdered and no justice.

##### LINDA

They reach out, but don't touch yet, white plastic handcuffs swinging at their sides.

##### EDDIE

These muscled, well-trained riot police.

##### LINDA

The onlookers keep their distance and watch in silence.

##### ELEANOR

We are the bystanders.

##### TOQUEER

There's one on the right, reaching out his arm out.

##### LINDA

They each take an arm and march her back towards the police line.

##### ELEANOR

And you can't do anything.

##### LINDA

The way has been cleared. An obstacle has been removed.

##### MEL

She was arrested and later released without charge, I believe if she had been a black man, we would be looking at a totally different picture.

**4.**

##### SHARON

It really doesn't take much because when my son was younger, and I only found this out recently, he told me he'd been stopped and searched all the time. And I didn't know this until recently. Now, I brought my children up to - if any policeman, if you get stopped, you don't argue. You don't say anything. You just do what they ask, so you don't get into any trouble. And that's how I brought my children up. But it's only until recently, I find out my children were stopped and searched. And I didn't know anything about it.

##### EDDIE

Why do you need to be polite when you can stop for the tenth time, right. And things like that?

##### SHARON

Because if you're not polite, then you end up in another situation. That's the problem. That is the problem. And just only because your skin's a different colour.

##### EDDIE

You're right, if you turn the other cheek you won't get any trouble or anything like that. But the other thing is, if you've been stopped for the 10th, 15th, 20th time, is it not surprising that people will react the way they do sometimes?

##### SHARON

Well then they get frustrated, yeah, I understand it that way as well. But it's just annoying that you have to do that anyway. It's absolutely annoying. Frustrating. Why do I, why do I have to tell my son, 'just be careful when you go out, you know, I don't want to be going down to no police station tonight or don't want to find out you've been beaten up in the police station' like a couple of my friends that I knew.

##### LINDA

It's not a conversation you should have to have with your kids.

##### SHARON

Yes, exactly. I shouldn't be saying that, but you feel you have to. You know, in order so your son can get home safe.

**5.**

##### EDDIE

What do you see?

##### MEL

A black and white picture of six black men, being stopped and searched by the police. I believe it's America, judging by the shield insignia on the shoulder of the policeman in the foreground. The, five of the black men are leaned against the wall in a plank-like fashion, legs apart, and one being searched by the police, the policeman's right hand in the man's back pocket, the other hand holding a rifle. In the background, there are two black women. And another white police officer. The one black woman has her hand to her head, looking almost exasperated by the situation. It's probably one of several stops that she’s maybe witnessed today. And these six black men were probably just doing nothing, just hanging around on the street corner, chilling, but are being searched by the police, probably not finding anything at all.

**6.**

##### EDDIE

'Oppressed: subject to harsh and authoritarian treatment.' If we use that definition, then I have to say that I haven't been oppressed. But if we have a look at an alternative definition, 'malicious, unjust treatment or exercise of power, often under the guise of authority or cultural opprobrium. Oppression may be overt or covert, depending on how it's practiced', then I have to say, yes. 'Not tonight, son.’ ‘Can I see your driving license?’ ‘Oh, it's the Three Degrees’. ‘Yes, I know you're a good manager, but I don't think it's a good idea to put you in that part of the country, they're not as open as we are here.’ ‘Hey lads, come and listen to this guy's accent', says the Aussie twang as I order a drink in a Melbourne bar.

##### DENISE

Something had happened within the class and I really cannot remember what that was. But we all got caught up in it in one way or another, I guess. But I was singled out, and I was sent to Coventry and nobody spoke to me for, for, I can't remember. It felt like weeks. But whether it was that long or not, I don't know. I think for some silly reason, my accent played a part. Well, that's what I thought. But maybe I'm wrong.

##### MEL

I had to think really hard about a time where I felt oppressed or being prejudiced against. And the only time I can really think, or a couple of examples, is being at school, being the only black girl in my form year and not being invited to a birthday party. I felt isolated. But as my mum would say, I didn't go to school to party, I went to school to learn. The only other example I could think of is being followed around a department store by security. You know, I've got money in my purse, I'm here shopping, why are they following me? And there was one occasion where I had a basketful and I felt so oppressed and intimidated that I just left the basket and left the store.

##### ELEANOR

I've had men touch me without my consent, often older men on public transport. You have men who shout at you. If they won't, if you won't give them your attention, who try to intimidate you. I have to make arrangements if I'm walking in the dark at night, if it's going home from a restaurant or a club or something, I feel scared walking alone.

##### TOQUEER

I applied for a placement within the NHS. I was really excited, looking forward to it. I prepared well and got there, showed my passion, answered the questions clearly. As soon as I mentioned I could speak a different language, I could bring something new in, new fresh thinking and ideas, and as someone who represents a whole faith group, their faces changed and they stopped smiling. I didn't get that and I felt really let down by the NHS.

##### GORDON

‘Can you write about a time when you felt on the receiving end of prejudice or oppression?’ I can't think of circumstances where I have, no.

##### 7.

##### EDDIE

What do you see?

##### JANE

I love it, the picture, I expect you've seen it, one lovely girl with a bemused smile. An EDL thug invades her space. She, relaxed, at piece. He, taut as a ramrod.

##### KERRY

So picture the scene, a protest in Birmingham City centre, a group of people gathered together in front of one of the city's new award winning iconic buildings. This is simply the Library of Birmingham, designed by an internationally renowned Dutch company. The protester's proudly wearing a badge of a Turk, George, the flag being originally an ensign of the Italian state of Genoa, a Turk who was venerated to sainthood by miraculously saving a Frenchman, a saint later adopted to protect King Richard the first on his third crusade.

##### ELEANOR

Their eyes are locked on each other, not on their bodies or heads or even their faces. They are staring into the depths of each other's eyes and the rest of the world falls away. It's just the two of them, locked in an invisible orbit. He leans in, all ligament and tension springing in his muscles, jaw clenched, eyes hard, he's a tightly wound spring. Fists throbbing to punch, blood simmering in his veins, copper pooling in his mouth. This man is all venom, and he's begging to bite. He has come here today to spew hatred at a teenager for the audacity of living in this country, for the colour of her skin. She has more backbone than he ever will. She can stare into the eyes of someone who hates her merely for existing and recognize him for what he really is. A racist. His name will not be remembered, but hers will. Saffiyah Khan.

##### GORDON

Saffiyah Khan faces down the EDL. April 8th 2017, in our amazing city. In our beautiful city. Outside the library, 50 men came, wearing the flag of a Turkish-born saint. Someone shouted out 'Racists'. Someone shouted 'Islamophobes'. Half of these men surrounded a woman. Shouting abuse, shouting 'You're not English'. Shouting 'Go back to where you came from'. Saffiyah Khan had gone to observe. She went there with no other intent. She waited for the law to take its course. Policemen stood and watched. Policemen did not move. Saffiyah moved to protect the truth. Smiling serenely, could not be provoked. Staying calm, wasn't scared in the slightest. Policeman woke to move her away. The EDL had lost the day. April 8th, 2017, in our amazing city. In our beautiful city. Saffiyah Khan faces down the EDL with a smile.

**8.**

##### EDDIE

'I don't see colour.' 'All lives matter.' These are the things that people say. And I'm sure that these statements are well-meaning and well-intentioned, but I think that they're part of the problem, or at least contribute to the problem. I want a world where people do see colour, where they notice that we are all different. Gay, straight, male, female, trans, black, white, brown, pink and every shade in between.

##### JANE

We should all treat each other exactly as we would like to be treated ourselves. And at the bottom of all that is love.

##### GORDON

And love is all.

##### ELEANOR

We can't just recover the system we're working under. Everything has to be burnt down and built back up again, because what hope is there otherwise?

##### GORDON

We are all human and we are more powerful when we work together.

##### MEL

We need you to speak out when you witness inequality in action.

##### GORDON

'Be active, not an activist.'

##### MEL

Evidence and report inappropriate behaviour by those that are paid to protect us.

##### KERRY

Be proud of the past because that's what's made you who you are, even the bad things.

##### DENISE

We've talked and listened and reflected. Looked at images of prejudice and oppression. I hope that our honesty and reflections give pause and maybe, hopefully, challenges us all to have difficult conversations with others and to question ourselves.

##### TOQUEER

Life is true. So can dreams. Love is true, so can hope for a better world. Love by its very nature shall prevail. We just have to believe it can and then live by it. Do not be afraid. Change is inevitable. Let us change with the world, for the better.