

Vice-Chancellor,

In 2021, today's honorary graduate, Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, published her book: *This Is Why I Resist*. In the words of her introduction, this book 'is a declaration that the Black identity will no longer be defined by a prejudiced mindset steeped in institutional racism that enforces White supremacy'. 'This book', she continues, 'is an unfettered call to action to revolutionise the narrative around the Black identity'. Endorsed by Naomi Campbell, Annie Lennox, David Lammy, and many more, it was drafted in six weeks in 2020 during the upheaval caused by the pandemic – but expresses decades of thought and feeling.

Born in Hackney, Shola was raised in London, Nigeria, and the United States of America. She received an honours LLB at the age of 19 from the University of Buckingham, an MA in Diplomatic Studies from the University of Westminster, an LLM in Commercial and Corporate Law from the London School of Economics, a PhD in Law from Birkbeck, University of London, and an Executive MBA from the University of Cambridge. She is a New York Attorney and a Solicitor of England and Wales with broad expertise in the financial services industry. She is an author, a scholar, a lawyer, an activist – and someone who enables others.

Shola established the She@LawTalks to promote women and Black and Minority Ethnic leadership in the legal profession through universities and secondary schools. She founded the *Women in Leadership* publication, which features disrupters and trailblazers, and offers to its readers inspiring, practical, and powerful educational content to help women succeed in both life and work. And, in 2022, she joined the board of Reprieve, whose investigations, litigations, and campaigns defend marginalised people facing human rights abuses.

Those who know Shola speak of her zest and her drive. They speak of the excitement of sharing a stage with her, of her positive energy, of her stylishness,

of her love of good food and of dancing. We should, they say, invite Shola to our parties because there is always fun around her. And when it comes to protest marches, feminist workshops, panel talks, and all the other events she does, you can be sure that Shola will always bring a true version of herself.

Such authenticity makes Shola an excellent commentator. She can say bold things in an accessible, human way. This is not easy at all. It requires preparation, the hard work of making sure that there is a strong message to put out. It requires the eloquence and will to deliver words that can overcome everything from the structural imbalances of the media to the hostility of a show's presenter. And it requires the ability to handle the aftermath. The comments on YouTube contain outrage and hate, but they also contain support and recognition, praise and admiration for Shola's anger, her ability to resist even the most overbearing and entitled interlocutors.

Shola's book sits alongside her media work; it carries the same passion and the same potential to help others but does so with the kind of scope only available outside the compressed world of TV studios and social media. The London School of Economics has placed *This Is Why I Resist* on its community-led list of 'Recommended reads on race equity'. It is easy to see why. Each chapter asks a question, pulling the reader in, teaching them and challenging them. 'Does White Privilege Whitewash Racism?' (yes), 'Does Reverse Racism Exist?' (no), and 'When Will White People Progress?' (...)

Questions like these are important prompts to action. Here in Newcastle, our University's successful application to the Race Equality Charter in 2022 began with a letter from the Vice-Chancellor recognizing both that 'we still have a long way to go to achieve real equity' and that 'we have ... the commitment and dedication needed for that journey'. Across the whole University, there are sustained efforts to address questions of racial justice. In the Law School, the Inspirational Women of the Law project is one such effort, as are the invitations given to external speakers on race, diversity and law, and the content of the core modules of the undergraduate curriculum. In the Business School, the

ongoing work to decolonise the taught curriculum occurs alongside research into such important issues as the profiling practices of law enforcement and the interpersonal relationships in multinational teams.

The journey towards real equity continues for all of us, and in a world that can sometimes seem increasingly mad. Shola is certainly not alone when she shouts, 'What the hell is going on?' at the television – and expresses horror and disbelief at each instance of inhumanity shown there. Yet what makes Shola so special is her ability to help us all engage with what comes next. Her determination, energy, and enthusiasm are exemplary – and so too is her attitude to herself and to others. Relationships matter to Shola. Meeting others is always a chance for learning and growth, whether that encounter is friendly or antagonistic. It is with others that we meet the troubles and injustices of the world, and *This is Why I Resist* is full of examples of such an empathetic practice, from making sure a panel chair pronounces her name correctly to chatting with her daughter about trans rights.

But let us finish with Shola's attitude to herself. She is someone who can also model the importance of self-care, the need to breathe in times of anger and frustration. She can set boundaries, define herself, and – guided by her Christian faith, her expertise, her *self* – choose to act in such a way that she makes the most of the power she has. We can all learn from that.

Vice-Chancellor, for her exemplary, inspiring, and empowering actions against the intersectional oppressions of our time, I present to you Adéshọlá Mos-Shogbamimu as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Dr James Harriman-Smith, Public Orator

4th December 2023