

*Image, Music, Power: Julian Henriques and Parminder Vir's Work in Film and Television*

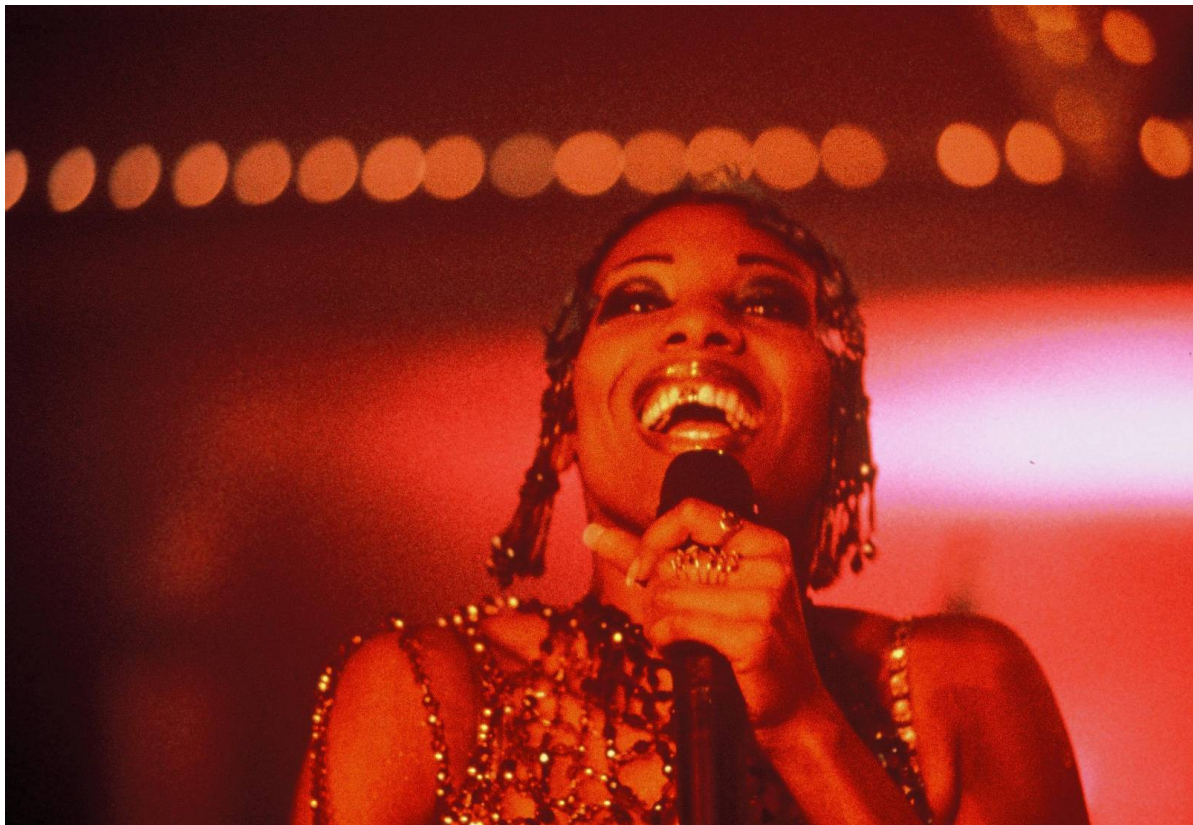
**Event 1**

**Title:** *We the Ragamuffin* and *Babymother*

**Date:** Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October, 18:00

**Venue:** Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

**Book:** [https://my.bbk.ac.uk/ords/f?p=832:100:0:::100:P100\\_EV\\_ID:44450](https://my.bbk.ac.uk/ords/f?p=832:100:0:::100:P100_EV_ID:44450)



Screening of *We the Ragamuffin* (1992), *Babymother* (1998) and *Word, Sound, Power* (2020).

Introduced by director Julian Henriques and producer Parminder Vir OBE.

*Babymother* tells the story of Anita (Anjela Lauren Smith), a young Black woman and mother of two, who, together with her two friends (Caroline Chikezie and Jocelyn Jee Esien), is determined to become a successful dancehall dee-jay, make a professional recording of her music, and transgress the role assigned to her by British society at large and, more locally, the music scene in which she is a participant. However, Anita's ambitions are met with various challenges along the way, not least the lived and financial realities of parenting, her babyfather Byron's (Wil Johnson) careerist ambitions, and the disapproval of her family.

Written and directed by Julian Henriques and produced by Parminder Vir, this film is often identified as the first Black British musical, and it is focussed on the dancehall scene in Harlesden, northwest London. In his review of the film, Professor Stuart Hall described the film's treatment of dancehall as 'first rate', praising the recording and performance scenes, Carroll Thompson and Cinderella's musical contributions, and Peter Middleton's cinematography. To this list, the late Annie Curtis Jones' extraordinary costume design must be added. Her decision to incorporate fabrics and jewellery purchased from Punjabi-owned shops in Southall reflects the heterogenous cultural influences on the emerging dancehall fashion. Just as the music combines different influences, so too the clothing. In his review, Hall also pinpointed the central issue raised by the film: '*Babymother* marks another episode in second-wave feminism's long, incomplete march. It reminds us that popular culture, despite its elements of celebration and resistance, is also and always an ambiguous and contradictory space. Among other issues, *Babymother* poses the question of just how, and by what complicated shifts, the liberation of women is connected to girl power.'

*We the Ragamuffin* (1992), Henriques' musical short film for Channel 4, can be considered the 'stepping stone' to the feature-length *Babymother*. Shot on the North Peckham Estate, *We the Ragamuffin* features a cast of local musicians, including Buckey Ranks, Jerry Lionz, and the late Militant Dee. The film moves between musical performance and improvised drama, outdoor sound systems (Lewisham's legendary Saxon Studio International) and interior spaces, including recording studios, club and domestic spaces. As with *Babymother*, this work is a fictional film that has a documentary quality, a time-capsule that indexes a local music scene and social housing that has since been demolished. Both works also feature women stepping into roles that were previously preserved for men. In the case of *We the Ragamuffin*, this includes a female dee-jay (Militant Dee) and promoter (Annette Toyloy). This event finishes with one of Henriques' short documentaries, part of his ongoing research project, investigating sound systems and other street technologies around the world.

*Word, Sound, Power* (2020, 10 min.) is documentary produced and directed by Daniel Acevedo and Recardo Vega about the Columbian sound system *El Gran Latido*. Henriques commissioned it as part of his ERC research project, *Sonic Street Technologies*.

## Event 2

**Title:** *Rouch in Reverse* and *Algeria: Women at War*

**Date:** Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October, 18:00

**Venue:** Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

**Book:** <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/events/event/44451/image-music-power-julian-henriques-and-parminder-virs-work-in-film-and-television-event-2>



Screening of *Rouch in Reverse* (1995) and *Algeria: Women at War* (1992). Introduced by the film's respective directors, Manthia Diawara and Parminder Vir OBE.

In *Rouch in Reverse* (1995), filmmaker and New York University professor Manthia Diawara introduces a technique that he calls 'reverse anthropology'. In so doing, Diawara assumes the position of anthropologist or 'scientist', to use his exact phrase, while Rouch, who is often described as the 'father of ethnographic cinema', becomes the subject to be explored, the 'informant'. The two filmmakers spend time together, have discussions about the French director's work, visit his home and various sites in Paris, all of which was shot by Arthur Jafa and Khalid Frikha. Throughout, however, Diawara is alert to Rouch's attempts to divert him from his task as well as his refusal to engage in serious discussion about politics. In many senses, it is these attempted diversions and absences that form the central problematic of this reflexive essay

film. Hence, what is at stake with it is not just an assessment of Rouch's films, their cinematic achievement, influence and, in various cases, profoundly problematic and racist aspects, but also broader questions about power relations in filmmaking and society more generally. Can anthropology, with its links to paternalism, colonialism and racism, simply be reversed? What possibilities are there for self-anthropology?

*Algeria: Women At War* offers a rare insight into the key role Algerian women played in their country's liberation struggle from the French between 1954 and 1962. Shot in 1992 and broadcast on Channel Four television the same year, this documentary uses a combination of interviews and archival footage to reflect on the position of women in Algeria. The inspiration for this documentary was Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), an important film about the Algerian revolution that has been praised by many historians and scholars. Nevertheless, the role played by women in the struggle for independence is absent from the account it offers. As such, 10 years after seeing Pontecorvo's movie, Vir travelled to Algeria to find these women and to document their militant commitment. As She has explained, 'My film *Algeria: Women at War* and the publication that accompanied its broadcast... pays tribute to the women who fought in the revolution, their daughters, also fighting for their freedom and their granddaughters. In my film veteran fighters like Aicha Bouazzar, Baya Hocine and Fatima Hakim talk – some for the first time – about their role in the revolution. Their daughters – Houria Bouhired, Khalida Messaoudi and Fadila Chittour – discuss the status of women after 30 years of single-party rule, the rise of Islam and increasing political violence.'

### Event 3

**Title:** *Derek Walcott: Poet of the Island* and *Denzil's Dance*

**Date:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October, 18:00

**Venue:** Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

**Book:** [https://my.bbk.ac.uk/ords/f?p=832:100:0:::100:P100\\_EV\\_ID:44452](https://my.bbk.ac.uk/ords/f?p=832:100:0:::100:P100_EV_ID:44452)



Screening of *Derek Walcott: Poet of the Island* (1993) and *Denzil's Dance* (2019).

This event focusses on art and literature emanating from the Caribbean. In 1993, Henriques produced and directed *Derek Walcott: Poet of the Island* (1993) for BBC Arena, a documentary presented by Professor Stuart Hall. Upon reading Walcott's epic poem *Omeros*, first published in 1990, Henriques proposed this project to the BBC, but it was only when the Saint Lucian poet and playwright won the Nobel prize for this work that the project was greenlighted. In December 1992, Henriques and Hall travelled to St Lucia to film with Walcott over the Christmas period. While having a broadly pedagogical remit, this documentary features a wide-ranging interview with Walcott, in which Hall asks far-reaching questions about notions of home, writing and language. He also pushes Walcott on the politics of some of his choices in *Omeros*: for example, his decision not to use vernacular *creole*, his employment of the *terza rima* form throughout, and its surprisingly sympathetic depiction of archetypal British colonialist Major Plunkett. *Denzil's Dance* (2019) is a short documentary about Grenada-born artist Denzil Forrester, whose enigmatic paintings often depict dances, particularly reggae and dub nights, in the UK and Caribbean.

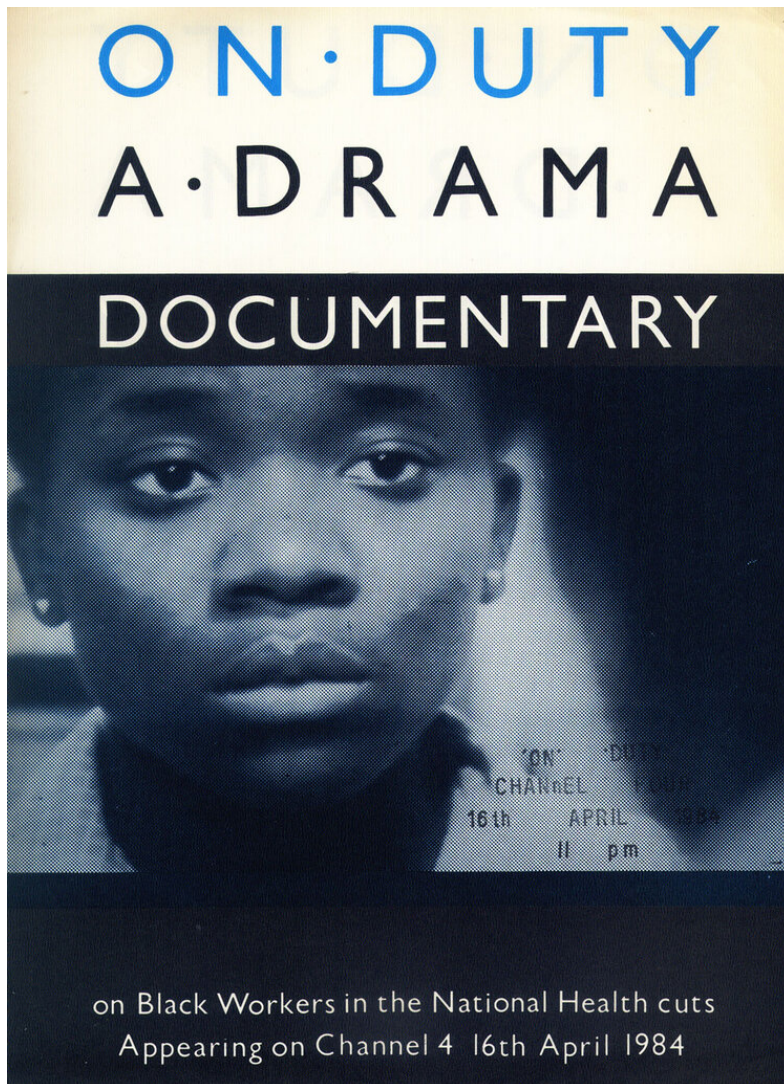
#### Event 4

**Title:** *On Duty*

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> November, 18:00

**Venue:** Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

**Book:** [https://my.bbk.ac.uk/ords/f?p=832:100:0:::100:P100\\_EV\\_ID:44453](https://my.bbk.ac.uk/ords/f?p=832:100:0:::100:P100_EV_ID:44453)



Screening of *On Duty* (1984) and panel discussion with director Cassie McFarlane, producer Julian Henriques, playwright Michael McMillan and Parminder Vir OBE.

This retrospective closes with a special screening of *On Duty* (1984), marking its fortieth anniversary. This drama-documentary about Rita Maxim's ongoing struggle with the management at St Mary's Hospital in northwest London. Maxim, a Caribbean NHS worker, refused to sign the new privatisation contract imposed by the hospital management and was

subsequently dismissed. This incident was secretly recorded and included in the film. *On Duty* was also able to capture the collective support among the hospital's Black health workers, who were fearful of losing their jobs if they didn't sign the privatisation contract. Made for Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour Series*, this film was directed by Cassie McFarlane, produced by Julian Henriques, with a cast that included Pearl Wilson, Michael Hamilton, Sylvester Williams, Yvonne Weeks, and Lyn Langridge. *On Duty* was originally a play, written by Michael McMillan and directed by Michael Hamilton. It was first performed at the Carlton Community Centre, northwest London, in 1983, and subsequently toured to various community-based venues across London. In her capacity as the Greater London Council Ethnic Arts Officer (1982-1986), Parminder Vir funded the *On Duty* stage and video production from the GLC Ethnic Arts Subcommittee in 1984.

## Notes

Spanning musical, documentary, agit-prop and essay film, this retrospective looks at some of Professor Julian Henriques and Parminder Vir OBE's work as directors and producers in film and television over several decades. The programme has been developed with the intention not only of screening a series of important works but also of considering the conditions of possibility, the political, social and aesthetic connections, that make movements and moments possible. The screenings and discussions should appeal to the younger generation looking for inspiration from the film history they've inherited as well as those who were there at the time.

The 1980s fundamentally transformed British film and television, witnessing the launch of Channel 4 (1982) and the emergence of an independent Black British cinema. As this series attests, Henriques and Vir were active in both. In 1987, they established the production company Formation Films and made *Exit No Exit*, a thirty-minute Orpheus-inspired dance drama set in the London Underground, directed by Henriques for Dance on Four. Previously, Henriques produced another work for Channel 4 which is included in this retrospective and celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year: *On Duty* (1984). Directed by Cassie McFarlane and adapted from the play by Michael McMillan, this drama-documentary about the true story of Rita Maxim, a Caribbean NHS worker, who fought the management of St Mary's Hospital and refused to sign the new privatisation contract they attempted to impose.

In the early 1980s, Vir worked at the Commonwealth Institute and, together with Jim Pines, co-organised the Black Film Festival at the Commonwealth Institute in London in 1982. She then began working at Greater London Council (GLC) and, as Imruh Bakari has recently

noted, convened the Third Eye: London's Festival of Third World Cinema (1983) collaborating with others including June Givanni and Lionel Ngakane. As the GLC Ethnic Arts Officer (1982-1986), Vir developed the policy for funding the Black film and video sector, an initiative that paved the way for funding important workshops in London, including Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa Film and Video, Ceddo Film and Video Workshop, and Retake Film and Video Collective, as well as independent production companies like Kuumba Productions and Penumbra Productions. These crucial events and initiatives have led to a revolutionary body of work and discourse that artists, curators and scholars continue to grapple with today. In 1986, Vir presented a showreel of Black and Asian filmmakers to the editorial staff in the BBC, where she would be employed, eventually as series producer, until 1994, working with many important filmmakers from across the globe, including Deepa Dhanraj, Gaston Kaboré, Michel Khleifi and Raoul Peck.

During the 1990s, Vir also produced numerous documentaries, including *Algeria: Woman at War* (1992), a work that combines archival footage and interviews to address the crucial role Algerian women played in their country's liberation struggle from the French and their equally important place in political life at the time of the work's making. In this retrospective, the film will be screened alongside Professor Manthia Diawara's reflexive essay film *Rouch in Reverse* (1995). In this latter work, for which Henriques and Vir were executive producer and producer respectively, Diawara offers a nuanced and critical account of Jean Rouch, often described as the 'father of ethnographic cinema' and precursor to the French New Wave.

Henriques two most widely seen films, *We the Ragamuffin* (1992) and *Babymother* (1998), focus on the dancehall scenes in Peckham and Harlesden respectively. During this time, Henriques also made *Derek Walcott: Poet of the Island* (1993) for BBC Arena, a documentary presented by Hall and featuring a wide-ranging and probing interview with the Saint Lucian poet, playwright and Nobel Laureate. The retrospective also features two recent works by Henriques, a documentary about the artist Denzil Forrester titled *Denzil's Dance* (2019), and a short documentary from a much larger series that is part of Henriques' ongoing research project, funded by the European Research Council, investigating sound systems and other street technologies around the globe. While the music scenes documented in *We the Ragamuffin* and *Babymother* seem at a historical distance in 2024, it is clear that the deep engagement with sound systems, whose influence continues to reverberate around the world, is being continued by Henriques today as professor in the Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. No event could testify to that more



than Jah Shaka's Nine Night, convened by Henriques at the Great Hall of Goldsmiths, on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

## **Biographies**

### **Professor Julian Henriques**

Professor Julian Henriques is convenor of the MA Cultural Studies programme, director of the Topology Research Unit and co-founder of Sound System Outernational research group in the Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths, University of London. Previously Julian was head of film and television at CARIMAC at the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica. Julian researches street cultures, music and technologies including those of the reggae sound system. He has credits as a writer-director with the feature film *Babymother*, a reggae musical, the improvised short drama *We the Ragamuffin* and as a producer with numerous BBC and Channel Four documentaries; a sound artist with the sculpture *Knots & Donuts* at the Tate Modern, a founding editor with the *Ideology & Consciousness* journal and as an author with others *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* and the monographs *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* and *Sonic Media: the Street Technology of the Jamaican Sound System* (forthcoming). He is a co-founding trustee of the Stuart Hall Foundation and the PI on an ERC Consolidator research grant (2021 – 2025), Sonic Street Technologies.

### **Parminder Vir OBE**

With a professional career spanning four decades, Parminder Vir OBE has dedicated her life to amplifying untold narratives and empowering underserved communities. Central to her mission is an unwavering belief *in the transformative potential of ideas and stories to ignite profound change*. Her work has championed African Entrepreneurship, brought untold stories to film and television, and nurtured creativity in the arts and culture. She is currently writing a memoir that interweaves the many facets of her career.

*As CEO of the Tony Elumelu Foundation and Advisory Board Member from 2014-2012, Vir designed and led a groundbreaking entrepreneurship programme that impacted over 10,000 entrepreneurs across 54 African nations. She remains a staunch advocate for entrepreneurship as a key driver of Africa's social and economic development, reshaping the continent's narrative through the stories of its entrepreneurs. Vir continues to offer strategic guidance as an Advisory Board*

Member for several African enterprises and promotes structured approaches to African entrepreneurship through writing, speaking engagements, and mentorship.

An award-winning film and television producer with 30 years of experience, Vir has produced for the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and more. She co-founded the Cultural Diversity Network (CDN), advocating for greater diversity in UK media. As an investment manager at Ingenious Media, she managed the £40 million World Cinema Fund. Also, she served as a non-executive director at Goldcrest Films, advising on a £20 million capital fund for Oscar-winning films.

Vir's influence extends to government boards, including non-executive roles at the Department of Culture, Media and Sports, the UK Film Council, the UK India Business Council, and the UKTI Asia Task Force, shaping international strategies and policies.

In 2002, Vir was awarded an OBE for her contributions to film and television, and in 2010, she received an Honorary MA from the University for the Creative Arts. Born in Punjab, India, she moved to England at age ten and is married to Professor Julian Henriques.