

The GLC Story Oral History Project

Interviewee: Bernardine Evaristo

Interviewer: Jay Bernard

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Location: London

J: So this is an interview with Bernardine Evaristo –

B: Professor Bernardine Evaristo MBE. (Laughter)

J: Professor Bernardine Evaristo and Jay Bernard. You can see who is in charge here –

B: (Laughter)

J: – And who's actually running this interview. Definitely not Jay Bernard. Right, so we're interviewing you about Theatre of Black Women. And I guess we'll start really, really simple because I guess this is about Theatre of Black Women but it's also about the GLC. And how the two kind of intertwined, and also about the broader politics of the day. So I guess we'll start with, how would you describe your background?

B: My personal background? Well I was raised in Woolwich, south east London and I was educated in Eltham, a girls grammar school. I come from a, I suppose, immigrant working class family. My father was Nigerian and my mother was white English. They married in the fifties, had eight children, in ten years, which was a lot. Had very little money. And, er, yeah, that's it in a nutshell. I was born in 1975. (Laughter) It's a lie. I was born in 1959.

J: How would you describe London when you were growing up? Coming of age?

B: You know when I was growing up – You don't know London, usually, when you're young, unless you've had the advantage of being able to travel around the city, so all you know is the area you grew up, and where you go to school. So I knew Woolwich, Plumstead, Eltham a little bit where I went to school. Blackheath, a little bit because my best friend lived there from the age of twelve, so I went there a lot. Greenwich, a little bit. I knew the centre of London a little bit which is where from kind of the age of sixteen I had Saturday jobs. So that's the London I knew. But the London that I really knew was sort of the South East area that I grew up in. My parent settled in Woolwich which was a bit more mixed than other parts of the capital. So actually, initially, I was born in Eltham, and they tried to raise kids there, but realised it wasn't the right environment because it was very white, so they moved to Woolwich because it was a bit more mixed, but it wasn't really mixed at all, you know, not by today's standards. Cos today you'd call Woolwich Little Lagos, it's so African. When I was growing up, my father was pretty much the only African in the village, but on my road there was my family, there was an Indian family from Goa, there might have been other people of colour... I don't remember. I don't think there were. My first school was a convent school, which was literally the house next to where I grew up. And, er, it was actually a private school, but it didn't really feel like a private school. I think it was ten pounds a year to go there. So it was a catholic private school. But when I say that, it then makes me sound middle class, but we weren't, we were poor. And then my mother was a school teacher, so she then went back to work when the youngest was of age. So then I transferred to a school up the hill, which is where she was teaching. And there was from my memory, one black woman in my year, black girl, called Yasmin Yusuf, whose career I sort of picked up on like ten years ago, and she was like the sort of creative designer for Marks and Spencers for many years and then she went to somewhere like Next. And I remember when I first saw her in a magazine, I was like, "Oh my god! That's Yasmin Yusuf!" But she and I didn't really talk or anything, but we were on the same netball team. And there was a black boy I think, in the school... and I think that was it. So it was a very white working class possibly lower middle-class – certain areas might be a bit more lower middle class – you know how class obsessed we are in the UK – part of London. Then I went to this grammar school. I was the only black girl there for most of my time

there, until when I was in the sixth form, it became a comprehensive, and then black girls came in their first year. So there were other students of colour, a few, there was like a girl from Hong Kong, there was a girl from India, and myself, that was in my class. So when people ask me about my background I tend to describe it as very white. Which, coming from a mixed race black family, impacted on my family in lots of different ways. And so by the time I went to drama school, which was the Rose Bruford college of drama, I'd had a very white upbringing, essentially. You know, my social circle was very white, except for my best friend Jenny, who was half Iraqi. And she was my friend who lived in Blackheath, we're still great friends. And, she didn't really identify as "of colour" and she didn't look "of colour", but her father actually was an Arab looking man. He was an Arab. And you know, you choose these childhood friends, based on people you can somehow relate to. And I think subconsciously we related to each other, because we both came from mixed race families, even though she didn't really look like she did. And my identity as a person of colour was not really very formed in terms of an awareness of being black, but that's a choice you make as well. You know, you identify in terms of being black, mixed race, biracial, the whole way that we categorise ourselves, is something I came to when I was in my late teens when I went to drama school. So, I would say there was probably a period in my life where I wanted to be white. Which I think is inevitable, if you're growing up in that kind of background. You don't see yourself reflected. We were not reflected. There were no people of colour in anything around us, apart from negative images in newspapers. You know, the national front was quite lively in my area. There was a sense of danger if you were of colour, and my father was very strict because of that – he had so many kids, he had four boys, four girls – he kept us off the streets because he wanted to protect us. That then meant we weren't very worldly-wise, and didn't have great social lives, because he was kind of like, keeping us at home, close to him. Erm, and then I went to Rose Bruford college of speech and drama, which was amazing because I'd chosen to go to a community theatre arts course. I had – I tried over three seasons to get into various drama schools, and I always got into places, but I never got into anywhere that I would – that necessarily would have been my first choice. So in the end, I think I got into four drama schools, and I'd never got into RADA – I tried – never got into central, never got into guildhall, not into the Drama Centre, never got into Bristol or the Old Vic, which were considered the top drama schools. At the time, you think it's because you're not good enough, but then later you realise, well, no, I was never going to be accepted. Because they accepted one person of colour every few years. And – but eventually, I did get into somewhere that I really wanted to go and it was called Rose Bruford community theatre arts course, where you created your own theatre, and that appealed to me because the Greenwich young people's theatre group, from the age of twelve to sixteen, that's how I got into theatre. Absolutely loved it. Loved the culture of theatre. It wasn't that racially mixed, but I never felt that I stood out. It was the kind of environment where you were just accepted as who you were and it was truly wonderful. And it really shaped me as a person. So that's how I became someone who was interested in theatre, and I pursued it at school, I got some good parts at school, and then at the age of fourteen decided I wanted to be an actress. And Rose Bruford, as I said, community theatre – yeah, I know, the point I was going to make was that in 1972, I saw a play by the Bubble Theatre which is a big tent theatre, and they may still be going. It was on Blackheath common, and I'd gone with my friend Jenny, who was also part of the youth theatre, it was where we met. And we met an actress called – Oh my god, her name's gone! ... Cleo Sylvester. Cleo Sylvester was the first black actress I ever saw live. I was twelve, so I was young, so that was pretty good actually, and she was with the Bubble Theatre, and I thought, oh my god, this is amazing. And she was mixed race as well, and she always stuck in my mind. And I met her about ten years ago, because my husband's an actor, and I met her when he did a show in her venue. And I said, oh my god, Cleo, I must tell you what an important influence you were in my life. And it was a community theatre company, Bubble, so it was like, taking theatre to the people as opposed to, you know, different environments, as opposed to having to go to the theatre to see it. And that perhaps sowed a seed for me that community theatre might be something I enjoyed. And – oh,

have you got another question?

J: Yes, and just one thing, I think we need to adjust your clip.

B: Mmm! It's hidden.

J: Because you're, um, you're also very enthusiastic so –

B: Where do you want it? Further down? Is it all plosive? P-p-p.

J: No. What's happening is that, because you're moving... you're animated.

B: Okay, I won't move.

J: If you don't mind I'll just put it down a bit further. And then – you can move, you can totally move, it's just that what you were doing was kind of –

B: Oh was I? Hitting it?

J: We'll just continue. But also I guess I do have another question, so.

B: Okay. You just press a button and I go. (Laughter)

J: It's fine, we can cut some of it out. So, it's really interesting what you're saying because, you know, the next question I had was about your “coming of rage”.

B: Oh, coming of rage, I love that expression, isn't it good? I bet other people have stolen it. (Laughter) Coming of rage. Drama school. When I went to drama school, I loved it, I loved drama school. And it was absolutely the right place for me because it was not traditional drama, the course I did, it was not a traditional course, where you just, performed in extant plays. Which, would have probably really limited the kind of theatre I would have – the kinds of roles I would have had. Because I know other people in other schools, when they were – it might have changed now, but I don't think it has. There's a terrific actress called Michaela Coel. Do you know her? Oh my god, she's amazing. Well. She went to Guildhall. And when she went there, she was the first black woman who'd been accepted in five years. Now my cousin, Victoria went there, and there were three black women when she went there in the early nineties. And I could not believe that they'd gone back. And that, in five years, you know... So that's what it was like when I was growing up. And if you were a black actor in drama school, the chances are you were not gonna get cast well, at all. Because the whole idea of integrated casting, multi-cultural casting, casting cross racial, colourblind casting, that whole concept hadn't really taken off. When I was at drama school. So I was so lucky, so so lucky, I made such a good choice, to go to this place, where a) they do colour – I got to play Lady Macbeth – they did do colourblind casting – but also we created our own theatre. And the amazing thing about Rose Bruford is that there were five black women in our year, which was probably the first time that had ever happened in the history of British drama schools, I think. And it could probably only ever happen at Rose Bruford, because it was a political course, and it was a community theatre arts course. And so they wanted people who were going to create their own theatre companies, and create their own theatre. Um. And those people were - Patricia St. Hilaire, who kind of worked – we formed Theatre of Black Women together – she left theatre, by the end of the eighties she kind of left it, but she did, she did write a libretto for a couple of African – she wrote one for the royal

opera house and I think she wrote something for Ajido. She didn't really continue as a writer or someone working in theatre. The other person is Paulette Randall, who is basically our leading black woman theatre director, and she's amazing. As a theatre director, in many ways, so's Patricia, but Paulette's leading theatre, and has just carved out an amazing career for herself. So the three of us. And there was also someone called Joan Williams, who's a very talented actress, who went on to work in the west end, in musicals. She then became a social worker after a few years. And somebody called Barbara Lee-King Monado, who we never kept in touch with, and she didn't really you know. I don't think she went into theatre. But there were five of us. So you have this, erm, mixture of a theatre arts course, feminist movement, and women being empowered in that way, and we would get feminist and very powerful women directors. One black women directed, in fact two black woman directors at Rose Bruford. You had the five of us. Strong together. We gravitated towards each other. And, erm, created our own theatre. So, um, what was the question?

J: That's a great answer to *that* question.

B: Oh! Okay, good.

J: I guess my next question would be, erm – that was kind of the genesis, like you say, the kind of seeds were being sewn for your very early experience. It was kind of cultivated at drama school.

B: Well, we cultivated it. Yeah, they did cultivate it, but they also tried to nip it in the bud. So my other experience at Rose Bruford was that we formed a – well, we did form a company initially, and we did a play called coping, which was about five different kinds of black women. So that was the show we did together in our second year. And Yvonne Brewster directed it, who of course, became one of our, well, our leading theatre director before she gave it up and now it's Paulette Randall. And she came and directed us, so that was a great recipe for something that would be powerful and a black woman, ad focused, and free, and we'd be able to express ourselves and so on. And the nature of the course was that when you devised your own shows you would go into the community and do some events. You know, you'd do performances, rather. So, I think, we did a performance at Brixton black women's centre and a couple of other places. And suddenly, there was a huge demand for this work that we were doing. And we were like wow, this is amazing. Because nobody else had done it before. And then the college said, nope, you can't go out, you've got to continue with your training. That's what drama schools are like. You don't understand it when you're in the school because you think this is a great opportunity, but they can be very controlling, I mean unless they've changed, of how much work you can do outside of your course. Because the idea is that you're still developing and so on. So they nipped it in the bud. And there was quite a lot of conflict around that, because we felt this was an opportunity to get this show out there, because it absolutely hit a button, and it captured the zeitgeist for black british women. Erm. But no, they wouldn't let us do any more than I think three performances.

J: So, what was your – when you were kind of establishing the theatre, with funding from the GLC, do you remember what that was and how you went about that?

B: You should talk to my friend Patricia. Because Patricia, she , she was really the manager of the company at the beginning, and she's got a very good memory, Patricia. And she'll remember a lot of the details I don't remember. So what happened was, we left drama school, we formed theatre of black women, Paulette stayed with us for around a year and then she got a directing apprenticeship or whatever, at the Royal Court. So she left, and it was Patricia and I running it. We got five hundred pounds from the minority arts advisory service that used to exist. And which, at that time, was a lot

more money than it is now, obviously. And we got some money from the – a charity – it was actually a Jewish charity –

J: Gulbenkian?

B: No, we did get some money from Gulbenkian actually. But not initially. Daniel Cohen charity? Or something. It was only a small amount. And we got GLC funding.

J: And you got Hackney Council funding.

B: And we got Hackney Council funding. And that was probably our, sort of, start up costs. The GLC funded us for perhaps a couple of years, then of course they went, because Maggie Thatcher of course got rid of the GLC because they were funding groups like ours. It was so shocking. There was a woman who was working in the – I think she must have been working in the theatre – department of the GLC. Which of course at that time was run by Ken Livingstone, who was of course, a great supporter of all kinds of radical groups and movements and so on. And she was called Parminder Vir. And she was the officer who we dealt with. And I'm sure she was in the theatre. And she was married to someone called Julian Henriques, who is a filmmaker, I think he's Trinidadian. But she was incredibly supportive of us and you know, we heard about the funding, we went for funding, and we got funding. And you would go – the funding would come – you put in your application, they would help you do your application, because of course you were new to all of this and then send it through to a committee, a funding committee, who passed it. I can't remember if they passed it the first time or not. Eventually, it was passed and they funded us, maybe twice. And it was always project funding. We also got funded by, eventually it was the Arts Council, but also by Greater London Arts, who were also, you know, Greater London Arts was the main funding body for all organisations such as ours working in London.

J: And to have a body like the GLC operating in London, what was that like at the time?

B: Well, it was amazing. I don't remember all the details of everything that went on. But it was very fertile. You know, I mean this is a rhetorical question, you know really fertile environment for people in the arts who were not represented in the so-called mainstream. So anybody who felt like an outsider. And that would be, working class, disabled, all the people that the daily mail and probably the sun and probably other newspapers vilified. And vilified because the GLC funded them. So you know, it would be gay as we called it then, and people of colour, left-wing organisations, so the environment was such that you could be funded and often I think the GLC funding was kind of initial funding, as opposed to – I don't know if they core funded. I don't know, maybe they did. I mean, were always getting – we got small funds, I don't know if other people got bigger funds. Maybe they did, but it meant that all of the arts was given a – well, it was a period where it came of age in the capital, because there was funding for it. So there were all these oppositional, marginalised, erm... demographics, were able to express themselves through the arts. So that would be, to spell it out, theatre, publishing, I mean there was Sheba, publishing which was really very black publishers. I was involved with Black Woman Talk, with their first poetry anthology – I was one of the editors, or one of the group for that. There were dance groups. Loads of theatre companies. Other black women's theatre companies came through. Er. Visual arts of course. So there's like an exhibition in Nottingham which I think has just opened, looking at some of the artists, some of the artists, I think they're black women, from the eighties, I mean, I think it's only black women from the eighties. And that's like Lubaina Hamid and Sonia Boyce and then going to see their Thin Black Line at the ICA. I mean the ICA has always been a prestigious erm arts venue. Although it was more kind of cutting edge, actually I can't say it was cutting edge, it was a little bit more shambolic then,

and now you know it's a very glossy, probably extremely mainstream kind of venue. But it wasn't then. It was still sort of, had its legacy of its hippy origins. I remember going there in my mid-teens to the ICA and it was really, kind of like, a scruffy alternative hippy place, and sitting there feeling so cool, you know, with my friend Lucy, being like wowwww, look at us, we're in this arty environment. And of course, now you pay to even get into the building. So that's how it was. It meant that – I'm not saying all of this arts activity was of a high quality, right. But they were early days and there was serious funding for these groups. It wasn't the beginning in a sense, it was a bit kind of... what's the word... there were things happening in the fifties and sixties. I can only talk about the seventies and eighties. Really the eighties. But I think the level of funding that was available for the arts in the eighties was what made the difference. And the venues were funded as well. So the women's groups were funded. Nothing to do with the arts. They'd be funded. The, you know, all the alternative community centres were funded. So that meant that you would have a show, financially, you would have to charge for the show, however much you charged, you'd be funded, subsidised, but you'd need to bring in income from the door, and the venues would be there with money that they also got from say the GLC or wherever else to pay for that. So the economy worked to a certain extent. But it was heavily reliant on subsidy.

J: And what do you think about that? So, now, I mean, to put it another way, how do you compare the theatre landscape when the GLC existed to theatre when it was abolished?

B: Yeah, well, I mean, I'm not up to date with alternative theatre now. I'm very pleased to see that the Oval House is celebrating its, I think its fortieth anniversary... Yeah, fortieth anniversary. Because the Oval House, that kind of venue, every show we did, we took to the Oval House. And there was a fantastic director there called Kate Crutchley, who always, she was just wonderful. And we would always have these venues that would always take our shows. And that was always great. And then we'd try and get venues elsewhere, and it was always a struggle. Erm. What happened in the nineties was that by the early nineties, a lot of these theatre companies lost funding. I remember at one stage, because I was like co-ordinator of the black theatre forum for a period in the nineties and maybe a year or two years, I was like, it was a part time job, and I remember doing a count of the number – there was a conference I put on, Future Histories, at the Southbank, which was all about Black British Theatre and it gathered everybody together, to think about where we'd been where we were going, where we were, where we were going, and I think, I mean, you might know a source elsewhere, but possibly forty-something Black and Asian theatre companies. And that's just black and Asian theatre companies, in existence in the eighties, in the early nineties. All over the country. It's amazing. By the mid to the end of the nineties, probably ninety percent of them had gone. That's not to say that they could have all sustained themselves. It's not to say they were all producing excellent work. But they all had their own different – their own briefs, their own communities that they were reaching, and there was a place for everybody. But it wasn't so available without funding. And of course if it's outside of London then it wasn't GLC funding. But there was a period in the eighties, when there was a lot of funding coming from the council bodies, whether you were in London or wherever, and that includes the Arts Council, but also local councils. Like you said, Hackney Council supported us. You know. Their arts budgets were just slashed, and you know probably hardly anything now. But in the eighties, you know, in the eighties, all these councils would have their arts officers, they'd have big budgets, well not really, but sometimes they'd have big budgets and they could support the arts. Without – I would say, in London, without GLC funding, it would have been the National, the RSC – where were they then? It wouldn't have been the Barbican, it was somewhere else. The RSC, the West End. Maybe a few other prominent... You know, the Royal Court. Which I was involved in very briefly. I had a show put on there, but it wasn't like a full show, it was part of a youth project. Erm.

J: Can you describe that show because I think it was Tiger Teeth Clenched Not to Bite.

B: It was, it was indeed!

J: Can you describe it?

B: Have you got a script there?

J: No.

B: It was a choreopoem. I was very influenced by Ntzoake Shange, so it was a choreopoem. Patricia, Paulette and I were asked, as part of their, I think it was their Black Writers Festival... I think we did two things... I did two things, they did three things, I think. I did something as part of their youth performance, I can't remember what that was. And then I did something called Tiger Teeth Clenched Not to Bite. Moving Through. So I did do two things. Moving Through and Tiger Teeth Clenched Not to Bite. Their youth festival or whatever it was, and the other thing was the Black Writers Festival, which got a bit of attention. And, my piece, Moving Through, and Tiger Teeth Clenched Not to Bite, were choreopoems. And they were performed, from what I remember, by a group of young actors, and they were monologues. And they were delivered, so there's like sort of a chorus effect. And I don't think it was that long. Maybe ten minutes or something. Paulette and Patricia did traditional plays, which were then developed, and they had their plays on.

J: So, one of the things you talk about is, "Like most ephemeral arts companies, its presence today remains anecdotal, archival and historical." So can you describe the trajectory of Theatre of Black Women, how you guys went about archiving it if you did, and how it disbanded?

B: Yeah, it's not very well archived, I've got the sort of archive as such, and I'm kind of loath to let go of anything, because when I do, I don't get it back. So unfinished histories, I sent them a poster, well, no I sent them something, and they were supposed to send it back and they didn't. Erm. So we began producing three one-woman shows and our first gig was, I think it was the first one, was at I think the Melt Fest, I don't know if it's still going, in Amsterdam, which was this very alternative venue. And it was the women's theatre festival. And it was just amazing. It was women's theatre from all over the world, and there was an African American women's troupe called Flamboyant Ladies. Have you heard of them? And in fact one of them, Alexi Duvou still quite a noted writer in America – she's an academic. They were older than us, and they were these funky African American women... I'd never met African American women, and we were just like, Oh my god... And their show was fantastic, and they were a black women's theatre company and we hung out with them a bit, and it was just wonderful. And this festival, this women's theatre festival, and it was just wonderful. In this wonderful alternative venue in Amsterdam. And we did our show, we got the audiences, we just loved it, I just loved it, Patricia and I especially, just loved it. And came back to London, toured those one woman shows a bit, but then we did our first script, which was Silhouettes, which Patricia and I co-wrote together. And that was the first production. We got, I think we got greater London Arts Funding for that. And that toured for about six months. That's not every day, but that's a tour that lasted for six months. Venues all over the place, libraries, toilets, women's community centres.

J: Actually, one of the things I did notice, yeah, was the festival of Migrant Workers in Frankfurt, and sort of went around ILEA venues.

B: ILEA venues! ILEA, ILEA, Oh my god, ILEA! County Hall! Oh that's GLC isn't it, oh and ILEA. Inner London Education Authority. Yeah. So, I'd forgotten that was called the festival of Migrant Workers. And that was in Frankfurt. And that was our second show, I think, Peyucca, which Patricia and I took there. Our first show was Silhouette... Was it Peyucca?

J: No, it was Silhouette.

B: Oh it was Silhouette. So Patricia and I did two shows, two women's shows together, before we brought in other writers. And yeah, I remember Frankfurt. Because I wasn't very well-travelled then, I'd been to Amsterdam a few times, and France, and that was it. So then we were being paid to go to Frankfurt. And, I remember Frankfurt, I haven't been for a long time, a lot of Germany then was just, incredibly spotless and clean. Not Berlin, but outside of the capital. And I remember Frankfurt, was like you could eat off the streets. And I remember one day, this was just like, this is not relevant, but one day there was a demonstration through the town, and we said, what are they demonstrating about, and then we found it was pollution. And we were just like, but this... come and live in London! This is so pure and clean and everything. Yeah, festival of Migrant Workers! Don't remember much about it, but I remember going to Frankfurt and it was good. And we went to Amsterdam, but was that with Peyucca? We did a festival in Amsterdam. Can't remember what it was. I've probably got it at home. Not the Melt thing, something else. But, yeah, so we were just on the road and we got funds and you know, I'm pretty sure that the GLC helped to fund silhouette and we went on tour. You know, we had to hire a van and we have a stage manager, and we had musicians for Silhouette. No, we didn't have musicians for Silhouette... did we have musicians for Silhouette? Can't remember. And the play was written as two monologues, that we then spliced together to create this – it was always experimental. It was almost performance art. It was quite. It was definitely not kitchen sink dramas as we used to call them, but it was always trying to find the best way to express stories that we wanted to tell through the form that worked best for it, which is what I still do as a writer. A writer of books, but that's what we were doing on the stage. So we would have symbolic sets, there'd be quite a lot of movement. It... we were very heavily influenced as I said by Ntozake Shange's *For Coloured Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Euf.* Which I saw in London in 1979. And the experience would be an unconventional theatrical experience.

J: What influence, do you think, Theatre of Black Women had?

B: Well, other groups came up. There was MUNIRAH, and we kind of mentored them for a bit, they were great. MUNIRAH. They did a few shows, I think they probably came up a few years after us. 39.03 And they were quite a physical theatre company. I can't really remember their shows. One of the company members, Adziko Simba, now lives in Jamaica. No, tell a lie, she lives in Trinidad, and she's a writer. She writes children's books, and I actually bumped into her when I went to the BOCAS festival. I hadn't seen her since the eighties. So there was Munirah, there was a company called OPTIONS, which Carol Russell and Jan Blake ran. Do you remember them? Do you know them? Jan Blake is a storyteller. I'm not sure what Carol Russell does, but she's out there on social media, she seems to be doing some kind of development work, getting black people or people of colour writing scripts or something. So they were a theatre company. There was a company called the BB Crew. And they played like [inaudible – “social”?] There was a black male company, what were they called, and they had quite a few black male leading actors in it and it was kind of an African comedy troupe, they'd do skits, and then there was their equivalent, called the BBCrew, with these black woman actresses who were quite, doing quite well with their careers, you know, all of them in their twenties probably, and they would do skits. And because some of them had quite high profile, and had done telly and so on, they got quite a lot of attention, and

because they were comedy and skits, they had quite a wide appeal. You can find out about them online. But I did, I have seen stuff about them online where they describe themselves as Britain's first black women's theatre company, and I'm just like, I think I emailed, I haven't got a reply. I was like, no no no no no no no, you came MANY years after us you cheeky bastards.

[N.B. possibly to remove: "Because we're so inconsequential. Because we don't have that voice. We don't have the voice of the African American lobby. You know, they're always complaining. I'm like, Jesus, you know, come over here. They're always saying, we've not got this, and then you go to these conferences, and there's these amazing powerful people who are all doing their thing, and supporting each other, and they've got the readership to support their radical alternative writers, as well as their more mainstream writers, and so on and so forth."]

J: So, I've got two or three more questions. So, what was the public opinion of the GLC at the time?

B: Well, there was the opinion of people such as myself who loved it and were supported by it. So there was sort of the grassroots, leftwing, alternative, contingency who really appreciated the GLC and the way it was changing the artistic landscape. And then there was the vicious, nasty, right-wing media, who absolutely vilified, hated, ridiculed it. So they would make fun – like the worst joke you could tell against the GLC was that they would be funding a one-legged black lesbian group. That would be how awful it was. That was how for them, the nasty right-wing media, that would be the epitome of disgust that they had for the kinds of people that were being supported by the GLC. And their campaigns were awful. And the Standard was like that as well. Different owner then, and I'm sure some of the other papers. There was a big campaign against the GLC. And then Thatcher of course got rid of it. Because it, in a way, she was getting rid of the artistic opposition. And we're there now with Trump, aren't we.

J: What was the artistic opposition?

B: Oh! Just that we would be, the people I mentioned working at the grassroots level, forming their own company, were very politically engaged. Very politically engaged. And not Tory. Anti-Tory. Not that everything we did would be political with a capital P and railing against Margaret Thatcher, but we would be an affront. Some people – there were many political theatre companies who would be, kind of, dealing with Thatcher, as their object of hate. But just by our very existence, being loud, being radical, being alternative, not buying into whatever Tory ridiculous beliefs about the nuclear family and good old Victorian values, which was bandied about in the eighties... Yeah, we really want to go back to the Victorian era? Really? So, yeah, we were an affront to that. And we were scapegoated and a target.

J: And were you involved with campaigning against the abolition?

B: I don't remember. When was it abolished, do you know?

J: 1986.

B: 1986... I don't remember. I don't think we were funded by it by then. Was there a big campaign against it?

J: Yeah, there was a huge campaign and there was also a final night celebration on the Southbank, which happened March 31st 1986.

B: I don't remember. I don't remember that.

J: But do you remember the aftermath?

B: No, what do you mean?

J: So, once it was gone, do you remember what London was like?

B: No, because we were then funded by the Arts Council. Well, we lost our Arts Council Funding eventually, a couple of years later. But we weren't funded by the GLC, so there was no direct.... Actually there would have been a direct effect. You know, you need to talk to Patricia as she's got a better memory on these things. There would have been a direct impact in terms of venues, having the funds to hire us, you know. For sure. There was a company, a venue not a company, called Yaasantawa – have you heard of it? It had originally been called The Factory, and it was in Paddington, near the Harrow Road. And it was actually a black arts centre. And they always booked our shows. It was fantastic. It was small, you know, and they did community activities and stuff. And, so they began as the Factory and then they became Yaasanatawa, erm... I think they might even still be there now, but I don't think they're a black venue. But I'm pretty sure they lost their funding. Dunno, they got money from somewhere else maybe. Harrow council or something.

J: And, what do you think the legacy of the GLC has been?

B: Well, I think it's part of our history, and don't forget... you know there were loads of women's theatre companies as well, you know, loads. Um. A lot of those artists, they didn't disappear. You know, they cut their teeth working at grassroots level, and then moved on to what they're doing now if they stayed in the arts. Anna Furze, do you know Anna Furze, you know, she taught me at Rose Bruford, and she had a company called Split... no, it wasn't Split Britches, that was Peggy – oh they were so funny. Peggy and, er, Lois! They were great. I mean, they were American, but I remember seeing them and just cracked up.

J: Was it “fire in the pocket”?

B: I can't remember... it was the mid-eighties, when they were just, quite new I think. Peggy in particular. Anna Furze had a theatre company, can't remember what it was called. Now she's at Goldsmith, a professor, director of something there. So you know, a lot of people are out there, seemingly as part of the establishment, but, I just saw that she's going to start up a course on satire. So part of the establishment, but not really. Still producing interesting alternative radical work. But then, the arts world has changed to encompass that. So the theatre that had been so traditional, became much more inclusive. You know, it did, it did change. It became much more inclusive, experimental. The alternative – what would have been alternative in the eighties is now possibly mainstream in the tens. You know.