

The Greater London Council 1981-86: retelling a forgotten history

End of project report



“It was really exhilarating to hear from an elder of the movement about how they organised back in the day” – Aviah Day, volunteer

The Greater London Council (GLC) was the government for London before the current Assembly and Mayor, and between 1981 and 1986 it was controlled by the left-wing of the Labour Party, existing as a hub for radical politics in London. The GLC Story was founded in September 2015 to retell this piece of political history.

In August 2016, we were awarded funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to collect oral histories from people who were involved in the GLC, and in the social movements around it. The project has involved younger activists and organisers interviewing people who were part of the GLC and the projects and initiatives it funded. These interviews are available on our website www.glcstory.co.uk; this report reflects on the successes and limitations of the project as it comes to an end.



Neil Fletcher with his volunteer interviewer, Vwede Okorefe

Report summary

The project involved many different stages: volunteer recruitment, delivering training, running socials, recruiting interviewees, developing the website, producing the digital recordings, designing exhibition banners and a zine about the project, and sharing the learning. This report looks at each stage in turn and the strengths and weaknesses of how the project worked out. It also includes reflections from the coordinators about managing the project, and from volunteers about what being involved meant them. Overall:

What went well?

- 23 people received oral history training, exceeding our target of 12-15 volunteers.
- 16 interviews were recorded in total. Interviewees were a good mix, having a range of relationships with and perspectives on the GLC. They were mostly pleased to be approached and enthusiastic about telling their stories.
- Volunteers were kept engaged through additional trainings, socials and regular communication with coordinators. Most talked really positively about what they learnt from their involvement with the project.
- The project has been shared with a large number of people. Our volunteers have talked about their learning at public events, at activist meetings and by writing articles. We have produced a set of exhibition banners that have been displayed in three venues, and a 24-page zine, 50 copies of which have been distributed. The banners and zines will continue to tour in coming months.
- Running the project has enabled the GLC Story to build capacity as an organisation and develop a network of people who are engaged with the history and can help us think about next steps.

What could have been improved?

- We did not always create a safe space within our trainings and events, and want to think more about how to embed our social justice principles more thoroughly into our approach.
- We never properly developed a social media strategy, and could have promoted the interviews better and also made sharing easier for volunteers if we had incorporated an online component.
- Sound quality on the interviews was variable and we had a number of problems with the equipment.
- We did not manage to produce the podcast for Resonance FM that we promised our funder, primarily because the design of the exhibition and zine was unexpectedly intensive.
- Overall, the project was extremely ambitious and relied heavily on volunteer labour from the coordinators, particularly in the second six months. We could have been more realistic in our goals and project design.
- We will go through a more in-depth process of getting feedback from volunteers in coming months, as we recognise that people tend to report positively on their experiences and we would like to have an opportunity to learn from more critical feedback.



Devon Thomas with his volunteer interviewer, Zena Edwards

1. Recruitment of volunteers

Recruitment took place from October 2016 to January 2017. Our first oral history training day was held in November 2016 and was attended by nine volunteers. However, as there were lots of other people who were interested but couldn't attend that training day, we ran a second one in January 2017 which was attended by 14 volunteers.

Recruitment took place via the coordinators' personal networks and activist groups we were connected to, but also through reaching out to a wide range of other organisations. We successfully recruited volunteers from GMB Youth Group, PEACH, the Feminist Library, Shake! and the London Cycling Campaign. We also made unsuccessful attempts to bring in volunteers from the groups such as Mosaic Youth Centre, Transport 4 All, a number of teaching unions, Jawaab and Alt Gen. Volunteers who received training were:

- Hero Austin, from PEACH
- Melanie Bartlett, from GMB Youth Group
- Jay Bernard, a writer, film programmer and archivist
- Zahra Dalilah, a Black feminist writer and activist
- Aviah Sarah Day, member of Sisters Uncut and PhD student at The University of Essex.
- Tanya Denhere, writer from Shake!
- Zena Edwards, writer and performer
- Evan Ifekoya, artist
- Didem Incegoz, from Sisters Uncut
- Alex Ingram, London Cycling Campaign
- Sekai Makoni, a Black feminist researcher and podcaster
- Lucy McFadzean, who works with archive film and video
- Vwede Okorefe, a queer Black British woman who works with the charity 1010

- Claire Perrault, who works as a media archivist
- Memuna Rashid, involved in her school feminist society
- Dhelia Snoussi, from Shake!
- Zak Suffee, a researcher focusing on race and migration.
- Rotimi Skyers, from Shake!
- Ayeisha Thomas-Smith, Training Organiser at the New Economy Organisers Network
- Angelica Udueni, from Sisters Uncut
- Joshua Virasami, a writer, performer and organiser of Mauritian origin
- Josie Wales, who works as an archivist and volunteers at the Feminist Library
- Lucy Warin, from Sexual Avengers

What went well?

- Our volunteers were a very interesting mix of people, including creatives and those heavily involved into political organising.
- There was a lot of interest in the project, and the 23 people we trained in total exceeded the 12-15 volunteers we had promised to our funders.

What could have been improved?

- Of the 23 people we trained, 13 went on to record interviews. Some of those who did not record the interview remained engaged and keen, but others stopped communicating with us quite quickly after the training. If we had talked more the commitment we expected beforehand we might have reduced this drop-off rate – although the design of the project was explained in emails, a more in-depth conversation was probably necessary to make it clear what was expected. Although some drop-offs were probably inevitable, it created more work for us trying to keep track of people who were not ultimately that committed to the project.
- Recruitment did rely heavily on our personal networks and organisations that we had prior connections to. In addition, some of those we recruited from organisations we didn't know beforehand were among the volunteers who dropped out early on.
- Our volunteer management style was pretty informal, and this may have made it easier for people to not feel so committed. However, it did enable us to create relationships of a different kind with our volunteers, which have already resulted in other kinds of collaboration.



Oral history training day, January 2017

2. Training

Oral history training was delivered over two separate days, to meet the interest expressed by volunteers. This training was delivered by Verusca Calabria from the Oral History Society. In addition, further training was offered to volunteers later in the project. The first was a digital archiving workshop delivered by Kelly Foster from the Black Cultural Archives, who talked through many of the issues arising with recording histories and heritage online and encouraged us to think more deeply about the digital component of the project. The second was an intergenerational dialogue workshop run by Zena Edwards, examining the challenges of holding meaningful conversations between people of different generations.

What went well?

- The oral history training was generally well received, with volunteers saying the sessions were enjoyable, welcoming and informative. All of the volunteers who answered the question¹ about how satisfied they were with the oral history training said they were either 'very satisfied' (eight people) or 'fairly satisfied' (three people). Feedback was generally positive about the mix of activities, the accessibility of the concepts and language used, and the opportunities to practice interviewing and use the recording equipment. Other volunteers said they found the guidance on conducting interviews useful, as well as greater knowledge about the legal aspects of oral history recording. Verusca's personal style and varied experience was appreciated.

"I can be really critical of training days, but this was really amazing. I really liked the structure and its allowance for commentary and questions without chaos. I really liked the mix of theory and practical."

¹ Evaluation questions were slightly different at both training days and not everybody completed the forms.

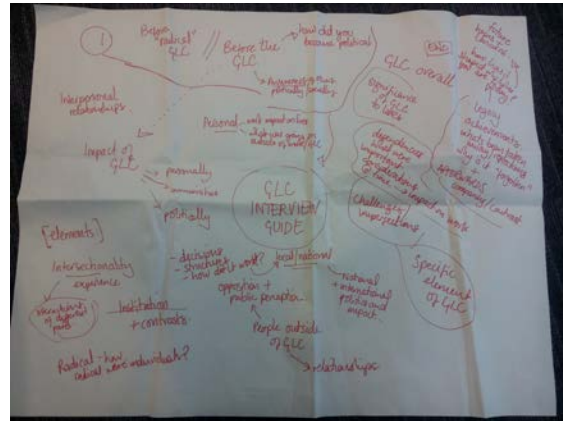
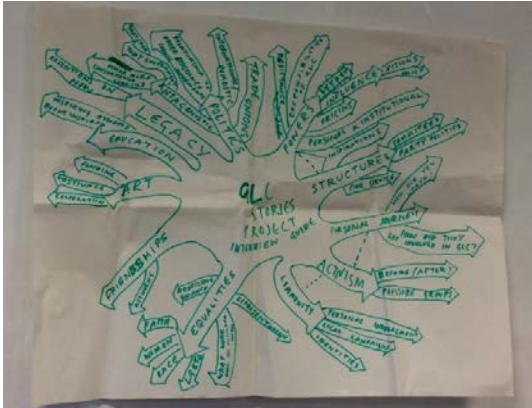
- The practical skills gained in the training have been used by several of the volunteers in other contexts since then, and the audio equipment has also been used by a number of groups and individuals for different projects and events.
- The other two trainings provided unique opportunities for certain kinds of conversations. At Kelly Foster's, issues were raised such as the importance of engaging with resources such as Wikipedia, and she also provided a lot of practical information about how to access different digital archives. Zena Edwards' workshop allowed us to think about generational divides from different perspectives, and to engage with the diversity of experiences amongst the volunteers.

What could have been improved?

- At the oral history training, several volunteers said they wanted more time to practice with the equipment and to try out interviewing techniques. Some also said they thought that it would have been helpful if Verusca had emphasised that her approach was a more strictly academic one, and not necessarily what we needed for the project. Not clarifying earlier how we wanted to use the method oral history for this particular kind of project may have caused some confusion for volunteers. (For example, Verusca felt that some of the questions in our interview guide were not sufficiently open, but we felt they were appropriate because of the kind of history that we were trying to record.)
- The second oral history training day also had some issues around misgendering and using incorrect pronouns for some of the volunteers. As coordinators, we realised partway through the day that we had not made time for to talk about our safer spaces policy at the beginning, or taken the time with the trainer to ensure that we were all on the same page in terms of the kind of space we were trying to create. While this was addressed after lunch, it would have been much better if this had come at the start of the day.
- The other two trainings were not very well attended, and we perhaps needed to take more time to understand what people wanted rather than going with what we thought would be useful. The low attendance may have been a scheduling issue with holding them in the evenings rather than at weekends. However, we may also have excluded people from the oral history training by holding those at the weekend, so it may not have solved the issue by scheduling them differently.



Volunteers trying the equipment and giving feedback at the October 2016 oral history training



Mind maps made during the interview guide exercise at the October 2016 oral history training

3. Socials

We responded to feedback from our oral history training that people wanted more opportunity to practice interviewing and using the equipment by running regular socials. These were opportunities for volunteers to spend time together, recap on the oral history training they had gained on the training days, look through the interview guide and practice recording each other.

Socials took place at the Southbank Centre, at All Hallows Church and at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). The LMA social was organised by one of the volunteers who was doing an internship in their video archive and had come across GLC-related films. Three of these were shown: 'Policing in London', 'The Future's Up for Grabs' about the Docklands, and 'Don't let them get away with it: dealing with harassment and eviction' about tenant rights.

What went well?

- People appreciated the opportunity to use the equipment and remain connected with the project.
- The London Metropolitan Archives event was particularly good as it was volunteer-led and showed how people's awareness of the GLC could be linked up with things they were already engaged with. The conversation at that event was extremely interesting, for example one of the volunteers who currently works for a community group in the Docklands being able to compare some of the issues being faced in the 1980s with today.

What could have been improved?

- Although we invited them, older people within our network never made it along to the socials and so we didn't manage to create more informal opportunities for people of different generations to meet as we had hoped.

- Attendance was reasonable but we didn't quite create enough of the community between the volunteers to make that part of the appeal of coming along.



Volunteers discussing the films at LMA, February 2017



Engagement on Twitter during the LMA social

4. Recruitment of interviewees

In total, 16 people were successfully recruited for interview. Some of these were recruited to our mailing list, some through attending events (for example, the Huntley Archives Conference), and some through personal networks. Volunteers were encouraged to research areas they were interested in and make connections with potential interviewees themselves. The following people were interviewed as part of the project:

- Linda Bellos, an officer for the GLC's Women's Committee
- Tony Bunyan, Deputy head of the GLC's Police Monitoring and Research Unit
- Peter Dawe, former GLC councillor

- Farrukh Dhondy, one of the founders of the Black Theatre Coop
- Bernardine Evaristo, one of the founders of Theatre of Black Women
- Nadine Finch, who worked in the GLC Programme Office
- Neil Fletcher, former leader of the Inner London Education Authority
- Brenda Kirsch, who worked for the GLC Police Committee and Support Unit
- Loraine Leeson, co-founder of the GLC-funded Docklands Community Poster Project
- Paul Marris, Film and Video Officer for the GLC
- Femi Otitoju, GLC Outreach Worker for the Women's Committee Support Unit
- Di Parkin, who worked with the Women's Committee Support Unit and Programme Office
- Ndaizivei Paul, co-founder of the Haringey Women's Training and Education Centre
- Devon Thomas, chair of the Brixton Defence Committee
- Hilary Wainwright, who set up the GLC's Popular Planning Unit
- Ansel Wong, Race Relations Adviser to the GLC's in the Ethnic Minorities Unit

What went well?

- Our interviewees were a good mix of people, involved in lots of the different departments of the GLC and coming from different political perspectives.
- They were very keen to tell their stories and many would like to be engaged in our activities in the future, so the process of recruitment has given us a good baseline for developing relationships.

What could have been improved?

- The 16 interviews recorded was four fewer than the 20 that we promised to our funder. However, given how intensive it was producing these 16 we feel that this number was still a success. A large number of additional people were contacted as possible interviewees, but for a range of reasons interviews did not take place during the project period – reasons including ill-health, international travel and difficulties establishing or maintaining contact. We hope that some of these interviews will take place in the future.
- The majority of the interviewees were directly involved in the GLC, and we could have found more people involved in the political and social movements surrounding it rather than people from inside the institution.
- We were probably overambitious in our design of the project and in our hope that all volunteers would be perfectly matched with their interviewees in terms of their interests. While we encouraged volunteers to do their own research to find people to interview, only one found their interviewee in this way, and this was not a particularly successful interaction. If we were to design it again, we would probably say that the first interview would be with somebody we chose for them so that they would get the opportunity to try out the interview process, and then that if they wanted to do their own research and find a second person we would support them to do so. As it was, in practice we did the majority of the research ourselves in any case and it made the process very time-consuming.
- We also faced an issue with trying to recruit black women and women of colour to interview, which we were keen to do particularly as this was the majority demographic of our volunteers. However, given that these groups are so often erased from histories, it was a challenge in itself to make connections and access the right people. On reflection, we could have made this an explicit aim of the project and

incorporated the research element as something that we were acknowledging would take significant time.



Linda Bellos with her volunteer interviewer, Aviah Day

5. Website development

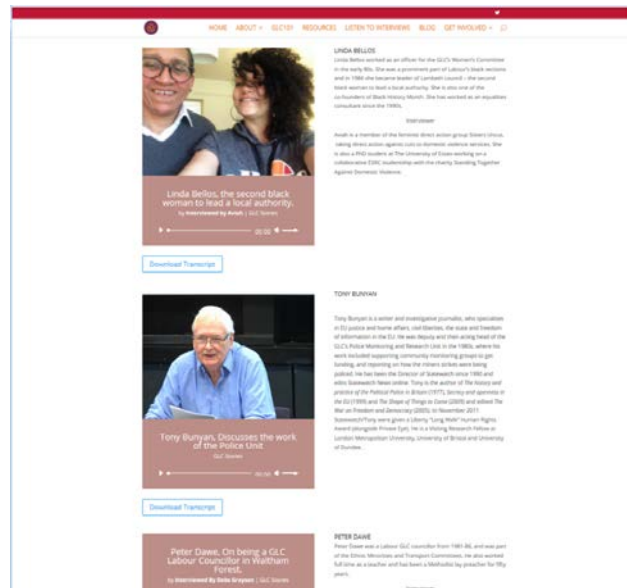
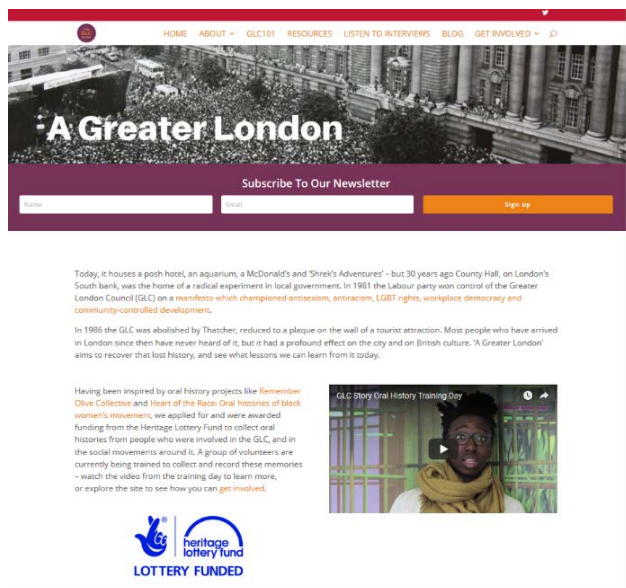
Two web developers were engaged, one to do the basic overhaul of the website, the other to work specifically on the oral history interview content.

What went well?

- The website was redeveloped in good time, and the site is now attractive and user friendly. This has been very important in terms of engaging the people that we want to attract.
- Our newsletter directing people to the website has generated traffic and helped with the promotion of the project.

What could have been improved?

- Not coming up with social media strategy sooner was a major limitation – for example, we could have set up our system so that developments on the website came up on our social media channels, helping to build our audience for when the interviews were ready.
- Engagement with our content is probably lower than we would like, and promotion of the interviews will continue in the coming months, along with looking analytics to understand how it is being accessed.



Screenshots of the homepage and interview page of our website

6. Production of digital recordings

16 interviews were recorded using the audio equipment we had purchased with our grant. These were then backed up on three hard drives, and converted to MP3 to upload to the website.

What went well?

- Although fewer than the 20 we originally envisaged, producing 16 recordings was a major success given how many different things had to be considered for each one. Having the full recordings accessible on our website is unusual, as these often have to be listened to in an archive context.
- We also ran an interview day where volunteers and interviewees met at a particular time and location to record them. This was a successful way of making the interview process feel more sociable and to enable more of a connection between the individual interview and the overall project. If we were to redesign the project from scratch, we would probably plan for the majority of interviews to be conducted in this way.

What could have been improved?

- We did not anticipate how hard this would be, or how many steps it would take for each recording. These included: matching up the volunteer and interviewee, arranging the interview time, arranging for the recording equipment and paperwork to be picked up, ensuring that the equipment and paperwork were returned, backing up each recording on our hard drives, converting them to MP3 and uploading them. Not having a central office, this also involved transporting equipment around various locations in London, which was at times stressful and frustrating.
- We had a number of problems with the equipment, which turned out to be a hardware problem and the supplier replaced the recorder. It was disappointing to discover after a number of interviews that the

sound quality was poor, despite people following our detailed instructions of how it should be used. Although it was always possible for us to produce a transcript, people's engagement with the recording will be limited because of this.

- We also needed to emphasise the necessity of quiet space – one of which the interviewee insisted on holding the interview in a noisy café, making the recording difficult to listen to.



Natasha Nkonde, Devon Thomas and Zena Edwards at the interview day, March 2017

7. Exhibition and zine design and dissemination

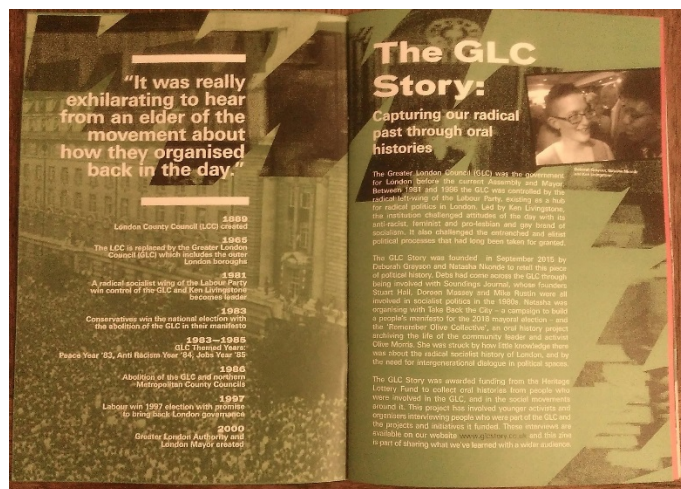
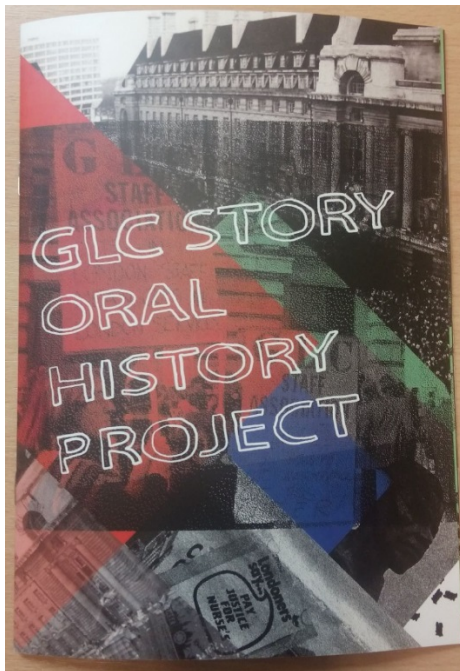
Three designers were engaged to work on our exhibition – a design duo who work together as Zenta Lux, who worked on the banners, and Jay Bernard, one of our volunteers who worked on the content and designed the zine. The design brief was split in this way after we had put out the call because these applicants had different strengths and design experience. Banners were displayed and zines distributed at events in September 2017: at Durning library (attended by 60 people), at the Marx Memorial Library (attended by 20 people) and at the World Transformed Conference (in a venue which saw 1000 people attend events over three days).

What went well?

- Working with outside designers was useful in terms of thinking about how to communicate the project with a wide audience. We also tested the banner designs and zine at All Hallows Church exhibition space, and incorporated feedback into the final products.
- The end products are very good, and have been well received as we have started to display them to a public audience. The zines are popular and we distributed 50 in the first week after printing.
- There has already been interest in the banners from Lambeth libraries and from Tower Hamlets. We expect they will tour a number of venues over coming months, extending the reach of the project.

What could have been improved?

- The process was significantly more intensive than we anticipated, and would not have been possible if we had not been able to shift our schedules around to make time for it. In a future project, we would anticipate that this would be a major undertaking and either think smaller or allocate significantly more time to it.



Zine cover and inside pages



Test prints of the banners at All Hallows Church



Print test of the zine



Banners on display at Durning Library, September 2017

8. Sharing

Ten volunteers presented their learning in a number of different contexts:

- the Huntley Archives conference at the London Metropolitan Archives, where we had a stall (attended by 150 people)

- an event at the National Theatre as part of their Bright Young Tings exhibition (attended by 30 people)
- a workshop at the South London Gallery in conjunction with The Place Is Here exhibition (attended by 30 people)
- an event at Durning library as part of the Lambeth Heritage Festival (attended by 60 people)
- in a walking tour of the South bank, also as part of the Lambeth Heritage Festival (attended by 10 people)
- at activist meetings for Sisters Uncut (30 people) and Black Lives Matter UK (10 people)
- in an article for Gal Dem in which a volunteer reflected on her experienced conducting oral histories.

What went well?

- Some of the best sharing took place when both interviewees and volunteers were present and able to reflect on their learning, such as the event at Durning library.
- Sharing was also successful when people were able to think about how the project related to activities they were already doing in spaces they were already in, such as Zahra incorporating it into one of her articles for Gal Dem, and Lucy connecting up the GLC with her archiving work at the London Metropolitan Archives.
- Sharing has also happened in less formalised ways – feedback shows how it has impacted on people in terms of the connections they have become aware of with the materials in spaces they are interacting with, and that therefore the project is being discussed in a wide variety of contexts.
- This will continue in coming months such as at an event we have been invited to present at about oral history in Hackney library in November, and an event at May Day Rooms on radical archiving.

What could have been improved?

- While participation from volunteers at the events we were invited to over the course of the project did take place, this was quite difficult to organise and overall it was probably more successful when they were supported to do things in their usual spaces. We also could have encouraged more recording of how sharing is happening, for example in private conversations.
- Given the demographics of our volunteers and that many of them have a significant following online, we could have emphasised online sharing much more, and incorporated this into our social media strategy.
- Some plans never came to fruition, such as a film screening in conjunction with the London Community Video Archive, although this may still take place in coming months.
- Now that the banners and scenes are prepared, it may make it easier for volunteers to think about how they could use the materials to facilitate further sharing about the project.



National Theatre event, May 2017



South London Gallery event, September 2017



One of our interviewees sharing at Durning Library, September 2017

9. Podcast

In our application to our funder, we said that the project would include broadcasting an hour-long podcast based on the interviews on Resonance FM. Unfortunately, this did not happen over the lifetime of the project as the time we had set aside to work on it ended up being taken up with designing the banners and zine, which was a much more time-intensive process than anticipated. We still hope to produce this podcast and broadcast it in coming months, but did not manage to complete it over the lifetime of the grant.



Banners at the Marx Memorial Library, September 2017

10. Managing the project – coordinator reflections

What went well?

- Overall, we feel the project was successful in its overall aims of engaging younger Londoners with the history of the GLC, and facilitating conversations and learning between politically active Londoners of different generations. The success of this reflects the fact that we had a clear idea of what we wanted to achieve, and enough experience and access to the tools and resources we needed to complete it.
- A number of good relationships have been developed through the project, with the volunteers, interviewees and also with other individuals and organisations. Delivering the project has built the capacity of GLC Story and enabled us to start thinking about next steps. For example, we have formed a relationship with May Day Rooms, who have agreed to host our physical archive, and we hope to explore with them possibilities for future projects. Our high open and click-through rates on our mailing list show that we have community of people around us who continue to be engaged with our content and ideas.
- We have worked well together as a pair, and as a wider team, as we have brought in different people to work on different aspects of the project, for example the website, the exhibition and zine design, and on delivering events.

What could have been improved?

- The project was overambitious – our initial assessment that we could complete all of our objectives in six months was far too short a timeframe, and even having gained an extension to a year we still struggled to get everything done. This also involved a significant amount of voluntary labour that was only possible because of our flexible working schedules, and would not be possible for many others.
- On reflection, we can see that had the project been designed slightly differently we could have made our lives significantly easier. For example, if we had planned from the start to conduct most of the recordings at interview days where we were bringing volunteers and interviewees to a specific place, we could have cut down a lot of the complications around transporting the equipment, and also created a more sociable atmosphere for the interviews to take place in. And if we had incorporated online sharing by volunteers into the project design more deliberately, this would have expanded our reach and increased engagement.



GLC Story walking tour of the South Bank as part of Lambeth Heritage Festival, September 2017



One of our interviewees with the banners at The World Transformed Conference, September 2017

11. Volunteer reflections

In general, we had very positive feedback from both our volunteers and interviewees about their involvement in the project and the impact of engaging with or remembering this history. We recognise that there tends to be a positive bias when this kind of feedback is asked for, and in coming months will undertake a more in-depth process to try and elicit more critical perspectives so that we can learn from them. Here is what we have heard from our volunteers so far:

Joshua Virasami:

"Conducting my interview taught me that there is an immense truth in how internal political struggles, particularly between white and black anti-racist organisers, repeat themselves, and importantly how doing interviews like these can help us not repeat mistakes of the past so that we may finally reach the future we deserve!"

I found the experience rich and rewarding, from learning how to do it, the historical importance of it and finally being able to be part of creating such a timely and powerful project.

I learnt so much, and that I have so much more to learn! From the different cultural interventions made in support of political work, such as recording singles and commissioning films to raise awareness around state violence on ethnic minorities to the regular, inclusive and politically ferocious festivals - something so hard to even imagine now. As for now, it has helped enrich my imagination - the neighbourhood, the council and the land is ours to win!"

Zahra Dalilah:

"Interviewing Farrukh Dhondy and Ansel Wong I learned that even the most legendary of campaigns and movements were as flawed and poorly resourced as our own. I learned of the dangers of institutionalising revolutionary thought as well as the limitations of working against the structures. If nothing else I was left wondering what our movements might look like in the context of a less hostile national and regional government.

As an interviewer you get a rare moment to simply listen and dive into the mind and past of a complete stranger. This project was a real reminder that life is long and if we're lucky there's a lot in between where we've come and where we'll end up.

I learnt a shit tonne. Being able to navigate London with the knowledge of how the buildings I'm entering were founded and under what political conversation the statues I'm walking past were commissioned has really impacted how I understand my role and how I engage with the space(s) I want to occupy."

Zak Suffee:

"When we were doing political organising there wasn't any framework, we had heard of different groups from that time but we didn't know there was this institution and how they fitted together. The fact that there was government funding to monitor the police back then is incredible, you don't hear about that stuff now. I guess it made me feel it's not a crazy thing to ask for. Sometimes when you're on the fringe you think 'are we just a bunch of weirdos?' But when you see the history it gives you renewed energy to demand things because you know they've happened before."

Aviah Day:

"From my interview with Linda Bellos I learned a lot about the inner workings of the GLC; the advantages having the power provide resources to social justice orientated groups as well as the limitations of relying on government structures.

Doing the oral history was quite nerve wracking making sure that I was able to interrupt at the right points and make sure I got answers to the questions I wanted. But quite soon it went into a natural flow which meant I could pick out things that came up that were of interest. It was also really exhilarating to hear from an elder of the movement about how they organised back in the day, and compare that with how Sisters Uncut operates. Some of the problems were really similar but it was also interesting to hear reflections on things I hadn't thought of before (one example being the shift towards 'identity politics').

I learned a lot about what drew radical activists at the time to become a part of the GLC, and about what their initial vision was. It was also interesting to hear concrete examples of how radical folk could use local government to resist the Tories plans. As much as I am generally skeptical about the wider potential of local and central government structures, being part of this project helped me to see ways in which engagement like this has a place, and can make a difference."

Sekai Makoni:

"I learnt about aspects of my grandmother's life that I'd had a vague sense of growing up but not in-depth knowledge of. I got to see how revolutionary the women's training and education centre she helped set up was and how important it is to learn from the models and approaches used in the past.

Doing the oral history interview was great! It was like an expansion of the usual conversations we have but in a more formal manner and the fact that it was being captured means others can learn from those narratives.

How instrumental the GLC were in providing the seed funding to set up radical approaches and models in areas such as education. It was that this was what made it such a threat to the status quo."

Jay Bernard:

"I have been interested in the GLC for some time, so it was good to talk about it with Bernardine (and to be involved with GLC story more broadly.) I have seen - and benefitted from - a lot of the work and ideas she developed during the eighties, and as a genderqueer person I am very glad to contribute to an oral history project. I like listening to the way people spoke in the eighties, and it will be interesting to hear how our voices and ideas change over time, when we listen back to these recordings in thirty or forty years. Society will be very different; it is important to have some record of how we understood the eighties in this particular historical moment. It will be interesting to see how that perspective changes as society changes.

In terms of the GLC's radical history: there were a lot of difficulties, but it also seems like a precious historical moment, in which socialist ideas about theatre, the arts, society and politics were manifested. There was the infrastructure to do so. It's even more shocking to see the dismantling of the idea of some kind of public power, some sort of civil decency, when you hear living people talk about the work they poured into doing exactly that."



Two interviewees, Hilary Wainwright and Loraine Leeson, and coordinator Deborah Grayson, with the zines and banners at The World Transformed Conference, September 2017

‘The Place is Where’ – article for Gal Dem (print copy, launched Sept 29th 2017) by Zahra Dalilah

“The act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy. It is the quest for the self, the centre of the self, which we, women of colour, have come to think of as ‘other’, the dark, the femme.”

Gloria Anzaldúa taken from *This Bridge Called My Back*

Between extortionate rents and zero-hour contracts sustaining oneself in today’s London is a daily struggle. But sustaining whole communities in London often feels impossible. Vicious rhetoric and violent cuts consistently attempt to divide and rule us, fragmenting our society and threatening the survival of our communities.

Communities are not just defined by geography but by common dreams, common beliefs. As people of colour, self-expression in a world where structures of oppression dictate that your voice is unworthy, worthless even, is everything. Speaking out, and speaking oneself into existence where otherwise your presence would be erased is an act of revolution. Communities of artists and communities of activists that incubate the liberty of each generation must be celebrated and sustained.

“Dance to the pitch of your blackness and feel the vibrations wash over you like ripples reflecting light along their edges

drink

beneath open skies and realise how small you are. Take comfort in it and begin to build with the people beside you. You cannot reach the sky by yourself.”

Rohan Ayinde, *Drink* from *Finding Soul*

Finding home as an activist and creative of colour in modern day Britain is a journey. As diaspora, we are born nomads and so often the frustration of living in a city that clearly does not want me to write, to find voice, to make soul is overwhelming. We don’t own anything, our access to institutions is often limited, our experiences in engaging with them poisoned, and more often than not it is by chance not by choice that we find ourselves wherever it is that we stand.

I don’t know the history of the Tate Modern gallery intimately, and I cannot pin down exactly what it is about that gallery or so many like it that feels alien or distant to me. I simply know that that space is – usually – not for me.

This year, I attended a viewing of the Tate Modern’s *Soul of a Nation* exhibition and for the first time in that space I felt at home. I realised almost immediately that the sense of home that I felt had nothing to do with the institution of the Tate, nor even really the exhibition. It was due to the familiar faces who wandered past, as well as live performances, and discussion from familiar faces such as Crack Stevens and Andrew Ashong. *Soul of a Nation* tells the story of North American art from the 1960s up until 1983. Of course, these stories, these histories of Black Power and black resistance are pertinent to our existence here, today. But as is often the case when we talk about our relatives across the Atlantic, we understand everything but we own nothing. Internationally speaking it is my history, but it is not the history of my home.

"We will be who we want, where we want, with who we want, in the way we want, when we want and the time is now and the place is here + there and here + there + here..."

Lubaina Himid, *We Will Be*

Slightly closer to home, geographically and historically, the South London Gallery's *The Place Is Here* exhibition focused on black British art from the 1980s – during a time when black was the banner term for all people of colour, as the movement for political blackness was in its peak. Having been a part of the Greater London Council (GLC) Story, a project which traced the radical history of the GLC (the city's government until 1986), I was intrigued to visit an exhibition which celebrated much of the art that was funded by the GLC in its heyday. *The Place Is Here* was an incredible exhibition which explored some of the most potent and important art of this country's modern history. The work captured and embodied the resistance of artists of colour just a generation or so ahead of our own, firmly setting out the path on which we are now walking.

During my time with the GLC Story, Trinidadian theatre-maker and former GLC staff Ansel Wong told me "the biggest sense of disappointment [after the GLC was abolished by Margaret Thatcher, came] in what we didn't leave behind... which we could have left behind... and that was property." The era of the GLC, of left-wing London, where transformative projects at the Roundhouse and the Southbank Centre were realised as millions were invested into Black arts and culture, has a bittersweet legacy. Outside of the arts, some ownership of buildings was transferred but the GLC's most ambitious black arts project, The Black Cultural Centre which once took over the Roundhouse has long shut down and the building is now owned by Eton and Cambridge educated Lord Torquill Norman.

Many of the arts groups the GLC funded too have long dissolved. Nonetheless as *The Place Is Here* demonstrated, many of the practitioners of that era are still here and their work lives on. For many it provided a golden era, freedom to make work and security in that commissions and funding were unlikely to dry up.

"This is definitely for us, for people who are part of this community for BBZ, gal-dem, Touching Bass, BLM, all of these kind of people who form this network of young creatives who are challenging who are pushing back, who are crafting [new] narratives"

Rohan Ayinde, poet, photographer on Finding Soul

Despite being hung up, for months, on Wong's words, I eventually came to celebrate the fact that as diaspora, ever homeless in a hostile London that seems set up to watch us fail, we are still here. With or without property, without land, without the inherited wealth of the building owners who are too often the gatekeepers to our success, we are still making work, and our work still matters. The Lubaina Himid quote from which the South London Gallery exhibition takes its name makes it clear that the place is nowhere and anywhere. The place for black artists to make soul, to find self, to build communities, and to reclaim voice will always be right here, right now, but as diaspora 'here' is anywhere we make it.

"We've taken the things, people, voices, imagery, posters, fragments of our community and pieced them together in ways that they haven't been pieced together before to create one continuous flow of voice."

Tayo Rapoport, filmmaker, on Finding Soul

Earlier in the year, a nomadic exhibition named *Finding Soul*, which existed only for 72 hours in its first home in a studio in Dalston before living on, in part, Upstairs at the Ritzy, in Brixton showcased and celebrated the work of the communities of artists, of activists, of creatives of colour who despite the odds are somehow managing to survive this city. At *Finding Soul* I also found home.

Curated by and featuring the art and artists which make up a community of agitators the exhibition meditated on what the concept of community even means. Yewande “YoYo” Odunubi’s curation threaded together the multiple communities overt or subtle which have the power to heal the rifts in our society and can push for change with an amplified, unified voice. *Finding Soul* was not commissioned by a wealthy institution. It was made possible by a crowdfunder campaign and the help and support of the artist's and curator’s colleague, friends and community.

Home, as diaspora, as an activist and writer of colour in today’s London, is wherever our community materialises and manifests itself. In our lifetimes, we may never own land, have buildings in our name, but we will continue to have community which is wise in the ways of crafting soul, unearthing the self and speaking out, speaking ourselves into history.