

## **The GLC Story Oral History Project**

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NN: It's Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> of July, and I'm doing an oral history recording with Femi Otitoju. Femi, do you want to tell me a little bit about what your relationship to the GLC was?

FO: My name is Femi Otitoju and I worked at the GLC from 1984 to 1986. And I worked in two places. I worked initially in something called the Women's Support Unit, for just over a year, and then for the latter part of my time there I worked in something that was intended to help run the campaign to help run the campaign to save the GLC. So the team was called B10, we were in the basement, in room 10, and we were employed by a consultant to fulfill our roles there.

NN: I'm just going to try and get an understanding of the context, and the background, and your own background. So if you tell me a little bit about where you come from, your background, your relationship to London, and growing up here.

FO: I was born in Nigeria, so my family are Nigerian, I'm quite close to that culture. As a young Black woman I was in school in Hackney, I was one of only two girls in my year who was Black, everyone else was white. My school was half Jewish so I have very strong allegiances with the Jewish community, joined various groups and things by the age of 16. I got involved in women's politics just before I left school, that would have been around 1977. Where I just named myself as a feminist, came out as a lesbian, and never looked back.

NN: So kind of what's happening for you in the late seventies and early eighties, as you describe your political growth, what kinds of things were you involved in?

FO: In the late seventies I was involved in the production of the London Women's Liberation newsletter, which we did pretty much by hand on old fashioned bender machines, which we turned the handle on, and turned them off. We literally typed newsletters and folded them, and delivered them. I was a volunteer briefly on London Lesbian Line, and a volunteer on London Lesbian Switchboard, which I was part of for 13 years, for a little while I was chair of that organisation. I also got involved in the Women's Aid movement, so money would be sent, and supporting women who were facing domestic violence, and I was just generally noisy on things like Reclaim the Night, and campaigning against sex establishments, I was generally a pretty active feminist at that time.

NN: And what kinds of people were also involved in this type of organising?

FO: Well, what was interesting being a young Black woman in the largely white...A young Black working class woman in the largely white middle class movement was how hard it was to find women like myself. In the early eighties we started the first Black lesbian group here in London, I was a member of that with someone called Jackie K I think, who came along to those meetings, and a few others. I was involved in the gay Black group, as well, which was a mixed group. So the social part of it was just as important as the political part of it, in fact, the two were almost inextricably linked.

NN: And can you describe being active from a really young age, and having been born in Nigeria, how old were you when you came here?

FO: Oh, I was a baby, I grew up in the south coast in Sussex, and came to London in my teens, I came here when I was six months old.

NN: Okay. And how did your family feel about your kind of political involvement?

FO: Well, I think the reason why I was able to be so politically active is that I was kind of alone here. My mother went back to Nigeria in 1970, the year I took my A-levels. Leaving me with a 3 bedroom council flat, an income, my father was putting me through college. And I think that was one of the reasons why I as a young Black woman was able to come out and be so high profile as a lesbian in way that perhaps a lot other young Black women weren't able to be at the time. Because a lot of family pressure and community pressures that other young Black gay people faced, or Black lesbians faced, I didn't have because mine [family] was so far away. I mean, obviously in our communities news travels fast, even across the water, so the things I was up to, my mother did get hear to hear about, but when all she can do is bellow at you through the damn phone, it doesn't make much of a difference, doesn't curve your activities. So my family didn't respond particularly positively to my political activism. Because my mother had not much to do with politics, I'm not sure she even voted in the 20 years she lived here the first time. But, they weren't particularly bothered, I think they mapped the whole thing up to being English, the whole thing was connected somehow.

NN: And how old were you when you came out? And what was that experience like?

FO: So I came out at about 18, gradually. To my best friend, to the women in my CR group.

NN: What's CR?

FO: CR is consciousness raising. And that's a gathering where feminists would get together and meet once a week and drink beer and fiercely grieve one about whatever the feminist issues of today were, we had started up certain groups and we discussed language and patriarchy and how to destroy it. Things like that.

NN: It sounds amazing.

FO: It was amazing.

NN: So, you went to university?

FO: No.

NN: Okay, well. That's really interesting. So you finished school and...

FO: I finished my A-levels. And did all the things you were supposed to do to go university, to I filled out my (???) 6:56) form, and went off to all these places, found various universities, got offers from a couple. But I had just found feminism, and loads of lovely lesbians in London, and there was no way I was leaving at all. And I was alone in the country, so I kind of just sort of drifted a bit. I had this flat which I filled with women. All sorts of women, who were hitching up and down the country and just sort of looking for somewhere to be feminists and lesbians. We had extra bedrooms, so we could have six or seven women, in the flat. I took up nursing for about four and a half minutes, I thought it was something I could walk into with just my A-levels, and not have to do anything else. But it was horrendous, the most appalling thing that anyone could have suggested that I do. To be a young Black woman in the NHS, in the late seventies. Just horrible. So I went from there and did medical and laboratory sciences, and that was better. So [I worked in] in laboratories for a while, and I didn't really like the NHS at all. So I walked into an employment agency, it was called (???) 8:17) at the time, now it's called ADEKO (???) 8:19). I said "this is what I've done, these are the A-levels I've got, I don't know what to do." And they said "well you seem quite personable, would you like to work here?" And I said "oh, alright!" So I spent two years working in this employment agency. Selling [ad] space, you needed to be an activist. And then I sold space at a couple of other newspapers, and I was at The Observer when I got the call to action. Somebody rang me up and said "You're a likely feminist. We're looking for women like you to come and join the Women's Committee Support Unit at the GLC."

NN: I just wanted to take you back to the consciousness raising groups that you spoke about. What were the kinds of things that you were discussing and reading and debating or arguing...

FO: Well, the first was about sexuality. The woman's rights to define her own sexuality, obviously fertility, and women's married issues. The right to choice around abortion, we talked about consent, and domestic violence, we talked about sexism, the mechanisms that put it into place and those that underpinned it... Unfortunately pretty much all the same issues that any women's group discusses today. I think the only difference between then and now was that now lesbianism is not really thought much of in terms of feminism, people don't think lesbians, feminists. People kind of understand, the first feminist conferences I went to we were still trying to get the right to define our own sexuality as part of the demands of the women's liberation movement. And some people thought that lesbian detracted from the messages of the women's issues. So I suppose that's a bit different from how it was then. Partly consciousness-raising groups were about just having the space to be a woman. And to be the voices, as opposed to trying to fight the power of male voices. It was also a space to let you hone your arguments, so you got to understand... Even if at gut-level you understood that it was important for women to have the right to choose, in your CR group you got the chance to sort of find out the best way to portray those arguments to others who disagree with you. To recognise the kind of resistance that you might come across, and identify ways of dealing with it. So it was a real

character building, skill building, argument developing, form, and everyone should do it. I think every girl should belong to a CR group from when she hits 16.

NN: And what was kind of the make-up of the people in the groups that you were in?

FO: Well, the groups that I was in, the main CR group... Had a very wide spectrum of women. There were two Black women in my group, variously about 8-10 of us at any given time. Some of them felt phenomenally old, some of them were nearly 30, which was relatively old for my 18 years, I went with my best friend from school. We had a woman from South Africa, most were middle class, we had a couple of women with children, I remember there being a Cypriot woman as well, and one single mother. It was a mix, yes, of women of different backgrounds, different ages, and of course, different sexualities.

NN: And how did class, race, gender, play out? In that space, or within the dynamics of the group?

FO: The thing about the consciousness raising group is that every woman is there because she wants to spend time with other women. The purpose of the group is to look at those issues of race, and class, and so on, disability not so high on the agenda as I would put it now. So what I remember is being very wide-eyed, variously shocked, appalled, intrigued, amazed, every week, by this CR group. And be supported, and buoyed up, and just looked after. Not in a motherly way, but in a sisterly way, by these women. So I was in a relationship which didn't go terribly well, and the woman kind of left and took loads of stuff from the, and I was left without a television, and vital things like a fridge. And I remember putting a note in the Women's Liberation Newsletter and I think by the end of the week I had three televisions, and two sofas, everything, because that's what the movement was like at that time. There may have been dynamics around race, and age, and class, that I wasn't sophisticated enough to see, because I was young and this was my first time in that forum. And there was no internet, and there was very little Black feminist writing in the late seventies and early eighties. So to find that stuff, I mean, if you wanted a book from America, that was a huge deal. We were still writing on those little blue paper air-mail letters, you sent that off and it could be three weeks before you got the letter back. The idea of trying to get a book from America, or even knowing that there was a book in America that you might want to read by some Black feminist over there... It was very difficult. We had the **Heart of the Race(???) 13:54) process**, and that was in the eighties. In the late seventies there was very very little around.

NN: Is there any specific texts that you remember?

FO: Well I just mentioned **the Heart of the Race (???) 14:10)** but that came in the eighties. I remember later, not in those late seventies, obviously things like Audre Lorde, but mostly I read normal feminist stuff so, you know, Meg Daily (???) 14:25). There were a few women around, Fletcher, who very much affected my thinking. But mostly it was being around women, both socially and politically. It was just amazing.

NN: I've got a really basic question, but I think as someone who has grown up with the internet, and emails, as my main form of communicating, and setting up internet groups... How did you lot all communicate and know when to... You know, agree when you were going to see each other, and keep in contact?

FO: Well, there were telephones. They lived in the hall, and they had wires. Most people had their telephones by their front doors, because that was somebody coming into your house, so clearly it needed to be near the door. It's a very old thing now, we take our telephones into our bedrooms. But before they were by the front door because strangers came in through there. Mostly you did things regularly. So you said, the CR group will meet on Wednesday evenings at XXX's (15:33) house, and when you got there you agreed the next. And you just planned better. Just like if you were going to meet your friend at the cinema, you couldn't say 'I'll text you', it wasn't there, and I'm sure [there was] many a time when some poor woman was standing outside the Odeon while somebody else was standing outside some other cinema. It didn't feel too bad because it was all that we had. But I think that made that first Black lesbian group so much more precious, when we managed to find each other. Because you didn't have the everyday access to just even be thinking about Black women, and Black lesbians, that we have now.

NN: I'm just going to take you back to you describing when you first started to engage with the GLC, tell me a little bit about that came about.

FO: So I'm down sitting in the offices of The Observer newspaper and I'm selling advertisement space. And I get a phone call, we weren't really supposed to take phone calls at work, but I got a phone call and this woman said 'The GLC is advertising for outreach workers for the Women's Support Unit, and they're going to want Black women, and they're going to want feminists, and you are a shoot-in. So I don't know where you are but get up.' So I applied for that job, and I got it. And my life changed forever. Utterly forever. I was one of four women, we were called outreach workers, our task was literally to reach out to the women in London. So I had ridiculously, South London. I actually think that's a bit racist. Because I think I was given South London because I was the Black woman, even though I lived in North London, so that's a bit mad. Anyway. So there was one East, one North, one South, one West. One white woman, one Asian woman, me... And Monica! So another white woman. And our task was to work with community groups to support them in working effectively with women. I took balloons out, and magazines, and other GLC literature. And I helped them create appropriate applications for art funding, so they could apply to a team that was heading up a grants team, at that time. It was the best job.

NN: I'm so I'm wondering what your thoughts were on the GLC before you got the job, but obviously you applied so...

FO: I knew about the GLC because I was an activist, and in particular I knew about the GLC because they had funded the London Lesbian and Gay Centre project. I

remember going along to an open meeting with this little man who was my friend – in fact, two little men who were my friends. One was called Mark Ashton, this tiny tiny beautiful man, and his best friend who was the same size – another tiny tiny beautiful man – was called **Jimmy Sommerville (???** 19:10). I hung with them a little bit, which looked really weird. I don't know if you can picture it, these little white men, and the Black lesbian in the middle. And they took me to a meeting at the GLC, in which they were discussing whether the GLC should fund this Lesbian and Gay Centre project. **In Cowcold?? (??** 19:32) street, because they did fund it. I'd already thought of the GLC as being a good thing, being supportive of the different ways in which I was, I'd seen their work, I'd heard about the place, of Ken Livingstone, so I felt positively about the GLC. It seemed to be speaking to all the ways that I was, all the things that were a part of me.

NN: So you got funding for the Lesbian and Gay Centre through the GLC, how was the creation of that, the setting up?

FO: The creation of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre was painful in many ways, because lesbians and gay men were not very used to being together cooperatively in London. I mean, there were pockets of good practice, I was a volunteer of the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, we had 120 volunteers on that, of which 5 were women, and 2 were Black. So I am used to collaborating in groups where I am the minority. The Lesbian and Gay Centre was always male dominated. They tried really hard, initially we had a feasibility study, then we got the full funding, we tried to be all the things to all the lesbians and gay men, so we had disco in the evening, and a woman's day, and we had a restaurant, exercise classes, it was a fabulous thing, right in the heart of London, just off of Farringdon Road. And I think it lasted five years or so, but for a while it was brilliant. There were hassles about everything. "Oh, S&M dykes were coming in, that's awful, oh, they're doing poppers, that's awful, everybody's racist...." There were rows about absolutely everything. Nonetheless, it was an amazing resource, absolutely phenomenal.

NN: And at some point, the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre was opened?

FO: Initially, the Lesbian and Gay Centre was never really a true home for Black lesbians and gay men. Although a couple of Black DJs had events there, it was never a place that felt like we belonged. In fact, the contrast of Black Pride... So the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre project was initially housed by Haringey Council, they gave us a space near the town hall. We had a switchboard, we had started to support a phonenumber, a Black lesbian and gay phonenumber. Because we weren't getting many calls from Black people we said, okay, we are going to have this phonenumber open one night a week. The rest of the line was open 24/7, [we opened this one] so that Black people would know they could call and there would be a Black person there. Having the response to that kind of showed that there was a need for some specific support, and so the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre project ran for two years and decided that there was a need, and there was a need for premises. And we finally got premises in South London, in Peckham, and yeah, we were there under the arches. The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre ran counseling, and socials, that was another amazing space.

It was specifically quite a challenging space, being under the arches, it was cold or hot, there was lots of rain, not much natural light. But it was our space and it was very precious.

NN: I'm just going to take you back to starting to work within the Women's Support Unit. What was the space like, where were you based, where were your offices?

FO: So I worked in the Women's Committee Support Unit, it was down on the ground floor, so you would go into that amazing entrance, into County Hall, and pan left, and then our unit would be just past the first corridor, on the right hand side. And just opposite us was the London Borough Disabilities and Resource Team (LBDRT) Unit, as it was then. So the Disability Unit on side, the Women's Unit just across the corridor there. There was a Race Unit on the second floor, and on the fifth floor, actually, there was something called 5-10G. The 5-10G was the lesbian and gay unit, rooms 5-10G.

NN: Really, why was that?

FO: Well, because it was in the closet! It wasn't out as a unit. It was just 5-10G. It lived up there. It was quite sweet. So I worked with a team who produced the women's newsletter, the Women's Committee Support Unit newsletter, which was a very fine document. I'm trying to remember the name of the woman who did it – **Heaven ??? (24:54)** produced that, very very high quality publication. And then I got a car! That was exciting. In the GLC, in County Hall, they had a garage. It was underground. So they gave us – me and the other three outreach workers – a car, we all had a car. I got this lovely metro thing, it was really cool. And they had a petrol pump. It was just the most exciting thing. So I arrived at work and they went 'Here's your car, here you go. There's your nice little car, here's the petrol pump, if anything needs doing we'll do it for you. Take these leaflets, take these newsletters, take these balloons, off you go and spread the word about the GLC to women in London. I had just an incredible task. During the day, when I went into the office, I was surrounded by I think there may have been, at it's peak, it felt like there had been up to 90 women in the Women's Support Unit. And it was one massive, open-plan office, and it was probably the most diverse – apart from something like **PARKS (?? 26:14)** or something outside of County Hall, that was still part of the GLC but not inside County Hall – we looked like an incredibly diverse unit. We were less straight, if that makes sense. Not just straight heterosexual, but less straight – our head of unit wore trousers. It was colourful, and messy, and bold, and there were often children there. It was very very different from... There was a bit of County Hall called The Principal Floor which is the first floor. And you weren't expected to walk around the Principal Floor. If you were on one side of the Principal Floor and had to go to the other side, you weren't expected to walk around the corridor, on that floor. You were supposed to down the nearest staircase, walk around the corridor on another floor, and then return to the principal floor by the nearest staircase. So only a certain grade of officer and elected member could walk around on the Principal Floor at any time. It wasn't written down anywhere, but people told me it, a lot. So I was very bad and walked around the Principal Floor, just for the hell of it. So we didn't... It was



still quite hierarchical, and that was quite difficult, because you know with all these old school feminists, who have been in collectives and co-operatives and so on, and we we're all struggling with trying to fit in to the hierarchy, and the structures of the GLC. And there was some talk that we had somehow betrayed the women's movement, because we were being co-opted by the GLC. And some people say, you know, the fact that you could put on a Women's Aid, when women's aid projects that I have around were set up from nothing... Nobody had anything, and so it was all the work that women could bring, our creativity, and this one would bring some cups, and this one could spend £25 on that. And by the time the GLC came towards abolition I think we had forgotten how to do things that way, because we were used to getting money. And some said it destroyed the movement, that it hampered the movement, because we lost our ability to organise on a shoestring, and therefore became dependent on the state. With the money, of course, come obligations. So some women felt that those of us feminists that chose to work with the GLC and later in other places in local government somehow sold out. I don't think we did, I know we didn't. Because I know that as it became clear that we'd lost the battle, I was in effect made redundant in the Women's Committee Support Unit, and went straight into this B10. Went down into the basement into the B10, and continued doing exactly the same work as I'd been doing before. And I mentioned the name of the person who said "Your job now, between now and abolition, is to get as much as you can out of this building and into the community. Off you go." And we took that pretty literally. So of course some things were being made for consumption, like 'Save the GLC' stickers and this sort of stuff, guidance notes on how to run a group. But it was also means and means of photocopier paper. And at one point, actually a photocopier. We used the building, because we knew that those units existed to support the community. Disability groups, women's groups, lesbian and gay groups, other people's groups, and because we were all activists, we were all committed to trying to make that continue. And all around that time there was the miner's strike, and we were all trying to support the miners, which was where, you know, the story about Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners... I remember we had collections in County Hall for the miners, it was a very exciting political time. And then came abolition. And I use this analogy a lot. It's like someone took a dandelion's seedhead, that was just ready, it was all fluffy, and just ready to go. It's like someone took that seedhead and just gave it a mighty blow. And all the activists, and all the trouble-makers and the lesbians and gay men and whatever, just burst out over local government and flew across the country. So instead of having one seat of unrest in County Hall, you now had all of us **beethering** (?? Is this a word? 31:15) in local authorities up and down the country. And that's when we started to see little shift, in things like – well suddenly the establishment had lesbian and gay units, Black units, women's units, proliferating all over local government. So Maggie did us a favour, really.

NN: I'm just going to check in a little bit about what your day to day as an outreach officer was, and what kind of projects you were doing, and who, and how you were engaging with the community?

FO: My day to day work as an outreach worker in the GLC involved visiting women's groups. So I would get in my metro, which I loved, and I would drive into County Hall and I would go in for a meeting with the four officers. We would talk about what groups we visited in the last week, and would try to visit this week. What publications had just come out and where we needed to get them to, and then we would pile loads of stuff – brightly coloured, beautifully laid out documentation – into our various cars, and then I would head south. And I would go somewhere like the massive **Kidbrook (?? 32:38)** Estate, and I would work with the mum and toddler's group, and ask them what they would like to do that they couldn't afford to do right now, I would take loads of notes about how things were difficult for them. Or I would go to the arts centre in Deptford and put posters up on the wall, and go and watch theatre by young women, and talk about what they wanted to do that they wanted to do, and I'd give them my leaflets and take theirs. And then I would drive back to County Hall – sometimes I wouldn't go back that day, I'd go to County Hall a few times a week and meet with the other Outreach workers and report back on what was going on in the community. And that would have been the early part. As we got nearer and nearer to abolition, it became much more vociferous campaigning. So it was our job to produce the protesters, to stage things, you know, here's this woman who can't take her children on the bus because the fares are too expensive so let's campaign... We would make sure that people understood about legislative plans and what it would mean to them, and tell them when the meetings were going on so they could decide to come along, and lobby if they wanted to. Mostly it was about mobilizing the community, and informing the community about what was going on.

NN: What were some of the highlights in terms of the campaigning work that you were able to do?

FO: My highlights were usually little events. So my aim was to get something on the news, you know. 'So here is little Kieran, and his mom Denise. And Kieran says he can hardly get on the bus, can't you Kieran?' Kieran is like, seven years old. And he says 'No, mum and I can't get on.' So my task is to find those individuals, and that was the highlight, to get them on the news, to share how things would get worse, or weren't good enough, because of the GLC not having enough money or not being allowed to make decisions in certain places. But other things were just about supporting groups such as – a family group over here, completely unfunded, trying to help with meals and daycare, and they're getting to the point where they can't complete a grant application, which means they're unlikely to get funding to continue doing their amazing work. We changed the law for some children and their mothers. It was great work. And that's the work I was doing at 24, 25. It was a big job for a little girl.

NN: What were some of the difficulties that you faced?

FO: Well, the biggest difficulties that we faced working for the Women's Committee Support Unit at the GLC I think were people who were outside of our movement who were critical of the work that we'd do. So we'd constantly see articles

everywhere about the GLC funding lesbian self-defense groups – and we did fund a lesbian self-defense group, and it was absolutely crucial that we did, because lesbians got attacked on the street and they needed to learn how to do self-defense. The challenges were that yeah, we were the looney left. I was the walking looney left, and so anywhere I went, from within my own friends – well, family – sometimes, to other social environments, people were criticising the decisions that we took. And of course there was also the fight in the left, against separating racism out of the women's movement, from the middle-class or the wider class struggle. So in the wider sense, you know, you're being vilified because you're lefty, within the left, you're being vilified because you're a feminist, or because you're a Black activist, or because you're a lesbian or whatever.

NN: Some things never change.

FO: Yeah, and we didn't even have the word intersectionality, so it was particularly difficult, you couldn't even talk about what was going on because we didn't have the language for multiple oppressions. That gave the impression that everything just piled on on top of the other, and not that there was, you know, overlaps. So if you're a Black woman, yes, you face sexism and you face racism. But if you're a middle-class Black woman, and you've got quite a lot of money, you can leave some of the effects of racism behind because you hang out in places that – you know, if you've got enough money, no one's going to treat you badly at all. So I think that some of that wasn't understood in the way that it is today. And it wasn't easy to articulate that either. In fact I don't even know that I, walking around as a working class Black lesbian – so you've got woman inside there as well – I don't think that I could have put a sentence together, or written a paragraph, that could describe the way in which those things intersected. Even if I had sat down by myself, for a long time, I'm not sure that we'd got it enough for us to recognise what was going on there.

NN: You spoke a bit about what it was like kind of within County Hall, and the relationships around hierarchy and things like that. What was instituted within the workplace that was different, new, that was coming from kind of the politics and discussions that you'd been having within your consciousness raising groups?

FO: So working at County Hall, on the first hand, for me, was a massive cultural change, because I had to work with elected members, senior, well, lifelong officers, in effect, local government officers... Men! I had never worked alongside so many men, close on. Even in the health service, there's so many women, in the employment agency work I was doing that was mostly women, and even though I worked in the newspaper, in advertising, in the low levels, you get almost entirely women. It was quite hard, the processes that you had to go through. Because it was a big machine. That was interesting. The biggest thing, I think, was the politics. Where something might not necessarily be the best way to do it, but it had to be done that way because it was politically astute to do something in that way. So for example, we might say that we're actually going to not picket for the survival of that hospital, even though the local people want to, we think that it's important that the women's hospital stays. But because the local councilor has this whole... You know,

on the GLC, we can't then criticise it because we're employers of that. So it adds a whole level of Politics with a capital P to my personal politics. And that was interesting. And it was challenging.

NN: I've kind of marginally heard lots of things of what it was like within the Women's Support Unit. You know, kind of, what were some of the conversations, and the debates that you were having, and the ways in which you were trying to bring your own kind of knowledge and understanding into that space?

FO: It's interesting, because initially the Women's Support Unit was headed up by a woman called Louise Pankhurst which of course was a brilliant name for the Women's Support Unit. But you know, very white, very middle class, not actually probably an old-school feminist in the traditional sense. And so trying to bring some working class feminism into that was quite challenging. Also I think just trying to raise voices and constantly going "How do we get Black women's voices across that? How do we get disabled women's voices into this arena?" And some people just saw that as divisive. So those were the conversations we were having. We were also talking about whether or not we were prepared to align ourselves wholeheartedly with that. And some people thought we shouldn't have any politics, you know, we were officers, and officers weren't supposed to bring their own... Because officers are supposed to survive the politicians, the politicians might come and go with the vagaries of the elections and the like, but the officers were supposed to be able keep their post. So were an odd-looking place, because we were all political, or so many of us were. Some of us were transferred over from other bits of the GLC but most of us were recruited because of our politics, and then once we got there, we were told that our politics had no place, and what do we do with that? How does that work then? And we took no notice of that, obviously. We just carried on being who we are. It was not surprising therefore, it was quite an ??? (42:54) place to work. So there were loads of lesbians, anyway, and that caused loads of hassle, because, you know, a lot of them were in all kinds of relationships with one another, which made things slightly complicated. But you were also constantly running up against someone who just – the difference between radical feminism and socialist feminism, which a lot of people wouldn't have got at all, was a enough to make us feel ridiculous sometimes on a project. So we were dealing with all of that. We were still finding language, so we were battling over whether we should be talking about heterosexism or homophobia, things like that.

NN: I'm just interested in what the relationships were like between the different units. So you had the race unit – the Race and Ethnic Minorities Unit? And you had the Women's Support Unit, but I wonder whether for you doing work over here, but also you're a Black woman, and so how did you engage?

FO: Well, one of the most disappointing things about working in the Women's Support Unit was the lack of collaboration between us and the Race and Ethnic Minorities Unit. We should have been matched to the highest. And I think actually sometimes we were pitted against one another. And it was male-dominated, and I think they found it difficult to deal with women a bit. I'd personally never engaged

effectively with the Race and Ethnic Minorities Unit. I tried, a few times. But my remit was women, and they were mostly men, so, that was quite hard really. I remember, this wasn't in the GLC but it was in the GLC times, I remember rushing to a meeting once, late, and apologising and saying sorry... (???? 44:40-44:55) "One day you're just going to have to make up your mind, about whether you're a Black woman or you're a feminist." And I remember thinking "Okay, that man, right there – that's the problem. That's exactly what makes it almost impossible." And actually, oddly, the strongest affiliation I had was the Disability Unit, across the way. It might have been because they were geographically nearer, but the women in there were strong and effective, and so we found a natural ally. And then of course we had 5-10G, upper, on the fifth floor, who were working... They produced a couple of publications. One was tackling heterosexism, it was a training publication, and the other was called 'Changing the World'. And it was a publication setting out good practice for local authorities around lesbians and gay men. And we collaborated with them on that. I did not remember collaborating with the Race and Ethnic Minorities Committee on any publication.

NN: And 5-10G was the...

FO: That was the Lesbian and Gay Unit. Hence tackling heterosexism. Yeah, that was the language, I was saying that we were constantly arguing about our language – that was lovely, in a way, in the Women's Support Unit, in that we did have those conversations about referring to one another as ladies or women or whether we talk about heterosexism or homophobia, and just all the stuff that I was good at, because I'd learnt it all in my consciousness raising group! But yeah, we had those discussions. I don't think they'd been held in the local government before, we really did bring the grassroots movement into the town hall. It was amazing.

NN: And what kinds of things was 5-10G, the lesbian and gay group working on? You described these two publications...

FO: Well two of them were... They were producing good practice guidelines, like the tackling heterosexism, which was about creating positive working environments. And 'Changing the World', which was basically a provision of services, amongst other things, also looking at the political processes. They were collaborating with the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) on good practice at schools, there was only two of them, there was a limit on how much they could do. But yeah, quite good stuff. They were supporting lesbian and gay pride, by then, particularly, when I first started there – although that came later, and in quite a big way. We had the fire service at the GLC as well, and we were looking at the way in which they worked, doing things like encouraging them to take on women firefighters, we were funding projects that just basically allowed women to get into these trades, into plastering and bricklaying and fields that weren't very well represented. Into all the of the building sector, and so on. My focus was less about the politics and more about the support and the building of the community. Because I believed that the voluntary sector could do so much more, and the women's movement could be so much more if it had the resources. And I saw the GLC as kind of our pool of money. Big pool of money.

NN: How did the GLC stand up to practicing what was being produced by groups like 5-10G about best practice, within the workplace? And I'm imagining that the Race and Ethnic Minorities Unit also produced some things around racism, so, how did that play out?

FO: My sense of how well we were living our own values was that we weren't doing it terribly well at all. I know there were accusations of racism within the Women's Committee Support Unit, I know that Black and Minority Ethnic people **were skilled in the lower levels ?? (49:27-49:32)**... With the whole of the GLC. I know that we were used to – we and the Ethnic Minorities Unit – were used to a kind of place of sanctuary. So people would come into the offices just to be somewhere where they could talk about what they felt they were facing in other departments. I don't think our house was in order, particularly. And I don't think many of us expected it to be. I think we had our eyes on a bigger prize, which was to change local government as a whole. Not just our institution, and that became more true when it became clear that abolition was on the cards. We stopped our own goals, and what we were like ourselves, and the main focus became... Either trying to help us survive, or making sure that the good practice got out to other places. The idea even of good practice, even if not actually it. That was one sad thing, is that we never really got that done.

NN: Is there any specific memories or incidents that you can remember?

FO: I can't remember any specific incidents. I remember an accusation when there were two heads of units. So **Valerie Vice (?? 51:08)** left, and two women took over, as joint heads of the unit. Their names are not going to come. The Black woman was a lawyer – I think they were both lawyers, actually. And none of them ended up being the right one, and she didn't end up being the head of the unit, and I know that was something ... You could have just guessed that that was going to happen, regardless of what their performance was like. You just knew that there was no way they were going to let a Black woman be head of that unit. And that was pretty much as it was like, you could never put your finger on it exactly, who knows what we didn't know about the relative performance of those two, the merits and what they were after. But that was constant, you know, who was appointed where. That's just more of the status quo. Those names should be easy to find.

NN: Yeah. They will definitely come up. You said earlier...

FO: **Deborah Wurlsey (?? 52:16)**, was the white one. I think the Black one was Bev something, but I can't remember. And that's typical, great. I remember the white woman's name.

NN: You spoke earlier about how the wider feminist movement felt about people going to work within the GLC, and about it feeling like a betrayal of some sort of your politics. So during this time, what is happening in the wider movement, and how are you engaging with it?

FO: Whilst I opted to go work in the GLC, while being accused of having sold out, in the wider movement, women's centres are being set up. They're not very clean, because the feminists don't want to do the housework in them, but they are there. Women's centres are being set up, women are collaborating in the arts, a massive blossoming of women's art actually, and background into the arts while we're at it. Oh! And LGBT stuff, so we see things like the **Drill Hall (?? 32:20)** being given over pretty much as a lesbian and gay arts centre, we see the arts centre in Deptford and Greenwich art centre, projects that are funded by the GLC. We are reclaiming the night, and we are basically just making things that we thought, that the feminists were making ordinary. So things around equal pay, campaigning around the equality legislation is all kind of gathering momentum. And that's the thing that paves the way for things like the Disability and Equality Act that comes much later in the 90s. But I think the seats are turned at this point. I for example was part of a project that's taking away 22 disabled people for three day residential courses, and then turning that into disability and equality training, to figure out training for local authorities. We're basically growing activists at this time. We're helping everybody grow up in a political way. It's lovely. We're helping people see that they can shape what their local authorities are doing, that they can be part of it. We're opening it up to working class people in a way that it hadn't been before, really. You know, there was a few that worked, but just, that everybody could be part of it, now, we were making sure that everyone could see how they could do the things they liked to do. So I am seeing – we've got the arts, the centres, we've got the Black community centres. I mean, at this part here, which is Haringey, we ended up with the West Indian Community Centre, the Asian Community Centre, the Greek Cypriot Community Centre, you had one for everything pretty much. It was brilliant.

NN: I guess I'm wondering now, obviously there was the politics of the day, and the debates, and the women's liberation movement at that time... When you look back at that, what has changed about your politics that you weren't really aware of at the time?

FO: Well, when I look back, the thing I notice the most I think is my confidence, my conviction, my belief that I can make things happen. In terms of the politics of the day, what's changed is that things that seemed revolutionary at the time, like, that you should say 'if you want to supply us with goods, you should make sure that you have an equality policy', those kinds of things that are just taken as read, whereas before, there were big arguments about whether or not we were going to be allowed to do that. I think things like equality impact assessments, the idea that before you put something in place you think about how it's going to affect the different protected groups like how it's going to affect different age groups and so on, and that's just part of the way in which things work now. In local and central government, and that's just amazing. We used to have these equality considerations which was basically two paragraphs at the end of every report that went to committee and usually people wrote "there were no equality considerations in this report" and then they'd say "we're going to knock down this housing block." They claimed, somehow, it wasn't going to affect people differently. So when I look back, things that were extraordinary and some of them just stuff that I just dreamed



about, are now not just ordinary but required. So we have to remind ourselves of things like that, when it feels like it's all going to hell in a **high cart (?? 57:41)**. We've actually come a tremendously long way. And it's not really easy to undo it, because some of those changes are now in legislation, and you need an equality impact assessment, and you can't dismantle it. That shows me up when I start to go a bit tired. There's been a lot of change, it's great.

NN: What are your thoughts on some of the debates that were happening, like I found it really difficult to understand the debates around like, S&M stuff, I'm like "oh wow, it's so interesting the things that are a huge deal, and I wonder how people see them now."

FO: I think there's debates around things like S&M, and of course the transition, are still raging. I mean, I was really clear about S&M and about... They don't allow people to consent to be harmed, but I think those debates took place, and we still want to have them. I don't think that's just going to stop, why would it stop? Because things have to continue to change, every one who comes to their own awakening, and looks to the thing that you thought you had sorted, in a fresh new way and says "Well, hold on, I need us to revisit this discussion about transracial adoption and fostering." We've gone from "obviously white people adopt white people, and Black people adopt Black people", and we've gone from that to, in the beginning of course, white people can adopt whatever people they liked, and Black people couldn't adopt anyone. And we've gone from that to okay, we must do culturally sensitive adoption, and so now only Black people can have Black people, and white people can have white people. And now we're kind of back round again. So I think that it is a cycle. It's healthy that we continue to revisit those issues, and that if we decide that we've come to the final conclusion, we're in trouble.

NN: I'm interested in what's going on for you personally, you've spoken a lot about the work, and what you're doing, and what's your life like? Outside of...

FO: So I'm working at the GLC. When I'm not in my Metro, I'm cycling around London. At the time it felt safer even though there no provision, well, less provision. I live in this sort of feminist bubble, nearly separatist in that the personal **belongs to the door (?? 1:00:34), but that's probably that it ??? (1:00:38)**. I spend every waking minute working for women. Either paid work or voluntary work. Or lesbians and gay men, or Black people. So I'm a living activist, I'm running from producing a newsletter to answering the phone at switchboard to doing a shift at Women's Aid to oh, I learnt to look after my bicycle! I was doing bicycle maintenance or car maintenance, or going to camping courses because that's the thing that women do, or you're looking for somewhere to do butch things... Someone tried really hard to get me into creative writing because they thought it was important to create our history but that didn't work, though I did write articles for things like Outright and Outraged, which was the lesbian one. I was a columnist for **Camp ?? Gay (?? 1:01:32)** so I wrote a column once a month for the gay newspaper. Life was crazy! And we partied hard, but even that was political. You'd go to this club, and there'd be no women, you would tell the club person "there's no women in the club, it's terrible,"



or I'd turn up at a club which was a gay club and the bouncer would say "it's not soul night, what are you doing here?" So that I had to go and start all this nonsense again about Black people. It was constant. And in the meantime you're getting into superglue, and into lots of sex clubs... And then I had to get a dress to wear to the lesbian stretchmark ?? (1:02:10) every year, because I always wore a dress to lesbian stretch because you couldn't wear a dress to pride, because they would always outdress you so there was no point in that. So it was a phenomenal time, that late seventies, early eighties, right up until abolition happened in 1986. It was just a whirlwind of political and politically motivated social activity. And there were so few Black feminists who had a high profile, that you had to constantly go to all these different forums and remind them about Black women's issues.

NN: Who were the prominent Black feminists?

FO: Well, they were American feminists that we all read. There was Linda B, who ended up being leader of Lambeth Council. There were Southall Black Sisters, who did the most phenomenal work ever, still very strong, still doing that. And then for me, that was about it. There was a lot... Now I'm pointing east because Southall Black Sisters was west. That was the Outright Collective were based, so they were producing that newspaper, the women's newspaper. There were some Black women involved in Spare Rib. But I'm not sure I could even name them.

NN: Yeah, because I'm wondering... I guess I've learnt about groups like OWAAD, which were all happening in Brixton and I'm wondering what your relationship was...

FO: Well, OWAAD mostly did the conferences. The Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent. And that was great, but for me OWAAD wasn't such a great place because I was out as a lesbian and that didn't feel desperately comfortable in the Brixton Black Women's Centre. I had to be persuaded by the lesbian group to meet there. So they were going on but for me, the sisterhood was not as strong as it might have been. Because I came out as a lesbian. And if I couldn't bring my whole self to the space, then I couldn't be in it. And I remember this OAD conference in which we started the first Black lesbian group because somebody said "oh, there's going to be a workshop on Black lesbians" and then somebody else said "oh, no, it's not on Black lesbians, it's for Black lesbians", in front of the whole room. And it got very nasty, people started saying things, and women started saying that they should be thrown out, it got really horrible. So we snuck off quietly into this meeting, that was in this room, and we were really worried that we'd get a negative response. But we didn't, nobody hassled us, but we'd had that difficult response in the first place, and that's when we agreed that we needed to meet regularly. So actually the first Black lesbian group came out of OWAAD conference. But not for the right reasons.

NN: And then how did you go on to sustain that group?

FO: Well, we just met regularly, at one point I remember someone saying "lesbians can't sleep with... (1:05:29-1:05:35) because that's all you've got to choose from."

That's what you want from a group. We advertised for the newsletter, we went over the country, every six weeks or so meeting, we hang out and met, some of us would write to the group and say "I can't get to you" and we would go off as a posse and meet them. I remember meeting this 70 year old woman and going "ah!", this older Black lesbian, that was exciting. So we were supportive of one another. And actually we went out into the women's centres, and they gradually accepted us, it just took time. We had to feel confident before we were bold enough to not just go into a space, but just take it.

### **audio skips**

NN: ... The term Black being defined in these groups?

FO: Oh, we had all sorts of fights about what the definition of Black should be. And I remember in the Black Lesbian and Gay Group we had someone called **Sammie ??? (1:06:36)** who was a formidable intellect. And she helped us pin that down, but she suggested that we borrow things... So that led to it being defined in a more responsible way, so somebody who is descended through one or more parents of the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia, Australia, the Americas, the islands of the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean. So we had this inclusive definition of that, and we spelled it with a capital B.

NN: And what was the relationship between people who were coming from all these vastly different cultural [backgrounds]?

FO: At the time of the GLC, it wasn't too bad, the relationships between all these people coming from all these different backgrounds because we weren't dividing, we were all happy to march under that term. Later it became a bit more sophisticated and we started to organise around Black and Ethnic Minorities, we said that rather than minority ethnic as we do now. BAME, for example, is very easy to name, Black and Asian and Minority Ethnic, but at that time lots of separate people marched under the name of Black. And that was good. It's about a shared experience rather than a shared identity, I think that's what Black meant in those days. Now it's more about identity. And of course, as I keep saying, we didn't have the internet, so we didn't have such a strong affinity with what was going on in the US as we do. And our struggles become one struggle, so that in the US we hear black lives matter, and we're instantly on it. Whereas over here, we were talking about Black people and in the US they were talking about people of colour, and you know, we'd already shooed coloured people, so we weren't about to embrace that one very easily. Because we didn't interact very much, or weren't so influenced by that. So we had to make our own journey to the term Black. And I think it was a good one. I think it was a warm, open, embracing definition which highlighted our shared struggle, our shared challenges, our shared experience, in a way that Black and Minority Ethnic doesn't really do.

NN: What's happening for you... So Margaret Thatcher is in power, Ken Livingstone is head of the GLC, John McDonnell – I mean, he's the chancellor now, I forget what the

term is, but he did all the finances... What were your thoughts of the leadership of the GLC, and also how were you interacting with the wider political Conservative government in place?

FO: It was very simple. We worked in the GLC, which meant we hated the government. The government was completely out of the GLC, and the government hated us. So Margaret Thatcher was the government incarnate, so that was all very simple. What was less simple was Ken Livingstone. He was a clever man, and he was a really good politician. And he was, more than John McDonnell, was widely well-regarded I think within the Women's Support Unit, I certainly found the man charming. You know, as a feminist, I have always called myself a radical feminist, as a lesbian, as a Black woman who had no interest in white men politically, I had no interest in white men at all – I worked with them, I was part of the switchboard, but they were nothing in my life at all. And so for a man like that to make me think "that's a good man", you could see that he tread the path carefully. He was skilled. I feel he has become less skilled over the years which is a critique. But at the time of the GLC he was a man who genuinely persuaded people that he was on their side. Whether their side was feminist, Black, whatever. And you know, took lots of action to show that, because I don't remember a time when I was part of a group that wanted something from the GLC that we didn't get. So that said a lot, the politics were open, upfront, and completely aligned with all that he did. Clearly supporting us around Troops Out, the miner's strike, all that sort of stuff. I was completely engaged with the sorts of the GLC. Any time I knew that there **imaginings (1:11:29 ??)**, as far as I was concerned they were the white men having trouble. Nothing to do with me.

NN: Looking back at that time, what for you was the most significant thing that you were involved in, or part of, through the GLC? Or the legacy of that time...

FO: The greatest legacy of that time was the proliferation of women-run organisations that were well resourced and just everywhere. Every borough had a women's centre. Some had two or three. There were childcare projects which released women to work and do other things, that was an incredible legacy. The expectation is that it's always been there, but we had to fight for that legacy. So I think it really contributed to the liberation of women, absolutely. No two ways about it.

NN: And you spoke a little bit earlier about the problems on creating dependency through funding? Can you elaborate on that?

FO: So the GLC funds all these women's projects. So the women's projects can recruit workers, so they're bigger and more effective. But then they become used to functioning with paid workers. So then when we approach abolition, and the funding starts to dry up... And it doesn't dry up immediately after abolition, there's the – they called it the London Strategic Policy Unit, and the London Residuary Body – those were the two things that lived on afterwards. So those organisations that would be funded by the GLC lived on for a while with little bits of funding. And that's

almost worse, because you don't go "Oh, we're going to be abolished tomorrow, everybody, fight fight fight, let's do this!" Because all our energy goes into that. And if we do this right we might keep our funding, and if we do that right we might keep our funding, and all that energy goes into keeping this little bit of money... So the problem is that by the time we've gone, we're tired and some of us have leeches away from the organisation and there's not enough money left. The entity is still there, but it's harder to be with so little [from what it] was before. You know, you only miss what you had. So we when we had no money we were okay, but when we were used to being funded, it was more difficult. There was the expectation of services without the money. I think there was a bit before we could get ourselves back up again after that. Which was a shame.

NN: And you said that you took on a particular role around the time of abolition, or before abolition – can you say a little bit about that?

FO: So the GLC is a public body. So I think they weren't allowed to be upfront campaigning. So there was an agency, a consultancy, I think it was called Paul Wormsley (?? 1:14:50) Associates, and Paul Wormsley must have just been given a big chunk of money, to run a campaign. So us campaign officers, us Women's Committee Support Unit officers went down into the basement to join B10 which had men in it, but anyway. So we joined this wider campaign and our task was to shore up the political campaign. To shore up by agitating the community, to run a campaign by getting them to get involved with the initiatives, protests, whatever else, and to get the money out. It was a bit naughty. It was great! So I was a paid activist basically, it was stuff that I would have done before and would do today for no money at all, and somehow they managed to get this consultancy.

NN: And B10 was the campaign to save the GLC?

FO: B for the basement. We were just down there, loads of us, all kind of grungy activists.

NN: And how did the wider communities feel about the fact that the GLC was going to be abolished?

FO: Well, you know, it depends on the political spectrum you were on, and how you felt about whether the GLC should be abolished or not. You know, if you were a woman with any consciousness, and if you minority ethnic person, or a lesbian or gay man, or an old person or a disabled person, or whatever, you felt the GLC was a jolly good thing. Which is why Ken [Livingstone] had been able to stage the coup in the first place. Because it had a very wide appeal. But if you were a raving Tory – some of the gay men were, to be fair – then obviously you thought the GLC was throwing people's money away and completely bonkers. So we made sure that we stayed in... That we understood were some of us came from and campaigned from over there. It was very simple, really – do you benefit from what it does or don't you? Well, there would be a few people who politically thought it was important to do right by people with disadvantage but mainly, it was those who were on the

sharp end that thought it was important that the GLC survived. It's not very different from the way politics are now, in 2017.

NN: And for you, how did that time shape who you are today? And how do you feel about it now?

FO: My time at the GLC and that entire period, so not just when I was at the GLC but everything that I did in the late seventies and early eighties gave me the voice, the ability to use the voice, and the language that I have today. That time gave me the confidence; it gave me the space to develop my thinking. And the GLC gave me the belief that things could be better, and that the establishment could be part of making it better. And the GLC helped me make the business that I have at the moment. The consultancy I have at the moment exists because I understood that you could persuade people to do things better by skillful negotiation and education. And the GLC paid me to do that at that time, and now a private company is paying me to do it.

NN: And how do you now relate to the criticisms from the wider women's liberation movement? In terms of that feeling that there was some people selling out, or that the establishment is not where change can happen...

FO: I have a lot of empathy for women who said that feminists were selling out. I think some of us, we were paid to do – you know, I became a professional feminist and a professional lesbian in many ways, there's no two ways about it. I think that they believe that we didn't mean our feminism anymore. That we took the money to do it and therefore we didn't believe in what we were doing anymore. And that's unfair, that wasn't true. If you're an artist, and someone pays you to paint a picture, that doesn't mean you don't believe in your art anymore. And it's possible that an artist will get paid to do some commercial art that they don't believe in. But we feminists who worked for the GLC, we weren't like that. We weren't being paid to do something we didn't believe in, we got paid to do the stuff we have done for nothing, anyway. We got paid to do the stuff – running around women's groups, getting them to campaign in order to get a fair bus tariff – I would have done that anyway. Running around taking newsletters to them and telling them about their rights, or helping them put on assertiveness classes, I would have done that anyway. So I think it wasn't fair to say most of us had sold out. But I can understand why they questioned why some of us were getting paid to do it, and some weren't.

NN: I guess now just to open it up, if there's other things you would like to say about your relationship to the GLC, I'm interested to know about what you went on to do after abolition.

FO: I think the GLC was an amazing period in our political history, the stand of it when Ken Livingstone ran it. I think the GLC changed the face of local government permanently, and for the better, and put equalities on the map in a way that no other organisation got anywhere close to doing. I went on to work for the London Borough of Haringey Lesbian and Gay Unit, the first lesbian and gay unit in the

country, only made possible by the GLC. The GLC helped register the first same-sex partnerships. They changed the lives of lesbians and gay men and paved the way for gay marriage. I know the Tories like to claim that they did that, but you know... Everything, from the bikes to the gay marriage, that was the GLC, that was Ken Livingstone, that was his baby, if you like. And I think a lot of people have forgotten that. So I went to the Haringey Lesbian and Gay Unit – and sadly Section 28 started, but that's a whole 'nother story. And then I left Haringey in 1988 and since then I run my own business. And I owe my ability to do that to 13 years on the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, and the time that I spent at the GLC.

NN: When I was telling you about the project, I was explaining that lots of young people, and certainly Black people, who are organising and who are activists don't know about the GLC. Why do you think it's been forgotten? What does it mean to you that that erasure has happened?

FO: I don't think the GLC has been forgotten, it's simply that the archives would have had to be hard copies. These days it would be all over the internet, and it would pop up every time – it would be like the Daily Mail website, you'd only be three clicks away at any given time. I think that it's a shame that its history is hidden. One of the reasons the GLC is gone is that the government at the time was determined to try and erase that legacy. Which is why the building was sold off with undue haste... And it was immoral to sell that building to owners outside of the country. I don't feel very much to list it, but I do feel that some things should belong here, to the people. So I think that that's another reason why the history and legacy hasn't stayed. And I think some people don't want to acknowledge that the things that they call results of their activism, things that are fruits of their labour, actually came to fruition because of the GLC. It's hard to give acknowledgement to the politicians, but in the case of the GLC I believe it's the right to thing.

NN: Yeah, it's definitely... My interest in doing this project and setting up this project was to hear people talking about an institution with such joy, and to have such – I can't think of any institution that I've grown up with that I can see in that way. Which brings me to my question of what your views of city-level democracy now are, and what the Greater London Assembly is?

FO: Well I think the Greater London Assembly has been quite disappointing, I think civil level democracy is a bit of a problem at the moment. I think that the current government's tactic of devolving power to some of the local government is basically just a way of tricking people into blaming those local authorities for austerity. I think that the soul is missing from city level politics at the moment. The GLC put the party into party politics man, they really knew what they were doing. I don't think we've seen anything like it since.

NN: Is there anything else you would like to put on record?

FO: I'd like to say... If I ever had enough money I'd buy County Hall back. It's still uncomfortable for me to walk past it and see it as a hotel and an aquarium and so

on. And I think that the GLC did create some local councils that were wonderful, and so we mustn't think that its legacy was entirely lost.

NN: And which ones?

FO: I think Manchester Council, Camden and Haringey, Leeds, and to an extent Birmingham. Places where the spirit of equality and inclusion continues long after the abolition of the GLC. Glasgow!

NN: Amazing. Well, I think we're ready to end the recording now, if that's okay with you.

FO: That's fine with me.