

Interview for Rainbow Jews on 15 October 2013

Interviewer: Surat Knan

Interviewee: Linda Bellos

Transcriber: Alison Turner

Track A: 0:00:00:0 - 0:03:23:0 Brief biography

I was born Linda Adibowali, my mother was Jewish, my father was Nigerian, lapsed Roman Catholic. I married a Jewish man in 1970, and kept his name for the sake of the children when we stopped being married in 1980. I loathe using my title of OBE, I only use it when trying to get businesses to get notions of equality. For about 30 years I have taught people about Equality law, Diversity Solutions, I teach people like the Cabinet Office, with my partner before she got ill. Also we worked with government departments, senior police service, lots of organisations. We try to make them aware without feeling guilty, tell people what the law is, and what equality is. Get people to read Acts, show them how to implement them and what happens when we don't do it. Caroline, my partner, describes me as a teacher, I wouldn't describe myself that way. I do enjoy reading things and explaining to people in practical ways what they are required to do.

Track A: 0:03:24:0 – 0:07:41:0 Background and upbringing

My family sat Shiva for my mother when she got married, they disowned her. She did keep in contact, she was aware of my grandfather dying in 1953 or 54. One of the last things I did with mother was take her to her grandparents' grave, they did not know me or want to know me or my brother. She left a stone for each of them and I've been subsequently. They are my ancestors. I have a strong sense of being Jewish and a strong sense of being African, they are not in competition, all part of me, I also define myself as English, I know English culture. I remember people telling me to go back home, it was lawful until 1968, still people discriminate. My parents were very much in love, less so as they got older. I watched the Eichmann trial on television with mother, it changed my life because I asked myself what would I have done, being a Jew in Europe? Would I deny being Jewish, it's not the first thing people think of me? I was 11 or 12 years old, I resolved never to deny being Jewish. It would give Hitler a posthumous victory every time any one of us denied who we are. It made a big difference to me at my core, the same way when coming out as a lesbian, do not deny anything that you are, my mother taught me that.

Track A: 0:07:42:0 – 0:09:16:0 Mother

She was such a good woman, a moral woman, a good socialist, working-class woman who was not educated, she simply had wisdom and courage. Many of my contemporaries whose fathers were Black, African or Caribbean, their parents were not married. My parents were married though mother thought she couldn't have children. They got married 6 June 1949, I was born 13 December 1950, so they wanted a baby. She didn't get pregnant till 9 months after marriage, they didn't have to get married, they definitely wanted children.

Track A: 0:09:17:0 – 0:13:14:0 Parents and coming out

Mother eventually divorced father when she was coming up to retirement, he'd already retired, she arranged where they were both going to live, very close together. The family dynamics changed, I was already not speaking to father, I came out as a lesbian around the same time. I came out in 1980, they divorced in 1984. The first person I came out to was my mother, she was in the kitchen, father was in the sitting room. In those days I smoked, I remember pacing saying "Mum I've got something to tell you," puff, puff, puff. I said "Mum, I'm a lesbian" and she said "I thought you were going to say that", she was amazing. I don't think I spoke to my father thereafter, I can't

remember exactly. I've been reading his correspondence with family in Nigeria, it's clear he was not speaking to me. I found him so difficult, now I know he had Alzheimer's, I didn't know at the time, I thought he was a grumpy old man. Mother died 3 years before him in 1997, the year of the election. She was so looking forward to being able to vote Labour, she died a month before but Labour won anyway. I took my Dad to the Jewish funeral, he looked bewildered. The whole family was there, grandchildren, son and my brother's boys, though one died of meningitis at only 21.

Track A: 0:13:15:0 – 0:16:55 Father

After my mother died, my father's condition got worse, I had to be his primary carer. At first he could phone me, shortly he forgot what it was. He thought his bank had moved and taken his money because NatWest had changed their sign when they rebranded. I got my brother to be a signatory to his account. My brother lived in Reading, I lived in South London, I would take mother shopping, she lived in Wembley, he was just round the corner. I would take her to Ikea, to Hendon and Brent Cross and we would have lunch. Then it was very similar with Dad. After she died he got more and more confused, it became clear he couldn't live on his own. I had always sworn as a matter of duty that my parents would never go into old people's homes and I would not abandon them. I had a discussion with other lesbian feminists, honour thy father and mother, usually it is the woman who does it. (Cries) Sorry, I miss my Mum and Dad, it's such a long time, my father died 13 years ago, my Mum 16 and I don't think there's a day when I don't think of them or talk about them. I'm not ashamed to cry, I grew to love my father especially as he grew more vulnerable, it was like having a baby.

Track A: 0:16:56 – 0:22:01:0 Father's illness

He said it one day “you are my mother now” through his Alzheimer's. I can't bear abuse of children and women by men because they can, it doesn't have to be like that. We choose to do ill, and can choose to be good, my parents taught me that. I feel a Jewish duty to do good, given a choice and mostly we have a choice. So I looked after him but as he got more ill there were things I couldn't do for him because he was a man and because he was my father. So I found a nursing home near where I lived, where staff were Yoruba. He was forgetting to speak English so I knew there would be staff who could speak to him. He was happy there, I visited every day. Before he moved I would make African soup, make sure he ate. He was smoking, dropping cigarettes into food, there were fires. So we had to move him. In the first nursing home he had to be restrained, he hated it there. He went to St Thomas's Hospital, Alzheimer's was confirmed which meant he could go into a nursing home and the State paid. My brother was paying for the care home, but it all worked out incredibly well. It was close to where I lived, I could visit every day, sometimes I took my granddaughter, his great granddaughter. My daughter's Rachel, her daughter Hannah was 2 or 3. All the old people's faces would light up when I took her. My father was the only Black person there after a few months, but there were staff. They would heat up food, he forgot what he ate, he ate John Bull food he called it, English food. It made me laugh to see him eating food he would never eat the rest of his life. I didn't have a problem, I always had elders and babies, I called them family.

Track A: 0:22:02:0 – 0:23:37:0 Father's family

So I grew up without a large family, I only had parents, my father's family was in Nigeria, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts. His parents died before he came to England in 1943, during the war. He had jumped ship, he was in the Merchant Marine. He joined up in 1939, he was taking food to South Africa, Apartheid was not officially in place, but there was a colour bar so only whites were allowed off the ship. He was torpedoed three times, he had to swim for his life. When he found out white sailors were getting twice the amount that African sailors got, he jumped ship in Liverpool.

Track A: 0:23:37:0 – 0:24:12:0 Father's arrival in England

In Liverpool, there were huge amounts of racism. He'd tell me these stories, with my uncle David they had to walk down the street together or get beaten up, that was British racism. Then he was a tailor's presser in Manchester, Jewish men would give him work where English men wouldn't. I don't know if that had an influence.

Track A: 0:24:13:0 – 0:26:49:0 Family life

My parents met in 1948 or 49 at the Trocadero Dance Hall in Leicester Square, they fell in love. He invited her round to dinner – roast lamb – which meant a pot of water in which he'd put a joint of lamb. He had no idea how to cook English food. Anyway they got married. My Mum's Jewish background and my Dad's Catholic background didn't clash, because they were both lapsed, neither was practising, but their moral codes remained. There was no friction around colour or religion. I do remember my Dad absolutely abhorring my mother's hygiene standards. Things looked worse after she'd cleaned them. From an early age, I watched my father cleaning an aluminium pot, he'd scoured it so it was completely clean and shiny. No wonder he had Alzheimer's, he was eating aluminium which I learnt not to do, but then I could afford stainless steel. My mother's standards of hygiene were less than perfect, she couldn't cook either. Her chicken soup was great, her fried fish was fabulous but anything else that was English was dreadful, she didn't have much interest in cooking, which was fine. My father cooked, I learnt to cook and my brother can now cook.

Track A: 0:26:50:0 – 0:28:54:0 Domestic violence

My father would gamble his wages away, giving my mother a small amount of housekeeping for us, but there would be rows about that. He was a complete chauvinist believing that the man had the power and my mother put up with it, verbally she wouldn't put up with it, but he would hit her sometimes. About 13 I started growing tall and strong and I found it completely unacceptable and I would stand up literally nose-to-nose to my father so he wouldn't hit my mother. I was quite happy for him to hit me cos I would have killed him. He was of course much stronger than me and I couldn't hit him but I knew he couldn't really hit me cos I was standing up to him. Later I discovered from things he had written that he quite admired me for standing up to him. I don't like violence against women. I don't like violence against anybody, I don't think I can tolerate it. If men want to box and put gloves on, that's a totally different thing, 2 men matched to each other. I don't want to go and see it necessarily but I don't have a problem with the so-called sport of boxing. But the culture in which men think it is acceptable to beat women or children is not one that I welcome. I don't remember him ever hitting us. So it was a kind of strange traditional family, violence in families was not unusual.

Track A: 0:28:55:0 – 0:30:41:0 My brother

I don't think it influenced my choice of job or campaign. My parents were socialists, they were moral people who would speak in practical terms about things and that has influenced my brother and I in different ways. I left home when he was 17 and I was 19, we didn't live together, we would spend some time with our families together but we are remarkably similar, so I imagine that's the influence of our parents. My brother abhors violence against women, he's aware as a big Black man he might be intimidating, even though he's as soft as a kitten but by appearance and bearing in mind the kind of propaganda out there, he is conscious of that and he adjusts his behaviour accordingly, not because he is violent, not at all, but because some women might fear that he will, he makes sure he gives space. These are not conversations we've had, I've observed him doing that and know it comes from a capacity to work stuff out. I have a similar capacity to make sure, because I might be perceived as a man.

Track A: 0:30:42:0 – 0:32:49:0 Body image and self defence

I have short hair, well I had big hair when everyone had big hair, these days, in the last 10 or more years I've worn my hair very short. I've been called Sir when I was 8 months pregnant, so it's not unusual for me to be perceived as a man. So I have to take that into account, I have to do or say things. One of the things I used to do, wearing a jacket, sometimes, this was years ago before I stopped menstruating, I used to keep a Tampax in my top pocket and when I went into the loo I'd say "Do you want me to change this in front of you?" in order to demonstrate a point. My Dad taught us how to box, he taught Frank and I, he didn't just teach Frank, I can still box. I have to take my glasses off cos I don't want them to get broken and I lean forwards and put my fists up and most men move away specially if they think I mean it and frankly I do. One thing I got from my parents, my Mum was a good runner, she was an athlete. You should know when to run, when to fight and when to talk your way out of difficulty. That's wisdom and I still think being able to fight is important should I need it. I haven't needed to do it in decades but I have sometimes had to square up to people where they are seeking to intimidate me or some other person who is weaker than them and I feel I am duty-bound to do everything in my power to resist that, even if it means threatening violence, if that is the only thing that they understand.

Track A: 0:32:50:0 – 0:34:10 Anger and fury

I was an Angry Woman and I was and I remain very angry about, it will make me cry again, but I see vulnerable children being abused, raped and beaten by adults who should know better and I am furious. Anger doesn't sum it up, I am furious. Children, girls 16, 17, 19 years old, young women who are raped routinely, who are incited to take their clothes off and exploit their bodies for men's gratification, of course I'm bloody angry, why shouldn't I be angry at the degradation of human beings? And I will, I think, maybe, kill myself at the point where I stop being angry.

Track A: 0:34:11 – 0:35:46:0 Introduction to feminism

What inspired me and changed my consciousness, the first feminist book that changed my life was *Against our will* by Susan Brownmiller. I read it as part of my university course, a man, my tutor had recommended it. I was very surprised, I wasn't a feminist when I went to university. It resonated with me, the extent to which the threat of men's violence had impinged on the lives of every child, every girl child, young woman, every middle-aged woman, every older woman, and the extent to which it didn't have to be all of them, it only needed to be some of them and for the culture to both praise and demonise. The effect of demonising was also to frighten, to hold all women in fear, I was really angry about that. So that book changed my life and I used to say of Jonathan, my husband, that he's different, but a couple of years earlier to me reading that book.

Track A: 0:35:47:0 – 0:37:49 Husband and family

We got married 13 June 1970, I don't remember the date we separated, as a rough estimate it was in 1977. My son was born in 74, my daughter Rachel was born November 10 1976, and within 3 months of her being born I was pregnant again. I made a decision very quickly to have a termination, even though I don't like abortion, it has to be every woman's right to choose, so in part that slogan started to resonate with me. It felt to me like my life would be over if I had a third child, I would have 3 children under 3 years old. I resolved to have a termination, take my driving test and apply to university and I did all of those three things.

Track A: 0:37:50:0 – 0:42:05:0 Termination

I took driving lessons and I passed my test 1st time, I applied to Sussex University to become a mature, unqualified student and I got in, and I had a termination. I still think of that termination, I know many Roman Catholics think, this was a life. As a feminist I knew this was part of my change of consciousness. I'm not sure I was a feminist then, I was growing into it. I was conscious of "it was my body". It was my right to say "I cannot, I must not for the sake of my existing children, for my psychological well being, to have had 3 little children, it would have buried me". Some women can do it, all praise to them, great, I wasn't one of them. Maybe I would have been if I'd already been to university, done some of the things I needed to do but I felt that if I had 3 small children I wouldn't get to do some of the things I aspired to do. So I took control of my life, it happened that one of my friends was married to a doctor and I asked him to be one of the signatories because my GP was an anti-abortion Catholic woman and we got somebody else to be the other signatory. This was within the 3 months, obviously we had longer but I didn't want the foetus to grow, the sooner I did that thing the better.

So I did it and I don't regret it, I know that it was part of my liberation. The growth of anger at the way men sought and still seek to control our bodies through pregnancy, through controlling whether and when we can terminate something that is growing within us and I will call that growth a baby, I don't have a problem with that. But I had a choice and I exercised that choice, it was the right choice and I want to support and defend every woman's choice, whether she chooses to keep the baby and to go to full-term or not. So these are the things that helped me become a feminist, they were the background, Susan Brownmiller gave me the wider connections. I didn't do this entirely on my own, the Queen's Park community organisation had some really good women in it who were feminists. I would have recognised the word and probably would have said I wasn't a feminist but when my personal experience came up against the limitations that society placed on me as a woman the more credible these arguments became and eventually the penny dropped. So I began to be somewhat critical of men and of the man I had married, who even today likes and feels the need to be dependent and to deny the power that he exercises.

Track A: 0:42:06:0 – 0:43:19:0 Power

That's a problem and I am quite clear about that myself. There are times when I exercise power and I do not deny it. There's no point trying to bullshit and pretend that you're not exercising power or trying to, that's what you're doing. Let people know, they can then exercise a choice to resist you or confront you or whatever. I'm moving ahead in some ways, that was a problem I had with the Women's Liberation Movement, those women who would not acknowledge that they were exercising power, but in fact they were. We all know where we stand when someone is openly saying "this is what I'm seeking to do", you can say "I hear you but I'm going to disagree, confront you, oppose you". So I learnt eventually, well maybe fairly quickly, I went through this very rapid process and another thing happened for me.

Track A: 0:43:20:0 – 0:45:13:0 First lesbian love

I fell in love with a woman. How did that happen? It was a long time ago, 33 years ago, a lifetime, not mine but someone's. I'd always played football, I was in Sussex University's Football Team. The penny dropped that the feelings I had towards a particular woman was love. In my head it was like "What the hell is this, what's going on?" It hadn't occurred to me despite the fact lots of women. A friend later told me she saw me and thought I was a lesbian and I said "Why the bloody hell didn't you tell me?" cos I didn't know. So it was unrequited love but I did tell her how I felt. She wasn't interested in me because she'd just been left by a woman who'd gone back to men and I could quite see why she would not want to touch me with a bargepole, in the sense that I was still married. But

the consciousness thing then became, over weeks, for me when I thought the feelings I have for this woman are real, how come I didn't know this before?

Track A: 0:45:14:0 – 0:46:39 Finding lesbian community

Then I thought about what subsequently I would name compulsory heterosexuality. I didn't call it that then cos I didn't know those words, that concept, but I certainly felt it and was able to articulate to myself that I did fancy women and not long after I took myself to a club in Brighton, well a women's night at a community centre. It felt fine, absolutely fine, it was like coming home. Most of the women were lesbian feminists, and I identified as a butch in the old traditional way, I just did, I clicked just like that. I think I mean really I'd always been a lesbian, I just didn't know it. From then on it was crystal clear within weeks.

Track A: 0:46:40:0 – 0:48:31 Effect on existing family

This is a really difficult bit. I wanted Jon to move out, to leave, and he wouldn't, so I moved out to a women's house. I went to live in the same road so I could see the children every day. Within weeks he stopped me seeing the children every day. It escalated, I'd see the children every day, pick them up from school and all that stuff I was doing previously and he said no and stopped me seeing them. We went through an absolutely terrible custody battle and battle for me to see them, awful. I don't want to dwell on it for my children's sake but eventually when my children had a choice, in their teenage years and earlier, I got the right to see them once a month and then when they were older, later separately, they both came to live with me. It was very difficult though and very difficult not to badmouth him but we see each other in relation to our children and our grandchildren. When my first grandchild was born, the first thing I did was ring him up and say "we've got a little girl" and that's Hannah who's now 18, coming up to 19. So it's history, I don't want to dwell on it, mainly because of my children even though they're grown up now. It was terribly painful, more so for them, it was awful for me, really heartbreaking.

Track A: 0:48:32:0 – 0:50:33:0 Lesbian activism and the NAC

I came out as a lesbian at university, joined SLUGS – Sussex Lesbian University Group – terrible name. I went to a conference or seminar or workshop on abortion run by NAC – National Abortion Campaign with my then girlfriend, I went up to London on the back of her bike. This was soon after we started having the relationship, a cold Saturday morning. I remember being quite moved by the politics of NAC, making connections but also feeling clearer about the systematic way men controlled women's fertility and bodies. So that helped me form my feminism but I soon outgrew it because one of the things I did notice, as I became more familiar with feminism, was the extent to which lesbians were doing the hard work, always in the background, being told to keep quiet about our sexuality. So we could do the work but it would frighten the horses if we mentioned that we were lesbians. I found that a little problematic, this was at a theoretical level.

Track A: 0:50:34:0 – 0:51:48:0 University education

I did finish my degree, I forgot to do one paper, I got a third, I wasn't that bothered, though I had got a provisional place to do a Ph.D. at Birmingham University. I was going to do something about women and feminism. I've lost all the papers now. It doesn't really matter, it isn't a big deal. I'm rather glad I didn't, cos I did a lot of other things instead. I did like the academic work but I did come across too many academics who were feminists and it was insular and theoretical and at a level most women could not understand and therefore it left me cold. The exception was about violence against women, that was about and remains about all women. I was then and now mainly interested in the things which are universal rather than things that are particular.

Track A: 0:51:49:0 – 0:55:32:0 Marxism

So what did I do? So having left University with my 3rd degree, it wasn't a big deal (laughs), you say you have a degree, which I have, people rarely ask you what bloody grade? So it isn't a big deal, I was really not bothered but a bit relieved not to be doing academic stuff. I think I'm a bit ambivalent, the luxury of study, the time and structure and deadlines is very useful and maybe I would have benefited but I was very much a practical Marxist as opposed to a theoretical Marxist and I remember the Marx I read at university helped particularly and I must give Caroline a copy. The Paris manuscripts, the 1844 economic and philosophical manuscripts of Marx were not published until 1932 and in England 1972. So most Marxists including my in-laws who were lifelong Communist Party members, had not read and didn't know about this strand of Marx and some people had critiqued it saying it was immature Marx. It isn't, it's absolutely profound stuff, very much in the spirit of the feminist analysis. I do remember, to paraphrase, I'm not quoting here, Marx's ideal, it was all about men, that a man will fish in the morning and work in the afternoon, or vice-versa, this notion that it's not all about life, what we are striving for and seeking is balance in nature of survival as well as intellectual and physical well being. I thought "spot on". I read Marx, well I read Das Kapital when I was 13, bloody hard, turgid language but it contains a description of man-made systems, and I emphasise, not just human but man-made systems of exploitation. And if they can be made, it follows they can be unmade. So I became a Marxist at a very early age, theoretically. This was with the International Marxist Group, bloody Stalinists, by about 14 or 15 I had left, I can't remember, it might have been older. I remember joining Gerry Healey's bunch at Clapham Common selling the Daily Worker outside Woolworths in Brixton. I'd knock on the door of my staffroom at school to sell the Morning Star to my teachers, one of whom I remember saying to me "I'd like to see you in 10 years time. I bet you're not a Marxist then." Well I continue to be 30-40 years later.

Track A: 0:55:33:0 – 0:56:57:0 Finding my feminism

So I was looking for a feminism that was not just personal, it wasn't just about men. I was looking for something universal, that applied to all women, just as Marx was talking about an analysis of power systems that impacted on all. Of course his limitations were where were the women? Where were the ethnic minorities that were being exploited by capitalism? His viewpoint was far too narrow and I was looking for something that would be much broader, I wanted it to be universal, not just now we'd include women, which is what some feminists have done, they leave out class, race and ethnicity looking in this very narrow way. I think I did find the universal thing that impacted on all women in different ways and that was sexual violence, violence against women.

Track A: 0:56:58:0 – 1:00:26:0 Violence against women

Soon after, I joined Women Against Violence Against Women. In 1981 I went to Leeds to a conference, I can't remember whose conference, I was an Angry Woman. I did an interview with BBC Radio 4 on the Sunday of that event, I think my name was Rachel Brown and I talked live on air, gave a critique of why we had done what we had done. I'm not going to say any more now, because I felt that our message needed to be wider. It wasn't just about feminists doing this, we were reacting to and protesting at men's violence against women. We were doing so for all women and because you couldn't keep this secret, you could not do it as a little cell going round doing things, actions, it had to be connected, again this is my Marxism, to the commonality of people who are oppressed i.e. women. So the Revolutionary Feminist Group, that's Sheila Jeffries and there was a whole host of women, Lou Lavender, Leeds, there was some good stuff in Leeds. I think probably I was the only Black woman in that group at that time. I think I was the first Black woman, maybe still am. The group isn't really functioning any more though women are doing lots of important things. I think some of Sheila's ideas now, particularly on trans are appalling and I've said so to her

recently. I still agree with her on violence against women and her critique of compulsory heterosexuality but some of her politics I find highly problematic. That's now, at the time, talking about the 1980s, I found that the work around violence against women had the potential to be unifying because it did at least impinge in different ways on us, the ways in which racism and violence against women has been used and is used, there are different ways in which violence is manifest but it has the capacity of uniting the men who are doing it and the women to whom it is done. At that time the Queen had a visitor in her bedroom, a man, I don't remember his name and I don't want to give him any more publicity, but he really did get into Buckingham Palace, which only goes to show that not one of us as a female is exempt from the threat or fear of men's violence.

Track A: 1:00:27:0 - 1:02:29:0 Collective action

So that's what I thought at the time, I'm not suggesting it's the only issue but it remains an important tool by which we might change society and galvanise. There had been the stuff about the Miss World beauty contest and the high-profile political stuff the Oxbridge women did, which had its place, but it didn't really get to some of the women earning a living, they were working-class women who wanted to get on and earn a few bob. I'm not suggesting I endorse what they were doing, but I do understand why women work in the sex industry, sometimes willingly, but that doesn't make it right, that for some women it's the only option. So I began developing an understanding, a strategy with other women, one of the things I did enjoy and wrote about at the time, was the process of collective action. That collective action might be writing a paper, I'm not talking about counter actions against men, more the ideas that we developed needed, in the view of revolutionary feminists, to be capable of being universalised, and I think the critique was right, the critique of looking at men's violence against women and the part it played in our subjugation.

Track A: 1:02:30:0 – 1:09:02:0 Spare Rib, Israel and Lebanon

I didn't work as an individual, I was in WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) and at that time I was working at Spare Rib. I was the first Black woman to be on the collective and in part I left that collective because of Israel's invasion of Lebanon and the anti-Semitism. There's anti-Israel critique I think that is entirely legitimate and a lot of it went over into anti-Jewish stuff by a woman who didn't necessarily know that that's what they were doing, but they were mouthing sentiments and ideas which have been uttered for centuries and have justified and underpinned pogroms and a number of us felt it. It's not something we saw merely theoretically it felt like we were being asked to deny. We had to say where we stood on Israel. Now my position had been and remains fairly clear. I will not set foot in Israel until there is a lasting settlement and the Palestinian peoples have autonomy and freedom and self-determination but I do uphold Israel's right to exist, in the same way as I uphold the United States of America. These are people who came from another place to settle, some of them in the Promised Land. We don't say that Australia or Canada or America should not exist because these people came and were usurped.

It is more recent that Israel was settled in this way, in particular I'm talking about post 1948, I'm not talking about the Balfour Declaration or any of that stuff which I know is problematic but it has been a long history and each year we pray for "Next year in Jerusalem", that's not for nothing, it has not a political but a spiritual meaning. As I say I won't go to Israel, I can't, I feel politically that I can't, but I absolutely support Israel's right to exist. That's the argument we had, a number of us, some of the women that have been interviewed for this project. Some of us came together then because we knew that it wasn't like we were being personally attacked, but we were almost being invited to deny being Jewish and I've already told you my story, that I'm that I'm never NEVER going to deny anything like that. Our families went to the gas chambers, members of my ...(breaks off) even if I didn't know that that was the case, it doesn't matter whether I know. Human beings have for centuries sought to stick to a covenant, an understanding, a faith, their relationship with

each other and their relationship with God and at the margins, I'm part of that and I cannot and will not deny who I am, any part of who I am, including being a lesbian, including being a feminist, including being a Marxist. They're all an integral part of who I am, and I cannot and will not deny. There's nothing you could do to me to make me deny who I am. These are part of who I am, and I would be dishonouring my mother, so I resigned from the collective. Spare Rib was a collective, I couldn't, it just got so intolerable. I wasn't the only Jewish woman there but I was the only one who would stand up and take a position. I took a position, I lost friends and in fact when I go to Ireland I'm going to meet up with one of those friends who I lost at that time. We're talking 30 or something years ago. Roisin Boyd, an Irishwoman who took the leftist position on Israel. We knew the position, I'm not condemning her, I understand, but I don't think she was right. We've been Facebooking or whatever it is, and she's in Dublin and my partner's from Dublin, so we're going there, I just booked the flights yesterday. I hope to see her and we might talk about that Spare Rib thing or we might not. It's such a long time ago but it still feels painful, not raw so much as painful to remember the feelings cos these were women, we had all worked together, we loved each other, I don't mean in a sexual way, the solidarity of fighting together and being comrades.

Track A: 1:09:03:0 – 1:11:05:0 Spare Rib and other international issues

I was at odds with a lot of Spare Rib because it was so bloody white and middle-class, it was so narrow and English. It would do what I called travelogues, feminist travelogues and when they came in to me or any that were contributed I would go "send them back". If you're going to go to South America or wherever they were bloody well going, no we don't want a piece from you, but if you want to put us in contact with local women to talk about their story, I'm quite happy to hear from them. But more and more of these bloody travelogues, the luxury of someone who's got 2 weeks holiday who thinks they are now going to tell us what it's like to be a peasant woman in Nicaragua or somewhere. I was not well loved among my collective members because I was the only Black woman and I wanted it to be not with a hint of the exotic. Spare Rib was meant to be about all women, all of us and there was a view about white middle-class women speaking on behalf of working-class white women, not understanding the Irish struggle. There were so many international things that brought many of us and our families to this country and if you are coming from this privileged narrow milieu, don't be surprised if those of us who understand what you're doing, don't approve. I understand it, I could see what they were doing, I bloody well grew up with it, I had a class analysis.

Track A: 1:11:06:0 – 1:14:10:0 Lambeth Inner City Consultative Group

After I left Spare Rib, I had a short period of being unemployed and then I got a job, near where I live. I worked for Lambeth Inner City Consultative Group – LICC it was called. It was an organisation that had money from the government, there had been the uprising in 1981, this was inner-city money, Michael Heseltine had been Secretary of State, he made sure that places like Lambeth, Toxteth and others like St Pauls, had a bit of money to help community groups to do things for themselves. My job was community accountant, cos I'd worked for the Inland Revenue previously, before I went to university, my job in LICC was to empower groups, get them to understand what they needed to do to receive money, spend it properly and account for it. Some of the issues around employing staff, they had legal duties, somebody might be your friend, but you are now technically, the employer, they are the employee, they have rights, you have duties and responsibilities. So teaching people how to use the money in the manner that was intended, enabling, facilitating, supporting them. Without that you really are giving people money for them to fail. They don't know what to do, how to manage, but they could know if somebody teaches them, shares with them. So that's what I did because I do have a tendency to work out how the bloody system works, read the law, interpret the law, put the law into practice, and it is public money, it has

to be accounted for. I still, I'll say it as passionately today as I did 30 or 40 years ago, it's public money. We can't do what we wish with it, if you get the money, just like you're getting the money for this Archive, if you get the money, you have to do the thing that you said you were going to do. You might need to be supported in order to do it and my job particularly for groups who had never received money before, was to enable them. We wanted the groups, not the ones who always got the money, but the voices who never got heard, the working-class Caribbean group, working-class Asian group, working-class groups of women etc. So I had great fun, literally going round to groups to meet with them, sometimes to troubleshoot because they hadn't done their employment stuff correctly and then needing to work out "what to do I do here? What does the constitution say? What does law say? and then translating that into practical action. I really enjoyed it.

Track A: 1:14:11:0 – 1: 17:59:0 Greater London Council

Then I saw the job at the Greater London Council for a team leader on Equalities and Grant Monitoring, which was the combination of two things that I was doing, the equalities stuff and the money stuff. So I applied there. This is mirroring my memoirs, cos I'm writing them at the moment, the dates are more readily to hand because I've been having to look them up. The Greater London Council job was much better paid, although the one I had in Lambeth, that was I think £14,000 which was quite a lot of money in those days, 1982, big bucks. However, the job I got at the Greater London Council was even more, about a third more again. So it was a relatively big salary, Team Leader. I enjoyed it a lot except that my bosses were awful, and I was picked on and bullied. This was within months of going there, I think partly because I was well-known in the Women's Liberation Movement, reasonably well-respected, I think in some quarters feared. I was quite robust and I was making some headway on getting the GLC Finance Department people to relax and set realistic criteria for letting money go. Because I think previously, I can't remember what it was, but they were something like 45% or more, might have been higher, a lot of the money the Committee had approved, the officers wouldn't let out. I was working with groups to help them meet conditions of grants so that they could get the money and I set myself a target in doing that, that was fine.

But where there was conflict was around me managing two of the women in my team, they'd been there before, certainly before I got there. They didn't want to be managed and I think one of them called me a half-breed. They were homophobic and the two bosses of the unit supported them. That was interesting. A particular irony, two years later I became their boss because the GLC was abolished and the Councils, the Labour Councils in London took over and I became the Chair of the Strategic Body to which they reported. I didn't use anything personal against them, as far as I was concerned they were an irritant, they personally were, but the work of the Women's Unit was important and we supported it and the work of the Ethnic Minority Unit included Black History Month which I helped inaugurate.

Track A: 1:18:00:0 – 1:19:37:0 Black History Month

So I both approved it and the funding for it, and hosted it at the Commonwealth Institute in 1987. Sally Mugabe was our Guest of Honour. I'm pleased that we launched it, I'm disappointed in what happened to it subsequently, which is Black History Month becoming any manner of rubbish which had a hint or tint of spice, as opposed to what it should have been doing, which is uncovering history and showing that history. But I did a lot of work myself in later years uncovering that history. People like Dr Harold Moody, he was one of the first Black doctors, he came from the Caribbean. I think he came before the First World War and was a doctor during that war. His own children were doctors and they served as officers in the Second World War. There were lots of people, William Cussey, John Archer, I didn't discover them all, but lots of my colleagues discovered these people of African origin, from the Caribbean or from Continental Africa, who had made a contribution to British life and who had been hidden from that history. The good thing about

Black History Month was the intention to be part of, not to be in the front, but as part of that history, the social history of Britain.

Track A: 1:19:38:0 – 1:23:19:0 Trans, lesbians and gay men

That's completely consistent with everything I've been saying about how my parents brought me up and who I am. We're here to stay and our history cannot and should not be rewritten and obliterated. So I've taken a consistent view with relation to my Jewishness, even my Judaism. I seek to do it again soon in relation to my feminism. There are things I want to publish which may help the current generation of younger women who are embracing feminism. I think that some of the mess we're in, in the LGBT community exists among the feminist lesbians who are anti trans. Seems to me, they're not all, but some women remain disrespectful, hostile particularly to male-female trans people and I find that repugnant. There's not a milder word I can use. I may understand the logic, it doesn't mean I share it or like it. I think we have the duty to respect each personal choice that each of us makes about who we are and what we are. I feel passionately about it. I used to be anti-trans, in the early days of my feminism I was critical particularly of men transitioning to be women. A colleague I don't want to name, I met a trans woman a long time ago whose personal story moved me so much that I thought "who the hell am I to tell another human being who they are? I don't have the right and I must respect the right of every person to be all the things they are". So I changed my position on trans a long time ago, coming up to 20 years ago.

There's two things I must say, the group I was critical of initially were the traditional gay men who were cross-dressing, they were not transitioning from one gender to another, they were the drag queens and I do recognise and I did recognise that cross-dressing has been part of gay men's culture for centuries. Some of us who came to our lesbianism via feminism haven't really got the right to tell another group of people to rewrite their history for our benefit. So I changed my mind on that one too.

Track A: 1:23:20:0 – 1:26:44:0 Relationships

I'm not in many groups now, partly because Caroline is still recovering from cancer and I spend most of my time really as a full-time carer. We are number one in the register of civil partnerships in the London Borough of Southwark on 21 December 2006 or 07, I can't remember the year, doesn't matter. I also train the group of registrars there and in other places in London including Islington, but that woman chose not to attend. My first foray back into public life is writing my memoirs, trying to get that done. I do share platforms with Paris and various trans women and sometimes men and sometimes bisexual people who don't get much of a say in any of this. I'm not, to say I'm not hostile is an understatement. I seek an inclusive politics and there are things I don't approve of. I came across, in the early 2000s, a small group of older gay men who thought it was legitimate for them to have sexual relationships with boys. I'm not talking about 17 year olds, I'm talking about boys and I do not approve and I will never approve and I am positively hostile. So in saying what I'm for and what I'm against, I'm not an "anything goes". I have my moral stances and I have no moral reason to have any objection to anybody who transitions from one gender to another etc. because there's a whole baggage of stuff there, there are people who are intersex. There's a whole host of stuff and I don't have a critical thing to say, except I wish some people would get off their bloody high horse and accept that trans people are part of the world. So that's one area where I have changed my mind and my position in a feminist context in the last 30-35 years. I think that's the only one, I don't think I have changed in relation to any other issue. I definitely know that I have changed around trans.

Track A: 1:26:45:0 – 1: 28:12:0 Men

I think I've probably changed quite a lot about men, but that's because I think men have changed quite a lot, and I think men have changed quite a lot because of our influence. I think that there is a cohort of men, our sons, I might have to exclude my own son, but Caroline's at least, who are conscious and aware, no actually Max is as well, conscious and aware of men's power and sexism and don't willingly take it on or see it as an important part of themselves. I think lots of the feminists have sons, or those of us who do have sons who tend to be pretty good. There's a lot, a growing number of young men, younger I can say that in my 60s, when I say younger I'm talking about somebody under 50, who take different views to that which their fathers and grandfathers would have had. I think the feminists need to be cognizant of that but it still doesn't mean that those men should lead or even join the Women's Liberation Movement. I'd quite like them to join a Men's Liberation Movement. Start it, get more men to join it, then we can work together.

Track A: 1:28:13:0 – 1:29:13:0 Lesbians and feminism

But the issue is still women who need to be working with other women who need to, as it were, come out as feminists. I hope some of them will come out as lesbians as well, but that's another matter. I don't want to recruit anyone to be a lesbian for any other reason than she loves women. I don't think there's political benefit in someone being a lesbian if that's not where their heart lies. It will only cause hurt to themselves and others. Is that a change of mind? No, I do rather feel like I am a lesbian and a feminist, or a feminist and a lesbian as opposed to a lesbian feminist, if you know what I mean. Cos they are different and you can be a feminist without being a lesbian or a lesbian without being a feminist.

Track A: 1:29:14:0 – 1:32:00:0 Lesbian Jewish identity

My lesbian Jewish identity is a kind of underpinning, particularly the Jewish bit and my African stuff. They underpin my moral code, I think that's the chief thing, the guidance of what's right and what's wrong. When you have to think about something, the tools, the framework will be one of inclusion and I hope awareness and sensitivity. Not merely to my particular and specific experience and heritage but hopefully that of others as well whose experience I may not directly know, although I'm a bit duty-bound to have some knowledge, just being ignorant and not reading anything is no (breaks off) If you can read then you should read, then why aren't you finding out? It doesn't mean I want to be an expert but I want to have some knowledge of the experience of Palestinian people in the disputed territories and in Israel and in Palestine. I feel I have some need to have awareness, I can use my critical faculties, but just not to know something is to be ignorant actually. We're all human beings, who was it, Lionel Blue, I quote him often, "we have to remember we are Jewish, God isn't." It's so true and it's a good principle to light your life by in relation to other people. We don't have to have personal ownership or protected ownership, to deny other people. Jews have a way of, in a sense, limiting, you can convert in and some people say you can't but it's not easy. You don't just call yourself a Christian, to be Jewish there are processes, legal processes. For most other faiths that's not the case and I'm not sure how relevant that is. I happen to be Jewish, that's how it is, what can I say?

Track A: 1:32:01:0 – 1:32:59:0 Circumcision

My brother doesn't identify as Jewish, even though he's as Jewish as I am legally and he was circumcised. My son hasn't been and my grandson hasn't been and it breaks my heart. Caroline doesn't understand why I get so upset. Nigerian men are circumcised, my father was a Catholic, he was circumcised, my son is not, well he is now actually, he had it for medical reasons. He said "you'll be pleased Mum". (laughs) I am, I am, so my son finally is a man, he's circumcised but it

should have been done before 8 days.

Track A: 1:33:00:0 – 1:35:34 Career as a public figure

I don't know when I became the public figure Linda Bellos, probably when I rejoined the Labour Party but I had done high-profile things previously. I had written things, been in magazines, newspapers, before I became Leader of Lambeth Council. In fact the Daily Mail spent quite some money, researching things I'd written and quoting things I'd written previously. I don't know, I'm not sure I even really care. The likes of the Daily Mail found me a godsend. There I was all-in-one, all the things they hated, socialist, lesbian, Jewish, Black, working-class, a gift to them. However aside from the jokes, those labels have given me some insights and experiences of what the world might look like if we were more able to be all of the things that we are. So I'm not desperately interested in my profile, sometimes I can be a bit sensitive. There's some LBGT list and I wasn't on it, this is only 2-3 days ago, my partner was reading it out from an iPhone or something and I felt a bit upset, but actually apparently I'm a national treasure. (laughs) So that's just ego, it's all bloody silly and for me it's utterly irrelevant.

Track A: 1:35:35:0 – 1:38:31:0 Duty and Speaking truth to power

I tell you what matters is whether you do your duty when nobody's looking, that's what matters, it doesn't matter what the media says of you or thinks of you. My relationship with I would say god with a little g is that I had to do my duty when nobody's looking, in my heart I have to do the right thing and that means to speak up, even if I'm the only person to speak up. If it's right to speak up, then it's your duty to speak up and it doesn't matter how many of you there are. That is one of the things I've done and why I have got a reputation, because I am not looking for the numbers, if the thing is right, you say it's right, if the thing is wrong, you say it's wrong, even if it's only you saying it. But if you choose not to, waiting for somebody else, then Hitlers succeed time and time again, wherever they are. Saddam Hussein, you can list them, because people who think they are righteous don't speak out. There are many Jewish stories about the need to speak truth to power. I feel duty-bound to do whatever I can, whenever I can and I don't beat myself up. If it's not possible, then don't do it, if you can't, don't. One thing, I don't use the word hate often, but there are some things I hate. I do hate it when middle-class people, particularly women wring their hands about something they didn't do, when it wasn't within their power to do it. It's self-indulgence in guilt, if it's within your power, do it, if it's not, don't bloody cry about it. That's one of the things I did experience quite a lot in the Women's Liberation Movement and working at Spare Rib, the letters and responses where people were falling over themselves, women were falling over themselves with guilt about things where they had no power to change. That's utter self-indulgence and it gets on my tits.

Track A: 1:38:32:0 – 1:41:33:0 Future plans

My plans are to write my book. I think if I can get the right tone, not too preachy and not too egotistical, there's a way I can do it. I can do it often when I'm speaking, if I can get that tone in recounting some of the tales, stories, they're not mythical stories, they are things that really have happened, maybe I can make a difference, to come back into the public conversation. I haven't been able to be there because of hospital appointments and going to the chemist to pick up another prescription, all of that stuff is important and I could not fail to do it. I have a duty to my partner as she would do the same for me. So I'd like to be back in the public arena, I think I have some wise things to say. I did a broadcast last night for LBC radio, it was about the story of the estate agents who are not letting properties to Black people and I gave some advice as to what to do. And I felt, well, I might have taught a few people something, it's nice. It was only a few minutes of dialogue between me and the interviewer. That was good and I get a few of those but it used to be 2 or 3 a

week. I'd be doing radio and being paid for it. In fact for most of the 90s I earned a living doing radio and television and writing things and being paid and so going through my own records I'm seeing fee from BBC £100 here, £120 there and £25, often a small amount but it was enough to just get by on. So I'd quite like to be perceived, this is one of the things I've observed for Black people, it doesn't happen so much for Jewish people, Jewish elders particularly male elders are listened to. To be Black you have to be young apparently. This is an argument I've had with Channel 4 among others, they want yoof, as though Black people don't get old. Old people are white, young people are Black and I'm a little critical of that.

Track A: 1:41:34:0 – 1:43:15 (end) Final message

So I'd quite like to work with a range of people, see if we can get dialogue, conversations going between groups and within groups so we can broaden our understanding of what it means to be a human and that means all the things that we are. That's my vision, that's my goal, to contribute to that broader understanding. So the small group of white men, there's no conspiracy but if we look around the world they're mainly white though some of them are Chinese. I'm not interested in your ethnicity, I'm interested in the disproportionate amount of power that they exercise and the accountability and it's about time the rest of us took the bloody world back, it's our world too. My message for the younger generation is to study the best of the traditions to which you are heir, to listen to other people's traditions to see what you have in common and work for the common good.

[ends]