Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Mabinty Samura
Interviewer: Mark Hutin
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Key

MH: = Interviewer, Mark Hutin
MS:= Interviewee, Mabinty Samura
[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time
[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time
Word 5:22 = best guess at word

MH: Could you start by stating to me where and when you were born?

MS: I was born in Islington 40 plus years ago. I never reveal my age. <laughs>. It's a woman's prerogative I hear. I was born in Islington to Cecelia [1:21 Ansomana] and Dr Mohamed Samura. They met in Dublin when they came over from Sierra Leone in the '60s. They were on of the wave of many African and African-Caribbean immigrants who came to this country on the say so of the British government. To come and give back to the motherland as it were.

My mother studied nursing and my father was studying journalism.

So they met and they had me.

MH: Mmhem. And could you tell me a bit about your childhood.

<Part 2 starts>

MS: Chaotic is the word that I would use. For many immigrants in those days it wasn't easy to raise a child, especially for those who came here has students. They didn't have the family network of aunts and uncles, so they pretty much relied on each other. The Sierra Leone community pretty much relied on each other. So I tended to stay with various aunts and uncles who weren't aunts and uncles but we … you know …in our community if they are older than you, you call them aunts and uncles.

I was in foster care very, very briefly, out of London on a farm. I can remember it very, very vaguely, but I do remember the name of the white couple, Christine and Roger, that lived in a farm, I can't remember where. I still receive cards from them today. They wanted to adopt me. As soon as my mother got wind of the she went and winched me away.

My mum and dad separated when I was about three and I went to stay with my father because my mum was still studying nursing at the time. Found a family that I stayed with in Golders Green. And I lived there until I was about say five.

By that time my father had gone back to America and my mother had gone into another relationship with my stepfather. So she had finished nursing, so

she was a bit more settled then, so she took me back. So I was living with her and her new partner.

Then my sister came along when I was about seven and then, a year later, my brother came along.

When I was about nine, I was taken to Sierra Leone where I remained until I was about twenty. That's where I did Catholic primary school and Catholic girls' boarding school up to sixth form. And I did a year in Fourah Bay College, which is the first university in West Africa.

MH: How d'you spell that?

MS: F-o-u-r-a-h and then Bay, college. Fourah Bay College, studying pre-med. I wanted to be a doctor. I came back when I was twenty, just turned twenty when I came back.

MH: So what was life like when you came back?

MS: I hated it! Didn't like it. Didn't like the weather. Thought the people were rude and unfriendly. And I felt very lost because my mum and my brother and sister remained behind in Sierra Leone because she wanted them to finish their education there. And I came and stayed with an uncle of mine … blood uncle. That didn't work out too well. Let's just say that there was a lot of bacchanal that went on there that wasn't … not something that I really like to re-visit. I had to come away from there. I found myself homeless within a year of coming to England. Didn't wanna call my mum because I didn't want her to worry.

So I sofa-surfed with various relatives and when I thought that my … I'd overstayed my welcome and then I moved on, so eventually … 'cause I was going to college then, I came back in the hopes that … I could get into med school. Wasn't the case, because the West African exams certificate wasn't recognised in England. So I found that I had to do more GCEs and O and A levels all over again. I came to this country with 10 GCEs and about 9 A levels and I was told, 'Well it's not recognised'. I even took the entrance exam into med school at Cardiff, and St. Andrews up in Scotland, passed them, but was still told that the West African Exam Certificate was not recognised. And I was advised to go back and do my O levels and A levels, which I did start to do, but I found that even though the West African Exam Certificate wasn't recognised, education was way, way in advance of anything you had in the UK despite our little resources that we had. Most of the stuff that they were doing in O levels I'd already done when I was in the third year of high school in Sierra Leone, and I found it really, really frustrating to go over stuff. I was told then by a lecturer, 'Listen, you're wasting your time. You'll pass it but … you'll be bored.' 'cause I was bored in the classroom. Set a task of work and most people were struggling along and I'm there, it's done. And I'm sitting there twiddling my fingers and thumbs. So I was advised to change my direction, basically.

And during this time I was contending with my uncle and his … well put it this way, unwanted advances. So I, as I said before I left, sofa-surfed with some relatives, and I was told by somebody at college about Piccadilly Housing Advice Centre.

MH: What sort of time period was this?

MS: This was … <pause> '88, '89? So I went down to Piccadilly Housing Advice Centre early one morning, just before they opened, and they opened up and I told them what the problem was and they put a directory of hostels in front of me. <Pause> Looked through the hostel directory, and I came across Stonewall Housing. And read what it was about and I was like, 'hmm …' Now this kind of like takes me back to how I came to … <pause> discover my sexuality as it were, kind of thing, and I'll have to backtrack now.

Ever since I was growing up as a little girl, I found that I always liked female company, I always liked being around women. And when my mum, as I was growing up, when my mum and my aunts used to sit around, we used to have a big wooden dining table in our house, which still is there today, without them seeing me I used to sneak and sit under the table and look up under their skirts! <Laughs> I was fascinated by the female anatomy. And then I was taken to Sierra Leone and I still had those feelings it wasn't until I got to … because in high school … you start becoming a boarder when you get to the third year of high school, so during the first year and the second year you're a day student; when you get to the third year of high school you have an option of being a day student or boarding. My mother was still in this country, and I was with my step father and his brothers and sisters and my two siblings, wasn't a very happy situation because me and him never really got on, we couldn't stand each other basically. So I wrote to my mum and said, 'Listen, I'd rather board, be a boarding student, because of what's going on at home.' So my mum managed to talk to him, convinced him, so I became a boarding student. It wasn't until I got to boarding school that I really … started to explore my sexuality. They had this thing in high school where they call it a Fejeh, don't ask me to spell it because it's … And a fejeh basically is an older student who takes a liking to one of the younger students. And I can remember her name but I won't say it just in case. She approached me and said, 'Would you like to be my fejeh?' And I'm like, 'What's that?' And she explained to me what it was, and I was like, 'Hmm … OK.' You had certain privileges in the sense that I didn't have to do chores, the only chores that I did were for her, and I got certain privileges. One of them was … I can get to eat, because the sixth form were the only ones … sixth form, upper sixth form students were the only ones who could cook their own meals, and because they always had a little more money than the lower form girls and they had access to the food commissary, they had nicer meals, so one of the benefits of being a fejeh was that you go to eat of these tasty dishes, and being the foodie that I am, I was like, 'Well, OK … fine.'

One thing I didn't realise, that being the fejeh it was their own … there was a lot of it going on, bed hoping amongst girls. Whether it's upper school girls or lower school girls, but within boarding school there was a lot of bed hopping going on, around, so that's how I came to explore that side of my sexuality, through being a fejeh.

So seeing Stonewall Housing on that day, it was kind of like, OK, this is what I am, I'm … I knew I liked boys and I liked girls, so I must be bisexual then, kind of thing. That's when the light-switch went off in my head, this is what I am, I'm bi-sexual.

So in those days it was just a case of the criteria for getting into Stonewall, it was relatively new, I think it was a year or two years from its inception,

conception rather, and I phoned up, and they were like, ‘Yeah, come down. There’s a place in the BME house, come and meet us at such-and-such a point.’ And that’s what I did, and I found myself with a room for the night at Lordship. However, I was … in those days I was a hothead, and living with people … I was used to a certain way, ultra clean, and I was living with total slobs.

<Part 4 starts>

… time, couldn’t cope with it kind of thing, and … I think it was two women, me and another girl who was sharing, which was a recipe for disaster in itself because we took one look at each other and decided we couldn’t stand the site of each other, so from there it went all down hill. Needless to say it culminated in me dangling her from the window, literally, after a fight. She had … I had managed to change my course through the tutor who had advised me to change my course, I managed to change my course to Access to Social Sciences and Humanities, so I was studying for that. My flatmate decided just at the time, I had a week the following Monday and that weekend … I’d told her I’ve got this exam, could it be a quiet weekend and she was like yeah, and then she changed her mind and decided that she was going to have a party. So needless to say it all kicked off from there.

Anyway, the Monday came around, went for my exams, came back and I was told to leave, because of what had went down. I was like fair enough. Went back to Piccadilly Housing Advice Centre and said, ‘Listen, Stonewall Housing hasn’t worked out.’

MH: So how long did you actually get [1:37 IA]

MS: Four months. <Pause> Four months. I went back to Piccadilly Housing Advice Centre and explained what had gone down, and one of the workers this time actually took the time to ask me, ‘OK, how did you … what was going on with your family, with your uncle, that you had to leave?’ So I explained and she said, ‘Well, this really is an issue of domestic violence, in a sense.’ So she put me through to another hostel, St Ursula’s, and luckily enough there was a space there and I got in there on that day. But having said that, during the four months that I was at Stonewall it really gave me a sense of who I was sexually, and being able to mingle with people who were exactly like me and actually introduced me to the LGBT scene and community as it were, and women and men who were like myself. So that was the good thing about it. More so especially during the ‘80s and the early ‘90s, mixing with up black people who were LGBT was very important for me, because for a long time … well apart from what went down in high school I pretty much thought that I was the only one. Being a black woman who did have these feelings for women, and had these feelings for women, so I felt kind of like an oddity. But it wasn’t until much, much later that I found out that I wasn’t the only one in my family who was lesbian, gay or bi-sexual. <Pause> My mother has five sisters, and each of the five sisters has either a lesbian or gay son. So it was not until very, very recently that I found all of that out, which was like oh, OK … must be in the genes then! <Laughs>

But like I said, my time at Stonewall … it was just exciting for me to know that there was a place where young lesbians, gays, bi-sexual, transgender …kids, because really we were kids even though we were in our early 20s and teens we were still kids, could go and just be themselves without being harassed.

‘cause I’ve never experienced the harassment side of it. I was lucky in that I have a mother who is very liberal and very … open-minded. My father … on the other hand, being an Al-Hajj, a Muslim, is something totally different. I have … in a sense been … disowned by him, because of this, because of this. But … it’s neither here nor there because he wasn’t really around when I was growing up so I don’t really pay much attention to what it is he has to say. As long as my mum’s alright with it then I’m fine with that.

And Stonewall Housing also … my lady love as I call her, I met her in Stonewall Housing, or through Stonewall Housing. She was a friend of one of the residents who lived there at the time, and we’re still together.

MH: So about 20 years.

MS: Yeah. We’re still together.

MH: You mentioned criteria for Stonewall Housing. I know it’s a long time ago, but can you tell me a bit about the experience of going to Stonewall Housing for the interview and what were the criteria?

MS: I can’t remember because it’s so long ago, but I do remember … I mean working for Stonewall Housing now … I think because it was relatively new the criteria was a lot more lax than it is now, in that I think it was a case of they just wanted people to know that it was there, they were a lot more open to getting people in. But I can’t really say that I remember what the criteria was. All I know is that I made the phone-call, there’s a space, come in for interview. It was all a blur on that day. I got to Lordship Lane and the person signed me up, did the interview, showed me my room basically, and that was it. You know , helped me set up my benefits, helped me … ‘cause at that time I didn’t know … coming from Sierra Leone I didn’t know anything about benefits. My mother used to send money for me to maintain myself, but when I moved from my uncle he was still holding onto the money. He hadn’t told my mum that I’d moved. So I didn’t really have any money, I was broke, I was walking everywhere and … relatives were giving me £10 here or £5 there those days. But it was really helpful in the sense that they made me aware of what my benefit rights were and helped me sort out my benefits. So in terms of me finding my feet, it was a good starting point for me.

MH: You’ve spoken quite a bit about how you came to Stonewall Housing as a client. How did you become a staff member?

MS: I worked through agency. I was just recovering … from bowel cancer, this was last year, convalesced, something that I’d been going through for about three years, and I decided that I wanted to get back into work, so I signed up with the agency, I think it was in May, they sent me for a couple of jobs, short-term jobs, which was great, fine. I get a call in October, whilst I was at another job that they sent me to, and said, ‘There’s an interview coming up for …’ No, first of all the interviewer says to me, ‘How do you feel about working for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans-genders? Would you object to it?’ And I said, ‘No, seeing that I’m bisexual I don’t see anything wrong with it, and quite frankly what people do in the bedroom is their business.’ And she goes, ‘Oh, great. There’s a position coming up for Stonewall Housing.’ I take the phone off my ear and I was like, ‘No!’ ‘Where did you say?’ She said, ‘Stonewall Housing’ and I was like … hmm, OK. She said, ‘You want to go for the interview?’ and I’m like, ‘Yeah! Sure.’

Came for the interview, was really nervous on that day. Did I want the job? I don't know. I kind of … had mixed feelings about it. <Pause> But anyway, I came for the interview and that same afternoon Alex called me, Alex Kylen called me and said, 'We interviewed you, we really liked what you had to say, could you come in and start next Monday?' And I was like, 'Yeah … cool.' So that's how I came to work for Stonewall. Through agency. And I've been here … I started in November, November 17th 2008, and I'm still here. I … the post was put forward for permanent and again I went for the interview and I got offered the post fulltime. So I'm pretty excited about that.

Stonewall … working for Stonewall, it's come a long way in the sense that it's very out there because through my work in the social care sector, the 15 years that I've worked in social care, I've come across it time and time again, just through my work, and I've even referred clients here as well. So to be working within the organisation that as a young woman I would say gave me my start in life, was very, very exciting. In the sense that it's like being able to give back … to me, especially … to the young blacks within the LGBT community who are … a lot less visible than our white counterparts, in the sense that our communities aren't really … <pause> inclusive of us, because of our sexualities. So it's kind of … good to be a role model, 'cause I do see myself as a role model for younger black LGBT youth and I am very much aware of the impact my working with them can have on them, for better or for worse, so it's good in that sense.

M You mentioned when I talked about criteria that you think obviously things have moved on and changed and so on, but how do you feel Stonewall Housing has progressed? Could you comment on that?

MS: It's progressed in the sense that there's a lot more demand, because if you consider that I picked up a phone and was able to get a place on that same day, compared to now where we're running waiting lists that can go on for six months, probably a year, probably two years. It has progressed in the sense that it's a lot more out there, people are a lot more aware of our presence as a housing group for younger LGBT peoples. And in the way that … support is given, 'cause I can remember back in the day you came into the house, you were pretty much left to get on with it, especially in terms of … those of us who didn't really have a problem, who it was just a case of being homeless, were pretty much left to get on and do what it is that we had to do.

Now as a supported hosing officer I'm a lot more whether or not they're … the girls in the house are sorted, I'm very much involved, I make it my business to know what it is they're doing. In that sense. But I think that is the big difference in the support that is offered. It's a lot more hands on.

MH: And is that a good thing?

MS: I think it is a good thing. Like I said before, especially … Stonewall caters, most of their clientele, 70% of their clientele are black. And a lot of them are really young, they don't have any parental guidance, so I'm not saying that I'm their parent, but in terms of guidance and guiding them, they know that there is somebody there who they can ask questions of and who they can come to if they have any queries about whatever area is in their life, and they know that that person may not necessarily give the answers there and then, but to go out there and find the answers that they need.

<Part 5 starts>

MH: And you mentioned the increase in waiting. Why is that?

MS: Stonewall Housing has only got six houses, 41 bed spaces, and I think it's more to do with our reliance on other housing providers. What I would … in the ideal world, if Stonewall were to come into millions, I would say that we should get our own housing stock and a lot more of it, because there is a need. The waiting list shows that there is a need for provision of more spaces for other younger people to come in and find their feet, as I was able to find my feet.

MH: And do you think that the demand is increased because people are more aware of Stonewall Housing?

MS: Oh yes! I mean definitely. It was only until I came … started working here, I mean Bob Green is like … he's a genius of housing, I mean in the sense that he is putting Stonewall Housing out there as a force to be reckoned with. But I feel that if we had our own housing stocks, rather than relying on the Circle Anglias and the L&Qs and the Family Mosaics, we would have a lot more say. And not only that, I mean take somebody like, an organisation like St. Mungo's, when it comes to homelessness and housing they're the first people who are getting called, for their opinions to be asked about, because they've been working around those issues for so long. So when they talk, people stand up and listen. So if we had our own housing stock, we would have I think a lot more autonomy and a lot more say. Not so much in the sense of Supporting People, we'll still have to adhere to what Supporting People … because they're the ones who fund us, fund our services; but in the sense that if we had our own housing stock we'll be a lot more visible, and a lot more out there, and being able to control what happens and what doesn't happen within that.

MH: Do you think that pressure on housing generally has an impact on Stonewall Housing and the waiting lists as well as lack of housing stock?

MS: Oh definitely. I mean things have changed in that when I left St. Ursula's I went straight into my own council flat. Now young people don't have that option anymore. For me it's heartbreaking having to tell them, 'Listen, you're not going to get housing association and you're not going to get a council flat at the end of it.' Which should be, I mean social housing should be everybody's right, it's a basic need, to have cheap, affordable housing I feel is a basic need along with clean water and clothes and food. It is a basic need. Now one of the basic needs has been taken away and they're having to go into the uncertainty of private rented accommodation where … how do we know that these people that these kids are renting from are not homophobic. How do we know? We just have to take their say-so for it. Do you understand? Where do they go … my thing is where do they go after private rented? What other … So I would in the long run like to see … Stonewall turned into a bigger housing association where we're able to offer social housing to the people who we support as a second stage in their life where they are helped to live fully independently, before then they can move on to other things. But like we say, if wishes were horses, beggars would ride, wouldn't they? <Laughs> And it's all a matter of money. We need a lot more money in order to be able to realise this dream.

MH: Moving on to something slightly different, just thinking about your life in London in the 1980s as part of the LGBT community, if you could reflect a bit about that for me, and also how you think that has changed over the last twenty or so years?

MS: Well, I mean, like I said to you before, I found someone who I would call my life partner twenty years ago, so … and both of us being … the LGBT community is … for want of a better word, is very white orientated. In the sense that you will go to clubs and I mean I used to go to clubs in Soho and elsewhere and it would be a case of spot the black person <laughs> kind of thing. And having said that …me and a lot of black friends who were lesbian or bisexual experienced a lot of racism within the LGBT community, so whereas we all shared the same sexuality we probably all … and the same harassment and the same problems that came from that, we never felt welcome within the larger LGBT community, so a lot of what we did were … very rarely went to parties, to clubs. What we did was hold house parties where we all could meet up as a group of people and just be ourselves. It was not until the Glasshouse was opened in Euston by Elaine … where we can then go and meet, obviously there were white women there and it was a lot easier to mingle, but ever since I settled down with my girl I didn't really … we never really went out there to clubs. I can't say that I got, from when I came across the barrier of racism I was like, 'Oh, sod that, can't be dealing with it.' So I tended to keep away from it. When I do now … being older, when I do now venture into … lesbian clubs, it's very different. It is very, very different, and just looking at my clients, who … or black lesbian women, going raving, meeting other black lesbian women and going raving, and myself going just out of curiosity when I started working here, I said to myself OK, let me go and see what it is these kiddies do, kind of thing. So I donned a disguise and went to one of the places and I was like WOW! I wish there was something like this when I was growing up, because It looked fun. It was a lot more integrated. And when I speak to them they're like yeah, there is racism but it's not … as in your face as it were. When we used to go to clubs we didn't feel welcome. There was also this sense of otherness, yes, you're lesbians but you're not really … of us, in a sense. So that put me off and I didn't want to expose myself to that. I didn't feel that I had to expose myself to that. So we just did alternative things.

MH: And what do you think has brought about positive change?

MS: Times are changing. Nothing stays stagnant. I just think …

<Part 7 starts>

MS: I mean for the younger generation I will say … if MTV did one thing, it was to expose the black culture, to bring the black culture into the fore through music and fashion, and give black people visibility. And it was, every now and then we tend to be trends, so MTV gave it that, so it was all of a sudden cool to be around black people, whether gay or straight. So it gave the youth exposure and that thing where they can come out and they could … and also the rave scene helped as well, in the sense where people were just brought together through music and drugs or whatever. If they had sex along the way that was cool too. But yeah, times are changing and black people are becoming a lot more visible. But having said that, black LGBT people are still very much … we're not visible within the community. We're there, but we're still very much hidden. We're still … over there somewhere.

MH: Why is that then?

MS: <Sighs> You know, Mark, the black community … where it's starting to be alright to be gay in larger white society, and I say starting to in that we can have civil marriages now and … we can pass our inheritances on to our partners etc. All these gains that we're making through law haven't, in a sense, trickled down into the black community because the black community is still … fighting the things that they had to contend with when they first came here in the '50s and the '60s, there's still a lot of racism in institutions even though Trevor Phillips, wherever he got that from, says that there's no longer institutional racism <laughs>, that's a bullshit. It's still very much there. So whereas the black community are still fighting to make advances or still come into power with their white counterparts, dealing with sexuality is the last thing on their mind and it's something that they don't want to confront with, and one of the biggest things is religion.

A lot of … grass-root black communities come out of the churches. And because the church teaches that homosexuality is an abomination, a lot of people have that attitude that if you're a chi chi man or a tomcat you're an abomination, you're not … it's Adam and Even not Adam and Steve, or Eve and Juliette or whatever it is you call it. They're not willing to confront that lesbian and gay and bisexual and transgender people exist within our communities because of what the church says or what Islam says. So it's more of a case of us as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders, who are people of colour, to start going into our churches and saying, 'Hey, listen, we do exist and we need to … be included, because a lot of the stuff that you are trying to fight still affects us as a people as well, separately from what we do in our bedrooms. It still impacts on us.' I mean as a bisexual woman I have children, I raise… I've had to raise a son and I have had to contend with the issues that raising black boys within white society brings. So … but the moment people realise that I'm bisexual I'm excluded from the proceedings because of that.

And I think there is a lot of fear as well, because of that, amongst black people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. We're already in some ways … excluded from society to some extent, so to be excommunicated from your community as well can be a very, very painful thing. So a lot of us choose not to expose ourselves in that way. We choose to do what we're doing behind closed doors and not put it out there … and only do so within, amongst ourselves. I mean a prime example is that I support two transgender black youth who have been thrown out of their family home because they're transgender. So no family member will talk to them because of that. These are things, apart from the stuff that they're going through, they have to contend with that as well. Where do you go if you're excluded from your community? Where do you go? You can't go into the white community either, because they don't really understand where it is you're coming from. They can empathise but there's not really an understanding of where it is they're coming from. So I say that I'm in a really unique and privileged position in that I can, as a bisexual woman, support these people through what it is they're going through, and be that proxy family as it were, to give them that guidance and give them that comfort and give them that assurance, and let them know that what it is they're going through is not unique, it's not … that there's something wrong with them. It's just that it is what it is.

MH: So in summary, if you were to summarise the changes over twenty years, would you say that things have improved but there's a lot of room for improvement, a lot of room for change?

MS: Things have changed in general for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trasngenders hugely, in that we are now starting to be recognised for who we are, same-gender-loving people or bi-loving-gender people <laughs> and transgenders, and it is being recognised, it is good, but for the black community there's still a lot of work that needs to be done, a hell of a lot of work that needs to be done, for them to enjoy the same … privileges that are given to all of us as our white counterparts, to really feel fulfilled and really live fully within their sexuality. I mean I lived in America for a while as well, I lived for three years in America, and I used to work for a HIV/Aids project in a mission district in San Francisco, and I came across a *lot* of black men who were gay, but because of how homosexual men are perceived within the black community, felt compelled to marry women and have children, but still maintained their gay lifestyles on the DL, on the down low, kind of thing, and this is where a lot of HIV infections come, heterosexual HIV infections come from. These men are going out there, having sex, unprotected, and coming home, and … fulfilling their spousal obligations … duties, and passing on the virus that way. Unless the black community are willing to confront the fact that gay men do exist and lesbian women do exist, these are the consequences that we're going to face as a people and as a community. We need to confront the fact that, and accept that, black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people do exist. Which is funny because when I really look at the history of black LGBTs, especially in America, not so much more here, some of the greatest black writers and poets were gay or were lesbians. And it was accepted in the 1920s and 1930s. Where did it go? What happened for it to all fall apart? What went wrong? That is the thing that we need to look at. And we need to get our churches on board. We need to get the churches where a lot of black people go to and hear all this drivel about … lesbians, gays and bisexuals being, transgenders being deviant and an abomination in front of god's eyes and blah de blah de blah de blah de blah. Unless we can get the religious leaders to change their tone … we're still always going to lag behind our white counterparts in enjoying the fruits of what's been fought for.

MH: Why do you think religion plays such an important part in the black community?

MS: Oooh! <Pause> It's a peculiar history. Very peculiar history. You just need to look at … how religion … you just need to look at the history of missionaries within Africa in the 14th and 15th century. They were the forerunners for the slavers, basically coming to give enlightenment and save the savage souls basically. And the promise of a better tomorrow during the time of slavery – work now; we'll work you to the bone but when you're dead you'll be alright later on.

<Laughter>

And that's where it stems from. All our struggles as a people within Western society have stemmed from the church. That's where people got their support from, that's where people met to air their grievances as it were. So church or religion within the black community is the mainstay of the black community. Maybe not so much so for the younger generation now, but for the older generation definitely. These attitudes, homophobic attitudes, still filter down

into … the younger generation, because they're hearing it from their parents, who do … who probably heard it from their parents, who did go to church and did read scripture. So yeah. Religion has had a long history within black communities.

<Part 8 starts>

MH: Well thank you for that. I'm just going to move on now to think about the impact of Stonewall Housing. Could you tell me a bit about … you've spoken quite a lot about the impact of Stonewall Housing on yourself personally. Could you comment on what you think the impact on the LGBT community generally, and the impact of your work, now that you're working at Stonewall Housing, on others that you're working with? So just thinking about impact.

MS: The impact Stonewall Housing has on the larger LGBT community is that we are, as an organisation, and through Uncle Bob (Bob Green), highlighting and illustrating the need for more housing provision for LGBT peoples, from the young to the very, very old. We've already tied up basically, in some small respect, the younger clientele route. More could be done there with provision of more housing, but from recent talk now we're starting to look at the older LGBT community who have gone through the brunt of the horrible times that they used to experience, the outlawing of homosexuality, and they have fought that but they're finding now that as they're getting older their housing needs are not being met, and I think Bob is doing a brilliant job in highlighting that there is a need for housing for older LGBT peoples. And that can only be a good thing, because then it can filter down to everybody else in that respect. So it's more just putting our voice out there, making us more visible. If you don't say then you're not seen. So he's making us, as a community, be seen. That's at a strategic level, more so, which is where things happen and laws change and attitudes change, so yeah.

MH: And thinking about … we've spoken about changes that you've witnessed in the LGBT community itself, just I'd be interested in your comments and opinions about policing of LGBT people, and how they've experienced policing and how you think that's changed over the last twenty odd years in London?

MS: I'm not a big fan of the police. Never have been, never will be I suppose <laughs>. But that is more so from my experience as a black person again. I always have to keep harking back because this is something that is peculiar to me and to others of my ilk. <Pause> We've had, in the late eighties and early nineties I can remember us having parties and our parties getting stopped by the police and their attitude would change when they came in and saw all females all … hanging out together, and 'Oh what, is this a tomcat party? No men in the mix' kind of thing, and comments like that. And being manhandled into paddy wagons and not really being charged but held in the cell for an hour or two, and then let go. <Pause> I can't really comment in all fairness about how it's changed now because I'm a settled married woman with a husband and a wife, so I don't really go out there anymore to cause any trouble to come into contact with police! But from my clients' experience, I would say that it has improved somewhat, attitudes have improved somewhat. I mean I remember not too long ago, last year, there was an incident that happened in the scheme that I run and police came and the policewoman said, 'Oh, what organisation is this?' I said, 'Stonewall Housing,' and she said, 'Oh, young people?' I goes, 'Yeah, the houses are mostly

lesbian and transgender women' and the look on her face was like… '*What?* There's a separate house for lesbian and transgender women?' I said, 'Yeah. There is. A lot of them are coming here because of homophobia within their communities or areas' and she said, 'Oh! You would think in this day and age there wouldn't be a need for this kind of thing!' So that to me was refreshing, in a sense, and … the nice thing was the next day I had the LGBT Liaison Officer, (who was straight) <laughs> come to the house to make sure that we were dealt with fairly, and if I had any complaints about how we were handled, and blah de blah de blah. So yeah, a lot has changed from … back in the day, and long may it improve, more can be done. I mean it would be nice if there were more visible LGBT officers within the force and there were more visible … as in San Francisco. I mean I hark back to San Francisco because San Francisco's lovely because you always knew who the gay or lesbian officers were because they always wore a button to show that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual. So something like that, yeah, let's see the lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender officers come to the fore. <Laughs> Then I'll give them the gold star as it were. But like I said, I'm not really a fan of the police.

<Part 10 starts>

MH: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MS: <Pause> Stonewall Housing … is in a unique position in that it is really very much a grass-roots organisation that is privy to a lot of what the younger client group that we work with are undergoing, and I would like to see it expand into something a lot bigger, because then I really do think that … we are a force to be reckoned with now, in the sense that people are starting to take notice of the things that we're saying, but we need more money to get our own housing stock, rather than relying on other housing providers. I would like to see us own our own stock. I mean we can probably never be along the lines of somebody like St Mungo's, but I'd like eventually in years to come to see us moving towards that direction, in that we're the people who are called upon to give our opinions and shape policy and strategy in dealing with LGBT homelessness in its myriad forms, from the very, very old to the very, very young. So yeah, and hopefully I'll be around to see that happen, and help make it happen in a sense.

MH: Fantastic. Well thank you very, very much.

MS: Thank you.

<End of recording>