

BEA FREEMAN



You're listening to the first in an audio series brought to you by me, Cairo Clarke as part of this year's curatorial programme this broken piece of yard initiated as Curatorial Fellow at LUX. As the series unfolds we'll hear from a variety of guests reflecting on navigating creative approaches in artist film and moving image. Unearthing the memories and reflections of Black British film movements, co-ops and collective practices. Shedding light on those who worked alone and offering space to those who have been marginalised in their field and across intersections of contemporary life.

In episode 1 I speak with Bea Freeman a filmmaker, producer and community organiser working across TV and film in Liverpool and the UK for the past 25 years. Bea's had an incredible history across community filmmaking as well as working for the African & Caribbean unit of the BBC, going on to commission and be commissioned across Black British documentary filmmaking.

Cairo Clarke: I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit more about how you got into filmmaking and your kind of personal history and your relationship to Liverpool.

Bea Freeman: Okay, how did I get into filmmaking, oh gosh, you're taking me back it started many many years ago. To be honest with you, I was at the uni-, I was on a course at Liverpool University I was doing a community development course, because I was a community worker at the time, and they opened up this course for community workers to go on this course called Community Development.

And then, I don't know, for some unknown reason the

BBC, when it was in the old church in Manchester got in contact with the course, and they wanted to speak to people who were doing further education or going into education. And I was selected partly because at that time I used to take photographs, and the actual program was called Carry on Learning, and it was a BBC programme that went out on a Sunday morning, I think about seven o'clock in the morning when nobody was awake. At that time, I mean I know it went out at some ridiculous hour. Anyway, that's while I was there, they were asking me questions you know why I was taking photographs, how I was organized and stuff so that more or less prompted it. And while I was there, I think it was one of the producers who said you know you've done a lot of research you'd make a very good researcher. And so I said "Oh" because I hadn't thought about it at the time I knew I wanted to do something in that area, but that was a little prompt for me. So then I thought, okay, I thought about it and just went back I was doing the work I was doing because at the time I was working at the Housing Aid Centre in, in Granby Street, and I was still doing my course and did that little programme so that was the first thing that they, that prompted me and I tried. I thought oh it might be a good idea, you know, and I tried, and I tried, and I couldn't tell you the amount, I wouldn't want to tell you the amount of letters that I wrote. There was hundreds and hundreds of letters and rejection, every time. And I thought, okay, because one I was not white, two, I had no connection with the BBC.

But that was then, and I never gave up. I thought I put all of that aside, I thought I'm never going to get there, I'm never going to get a job in the BBC that woman was just talking a whole bluff because I was, you know, she got my interview, and it was good for her ego and for the programme and everything else and that was that never thought no more about it. And as time went on, funny enough, I then, whilst I was still working as a community development worker. One day we were just sitting around talking, and at the time, this

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information came through, this booklet I was looking through this booklet one day and it said, you know, courses at Ruskin College, Oxford, and my friend and I, we were talking and she said, "Well, why don't you apply for it?" I said No, so she said yeah go on apply for it. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I applied for it like, and then the following January, almost like a year later, I got a letter to say yes I've been accepted and they've given me a place at Ruskin College, to start the following September, so I had to make big decisions and everything, but to cut a long story short, then I went. I thought, wow, this is the path, coming back to filmmakers, I thought now they can't stop me because now I'm here.

So things started coming up and I was getting involved in like art things, and still doing my photography, and then the opportunity came. It was, it was when Channel Four opened up. And they were looking for researchers and I applied to this company, and I got the job and that was my first job as a researcher, and that was with Third Eye. I really, really enjoyed doing the research and they enjoyed me as well, because I was from Liverpool and so I was getting other stories and I was good at, at the research and finding stories and what have you and so I was put on one programme and then on another programme. And then, what was happening also at that time that Channel Four opened up the Black Media Workers Association. Because what was happening you were only getting jobs under contract so as soon as you programme had finished, you'd get a contract for like three or four months for whatever time it was, but then when you would try to apply to get another job, you couldn't because companies were saying well, you know, "Have you got a union card?" we didn't have a union card because we couldn't join. It was a catch 22 situation. You couldn't join the union, because you didn't have a job, you couldn't get a job, into bigger production companies, because you didn't have a union card.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah, I'd love to come on to that and kind of that catch 22 and navigating that in a little bit but one thing that stuck out is I was doing a bit of background research as well and looking into the like such a wide amount of productions and films and things where you've been, a researcher, but also been a director and a producer and kind of a facilitator and organizer in all these different spaces. And I guess, occupying these different different roles, how, like how for you and for kind of working across, I guess also, it's worth mentioning, you know, working a lot across black documentary filmmaking and how those different roles, kind of the researcher and all of that comes into weaves in and out of each other when you're working on projects...

Bea Freeman: Working on projects, I only it was. It took a long time for me to actually realise my own sort of artistic potential as a black filmmaker, because I start you always doubt yourself, and you only do when I first started off as a researcher, I was given the works by somebody else saying, oh, can you go and research this or can you go and research that. And I never thought at the time, you know, oh, what about my own ideas. And what about my take on a subject, because I felt very much you know I was pleased just to get the jobs, and that was it. But I was never asked about my input into it, not for a long time. And it was only one day when I was, I think I was doing some work for some company or other. I remember it very clearly because they'd sent me off to Scotland or Leeds or somewhere or other to interview somebody. And I interviewed this person, met the person did the interview and then had to go and report back to the company, you know, but for me, then I realised I thought, okay, that person who they've sent me off to interview is all very interesting, but the story the real story was behind this other person who I met. And I'd recognised that and I thought, no, that's not the story, that is the real story. And then I started to think yes I'm recognising my own potential here, so I went back and said

look, that's not the story, this is the story and they agreed with me.

Cairo Clarke: There's always this kind of like, there's a very kind of homogenous or one way view of kind of film and TV culture and challenging that and pushing up against that it's so important and I think especially within amongst Black Filmmakers at the time and working across TV that was so much of where your energies were were being put in challenging those structures.

Bea Freeman: Yes, because so that evoked in me a feeling of well, I don't have to if I'm going to stay in this game. This film game. I'm not going to allow myself for them just to film what they wanted. And I started thinking, I thought the only way that this is going to happen, is if I, you know, can film things myself. And at the time, there was nothing there was no structures available for us. The only thing I knew of was these, the collectives there was the Open Eye collective in Liverpool, and through them, I learned about, there was Amber Films up in Newcastle. There was another collective in Cardiff. And it was also John Akomfrah's collective in London I think they came a little bit later on. But the four, the four, three big sort of collectives or cooperatives were in, I think was Newcastle, Cardiff, Liverpool, and I think they were oh, and the collective in London. They were the four and it was through them. And I got involved with the Open Eye collective in Liverpool, at the time and everything was, oh gosh it was everything was done 16 mil, 16 mil film and it was a collective where, I've got to say it was run by a group of, a small group of white men. So my coming into there was an oddity.

Cairo Clarke: What kind of films were they making at the time?

Bea Freeman: I think at the time, they were um, I think it was a left, they all appeared to be lefties at the time and they were making type of union films and things

about the union and the labor group and, um, I think I'd seen a couple of the films that they were making. And yes, it was very much documentary like union type of documentary, they wasn't making anything about what appealed to me really, um, although you know I was involved in the union and everything but the type of filmmaking they were doing, I felt wasn't what I was really into. They were all about this group of white men, who were all into their own egos, so to speak, and we're a collective and a co-operative and we don't need the establishment and we can make our films. I mean that was all very good. That was great, so that they could, you could screen films and that they had the capacity, they had the equipment and everything so which I didn't have or other young Black Filmmakers in my position we didn't have that. And that was already even with Amber, and with the people in Cardiff as well. As far as I knew at the time there was no Black Filmmakers involved with them. That's why the whole thing about the Black Media Association came into being, with Darkus Howe, Tariq Ali... You know there was Dianne Abbott at the time, what's her name Patel. I could list, you know, there was a lot, and that's what brought us all together. So, to look at the work that was 1. about employment, and how we were being offered work and why that they only appeared to want us when they wanted to expose black issues.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah

Bea Freeman: And the type of work we were given we were not given the big dramas. Um, you know, they just wanted us all running around, and we were not, we were either not in the structure, we were not in a position as producers or directors.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah. And then as you kind of were working, or working more again, amongst other black filmmakers and black collectives, how did that kind of production and creation of work change where you, you know, how did you start to kind of

make the things that you wanted to make? I think that it feels like there's a really amazing ability in in the works of yours that I've seen that, you know, people are involved from in the production of it from the outset and there is a real kind of intersectional approach that thinks about class and race and gender...

Bea Freeman: The things I wanted to make, in the way I wanted to make them, didn't come about for a long time because I was still very dependent as a freelancer, getting work. And that was also very difficult because the amount of letters you have to, I mean there was all the jobs that used to come up in Bectu, well then it was the ACTT the union before it changed over to Bectu. And there was also the jobs that used to come up every single Monday in The Guardian, you know, and you're always fighting, you know, chasing after these religiously, you know, I always used to get the Monday Guardian, the Saturday Guardian, because you were always looking, and then we used to have, there was a union magazine. And you could look in that as well but I was always running after those type of jobs as a researcher, and I was picking up more and more experiences.

And it wasn't until 1981, it was after 81, after the riots in Liverpool, there was a commissioning editor in Channel Four called Alan Fountain. And he used to produce there was a programme on a Saturday evening, that used to do black programming at seven o'clock on a Saturday evening which was amazing at that time and a prime spot it was called People to People. So all the collectives, around the country who were making films, and there was a lot more community groups and individuals coming together, and they had the opportunity to have their thing screened on television. I mean all the copyright and all of that had to be sorted out and the way things was done, but all that was cleared, and as I said before, he approached me and said could I do something in Liverpool on the riots because we were the first one, and I just thought,

oh my god I said, they've come to me now that was the first thing. And I thought about and I questioned my own self and I thought, my own abilities and skills, was I able to do this? Because now you know the thing that we'd been challenging. You know they'd actually come and asked me, and they'd asked other black Filmmakers as well from London from the London collective and they were doing stuff as well. So I agreed and I had to think about it. And I thought about it a long time and I thought, if they want me to make a film about a group of young black people just sitting around - over - in a youth club an all playing pool, and smoking ganja, I thought, I'm not doing that. So, I went to see them and I said, if you're expecting me to do this, they said oh no we want an insight into Liverpool and how the riots had come about, I knew how the riots had come about here. It was all based around one young black youth on a Friday afternoon on the fourth of July, on his motorbike who had been taken to court in the morning, and he got off from court and the police officers came and said to that same person it was Leroy Cooper. We're gunna get you. And that's what started the whole thing off on that Friday afternoon.

Cairo Clarke: It's the 40th anniversary this year as well, which I think when we're talking as well just about the recent race report and how that you know with the kind of current context that we're living in in Britain and what it means to be British and, and all of this kind of these very like tense subjects it feels like there's such a resonance with you know that time and, and now.

Bea Freeman: Well, yes I entirely agree with you, there is a resonance, and I was only speaking this morning to a colleague of mine about the report that came out yesterday, and we both agreed in relation here to Liverpool, which is a microcosm of the rest of the country that things have not changed, that there was a report done by the select committee in 1972, in relation to black youth and institutionalised racism and

jobs I could go on. So, when you know, coming back to the film they asked me to make this film and I sat down for a long time and the wonderful thing, I mean, the wonderful thing about living in Liverpool, I had everything around me, I didn't have to search, you know because I was in the Defense Committee, regarding the riots I was on the defense committee. I knew, I knew the person who the whole thing had, you know, erupted around. I knew all the people I knew his family, the background to it. The whole question of racism within the police I had the whole story around me so I could select anything I wanted so I thought, you know, I thought I'm not going to do this black youth what they expect, what they would do and all the news was saying was, you know, black youth and education and schooling and jobs and poor environment and you know the culture of black youth in Liverpool and there was the whole Fletcher report about, you know, "half caste" children that all came out as well. A big report that was that was done years and years ago, at University of Liverpool and so I looked at all these angles, and I thought, okay, the best way to do this, I knew then that this wasn't the first riots in Liverpool, there was riots in 1972, there was riots in 1960 and I went right back to the first riot 1919 and I looked and I thought, this is what I'm gonna do I'm gonna go back and look at all the riots in Liverpool, that involve the black community, and how they happened. And who was the beneficiaries of all of this, what happens when the riot happens? And I also investigated at the time, in 1919, there was riots happening at the same time all around the world in other black communities. And I thought, okay, so I thought and I thought the best way to do this and I knew the people that was involved in the riots and I knew the people on the Defence Committee and I knew all the black leaders and I thought okay, these, this story has got to be told by them. They must tell the story. I need you know, I'm not going to go out there and say, Oh, this is this and this is so and so I thought, they have got to tell the story. And the best way of them telling the story, and their involvement I thought, Oh, am I

gonna do this and so, Channel Four said you can't, you know, one of the things I had to do was to set up a company, and I thought, why am I going to set up a company because that's part of the business structure, how you get your commissions so thought okay, the best way of doing this, I set up a company with the people who were going to be involved in the film. And I called it Need Young and you know you only have to set up the company, just to do the film, and that's what I did. I set up this company called Need Young Productions, and it was just, and the people involved in it, in the film, they were the producers and the directors and the way I made the film I thought okay and I had to sit long and hard, it's very challenging to me because the whole thing rested on my shoulders. And if all went wrong that was it, my career was finished. So what I did was I made them the company directors, we set the company up. I thought, Okay, the way I'm going to make this film, also, is I'm not just going to bring in a director and a sound man and a cameraman, I made everybody that was involved in the film they became assistants too, the people - to the technical people.

Cairo Clarke: It's kind of stretching out that collective structure just amongst the production of, of one project as well. And one thing I had written down in my notes, just kind of thinking about our previous conversation and your work is that care feels really like intrinsic to how you work and not just caring to make sure that the people are okay but you know the care for the subject, care for who is involved, how's involved, how people are involved, how the stories are told and also this refusal. That's very kind of very energising a refusal to, you know, to feed into any narratives about, you know, certain narratives perpetuated about the black community in Liverpool or in general and really kind of pushing against to share more expansive views about blackness and the black community in all different ways, which I think is really, really inspiring, there's kind of no essential identity which

I think the media often portray, you know, poor people are like this and this is like this again like we saw in the race report so...

Bea Freeman: yeah, so that's how we made the film. It took a long time. But then I was happy to take the time to get the real story and the story is woven around this group of young black people who are very articulate, intelligent, and they tell, they tell the story and they go back to 1919, and they go back to, you know, the way Heseltine came to visit Liverpool and said we needed a garden city, and if you give them flowers they'll stop rioting. They took all those subjects and that permeated itself through the film and interwoven with the film is other artists in Liverpool Levi Tafari and other young black youth and that's how the film was made it was called They haven't done nothing, which grammatically sounds incorrect, but it came out again, they decided the, the group decided the title of the film and it came out of, Stevie Wonder's record, They haven't done nothing.

Excerpt from They haven't done nothing (1985)
Director: David Horsefield Producer: Bea Freeman Production Company: Liverpool Black Media Group

'He's mister know it all' - Stevie Wonder, They Haven't Done Nothing.

Person 1: When you sort of like, align the unrest with the social conditions of unemployment and poor education and poor housing and so on, that's ok on the one hand but at the end of the day black people have always experienced that. That's something that has never ever been taken into account as far as those riots are concerned.

Person 2: I think things are returning back to what we would call normal, um where police are riding round in vans shouting racial abuse, people are still getting beat up when they're getting locked up. All that happened in 198 seems to have been thrown

out the window.

Person 1: The response from white people to black people is one which has always been negative, and that has always been practiced at whatever level black people become a part of the society. You take the post riot period since '81 in Liverpool when all the employers both at the private sector and public sector level come together to actually develop policies or bland statements rather, I mean the question I would like to ask four years on is what's happened since then?

Bea Freeman: There was also a black art group at the time we got them involved to do all the end credits. All their paintings and everything so it's a huge involvement of a lot of people. The music, the dancing, the artwork, everything the way it was done and it was unusual. I nearly had a nervous breakdown over the way it was made. But we did it, and we got it out there. And it was different. It went out on a Saturday evening, which is brilliant. We got a lot of good feedback from it. Alan the commissioning editor, he was very happy with it. There was a lot of you know, ups and downs along the way. But nonetheless, we finished, we got it done and it was from then that I thought, this is the way that film should be made and this is how they involve them and then this is the only way you're going to tell the real story. If, if I do it myself. I still took other work on but I was able to challenge and say, this is how story should be done, and it was during that time that Barbara Phillips, she was my assistant producer, but she was also involved with another woman called Ann Carney they set up this little photography group called Black WITCH; Women's Independent Television Cinema House.

Excerpt from They Don't Get a Chance - A Tribute to Black Women (1985) Production Company: WITCH (Women's Independent Cinema House)

Interviewer: Can you name any famous women?

Child 1: Only Diana Ross that I know of

Interviewer: Do you know any other famous black women?

Child 1: No

Interviewer: Are you taught about any black women at school?

Child 1: No

Interviewer 2: Are you taught about black women at school?

Child 2: No

Interviewer 2: why do you think you don't get taught about them at school?

Child 2: Because they're black

Bea Freeman: And so after the film I was involved with them, doing work

Cairo Clarke: Was that more making films through Black WITCH, as well?

Bea Freeman: Yes, it was because they'd set up this if they got this bit of money they set up a training course for women to become filmmakers and and, you know, learning how to use a camera, learning how to do sound and stuff and I was involved with them, looking at pieces of work and one of the pieces of work that they did they did this it was a little vox pop on what, what work do black women do. And it turned out, after the vox pops it was just a little soundbite thing and people were saying oh black women are nurses or cleaners. And after the interview, we sat around with Barbara and Ann and I said, you know, they wanted to expose they were looking at the racism within Liverpool and how Liverpool view black women and work. And I said hang about so we move that on, and we knew, and they knew that black women, all black women are not cleaners or nurses so to speak, I, you know, they were black women photographers, I was a black woman filmmaker and we could list off all these other people so what we did what they did, they got some money. And we started taking them, we invited all these other women who were not nurses or clean-

ers who were also accountants, teachers, heads of schools, and we did this big exhibition called Hidden Strengths.

Huge exhibition it was about 30 or 40 women, it was blowing up cardboard cutouts of women. And we had it exhibited in one of the big shop windows in the city center. From there we had it exhibited in the education room at the Tate. And I looked at it and looked at it and at the time, there was something coming up in BBC called, I think it was called Birth Rights or something or other

Cairo Clarke: Yeah Birth Rights, the series

Bea Freeman: and I applied and I got the commission to make this exhibition into a film.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah. It reminds me a little bit of Daughters of the Windrush, which you also kind of mentioned but how kind of workshopping comes into the creation of your films. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that.

Bea Freeman: Yeah, Daughters of the Windrush, and it was the same approach. I'd seen the Windrush Foundation were asking for, they were giving out a commission for people to make things on the, on the Windrush and so I applied. I thought about it again, and I thought, well, I didn't want to fall into that trap that the establishment want, you know, anything that's Caribbean, you've got to have a steel band, you've got to sit around you know what I mean everybody, eating, you know, chicken and rice and stuff like this and you know, they'll show you about the Windrush, and I thought about it and I thought no, I'm not going to do that because I knew, again the story that the story, I want to tell is right here in Liverpool, but the story I want to tell, I'm going to tip it on its head. And this story must be told from the women's perspective, from the daughters, the granddaughters, because they, it wasn't just about as much as we

appreciate and we have to understand what's happened when the Windrush came here, and the racism and what they endured all those elders. What happened, it was still the other side of the story, the women what they, you know, endured as well. And interspersed with that there was a number of white women here in Liverpool, who, for all reasons, you know, they, you know what I mean. The Windrush men came here, they married local women, and you know they had children and, you know, their lives just any like other family so let me look at that side because I want to know what, what happened there. We hear of the other side of the stories and we know that, it's well documented. Right from when they came off, off, off the ship so to speak, they had Pathé there talking to the men right as they came off the ship. And Lord Kitchner. So that was very heavily and well documented.

such and such or her mother was from. I said you have to tell your own story and how the Windrush had an impact on you as an individual, how you seen yourself growing up. And if you want to tell the story, it's your story, it's not my story. I didn't want to put words into their mouths. And the only way we could do that is by getting a series of workshops together. So they used to meet every week they'd come along, sit and talk. Bring photographs along, show photographs, you know, and that's how we made the film.

Excerpt of Daughters of the Windrush (2019)

Director: Hambi Haralambous, Executive Producer: Andrea Rushton, Producer: Bea Freeman, a Blackburne House Production.

We boarded the ship for England, not knowing what we would find. We believed the promises that were made, and left our families behind. We were heading to this marvelous place where everyone was free, we would have a better life and help the economy. The journey was long but the weather it was kind, looking to our new life that's all that was on our mind. We disembarked at London and everything had changed, no proper jobs or housing oh England what a shame, oh England what a shame. We weren't illegal immigrants, we were invited to this country, we did the jobs you wouldn't do. We cleaned the factory and the streets, we even cleaned the loo. We weren't illegal immigrants, we paid our taxes just like you. All we asked for is what you promised, all we wanted was our due.

Cairo Clarke: It's really nice as well I think because that approach differs so much I guess from a much more kind of corporate or commercial structure where there's a lot of pressure to get something made within, you know, a week or two weeks, having that a little bit more space and time to build those relationships with people for people to bring their photos to feel comfortable in sharing their stories, means you get a lot can get a lot more.

And I thought let me look at the other side of it so I decided to look at the women, the daughters, the granddaughters and that was the story I wanted to tell. How, how the impact of the Windrush, how the, the Windrush impacted on them as individuals and their lives growing up in Liverpool, and how did they see the situation now and the impact of that. And that's the way I, I came up with that idea and I thought, Okay, the best way to do this I knew, all the women call out, again, on Windrush day. I put a call out to women and said, you know, are you the daughter, granddaughter, sister, you know, this is what I'm planning to do, I want to make a film, you know, a documentary film and I couldn't do it without your help and I want to hear stories. And then I'd set a meeting date and so women came along. And then I had a, we set up. I said this is what I was planning to do and I got a writer involved, Marjorie Morgan and she led the workshops and I said, if we want to tell our story, if we want, if you want to tell your stories, you know, you must tell your stories in the way you want to tell them it's not for me to try and say, oh, you know, Joan, this is Joan and her dad was from, you know

Bea Freeman: That approach I've done quite a lot and for me it works. And that's the way I want to make films. And I've stuck to that and it's always worked. Even when they did the 50th anniversary of the Windrush I made a film then, and it was called Love in Black and White.

Excerpt of Love in Black & White (1998) Director: Maxine Watson

Secret lectures were given to women in RAF before these men were called over, telling them that they were simply not to have sexual relationships with black men. The content of these speeches were amazing, they dwelt on the presumed size of a black man's penis and it wouldn't be accommodated by a white woman. These were the sort of speeches being made to women in the RAF.

Bea Freeman: I looked at the women, the white women that married, black men and their relationships. Again, that was done in the same sort of genre, you know, involving workshops, getting to know women, getting to know people, I didn't just want to dive in there and, oh you know do the interview, get back, get to the editing room and and everything can throw some music over it. My relationships with people over the years, has maintained simply for the work that I've done and my approach, the way I've, I've made films in this collective way involving people, their stories, has paid off, you know touch would it's always paid off. I'm still friends with those people and I can go back to them any time.

Cairo Clarke: It's so nice because it shows it's not, it's not just a commitment to get a story told, but it's a commitment to the, to the people and building a relationship with them that like you say, goes beyond just the instance of film or making a film itself.

Bea Freeman: Also, what I have done over the years, is I try to ensure that yes we have a script or a workshop

or something. But if I can get something else out of it for individuals..so maybe I don't know, somebody could get into filmmaking through the workshop, somebody could become a researcher something which, which, has actually happened because out of the 1981 film on the riots, three of the people there, got jobs on then what was Brookside.

Cairo Clarke: I remember Brookside.

Bea Freeman: Well there was a whole inc-, well not incident but we looked at the way Brookside was employing people and it was you know a series made here in Liverpool and yet no black people worked on the program. And again through the union involvements and everything we questioned this and everything, lo and behold, they took on three people.

Cairo Clarke: I think it's really interesting, especially when you talk about like how you'd kind of got into film yourself if you think about the kind of the full circle of it that, where does, how do you access these spaces, who you know, there's so much gate-keeping or kind of this kind of institutional or inherited kind of way of making your way through things and if you don't come from that background or from that kind of education, access into spaces is really difficult and it feels like you've broken that for yourself and continue to break that for other people as well. I wonder at this point, maybe you could share a little bit about, we spoke about it a bit before, but just kind of the centrism and focus of you know the South and London and actually kind of understanding more of the legacy of filmmaking and organising in Liverpool and in other areas and what, what that kind of tool, creative tool and outlet has been because like you're saying it really does become a platform and snowballs into other things and I think there's a real importance of having a much more wider dialogue that isn't just central to London or everything has to be brought down to London or kind of funding comes from these

organisations that are based in London.

Bea Freeman: Well that's what used to happen initially in the first place I mean unless you were based, I mean, again, it was very London centric unless you're based in London, you know you only had access to things. But we, I, and other black Filmmakers here in Liverpool, I looked around me and I thought I don't have to - the stories I want to tell are already around me, and I don't always have to go down to London, what used to be the issue is funding, like running a film festival, you do need some funding and a lot of things came out of it for us. A lot of people moved on and got work which was brilliant. However, what happened on the funding stream was that we used to get funding for our film festival, and then it used to be Northwest Vision and then the Film Office was set up, and Northwest Vision now it's Creative England now. Um, you know when they've segregated all of that off so you know there's this body and that, but black filmmaking, I mean, we used to be you know, the people of the day. And so, if they gave us a little bit of money. Oh well we give something to black filmmakers, but then FACT was setup. And so all the film money was directed to them, because they said oh well, they'll be able to show black films you don't need to do that now.

Cairo Clarke: And so it kind of, I guess that kind of stifled people accessing funding, or who got it or who had relationships with FACT, perhaps...

Bea Freeman: Yeah, well FACT was a film theatre as well as a collective, you know, showing art work, so they had a new building and a new purpose building so you know and if they were then, you know, if you look at the sort of practices and what they were doing to get funding, you know, it was supposed to be community orientated and they and the films they were showing were from Picture House, which were independent films, you know, Picture House based in London? So, you know, so they were doing the alternative and so therefore they got the money. And so the

practices of filmmaking here in Liverpool, changed rapidly because you had people from all the these things set the structure set up Northwest Vision, and people could have, because they were getting their money from then it was the Film Council, it was coming down to a body and then they distributed it again and then you were at the receiving end, in, in competition with others, to get a bit of money to make a film.

And then, all of that changed again because they opened it up again and you know you could only get the money if you adhered to a certain style of film that they wanted. Creative England opened up again and they only want short, they want films made on a shoestring by new perspective and reimagined people, you know all these odd type of films they want making, and then it opened up again the structure opened up again because the Creative England which the money comes from the BFI now. If you set yourself up and practice in the Northwest of England, or in the North-east. Even if you're a big production company, you could come in, draw down some of that money. So, the community, collective filmmaking they were wiping that out and setting up the big production companies, and you didn't even have to live here now you could set up a company in the Northwest of England, in Liverpool or Manchester and a lot of them moved to Manchester, or to Leeds, and they could they could draw down that money what was originally, you know, put aside for other for the Northwest filmmakers. So unless you had a major big production company and you were putting out stuff on TV every week, or getting big series. You couldn't compete with that.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah, which again comes, I guess, to the kind of catch 22 of commissioning and how you commission, a collective or community focused work and how you kind of commission an individual and, you know the hesitancy I guess to circulate certain types of films when these funding bodies

perhaps there's a certain preference towards the way they would like stories to be told.

Bea Freeman: Yeah, well, that's what will happen you know, if unless you tick the box you don't get the money and the structures, the way the money you know the money came from the Film Council setup that was all changed. Then we had the DCM, the money was coming down, that all changed. Then they carved up the country you know it was Creative England North, Creative Northwest and all of this and oh we're missing out filmmakers in Wolverhampton, we're missing out filmmakers in the countryside. And the way that I mean, unless you have a registered company, you can show evidence of work that is going to sell, you've also got to have some type of international ethos or you can bring on big name people. You don't stand a chance in commissions. Not nowadays, because the programs have to sell.

Cairo Clarke: There is so much... I guess it kind of, kind of coming to the the last little thought that I wanted to, or thing I wanted to share. And that was whether you had one particularly beautiful moment in, for you in black film making, whether it be a personal memory or a piece of work, something that really kind of has stuck with you and resonates with you...

Bea Freeman: oh gosh, memories..I think the very first time I seen my name coming up that I've made a film that wasn't anybody else's idea. I made it how I wanted to make it. And it was there. And I thought, yes, that's it now you know, that is good for me.

I've made that. And I've made it the way that I want to tell that story. And I haven't had to condescend to anybody, or compromise myself in any way. I thought, yes, so I always have good memories and, you know you have your highs and lows making films, it's not an easy game. And you've got to have that commitment to stick with it and say yes I'm gunna get there. And I

think the skills, the practices and how I think and I've got to blow my own trumpet because I am good at what I do. I am imaginative, I can come up with lovely story ideas, turn them around, I think outside the box now. I didn't have those skills when I first started. Perhaps I did, but I didn't recognise them. So I had to work alongside the way people wanted me to until I was in a position to work the way I wanted to, and to tell the story.

Cairo Clarke : Yeah, I guess it's always this opportunity for that project or that thing that you're making to lead on to something else, that you know that creates other opportunities, creates the relationships, that nurture these other opportunities and relationships amongst people.

Bea Freeman: Yeah, I've been, I honestly, I can say that all the things I've done, working with groups of people has always led on to something else. It's created something else, not just for me but for other people as well. In the way I work, you know, okay, maybe creating another commission for me, but for the people I've worked with in a collective environment and relations made within that environment with other people that they've been able to go on and work and work together to do something else, which necessarily didn't involve me.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah.

Bea Freeman: Um, but they've been able to move on and work on to something else. I mean, out of Daughters of the Windrush I know Carol, who was one of my interviewees and she's teamed up with somebody else now and they're going to be writing a play around her dad so that you know that's moved on and somebody else's doing something. Yeah, so they're all good memories for me and you know it's sometimes they'll think, you know, oh you know I'll havent sometimes, you think Oh, have I done enough you know and have I

done it that way and then, on reflection I mean, getting your questions and doing this interview, I think, yeah you know it's okay I've done enough...

Cairo Clarke: More than enough, more than okay. I think you've, you've really done so much that is really inspiring and very thoughtful and, you know, groundbreaking in its own way...

Bea Freeman: I think with me, I've had the confidence to challenge along all these years and to say I'm not gonna give up, it's just what I want to do. And I think you've got to have that confidence and we've all got that confidence people say, Oh no, I couldn't do that I couldn't approach that person I couldn't. You've got nothing to lose. You've got, which I say now you've only got, you know, it's only an email, isn't it? Or a telephone call, I used to say or a stamp on an envelope. And, you know, if they keep saying no, what you say, okay, which I did. And I'm going to do it this way, I'm going to try it, I'm going to do it this way. And in the end you will come out and it's hard to try and penetrate that, but I think at the beginning for me it was, but there is a lot more people taken on that stance now that you can challenge, you don't have to always do things that way you know, if you're creative, which I am and I blow my own trumpet and I know that, I can do those things and I, and I will make the things and do the things the way I want them with other people.

Cairo Clarke: I think that's a good note to end on and to sit with to think about that confidence in ourselves that we need to keep pushing forward and not wait for someone else to activate it within us. Thank you so much for chatting.

Bea Freeman: I hope that's answered all your questions.

Cairo Clarke: I hope it was nice to talk about as well it's been really great to listen to you...

Bea Freeman: I think I should guess you know I do like talking about my work but I never used to. But now I do and I think it's important that other people know about my work, that it's there, that I did exist, that I was part of that time and that place.

Cairo Clarke : Yeah, absolutely

Bea Freeman: And that some of my work, if not all of it, if they can't access it is out there. And at some point or other now I've got time, I'd like to try and track down all the stuff I've done at the BBC, it's quite difficult because they, they, unless you're, if you're an independent person, it's very very difficult, but again with the people I know that should be able to happen, because I want to bring it all together. I mean the amount of films that I made when I was in the Afro-Caribbean unit. You know in Birmingham and there's no record of that at all anywhere.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah, well I hope you managed to get home, I mean it's, you know, those films wouldn't exist without you being a part of their creation and so you should be able to have some kind of record...

Bea Freeman: There's all the films like from People to People like A Place in the Sun that's Channel Four and when we did all that stuff with the, what was it the Black Philharmonic Orchestra, when there was all those musicians and, you know, People to People slots all the films that was made in there. Such a lot of films there and, you know, they belong to Channel Four, they don't belong to me and to the individual production companies but Channel Four should have them in their archive.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah

Bea Freeman: I think maybe what they should do is try and bring that series back and reshow it but I think the difficulty would be, because when they made People to People slots. I think they'd have to pay all

the different production companies again.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah

Bea Freeman: I don't know whether people signed up for one viewing or one screening or two or three I don't know but that was a thing, but, you know, it wasn't world rights. Like They Haven't Done Nothing, you know, converted back to me, because it was my film as a producer, but anything else I made for them belongs to them and it's, it's always difficult but maybe, maybe it's something maybe, I don't know the BFI might bring all of those black films together so they're all together, rather than just you know scattered about. Bring them all into one, one sort of archive.

Cairo Clarke: Yeah, would be nice to do I mean, you kind of find over like a lot of those times there was always one section or one moment within, you know, a broadcasting that was for black films, whether it was for an hour or a couple of hours once a week and then that's already a kind of marginalization and then to not have access to the archive or then to be scattered and not kind of cared for, is frustrating.

Bea Freeman: Yeah, it's all those things you know. It needs somebody, but then again this question of who's going to do it, who's going to get the money, who's going to be the owner of it, who's got the ownership and why is it being done and you know there's all of that. Or somebody will start it and then the money will run out and there's all of that.

Cairo Clarke: But as much as all those things are archived it would be nice for them to be un-archived so we could see them.

Bea Freeman: Yes, that's a good thing. All those archives need to be unarchived. Yes. Yeah.

Cairo Clarke: Thank you for tuning and please join us for the next episode. This series is supported by LUX, produced and edited by Sandra Jean-Pierre, soundscape by Ratiba Ayadi and design by Joshua Woolford. A special thanks to our guest Bea Freeman. See you next time.