**Archive Ref: 2015\_esch\_VoLe\_01**

*And would you like to invite your interviewee to come?*

*Would you please come and join us?*

I’d love to.

*Hello*

Hello there.

*What’s your name?*

My name is Mo

*How’s that spelled?*

M. O. But that’s – my real name’s Alice Kirby, but lots of people call me Mo. No one really calls me Alice, so you can call me Mo.

*OK. Um, Mo, what’s your date of birth?*

The 30th July 1983.

*And um, where are you now?*

I live in Clapton now, in Hackney.

*So you can clarify. You can say, where are we, actually now?*

*Where are you now?*

Oh, right now? I’m in Forest Lane, which is in Newham, erm (laughs) and a place called The Lodge, at a Woodcraft Folk group. That’s all I know, I think.

*So, um, were the roads busy on like a daily basis, around where you lived?*

The woods?

*The roads.*

The roads. Um, yeah, I guess so. My memory of them is probably just of normal London roads, but I imagine they’re probably busier now in a way, but I think… I don’t remember them being particularly busy.

*Did you feel comfortable and safe when walking around your area?*

Um, I lived in lots of different places, all around east London, Newham and Waltham Forest. We moved around quite a lot, so in some of the places I lived in, in some of the areas I did feel safe and in some of them I didn’t feel so safe, but when I was very young I usually did feel safe. When I became a teenager and I started to be more independent, then sometimes I didn’t feel quite as safe.

*What sort of places did you live?*

I lived in Cattle Estate for a while, when I was a teenager, and that always felt quite scary, parts of that have been demolished now I think, and the block that I lived in has been demolished. Um, I lived in Hackney for a little while, um, near the Chatsworth Road, when I was growing up, and that’s when I was a little bit older, and that didn’t always feel so safe. Um, yeah, but it was mainly when I got older that I started to feel less safe, not when I was young, it always felt quite safe when I was young.

*Um, did you feel that you were emotionally effected by the construction, and if so, what were your emotions?*

Um, I think it all seemed quite abstract to me when I was young because I was too young to really have an idea what was happening, I knew, mainly friends who had either parents or older siblings that were quite involved in the protests and were quite effected by the building of the road and the eviction of the squats and things like that. Um, my parents have links with quite a few of the people who lived in the squats and I used to go there when I was younger as well, so I feel like those people were quite effected by it but I didn’t really understand the ins and outs of what was happening, because I was quite young. Yeah.

*About how old were you when this was happening?*

In my head it all goes on for quite a long time because my parents knew people who lived in the squats that were evicted and I had an older friend who my brother’s friend, my brother’s a bit older than me, my brother’s friend’s boyfriend lived in the squats and we used to go and hang out there and my parents knew some artists who lived there before they were gonna be evicted and that all ranges from when I was about… I can’t even remember when it began… maybe 10, or 9, but then I remember it going on later, because I was a bit confused when I was talking to my parents about it because I remember there being some protests when I was in secondary school and I remember people living in the foresty bit right on Hollow Ponds, which is right on the top of Leytonstone High Road, but that was quite a lot after, so in my head it’s quite mixed up, I don’t really understand… I don’t really remember when everything was happening, or what it all meant really.

*And what type of people did you see in your…*

In my local area? It depended where I was living at the time, but to take some examples…it varied quite a lot, because sometimes we lived in… like when we lived in Cattle Estate it was a council estate so there was lots of families all quite closely packed in together, um, very, quite diverse, but my parents are also creative people so they were friends with lots of artists and lots of people that lived in squats and we also lived in sort of communal living situations, or houses with lots of people, so I was always surrounded by creative people, but we also lived in some council estates, so also people from really diverse backgrounds, not particularly well off people. I remember there being quite a lot of, I don’t know, danger in a way. It sometimes felt quite unstable in those places. But also quite warm places as well. Yeah.

*Um, by any way were you disturbed by any loud music or loud sounds…?*

Um, I think when we were living in quite close quarters with other people, so either when we were in estates, or when we were living with more than just my family, with bigger groups of people, there was always quite a lot of music, and it wasn’t always like loud music that the neighbours were playing, sometimes it was music, because my dad’s a musician so there’d be lots of music in my home, and that was always quite… I remember going to sleep listening to people making music, and that was always quite nice. And I do remember going to visit some of the squats as well, and the particular squats that you’re kind of… the squats that were evicted for the building of the road, I remember spending some time there with a friend of my brother’s who lived there and he was a kind of reggae DJ and I remember him playing lots of music, and I was quite young at the time as well, so it was quite fun, I thought it was quite cool. I thought it was quite a cool thing that he was a reggae DJ and I used to hang out with him (laughs).

*Do you feel that stress was relieved by the music in any way?*

Er, there’s different kinds of music. I feel like there’s different… there’s noise and there’s music. I feel like if you’re next door to your neighbour who’s playing really loud dubstep, and you don’t really want to listen to it, that’s noise, but if you’re choosing to be in an environment that playing a certain kind of music, then that’s music that you’re enjoying, and it’s usually quite an enriching thing, rather than an unwanted thing. So, I was only… no I don’t think I ever was… and I think actually when you’re younger you’re less bothered by things like that. Even unwanted noise I don’t think particularly bothers you when you’re a kid, because you probably make a lot of unwanted noise yourself, so I don’t think it’s as important to a child.

*Have you visited any of the places you used to live?*

Erm… I’ve not been inside any of the places. I live quite close to one of the places, now, so sometimes I go past it and look at it, and sort of have a vague memory of living there when I was a kid. But one of the estates I grew up in has been demolished now, so sometimes I have been past that I tried to imagine this huge tower block where there’s now something completely different and that’s quite interesting, to try and imagine what was there before what’s now there.

*I was wondering… do you prefer… if you could change it back to how it was, like not your age or anything, but the whole surroundings, for it to be as it was before or as it is now…?*

Umm… I’d like to give you a really simple answer to that, but I don’t think I can (laughs). Um. I think how it used to be is so mixed up in my memory of my situation because I was moving around so much, and I was surrounded by so many different things, so I haven’t got a very clear view of the state of the way things were then. Like I don’t even know any specifics, like when these protests took place and stuff because it’s all in my abstract memory, so I don’t really have a very clear memory of how it was, or even the political situation, I don’t have a very clear memory of it. But I remember it feeling quite exciting and quite lively, and now it doesn’t feel quite as exciting and quite as lively, but I think that’s also because there was a lot of struggle going on, so that’s not necessarily a good thing, that there was a lot of struggle, but it felt quite powerful and I feel that less now, but that might be because I’m in a different situation. I’m not as part of it.

*Thank you.*

You’re welcome. Thank you.

*Guys that was re-*

(Tape stops. Panel of young interviewers changes)

*Would our esteemed guest like to enter?*

Yes, I would love to.

*Um, can you remember anything about the protests?*

Yes. I remember going on a protest when I was in secondary school. I’m not sure, in hindsight, what the protest was about. It was to do with the link road, but when I look back on it I think what was happening with the link road was a lot earlier, so I’m not sure what this protest was about. I was quite young when I went. I remember that, and it was quite crazy and busy, and there were lots of police.

*Were you heavily involved in the protest?*

Not really. I didn’t really understand what was happening. So it was quite um… it felt quite violent in places. I was a bit kind of frightened I guess, so I wasn’t that involved, but there was quite a lot of tussling with the police.

*Were you at the forefront, or were you more at the back or in the middle of the protests?*

Um, I think it was…during the protest I wasn’t in the forefront, but I think when it was disbanding and when the police were getting involved, I think it was hard to not be in the forefront because they were just trying to clear everyone out, whether you’d been a trouble-maker or not.

*How did you feel about that?*

Um, quite frightened at the time, because I was quite young, and I felt like they were being quite forceful, in a way, so I felt quite frightened.

*Was it a local protest, or was it in other parts of London?*

No, it was in Leytonstone. Um, I can’t really remember exactly where it was, but it was around the Grove Green Road sort of area.

*In protest in general, not just the ones you’ve been to, do you think protests are effective?*

Um. I like that question. Um. Yes. They’re effective. They have an effect, so they’re effective I think. Um, it depends very much on how the protest is treated by the people trying to enforce restrictions on it, and it depends on how the people behave, and it depends on how the protest is organised I think, As well. Um, but they can be very effective, yeah.

*Would you ever involve yourself more heavily in a protest than you did in that particular one?*

Um, I have since, and yes, I probably would again.

*Were they enjoyable?*

Yeah, they were enjoyable, yeah. There were times when they were really enjoyable. Times when they felt quite powerful, because you’re with a big group of people who are all kind of, feeling passionate about the same thing, so it’s a very unifying thing, it feels quite, it feels quite powerful.

*In those protests were you an organiser, or were you just there because (inaudible) the concept of protest?*

I was there. I wasn’t an organiser for any of them. Um, I was there… I was involved in the music that was going on at a protest, once, and I sort of had a bit more of an organising role in that, but I wasn’t really organising the actions that were taking place, it was more just being involved in the music.

*What was the music you were making?*

Um, lots of people with instruments playing music, and there was a choir that I was running at the time, that was there. It was quite impromptu, I hadn’t organised anything but there happened to be a few people there, and we did some singing and changed some words to some songs to make them relevant to what we were doing, and things like that.

*Would you ever organise a protest? And if so, what would it be for?*

I don’t think I ever would organise a protest, because I don’t think I’d be very good at it, um… I don’t think that’s my forte, organising protests, but it is some people’s fortes, and that’s very good, that it is, but I don’t think I ever would.

*Can I just make a suggestion? Given that this project has a focus on music and protest I think it would be really interesting to ask a little bit more about the songs that they were singing and the words that they changed, because I think that might be really relevant to this project.*

*What songs did you sing and what words did you change?*

Um… we were singing a song called Blood and Roses. Bread and Roses, sorry, which was an old protest song. We didn’t change any of the words to that one, because that one was quite relevant, and that was about… the song’s called Bread and Roses, and it’s basically asking for more than just basic human rights, its asking for access to culture and creativity and things that are more than just basic human rights, so that’s what the song is about, but it’s a very old protest song that was sung in a … I think it was something to do with a factory that was something to do with cotton production, or something. And what else did we sing? We sang um, an old Gospel song which is, I can’t remember what the title of it is, but it’s about… the lyrics are something like ‘gonna lay down my sword and shield, by the river side’, which is to do with peace, basically.

*Can you remember anything about the art work?*

The art work? At the protests?

*Yeah.*

Um… I don’t remember there being much art work happening at the protests. Um, there was definitely some things that you might be able to call art work I guess. There was definitely some destruction of things, and some kind of burning of things, and stuff like that. I don’t know if you’d include that in art work. I might (laughs).

*Was it a very colourful event?*

Yeah it was, it was colourful. There were quite a lot of kids there actually. Which one are you talking about? Are you talking about the one I spoke about earlier? The one in Leytonstone?

*Any events that you’ve been to.*

Any. Well, um the one when I was… the first one that I remember, which was the one in Leyonestone… actually it’s not the first one, one of the first ones, that was… there were a lot of children there and that seemed quite colourful, I guess. And since then, other protests that I’ve been to have always seemed quite celebratory really, there’s an air of celebration and singing and music and creativity. So yeah.

*Can I make another suggestion? I know that Mo has got quite an interesting story around that first protest, so can you try and find out what it is?*

*What’s your story about the protest? (all laugh)*

*That’s not going to… you have to probe a bit. Think of interesting questions to ask.*

*Can you give us a little insight into you first protest?*

Um, yes, um not going to give it to you on a plate. You’re going to have to work for it. (all laugh). Um… a little insight into my first protest… um, I was quite young, um probably about, maybe about 16, 15 or 16, around that age.

(The tape ends here, continued from video recording)

It became quite a violent protest. There were lots of police.

*Was it mainly kids from your school that were doing the violent actions, or…?*

No, there weren’t, I was one of the youngest people there. It was the older people that kind of…provoked the violence. And it didn’t really come… it came from trying to disband the people, to get all the people to leave.

*Do you know what the protest was for?*

It was to do with the M11 Link road being built. And the eviction of some of the squats, but this was quite a bit later when I was a bit older.

*How old were you at the time?*

Like I said, I can’t really remember, but I think I was about 16.

*So you were in secondary school.*

Yeah.

*What was it like with the other children there?*

In secondary school? There weren’t really many other children at the protest, that were my age, because I was hanging around with a group of older people, so there weren’t any of my school friends there.

*Who were you with?*

I was with, erm, an older friend of my brother’s and my family, called Celestina, she had quite a lot to do with the organisation of the protest, and she’d been involved in the earlier protests as well, and she was married to somebody who used to live in one of the squats that was evicted and she lived there sometimes too. She had a small… a baby…a little baby with her who was in a pram, and I was mainly with her. I used to hang out with her and her husband and her family quite a lot.

*Would they take place of a weekday or a weekend or a holiday?*

Hmm…I can’t really remember, I imagine it was probably at the weekend, but I can’t remember.

*What was it like for your friend Celestina having a small baby at the protest?*

Um, quite tricky I think, because it was intended to be quite peaceful, but it became quite, um, scary and violent and the police were trying to clear everybody out, and during the process of trying to clear everybody out it got a bit tussley and violent and one of the police officers was trying to move the pram which had a metal frame, was trying to move the pram out of the way to clear all the people out, and I don’t think he realised that there was a baby in the pram, or a toddler in the pram, and the baby wasn’t strapped in, he was just sitting in the pram, and he was pulling the pram, the pushchair, and the baby was nearly falling out, so I was trying to keep him off the pram, and it was all quite tussley, so I pushed him back like that to try and get him off the pram, and he fell back and hit his head on the floor, and then groups of us were just shoved into a van at that point, so I was taken off in a van by the police.

*What was it like after…in the van?*

Um, quite scary, because nothing like that had ever happened to me before.

*Did you know what was happening?*

Yeah. I knew what was happening. I don’t know if I really thought about what was happening. I assumed that we were going to a police station or something, but I didn’t really know what was happening.

*Where did you end up?*

We ended up at a police station of Leytonstone High Road, erm, which I think is no longer a police station, but we ended up there, and we were put in a cell for a while, and parents were informed, and things like that.

*Did the protest get a lot of attention in the media?*

I’m completely unaware of that. It’s quite a good question though, but I don’t … it got recognition… I don’t know when I was that age if I had that much interaction with the media. We didn’t have a TV at home, so I don’t know if it would have been on TV either, it might have been in the local newspaper, but I think smaller things like that are possibly a bit more word of mouth. It was big news at school, and it was big news in the local area. People were talking about it, but I don’t know if it was on the news, or in the local papers or anything.

*What were you thinking, and how long were you in the cell for?*

Overnight. So we were there all night and left in the morning.

*What did your parents think of it?*

My parents thought that… I think they were quite upset, not with me; they were quite upset with the situation. But I don’t remember them being in any way upset with me. If anything they were angry with the whole situation had been treated.

*Were they involved in the protests as well?*

No, but they’d been involved in earlier protests, and they had been sort of the outskirts of being involved in the eviction of the squats that happened in the early protests, and stuff like that.

*Were your parents happy that you were involved, or, what were their (?) at the time?*

Er, I don’t I don’t know. I don’t think they shared with me how they felt about me being involved. I think secretly they were probably happy about it, but I don’t think they wanted to encourage it, because they wanted me to do what I wanted to do, rather than what they were encouraging me to do.

*I’m really sorry to stop you, because it sounds like you’ve got a lot more questions to ask, but we have 10 minutes left and we still have one more group, so we’re going to have to stop. Would you thank your interviewee?*

*Thank you.*

Thank you!

(Video ends. Panel of young interviewers changes)

You need to say action.

*Action.*

*Were you involved in the parties and the music as well?*

Um yeah… I was involved. I wasn’t really making any music at that point. Um, but I was around quite a lot of music.

*Did you enjoy it?*

Yeah, I really enjoyed it. It’s probably the thing about it that I was most able to connect with emotionally, was the music that was happening.

*What kind of music did you listen to?*

I listened to a lot of music that my parents listened to, although I pretended at the time not to be, because at the time I pretended to be listening to punk and heavy metal, I was secretly listening to Curtis Mayfield and Gospel music.

*So is that the genre that you prefer?*

Now? I think I like it all now. I think sometimes music… and… when you’re a teenager, I think the scene that you’re part of and the music you listen to are very tied up, so I think at the time I was um, listening to a certain type of music, and pretending to… and hanging around with people who listened to a similar type of music as me, so it was all part of who you were friends with, and stuff like that.

*So why did you keep the music that you listened to a secret from some people?*

Um, because I didn’t understand what it was part of. I think when you’re listening to heavy metal you know what it’s part of, it’s part of a particular scene, and you can be friends with other people that listen to that music, but when you’re listening to old American Gospel music, you don’t really know what that’s part of. Um, so, I didn’t really understand what…I think I was probably a little bit embarrassed of it.

*Do you remember any of the musicians?*

Um… people that I know, or…?

*Musicians that played in the protests.*

Musicians that played in the protest. Well I don’t really remember… the guy, I mentioned him earlier, the guy that played a lot of reggae music, he was a DJ but he was quite linked with all of the protest stuff that was happening at the time. But I don’t really remember him playing music at the protests. But music was very much a part of that scene. And protest music as well, which is a whole thing in itself. The music that you sing and the chants and things like that.

*When they played music, what instruments did you notice that they used?*

Guitars, there were lots of guitars. Lots of singing. Drums. Erm…There was a few bands about, so there was the occasional electric guitar and bass and drum kit and things like that, so yeah.

*How… did you run the parties, or were you just involved?*

I was too young at that time to run any parties, although I probably would have liked to, but I was too young. So…and I didn’t really go to any of the parties, but I was aware that they were going on, and I was aware that it was quite a fun place to be, and almost a bit intrigued by what was going on there, because there were a lot of older people living in squats having parties. I didn’t really go to any of the parties.

*Were some of your family involved?*

Yeah… when I was younger they were involved. By the time I was in secondary school, they were not as involved, because we weren’t living in communal living situations or squats anymore. We were living in a house with just my family, so they were less involved, but they had lots of friends who were involved with all that.

*Why don’t you ask something about the… Mo started to talk about protest music and chants. Would it be interesting to ask a bit about that?*

*What sort of chants were there?*

Um… I think I’m going to find it quite hard to remember. There were chants that were started by a group of people and then they spread through the crowd, and they were usually about something specific that was being protested about, so to do with the M11 Link protests it would have been to do with the building of the road. I can’t remember what they said. Um…

*What about other protests that you’ve been to? Can you remember any protest chants that you’ve heard?*

Urm, I don’t know if I can. No. I don’t think I can remember any. I can remember some protest songs, but I don’t think they were songs that we sang at protests, apart from the ones that I spoke about earlier on, which was the Bread and Roses one, erm, er…

*Can you remember the chorus from that song?*

Yeah…Yes…I don’t know if there is a chorus. There’s lots of verses that one. Do you want me to sing it? Is that what you’re leading to?

*Sing it! Sing it!*

I might not remember all the words. But the first verse goes

(Sings)

As we go marching, marching, in the beauty of the day,

A thousand darkened kitchens are something something something…

True art are love and beauty…der der ber der ba der…

But the people here are singing, give us bread, but give us roses.

…Which is all about wanting more than just the basics. It’s all about the importance of protest, that song, but I also ran a choir in Bristol for a while, we got a collection of Union songs together basically, and protest songs…

*Can you remember any?*

Yes… I find it really hard to recall things, but once I’ve recalled it… urm… I remember it now!

(Sings)

Let us pause in life’s pleasures and count its many tears,

While we all sob sorrow with the poor

There’s a song that will linger, forever in our ears,

Oh, hard times come again no more.

It’s a song, a sigh of the weary,

Hard times, hard times, come again no more,

Many times you have lingered, around my cabin door,

Oh, hard times come again no more.

*(Applause)*

So it goes like that, but there’s lots of verses.

*Did you have a favourite song?*

A favourite song? I liked that song. That wasn’t a song that we sang at the time though, that’s a song that I’ve learned since. I learned about where it comes from and things like that, but that’s not a song we sang then.

*Do you know the song Testimony of Patience Strong? I think that’s what it’s called…*

No…it sounds… The Testimony of Patience Strong… Is it a Union Song?

*It’s a song about a person, I think it’s from 1880, and it’s an individual testimony about the conditions of a pit in Newcastle, and it’s got a little bit of Jordy in it, but it’s just this person’s testimony, and this person’s talking about why they haven’t got any hair, and why they’re calloused from the pit…erm…the person that the song is about… it’s a true story, and it changed the legislature about who could and couldn’t go down in the pit, after it. It’s a turning point in worker’s rights in history, but it’s a very beautiful acapella song.*

Hmm… it sounds it.

*Is that the name? It might not be Patience Strong.*

*It sounds amazing.*

*It is a really beautiful song.*

Because I was into work songs, specifically female work songs work songs of groups of females that would work together and the songs that they would sing, but that kind of led me to Union songs, and Union songs are a lot more kind of written, they’re a lot more formal in a way. The song that I just sang, that wouldn’t really be sung whilst working.

*No, it’s too complex.*

And it’s a song that’s written to communicate an idea.

*As opposed to Willy Brown(?) which you could sing as a work song.*

Yeah., Yeah. Exactly. And that’s much more… the work songs are much more to do with rhythm and often an explanation of what’s happening right now.

*Simple, repetitive choruses..*

Yeah, yeah.

*(Someone asks an inaudible question)*

Was it loud? Yeah, it was loud. I think most protests are quite loud. I think that’s one of the powers behind it.

*What instruments did they bring?*

Um… mainly voices. There were some guitars. I’ve been to protests since where there’ve been flutes and saxophones and violins and things like that, but not really no, not really when I was young, that I remember.

*(Someone plays Testimony of Patience Strong on a mobile phone. The interview pauses to listen)*

Is this the melody that you remember?

*Yes, but it’s got music in the background. And I don’t know it, I only heard it the other day.*

*(Music continues in background – inaudible speech)*

*It’s a love song…(inaudible)*

So she’s working in the pits? (Inaudible…)

*I’ll kill it. But it’s big man, it’s really a piece of poetry.*

It’s interesting that it probably could be sung by a man or a woman.

*It’s a woman...(inaudible)*

*Guys, we’re way over time, so we’ll have to stop there.*

**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Alice Kirby**

**Project: Voices of Leytonstonia**

**Date of interview:**

**Language: English**

**Venue: The Lodge, Magpie Close, Forest Lane, Forest Gate, London**

**Name of interviewer: Newham Woodcraft Folk Venturers (supported by Polly Rodgers)**

**Length of interview:**

**Transcribed by: Polly Rodgers**

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