

GALATI M E S

The GALA Queer Archive's Newsletter

DIRTY THIRTY

1/3 January - May
2024

Ruminations on the conditions of queer life on the thirtieth anniversary of South Africa's democracy

At GALA HQ, 2024 had started off in a rush. The rush is still rushing, and the team is busier than ever.

This year we welcome two new members to the team: Shaun Nzanzana as our Administration Officer, and Karabo Moeti as our 2024 intern. This also means that we have sadly had to say goodbye to our 2023 intern, Demi Phasha.

The team have been working on some home improvement projects that will make our offices more comfortable for visitors and researchers (*cough aircon for the library*), and some general updates that will hopefully allow our resources to be more user friendly.

What you can expect is a significant re-vamp of our library. We have begun the process of formally cataloguing the existing books and will be updating the collection with more local and up to date texts. This means that our library is abuzz with activity and space will be limited. We encourage making an appointment before visiting the Library, as we may have to be less accommodating to walk-ins over the next few months as the Library Manager organises the space.

We are also busy restructuring our website to be more intuitive to navigate, and more concise in relevant information. Please be patient with us during these growing pains.

Unbelievably, we have already pulled-off another iteration of Salon Kewpie: The Legacy Project and the Queer Catalyst Animation Incubator.

All of this has been going on amidst the broader socio/geographical/political upheavals around the world demand our attention. The anti-LGBTQIA+ Bill that has been threatening Ghana for the last few years has reared its ugly head in a big way. The persecution of queer and ally Ugandans continue. Horrors of wars and famines beyond our borders are impossible to ignore.

While trying to keep our house in order, and experiencing an existential crisis of humanity, we continue to battle with the ongoing violence and discrimination of our community.

Oh, p.s. it is also the Thirtieth Birthday of South Africa's democracy this year, and rather than celebrating, girl is going through a crisis.

In an attempt to organise our thoughts, our Educational Programmes Manager, Kgomotso Kgasi, put together a Town Hall with representatives from a few political

parties. The Town Hall was hosted at Constitution Hill and the audience brought questions regarding each political party's stance on the Hate Crimes Bill, what each party is doing to address the ongoing state hostility toward migrants and refugees, and how they intend to improve access to healthcare for queer and trans people. The event was livestreamed and [a recording of it can be viewed on our instagram](#).

In this edition of *the GALA Times*, the team respond to the anxieties of South Africa's 2024 elections, and how this Democracy matures into one that can take care of and responsibility for its people.

Karin Tan

(Culture and Media Manager)

(p.s. The contributions to this edition of GALA Times had been written in the months leading up to the elections. I would like to express my deepest apologies to the team, and the readers, for the delay. While very busy attending to my projects, it seems like one of my own anxiety responses to the elections included putting this edition together.)



Panellists at the Pride and Politics Town Hall Debate. Constitution Hill, JHB. IDAHOBIT 2024. Photograph by Karabo Moeti.

(left to right) Dr Athinangamso Nkopo (moderator), Christian De Jager (ActionSA), Palomino Jama (ANC), Tholo Motaung (COPE), Patrick Atkinson (DA), Lerato Mahoyi (RISEMzansi).



7th Floor Es'kia Mphahlele (Wits University)
corner Jorissen Street and Bertha Street
Braamfontein, Johannesburg
www.gala.co.za

THE PINK VOTE

As we head out to cast our ballots in our national elections, and celebrate 30 years of democracy, queer voters need to be aware of the power of their vote, and the intersecting human rights issues that come with the so-called 'pink vote'.

In this issue of *The GALA Times* we go back to the late 1980s, a time of conflict, uprising and hope. A time when the National Party was desperately trying to hang to power. The political turmoil of the time was playing out in the largely white gay rights movement, as ideological divisions within the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) and the broader white, gay community came to a head in 1987. Widespread disregard for the fight against apartheid was made evident when a large portion of white gay voters openly supported National Party candidates who agreed to publically support gay rights in the 1987 whites-only parliamentary election campaign. In the words of Jacob Tobia:

In many senses, the open embrace of pro-apartheid politicians by a significant number of GASA members rang the death-knell for the organisation", while Mark Gevisser maintains that the elections "proved to be a watershed for South African gay politics."^{i, ii}

While the ANC and other anti-apartheid activists were calling for an election boycott, the leading gay publication, *Exit* (under the editorship of David Moolman) was actively campaigning their readership to "vote gay."ⁱⁱⁱ *Exit* began their front

page coverage of their political campaign to get politicians to court the gay vote in January 1987, announcing that *Exit* would be asking all major political party candidates what their stance was on gay rights, and covering this over the next months.^{iv}

A key constituency in the campaign was the increasingly racially mixed suburb of Hillbrow^v. Hillbrow was also the centre of gay life in Johannesburg, with a number of gay clubs and bars, and home to the GASA Rand offices. However, even in relatively liberal and integrated Hillbrow, racism was rife. Opinion polls of white Hillbrow residents in 1986 and 1987 showed that most were in favour of the Group Areas Act and were concerned about the increasing number of "non-white" residents.^{vi} In June 1987 *Exit* reported a racial assault on Rand Gay Organisation leader Alfred Machela and Anglican priest Father Dowie (who the assailant accused of being an ANC member) at Connections bar in Hillbrow.^{vii} The National Party was sending mixed messages regarding both the Group Areas Act and gay rights, but many in the party were willing to overlook their distaste for homosexuality in favour of white unity.

In Hillbrow, a previous stronghold of the more liberal Progressive Federal Party (PFP), the young NP candidate

Leon de Beer came out most forcefully and publically in support of gay rights. De Beer not only campaigned with promises to advance gay rights, but also to return Hillbrow to a whites-only area, and *Exit* lobbied readers to vote for him.^{viii} De Beer won the election in May 1987 and the June issue of *Exit* celebrated his victory as a victory for gay rights:

The white general election was a victory for gay people on all sides. Never before has the gay issue received so much publicity, nor created an awareness of the power of the gay vote with so many public representatives, voters, or the general public.^{ix}

In the following issue of *Exit* the Letters page published some of the outraged responses to the campaign and NP victory. The student Wits Gay Movement (WGM) called out Moolman and *Exit* as "morally indefensible" and Julia Nicol of the newly formed Organisation of Lesbian & Gay Activists (OLGA) called the campaign a "moral outrage."^x Edwin Cameron, a human rights lawyer at the time, described *Exit's* campaign as "a debasement of the gay cause and profaning of its responsibilities to the South African gay community as a whole."^{xi}

And while *Exit* rejoiced in and publicised De Beer's support of gay rights, it also called out the ANC for homophobia. The October issue of *Exit* led with the headline "ANC turns anti-gay", and while homophobia was indeed a problem in the resistance and democratic movements, the way in which *Exit* reported on this seemed to reinforce the anti-ANC



FREE

exit

No 18
April/May 1987

Key Nats say yes

Old Prog waffles, Schwarz positive

JOHANNESBURG – Two Nationalist candidates in key gay constituencies came out strongly in support of gay rights and for legislation for a better deal for gays in South Africa.

They are Leon de Beer, De Beer told *Exit*: "Be-

in Parliament, depending on its contents, I would have no objection in principle. I would be sympathetic to the rights of persons.

"Obviously I emphasise this is as far as adults are concerned. I do not believe this should involve young people, particularly very young boys."

view of the urgency of your request I have not consulted my colleagues. This is my personal view and I stand by that. I have always attended to the needs of my constituents over the last nine years. Many of them will bear that out and I have received all kinds of requests for personal assistance."

HNP, CP say no

BOTH the political parties at the far right of the election spectrum, the Conservative Party (CP) and the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) have rejected any suggestion of support for the gay cause or the embracing of gay rights. Both will oppose any bill in Parliament aimed at a better deal for gay people in the country.

This means that all candidates of both parties, whether they have an election pact or not, are disqualified from deserving the support of gay voters in the coming election.

Gay voters should at least withhold their votes from these candidates, and at best spoil their papers if they cannot reconcile their beliefs with the policies of

Also see Page 7.

Ask questions

READERS are urged to ask candidates whether they would support gay rights, and whether they would support legislation providing a better deal for gay people in South Africa.

They should ask these questions at meetings and house visits, and make accurate notes.

Please let *Exit* know what transpired. We will

Dr No says no



Dr Andries Treurnicht ... being gay is not an acceptable practice. He rejects any support for gay rights.

No ja from Jaap



Jaap Marais ... will definitely oppose legal reform. "We can never reconcile ourselves with that which you represent."

other candidates in their constituencies.

The leader of the CP, Dr Andries Treurnicht, said being gay is not an acceptable practice. He would most certainly oppose legislation aimed at the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Even though it is not dealt with in their official policy, he said, and even though he had not discussed it with "his people who deal with such legislation", it is unacceptable "as a matter of course for people with a specific religious vision" and his natv

The leader of the HNP, Jaap Marais, categorically stated that his party would never support gay rights and would definitely vote against legal reform.

Neither he nor his party had ever reflected upon the gay issue, but off the cuff "I do not think that we can ever give any consideration at all to reconciling ourselves with that which you represent. It reaches the fundament of our very existence."

"Our party is strongly focused on the family. It is the basis of the society of a

sentiments of its conservative leadership.^{xii} Nevertheless, the ANC was in fact forced to confront these prejudices in the coming years, partly thanks to campaigning from gay anti-apartheid activists such as Simon Nkoli.

Linda Chernis

Archives Manager

(Partially extracted from her Master's thesis)

ⁱ Tobia, "Out of the Laager, into the Streets", 107

ⁱⁱ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom", 61

ⁱⁱⁱ Daniel Conway. "Queering Apartheid:

The National Party's 1987 'Gay Rights' Election Campaign in Hillbrow". *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2009, 35: 4) 849.

^{iv} "Election: vote gay". *Exit* issue no.16 (January 1987) – Exit Collection (AM2723), GALA Queer Archive

^v From the late 1960s Hillbrow, with its dense, high-rise living and plethora of cafes, bars and clubs, had become increasingly diverse, attracting white immigrants and young people moving to the city. From the late 1970s authorities tended to turn a blind eye to landlords desperate for tenants flouting the apartheid Group Areas Act which kept South Africans separated into racially defined geographical areas

^{vi} Conway, "Queering Apartheid", 853

^{vii} "Machela, Dowie assaulted", *Exit* issue no.19 (May/June 1987) – Exit Collection (AM2723), GALA Queer Archive

^{viii} Conway, "Queering Apartheid", 856

^{ix} Letters page: "WGM stand clear" and "Outrage", *Exit* issue no.20 (June/July 1987) - Exit Collection (AM2723), GALA Queer Archive

^x "Election was gay victory", *Exit* issue no.20 (June/July 1987) - Exit Collection (AM2723), GALA Queer Archive

^{xi} Conway, "Queering Apartheid", 860

^{xii} "ANC turns anti-gay", *Exit* issue no.24 (October 1987) - Exit Collection (AM2723), GALA Queer Archive

FREE

exit

No 20
June/July 1987

Now make Jhb Prog

Election was gay victory

THE white general election was a victory for gay people on all sides. Never before has the gay issue received so much publicity, nor created an awareness of the power of the gay vote with so many public representatives, voters, or the general public.

In the wake of *Exit*'s election campaign, altogether sixteen people are now in Parliament who have publicly pledged their support to the gay cause – some in powerful

positions. They include seven Progs, eight Nats and one independent (see more views inside).

The one effective swing was in Westdene, where cabinet minister Pik Botha saw his share of the votes slashed from 72% in the previous election to only 57%. This despite the PFP share elsewhere on the Reef being considerably reduced and the Nat share increased. Prog Margaret Fourie reversed that trend here. She also increased the PFP votes and reduced the Nat majority.

numbers from the Prog tent, none from the Conservative Party tent, but 42 went to Leon de Beer's tent.

Excluding Hillbrow, the Progs could have retained Albany, Umhlanga, Umbilo, Wynberg and Edenvale. Progs in the rest of the country, including provincial leaders and Colin Eglin, the national leader, were so supportive that it is likely that the party will now formulate a gay stand. In the next election it could prove worth their while.

INTRODUCING...

As we head out to cast our ballots in our national elections, and celebrate 30 years of democracy, queer voters need to be aware of the power of their vote, and the intersecting human rights issues that come with the so-called 'pink vote'.

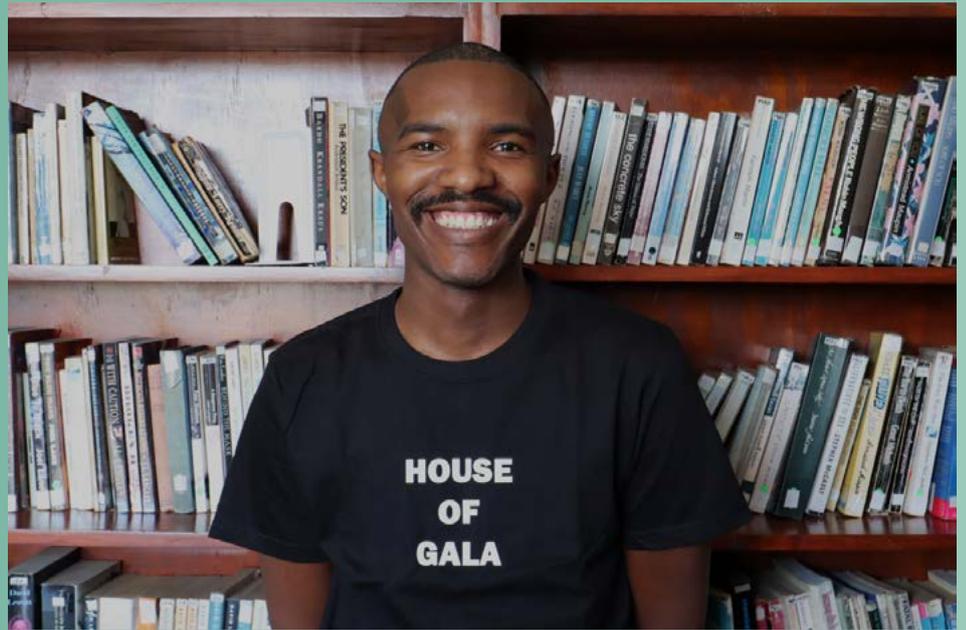
Shaun Lunga (he/they) joins GALA as the New Release Office Administrator, bringing with them a passion for artistry and storytelling. They are a budding artist, exploring avenues of expression through photography, video essays, and written narratives. Known as the "bookish, spiritual pantsula" on social media, Shaun shares their thoughts on African fiction, contemporary literature, and literary works.

In their spare time, Shaun contributes book reviews to publications such as Times Live and Oak Magazine. They also lead a feminist, socialist, and pan-Africanist book club, advocating for inclusivity and amplifying marginalised voices in literature. Shaun firmly believes that feminism is for everybody, embodying this ethos in their activism and engagement with literature.

You can find Shaun Lunga on Instagram and X at @shaun_lunga, and on TikTok at @shauninthebooks.

SHAUN NZANZANA

Administration Officer



KARABO MOETI

2024 GALA Intern



I go by Karabo and my pronouns are they/she. Coming to GALA, I am excited to learn about queer archives in the South African context. I seek to gain valuable work skills that can be applied to a future career in archival and social work. I hope it is also a space where I can develop my photography practice and research. I am from the North West Province, and I would especially like to apply my experience to where I come from. At GALA I hope to work on my own archival project and exhibition.

I studied Photography at the Market Photo Workshop and graduated in 2023. While there, I also volunteered and gained more experience in photography and the gallery space.

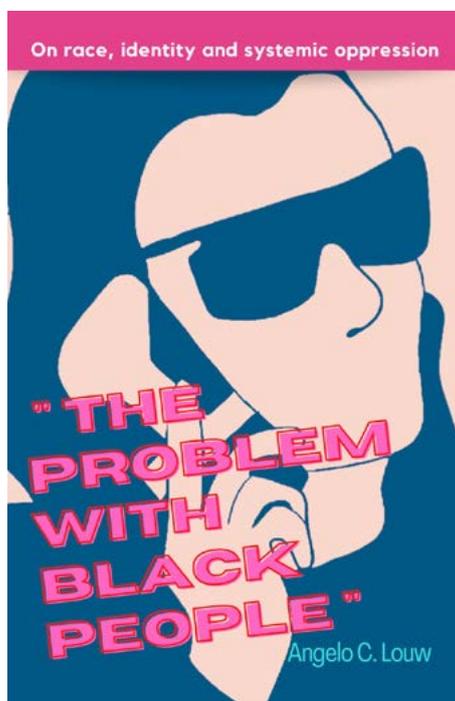
Reading is my power, and I particularly enjoy material on queer history and issues such as climate change and environment. I draw and enjoy comics books too. Low-key I am also a basketball player.

HOW THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS PERPETUATING HATE CRIMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Author's reflections:

I heard someone call it anarchy the other day on the radio... the state of our country, 30 years into the democratic dispensation. We live in an era of instant access to information, and we are becoming more and more aware of the mafia tendencies of those in power – both in and out of government. Their behaviour signals to the public that abuses of power and privilege go unchecked, and that some are above the democratic principles and laws of this land. This is a very dangerous space for vulnerable groups like our community – who remain the most vulnerable even amongst society's most defenceless. In a society that rewards the abuse of power, we become an easy target for the bravoda. I explore this in the following chapter of my book.

The Following text is featured in Angelo C. Louw's recently published book, *The Problem with Black People*.



An ignorance of our core constitutional principles often reverts them back to their age-old value systems as a gauge of morality. And within many of these cultures, people like

me are not only condemned to the bowels of hell, but are seen as a symptom and a sign of the end times — as per the religious text 86% of South Africans claim to subscribe to: *The Holy Bible*.

Coupled with the devastation that the climate crisis is wreaking on the world, let alone the African continent, ring-winged rhetoric and religious dogma have steered blame away from the greedy colonial corporations pillaging the Earth to those bearing the proverbial scarlet letter of progressiveness (that many have been led to believe these religious texts warn us about).

The real culprits of these seemingly biblical droughts, floods and locust infestations are cooped up in their corner offices in far off lands, away from the public's gaze. The sheer spatial design of our townships keep the majority of poor South Africans far away from the displays of opulence in the leafy, almost exclusively white suburbs.

It is the so-called "wayward" members of society, who live down the

road in our ghettos, that have become easy and attainable targets for retribution. We've become sacrificial lambs in our communities' efforts to save the world.

Recently, research by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) confirmed that the Southern African region was already experiencing climate changes that are more rapid, and with impacts that are more severe, than the global average.

But we don't need a report to tell us that; over the past two years, locust infestations we observed in East Africa now plague our agricultural provinces, droughts have dried up our taps in some parts, while severe floodings have claimed countless lives in others. (All of this, while the Covid-19 pandemic relentlessly tore families apart.)

During this time, we also saw an unprecedented number of hate crimes perpetrated against members of the LGBTQIA+ community — including the brutal murders of 20 gender-nonconforming individuals. The

surge of violence against LGBTQIA+ people prompted President Cyril Ramaphosa to publicly denounce the attacks and prioritise new protective legislation.

Slow-onset climate change impacts, like water scarcity, lower crop and ecosystem productivity, are forcing people to migrate in search of opportunities elsewhere in a country where the climate crisis is fast shrinking what little opportunity is left to find.

The impact of climate change on our food security is already apparent; the cost of food has skyrocketed in tandem with the rate of unemployment and poverty in our country. An estimated 40% of South Africans go to bed hungry — a figure that will certainly rise as the impact of the Russian war on Ukraine compounds exiting food injustice across the continent.

And if South Africans cannot afford food, they certainly cannot afford to go to university — one of the only places to formally learn about climate change in our educational system. Also, there is still a large portion of our population without access to the internet. This means that millions of South Africans rely on these personal networks and communities to make sense of what is happening (and as already established, the vast majority of them belong to faith-based communities).

Hunger often leaves people vulnerable to manipulation by the powerful — and religion has long been used as a means to sustain systems of exploitation across the continent. It makes sense that so many people are misguidedly seeking redemption in an era defined by fear mongering, instead of challenging the root of their deprivation: the *real* reason we may very well face the end.

Without effective sensitisation of the climate crisis in grassroots communities, historically marginalised groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community not only remain at risk of violence,

but will continue to be systematically excluded from our failing economy, as well as relief efforts aimed at alleviating climate impacts.

“When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will eat the rich,” philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously said. Yet, history has shown us time and again that it is society’s most vulnerable who are thrown out to the wolves — for reason often gives way to hunger pains, and my people are starving.

Angelo C. Louw
(Contributing Writer)



Angelo C Louw is an award-winning activist and documentarian. His book *The Problem with Black People* is available on several [online bookstores](#). His recently released documentary *CRUDE: Wentworth Community vs Big Oil* can be [streamed on the Greenpeace International website](#).

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

Salon Kewpie - The Legacy Project 2024 took place in early April this year. As I reflect on this year's programme, the themes of Home and Family continue to stand out as the areas where the basic needs of our communities are desperate for. (Photographs credited to Sara Petersen)

Do you remember the 'family meetings' Cyril would call during the lockdowns? Whether or not our political leadership have any sincerity in their bureaucratic bones, at the very least, it seemed like they were trying to encourage the story of togetherness and care.

I am amazed at what a surreal time 2020 was, and surprised at how easy it has been for us to move on and forget. Jokingly, Kgomotso and I were berating ourselves (as a society) for actually coming out of lockdowns as worse people than we were going in.

The bright side of our collective trauma was supposed to be the lessons we learnt from that time. There was an emphasis on

being more aware of each other. The word "care" was being used more than I'd ever heard before.

I don't know how Cyril's speeches became termed family meetings, but if you know the South African disposition, you know that between each other, it was being used with a pinch of sarcasm and a hand-ful of humour.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic was, and continues to be, a major collective challenge, the 2020/2021 lockdowns were kinda sorta the first time I heard this kind of rhetoric of togetherness coming from the government.

That's not to say the dysfunction wasn't

real. The power given to the police was over exerted (more so than usual). The desperation of working-class people was exploited. The corruption remains largely unaddressed.

Perhaps there was more than a pinch of sarcasm embedded in the memes about the "Family Meetings".

There is no humour in remember the family meetings now. When reflecting on the mistreatment we have been experiencing from our political leaders, I get tight in the chest.

After recently being reminded of the lockdowns, my reflections on the [Salon Kewpie project](#) became punctuated by thoughts





of that time and how our relationship to our homes was challenged.

In Ballroom culture, the competition on the runway is between “houses” of queer people. The metaphor of this kind of family structure goes beyond a cute way to describe a sports team. Chosen-family, siblings, community, comrades, “my people”. Words and phrases common in the queer vocabulary that may have humour attached, but not a lot of sarcasm.

This year, the cohort participating in the Salon Kewpie workshops were divided into “Houses”. “House Parents” were assigned to each group to offer the participants more attention and allow for more intimate engagements.

This structure was implemented for the workshops, but we were under no delusions that these formations would persist beyond the programme. It was mainly an expression of the project’s ethos. For the time we were together, it was a family affair.

The home and family are the central nodes which we measure our identities with or against. The home is the locus for safety and accessing basic human needs, and family is the primary provider of place and belonging in society. Marginalised communities are well aware of the challenges when their home and family are threatened.

Thinking about the lockdowns and the elections, I am set with bitterness, scerp-

ticism and frustration about the use of this analogy of home and family. Where someone is born, and who they are born to, doesn’t guarantee a reliable home or family. And yet, society places so much importance on these uncontrollable factors. Queer communities and exemplify the fact that home and family are not static nouns that can be taken for granted.

As I consider the Legacy Project and the roles and responsibilities everyone took on to execute a successful programme, it illustrated to me the verb-like quality of home and family. They are physical, ideological and emotional commitments that needs ongoing maintenance.

Families and cohabitators will always experience moments of tension and frustration. But we express generosity, compassion and forgiveness to come to a mutually healthy space.

Attempting to make the House of Salon Kewpie - The Legacy Project into a home has been a big endeavour. It has relied on the generosity of many individuals and groups. Compromise and tension is unavoidable with so many personalities and idiosyncrasies in such close proximity.

But coming together with the team, meeting the participants and sharing the project with the public through the ball, for



Graduation category of the 2024 Salon Kewpie participants. Homecoming Centre, CPT. April 2024. Photographer: Sara Petersen

me, the use of domestic language became a reminder that what we were trying to create isn't just part of my job.

Ruminating on home, family, belonging and responsibility has been somewhat startling for me, because I rarely have active feelings about it. The use and analogy have become so pervasive in the sector that we work in, that it has become relegated to an overused trope in my mind. But the affect of ideating on Salon Kewpie, lockdowns and the elections has become a wiggly tooth that I keep worrying.

I am quite annoyed with myself for talking about COVID-19 and South African politics. Probably due to over exposure. I am bored of it. I am sceptical that anything new can be said, or that doing anything will make a difference. Am I sounding a tad jaded?

This being a notable election year on the 30th anniversary of democracy has come with considerable anxiety and helplessness. An election year bring up the usual examination of how we participate in the project of democracy.

Is a visit to the polls enough to consider someone an active citizen? The lockdown family meetings were requests for us to what? Do the right thing? Care for each other? Be understanding? Did we do that? Are we still? Can we consider voting a gesture of care? My difficulty is that it doesn't feel like an act of care when political leaders and parties present and behave like they are at war with each other and we are all their casualties...

Bringing up the housing crisis in South Africa is probably a bit too on the nose?

Maybe this has been an extraneous exercise, trying to tie all these floating thoughts together. I guess to try and find some sort of conclusion about all this amounts to something quite anticlimactic. Perhaps there was too much pressure put on us to become better people through COVID-19's "new normal". Family is messy. We don't necessarily like the people we love. Housekeeping is a chore.

A broken home is a story the queers are quite used to. As I sink further into my jaded and helpless headspace, I am forever grateful to Salon Kewpie 2023/2024 (and the spaces comparable) for being an example of home being where the heart is.

Karin Tan

(Culture and Media Manager)

The head nurse of the Triangle Project, Carol Lennon, honoured us with her attendance of the Legacy Ball. At some point of the evening, we found each other outside, sharing a smoke break. She told me that this was the first ball she had even been to. I found some of her reflections on the evening very poignant, and in a follow up email, I requested she write down some of those reflections:

To set the context for my feedback: I am a nurse, and was a paramedic. I have lived a very real life.

I was entertained and interested by the evening. I loved the diversity and inclusion but needed a bit of alcohol to relax and get into the idea of watching people walk, dance and pose. By the end of the night I was screaming for everyone.

My sorrow was at the forefront of my mind. Sorrow for the loss of our clients. It was Roxy's birthday.

A project and magazine was done by an artist from the Netherlands, Jan Hoek. I don't know if you have seen it, [Sistaaz of The Castle](#). It's where many of our transgender female, sex workers lived.

We have lost so many sisters to TB, HIV and AIDS, and the small group that remains is not in the best health. There are still about 25 of the SistaazHood group who access the healthcare services at Triangle Project, or in hospital or in prison.

It would be amazing for them to have an opportunity to tell their stories while they are still alive, and speak of the sisters that we have lost.

It is so important for people to see what prejudice and exclusion looks like. People who are sex workers and substance users who live on the street, or in the fields are not seen in the same way. Many are invisible to society. And yet, the girls of SistaazHood are sassy and amazing when they have access to wigs, clothes and a bathroom and mirror.

It would be so exciting to see the House of SistaazHood. Not that I understand, read, or watch anything about ballroom culture. I do see how art is a powerful tool for activism. I just wish for a real house for our girls, and all without a home, to live in.

Street evictions are happening in Cape Town. Amazing souls are going to be lost this winter and I don't want to lose them, their stories and conversations.

Carol Lennon

(Contributing Writer)



Triangle Project team members at the 2024 Salon Kewpie - Legacy Ball. Homecoming Centre, Cape Town. (Left to right) Carl Capitaine, Carol Lennon, Refilwe Legodi and Ayesham Khan)



Nonhlanhla is the founder [Lebo Basadi Foundation](#) and an ex-technician in CCTV alarm systems and electronics. She is a married lesbian and a parent. The Lebo Basadi Foundation is a safe house for queer victims and survivors based in Evaton, Gauteng.

Nonhlanhla was interviewed by GALA's Education Programmes Manager, Kgomotso Kgasi, on 04 April 2024, at the safe house. The following is an edited and translated extract of that interview.

Kgomotso (K): So Lebo Basadi, what inspired this work? What does this name signify to you.

Nonhlanhla (N): I was staying with my aunt who used to welcome everyone. You could come with whatever problem, and she would welcome and understand you and make sure you had space to sleep. She was even closer to me than my mom, so I think she was the one who inspired me.

I could see this was done with love and passion. She had a heart- to a point where you could say people took advantage of her. I could see the way she did things as things I could do in my community.

During apartheid, there were no gays and lesbians, we didn't know those things. We were dating like *nyonyoba wise* (tiptoeing) as friends. Come the time of Mandela and others were released from jail, we knew about it and saw it on TV with the likes of Phumi Mthethwa and Simon Nkoli.

I started helping queer people in 2012. That's when we started to have the likes of Sipehelele and Lebo. Lebo was from Limpopo and was disowned by her father when he found out she was lesbian. He removed her from school, so I used my own money to help her continue, even with Sipehelele I used my money.

In 2013, when I was a senior technician, I could afford anything. I used to help other lesbians. In 2020 my wife decided that we need to register as an organisation.

The name "Lebo" comes from my wife's daughter, short form of Moleboheng. Since she is also adopted, we decided that yah, let's do her name. Maybe when time goes on, she will want to carry on with it.

K: Do you still work as a technician?

N: I'm retired but I help here and there.

K: You still have the skill?

N: Yah. I've got lesbians that I taught. I used to take them on site. I don't know if you remember Mandisa, she was taught by me and I hired her. There was Jabu, I'm thinking she is no longer a lesbian. Even Thobile, she's got her own business now, taxi drivers, taxi owner.

K: You were inspired by your aunt and how Mamkhulu orientated herself around community. I'm sure Mamkhulu was opening it up for absolutely everyone. Why did you decide to be specific about having this space for queer people?

N: There are friends who get inspired by the fact that you're an older lesbian, and they will come through. Sometimes they come like they are visiting and end up staying. As time goes, you find out why they won't return home. They often come with stories like "at home they don't want me" or "at home they don't treat me well".

That's where I noticed the need to start this. So they can be comfortable as queer people and there's an older queer who they can live with. When they go to other shelters, they get discriminated against. They hear things like, "You dress like that, which side are you gonna sleep?", "You will be touching other people inappropriately". So they know they won't be comfortable. But when they live where I live, I know that my way is to only reprimand

them about minor things. I'll say "we don't do this because your safety comes first."

They all know me, you will never - You won't get lost. They will tell you "which Nonhlanhla? The queer one?"

They used to call me Queen Latifah.

K: Because of Set-It Off?

N: Yah, and then I used to beat the boys, I never used to play with them.

K: So if I'm hearing you correctly, most people come here because of issues at home- being discriminated against and not being seen. Are there other reasons that you've encountered?

N: The main problem is home. This is where one is supposed to run to, right? Home is where you are supposed to find comfort. It's like going to church. People can say all they want but when you go to church, that's where you must find comfort. But when you get harassed at church, where must you go? You decide to wander around. The same applies with us queers.

To be honest, sometimes not all of them come with this story. You find that one does not want to do the dishes and is behaving like the man of the house, and automatically she's a girl. When it's like that, you have to investigate and find out where is the problem. Others come because they have encountered problems from outside. They got involved with someone's partner and now she is getting beaten up. You know, lesbians being naughty.

K: In the situations when it's actually someone's naughtiness, where they were struggling with the rules at home and didn't want to do to take on responsibility in the house - How do you intervene?

N: I usually ask their parents to borrow me that person. I spend time and mentor her. Here, no one will say "I won't cook" or "I won't do this and that." Because you have to clean after yourself. Most of the time it

is my wife who cooks. If you can cook, then you will help her so you get used to doing chores. Then you go home when you're okay. I will follow up to check this person is okay.

K: Are there any challenges that you encountered when trying to officially establish Lebo Basadi?

N: At that time I was no longer working because of COVID. So my wife had to buy us food to keep us going. Like any other wife, she would complain here and there. But establishing it until this point, I had to reach out and ask Phumi. I have known Phumi from a long time ago. She was surprised, "Oh you're still in this group we were in?" I was asking Phumi if she could buy me a laptop and a printer.

She told me to come through and we had training sessions for this and that. She found us a stipend from the Dutch. - *audio cuts* - It's a mission. Especially they think we want to be special when it comes to DSD (Department of Social Development). It's not friendly. They will tell us that "we've got places where you guys can shelter". But a shelter is not jail- it doesn't have to be like jail. They came here and told me these beds are too comfortable...

K: They say the beds are too comfortable?

N: Yeah. They said we can just use those beds made out of steel. I know it's not going to be easy, but we will push. We need a place that we can make our own.

They come with too many regulations. Right now we're in a 'dry season' according to them. We are yet to receive money because we had a problem with our sponsor. So, there's nothing that comes in. We're back to my wife sponsoring food.

K: So given that Lebo Basadi is in the Vaal, some people consider it quite far away from other things. How do people come to know about this place?

N: Some via you guys, some via One in Nine. From organisation to organisation that know us. Except the ones from Vaal. They will just come.

K: How many people can Lebo Basadi accommodate?

N: For now it's four. We are busy building so we are planning to have about twenty.

K: What kind of resources or support do you provide to the people who are here? You mentioned food...

N: It depends on the problems they come with. If they were beaten by a man we refer

them to [POWA \(People Opposing Women Abuse\)](#). We end up making friends with a centre for social workers here in the Vaal.

K: Do you have a cap on how long a person can stay?

N: The maximum is six months. It was three but then we saw that it's not fair.

K: Is this shelter space organised? Do you talk to other people who run shelters?

N: Yeah, it's not like we know everything. We've got Thuli, Thuli's home that's a shelter for heterosexual men. And then we've got Ikhaya leThemba who especially focus on women who are being abused by men.

K: You don't have anyone who's doing what you are doing, who's focused on queer people?

N: No. We had to go to Cape Town to meet Pride Shelter so we can understand more. We went to check how they run things so that we can maybe adopt their style.

K: The people come here from different backgrounds, the things that bring them are different. How do you balance out-how do you make it safe for everyone?

N: Yo, Yo! How do I balance neh? Easy! Be yourself. They must get to know me as me. We're learning each other, balancing each other out. Coming here you might be scared for a bit, then eventually you get used to me. "this one doesn't like nonsense, and will say when she doesn't like something." And then I also learn, because people come from different cultures. You even learn the way they eat. You need to adopt to it. We are the ones who are adopting. You think to yourself, if I try say they must do things in a particular way, others don't take it very well. Then they start talking bad, "that shelter is like this and the food is like this and that"...

K: I was asking pointedly about that to say, when you find a person who clashes with how things are done, who wants things a particular way because people are particular, how do you build peace?

N: If you get arrested, do you choose your food? If you're in another shelter, do you choose food? Remember it's not a hotel. I'm trying to meet you halfway. If you cannot choose my things, you have to give me a reason. Are you allergic? But if you're telling me that "No because in my previous shelter I used to eat cheese and bacon" this is a different place. We're not in the suburbs. We don't get sponsored by Shoprite and Spar. It is out of somebody else's pocket. You need to meet us halfway. Everyone must be on the same level.

K: Yah. You can't give what you don't have.

K: Can you offer any memorable experiences or success stories?

N: A lot hey. We had Kim, Kim was a sweet somebody and she's working now. Hopefully she's still working. And then we've got Hanwha from Tanzania and her partner. They're saying that we must visit them.

K: Most of the time we struggle to create distance between our work and how we live. A lot of people are cautious about taking work home, but your work is in your home. So how do you self-care? How do you take time for Nonhlanhla? Nonhlanhla who is not trying to figure out a fiscal sponsor for anyone you know?

N: Yoh that's hard. Counselling. So that we can reset our minds and start afresh. Sometimes you get exhausted and then you find that you're troubled by your heavy things and then some poor person is just sitting here and the you find yourself taking out your frustrations on them, which is not healthy.

K: I agree, but over and above that, you need to take time for yourself. Do you like reading or music? Sometimes self-care shows up as things we like doing.

N: I like watching documentaries. I like different kinds of documentaries, others are of murder, political parties etc. I get bored easily so I'm not a type of person who reads a lot, but in the form of a documentary, I'm a good listener.

K: What are your long term plans for Lebo Basadi?

N: The dream is to make an impact. To make a stamp. So that we can be a big organisation like POWA. As queer organisations we like to perish quickly. You come in famous and then you quickly disappear. If I'm ever tired, there needs to be people who can take the spear and move forward with it. Not for only me, but for themselves and the young queers who are still to come. We need to grow to be impactful and people need to get paid for the work they do.



MUSINGS OF AN AXIOUS QUEER

Thirty years down the line, in Mzansi's democracy's stride,
Constitution's promises, shining bright and bold,
But for queer folks, freedom's story remains untold,
It's got its words you know, all so grand,
Promising freedoms, guiding light
But liberation fails to land,
They all preach freedom to love in South Ahh, that's the tease,
But there's still a chill in the breeze.
Behind closed doors, in secret spaces,
Queer love still wears hidden faces

Even so,
From townships to cities, across the land,
We explore desire, in every way,
Our bodies and minds, we freely lay,
For war and for love
We navigate shame, we find our bliss,
Our intimate moments, a tender kiss
We share our bodies, with those we trust,
Our pleasure's blessing, with no disgust

In the tapestry of race and gender and being,
our existence weaves,
Layers of oppression, hard to perceive.
For being queer and also Black, life's a complex dance,
Navigating identities, taking a chance.

In the streets, in the bars, in everyday scenes,
We are the dreamers, the fighters, the proud,
Breaking barriers, speaking aloud.
Through hardship and triumph, we've come so far,
In the journey of freedom, beneath the same star
Queer lives intersect with all kinds of dreams.
But come election time, we scratch our heads,
Unsure of who to trust, feeling misled.

Come May 29th, it's time to choose,
But the options? They leave us bruised.
In a world where rights are under strife,
We fear for our freedom,
our very life.

Look to Uganda, look to Ghana,
Anti-homosexuality laws create chaos.
It's a scary world no doubt,
And finding a voice feels like swimming in drought.

So, as we navigate this political maze,
We will remember the struggles of queer days.
And when we step into that booth,
We will choose leaders who champion truth.
If there's even a choice

VIOLENT MEASURE

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us...

Charles Dickens' words from "A Tale of Two Cities" encapsulate the paradoxes of my twenties. I find myself struggling to breathe, at times yearning for a sense of relief or even

posed by mainstream media to have a flourishing career, a perfect body, and envy-inducing achievements by this age is immense. Witnessing friends ascend to prestigious positions in "big" law firms, accounting firms, and consulting firms left me feeling behind, questioning my own trajectory. Yet, amidst this struggle, I held onto my sanity, showing up for myself every day, even as I grappled with feeling inadequate compared to my peers.

The societal value placed on one's occupation exacerbates these feelings of inadequacy. The question

the structural violence experienced as a black, queer individual. Despite living in a post-apartheid era with a progressive constitution, the reality is far from ideal. It's still not safe to be queer in many spaces, where violence and discrimination lurk just outside the door. My appearance may afford me some protection, but it also raises questions about authenticity and performance – am I truly expressing myself, or am I merely conforming to societal expectations?

Amidst these uncertainties, one question persists: what does freedom truly entail? For me, freedom exists within the safe spaces I've cultivated for myself, where I can authentically be who I am without fear or judgment. As we approach elections and celebrate thirty years of democracy, I yearn for change. I want the next generation to inherit a world where they can exist boldly and unapologetically, free from the shackles of identity negotiation and racial sanitisation.

On May 29, 2024, as I cast my vote for the second time in my life, I grapple with the decision of which political party to support. I'm not alone in this struggle, and I turn to resources like "Who Will Rule South Africa" by Adriaan Basson and Qaanitah Hunter in search of guidance. Despite the uncertainties of the future, I embrace the transition into my thirties with open arms, celebrating the journey and the resilience it has instilled in me. For I am here, doing the work of the living, showing up every day – and that, in itself, is worth celebrating.

FOR ME, FREEDOM EXISTS WITHIN THE SAFE SPACES I'VE CULTIVATED FOR MYSELF, WHERE I CAN AUTHENTICALLY BE WHO I AM WITHOUT FEAR OR JUDGMENT.

a slight sedation from the pain that cuts deep, like raining knives. Moments of happiness become precious commodities, cherished and clung to as if my life depends on it – because sometimes, it feels like it does.

The looming anxiety of approaching thirty comes with societal expectations that we should have it all figured out by now. The pressure im-

"What do you do for a living?" becomes a painful reminder of the judgments and dismissiveness I've faced based solely on my line of work. It's baffling how our worth is reduced to our profession, a concept deeply rooted in classism that I find unsettling.

Reflecting on my struggles, I recognise that they are deeply intertwined with capitalism, spiritual unrest, and

Shaun Nzanzana
(Administration Officer)

WOMEN TO A LESBIAN

Women

There is no creature in this universe

I admire more than Women

See as lesbian as I am

I consider myself obsessed with women

Black women

Have the melanin that makes the sun wake up. In hopes to beam on her skin

Cementing the gold cutis that was already evident

Oh her hair speaks volumes

Disagreeing with gravity

It stands tall and curly

Proud women

Stand tall with their knowledge of their strength

The strength that was imbedded in them , from a beautiful generational line of women,
that gracefully walked paths that shook the earth

Being able to lead upcoming superwomen

Smiling at the work done

Learning from the past mistakes

Living with pain stitched in them

She baked cakes because she saw the importance of celebrating

Holding themselves with care in a world build through disintegrating

Proud women find the courage to love themselves, in order to love others

Proud women are the reason constellations exist

For even stars hope to map their courage

Women stand tall,
It makes no sense-how a woman is really all that curves the lines of life
Women are beautiful,
I know it to be true,
for as lesbian as I am
I'm obsessed with women



Demi and her balloon effigy at her farewell party. JHB. March 2024.

THE LAST ACT OF LOVE

We sadly say goodbye to Demi Phasha, GALA's 2023 Intern. We wish you all the best as you embark on the next phase of your career. Thank you for sharing yourself with us!

As I prepare to bid farewell to GALA, I am filled with a mix of emotions. My time here has been nothing short of extraordinary, filled with love, joy,

growth, and yes sometimes, a bit of pain. It has been a journey of the heart, and as I reflect on my time here, I am reminded of the words, "I came, I saw, I served, I loved, and now it's time to go." – words I sometimes wish our current ruling government could say but they might not, so we are going to have to settle for these words being mine.

My journey at GALA has been a beau-

tiful one, filled with moments of profound connection and deep meaning. I have had the great privilege of working with some of the most dedicated and passionate people I have ever met, and together, we have achieved great things. From organizing forums, and meeting kings and queens, right down to regular check-in hugs and conversations, every moment has been a testament to the power of love and community.

However, with growth comes pain, and the pain here is a feeling of sadness and anxiety. Sadness at leaving behind the work and the people who have meant so much to me, sadness at saying goodbye to a chapter of my life that has been so defining.

So, as I prepare to say goodbye, I do so with a heart full of love and gratitude. Thank you, GALA, for everything. Thank you for the love, the joy, the growth, even the pain. Thank you for the memories, the lessons, and the friendships. And most of all, thank you for allowing me to be a part of something truly special.

I am filled with hope and excitement for the future. I know that the lessons I have learned and the experiences I have gained at GALA will stay with me forever, guiding me on my next adventure.

Demi Phasha
(2023 GALA Intern)

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