

GALA TIMES

The GALA Queer Archive's Newsletter

1/3 2022 January - May

SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

Dear GALA Friends and Fam

Solidarity. This singular term echoes loudly through the pages of our collective queer history. Solidarity is the constant whisperer appealing to our human instincts of empathy and understanding. Without the collective, there can be no self. Acts of solidarity may also vary but never its resolve. Solidarity is needed now more than ever as we continue to face

hardships on multiple fronts. The enduring impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; the pain and suffering brought about by war and conflict in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Palestine; the adoption of pernicious anti-gay laws in Ghana, in Florida in the United States, and Chechnya; the devastating impact of climate change; the enduring hatred and violence which continues to be inflicted on our community in South Africa.

The first edition of 'the GALA Times' in 2022 is dedicated to queer solidarity. We delve into the archive once more to reflect on moments of solidarity which brought about change and we also unpack the ways in which solidarity continues to bind our community and move us to action.

I also want to take this opportunity to welcome to the GALA team our newly appointed GALA Intern, Bonke Sonjani and the Youth Forum Coordinator, Obvious Nomaele. Welcome fam!

Keval Harie
(Director)



Image: #RhodesMustFall protesters placard, University of Cape Town, 2015. Photo by Keval Harie

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WHAT DOES SOLIDARITY MEAN TO YOU?

Genevieve Louw, GALA's Programmes Coordinator, asked *What does solidarity mean to you?* on Facebook. This is what their friends and fellow activists had to say.



Genevieve Jeanne Louw

February 7 · 🌐

Friends and fam we want to hear from you! If you are willing to share your thoughts publicly for something I'm working on for the GALA newsletter, and you provide permission to be identified (provide permission to potentially have your name displayed in the publication) I want to try and amplify some voices from my online queer and allied network. Can you tell me... What does solidarity mean to you?

Please share your thoughts by commenting below 🌈🌈🌈🌈🌈
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If you would like to share your thoughts but remain anonymous please send me a DM explaining what solidarity means to you



Roché Kester

I think it means being an ally to everyone on the community, even in their absence. This is to say, pushing for inclusion of trans persons even if you're queer only in orientation yourself. Within our community we need more kindness and support. That's solidarity for me.

Like Reply 5w



Kellyn Bauer

I think we've all heard talking points on solidarity before: Listen to and amplify queer voices. Respect their truths. Do what you can, when you can, to advocate for them. But solidarity can also be the little things. Sometimes, it's as simple as seeing a person in front of you, not an advocacy project or an avenue for you to showcase your own allyship. Fight alongside us, yes - but have a braai with us, watch movies with us, and talk to us even when it doesn't serve "the cause".

(Use of name and all else needed granted)

Like Reply 6w Edited



Bianca van Heerden

To be an ally no matter what. To be empathetic to others' n experiences and to listen. To assist the community however you can.

Like Reply 5w



Siya Hlongwa

Solidarity as a concept is broad yet we can only define it authentically in a personal context, simply caring and being supportive to our community. In my experience others will want to perform solidarity for reputational credit, while comfortable with not compensating those they exploit. I am honestly humbled by the authentic solidarity I have received over the years and that I have been able to share with others through GALA, Iranti, GDX, Wits WCOO and Mx Tish Lumos of the University of the Witwatersrand who has been my rock. In a world where your life only exists because of solidarity and minimal state recognition there are no words to express the importance of solidarity as a principle. This is the principle I base my advocacy through the **Transworks Global** working in the broader queer community to provide referrals and guidance on critical issues. We currently host Twitter Spaces on the @lgbtqiasspaces account from 8:30 to 10 pm SAST 7days a week to spread awareness and open dialogues. As activists and advocacy organizations we work not just for our own survival, but for that of our communities. #solidarity #lgbtqiaplussspaces #transsafespace #WisdomNuggets #LetsTalk #GBVF #lgbtqia

Like Reply 5w Edited



Mphuthi Thato

Queer Solidarity means being one embracing our differences and uniting to eradicate injustice faced by our community. The willingness to learn from each others experience whilst eradicating classism, ableism, racism and all other ism's that exist!.

Like Reply 5w



WHAT DOES SOLIDARITY MEAN TO YOU?



Donwell T. J Mpofu

For me is to stand together nommatter how hard things mybe be there for each other one love and be united

Like Reply 5w



Tinoashira Peter Govinda Chikuni

Queer solidarity is queer ubuntu- Supporting your diversity, rights, and liberation is supporting my diversity, rights, and liberations, and vice - versa. It's also the duty to make sure that I constantly learn what allyship is within the queer family, and making sure that I do so.

Like Reply 5w



Truncle Thomars Shamuyarira

Queer Solidarity to me is standing together as a community, regardless of nationality or beliefs. Destroying all the little factions we have within the Queer community. Standing together for all causes whether they affect us personally or not. Unconditional love and unity🏳️.

Like Reply 5w



De Lovie

Queer solidarity for means to still show up as authentically and unapologetically against all odds. To listen without judgement to our queer siblings and understanding that our circumstances are completely different from one country to another.

Like Reply 4w



Uhuru Madingwane Jade

Queer solidarity looks like actively and continuously working to make sure we are able to celebrate our queer identities in the communities we exist in.

Like Reply 4w



Thiruna Naidoo

Queer solidarity is so important because as a community, it's how we can ensure that we reach underrepresented and particularly vulnerable queer identities on the fringes. Queer solidarity means being intersectional in our thinking and lending our voice to movements which impact queer people around the globe.

Like Reply 5w



Jen Kruger-Ayebazibwe

It means love. Love for my subversive, transgressive-by virtue of our existence-queer family. It means acting and speaking from a place of that love in the knowledge that while our struggles are contextual and unique, they are all interconnected. That none of us can be free until we are all free.

Like Reply 5w



Zoey Black

Queer solidarity is kindness. It's an act of internalised empathy and compassion that precipitates in positive action for your community. It's showing up in the little everyday moments of your life, even when no one is looking, and the little moments adding up to big impact, sometimes unnoticed. Queer solidarity is both a state of being and of doing.

Like Reply 5w



Sam Poetical Achiever

Queer Solidarity to me starts from the notion of firstly understanding the multiplicity of our existence, firstly from a personal level knowing there are various beautiful aspects of ourselves with being queer as only one of these. This facilitates understanding of the multiplicity of our other queer siblings culminating in supporting each other from a holistic lens that constantly analyses and challenges power.

Like Reply 5w



Archive Spotlight:

THE NCGLE

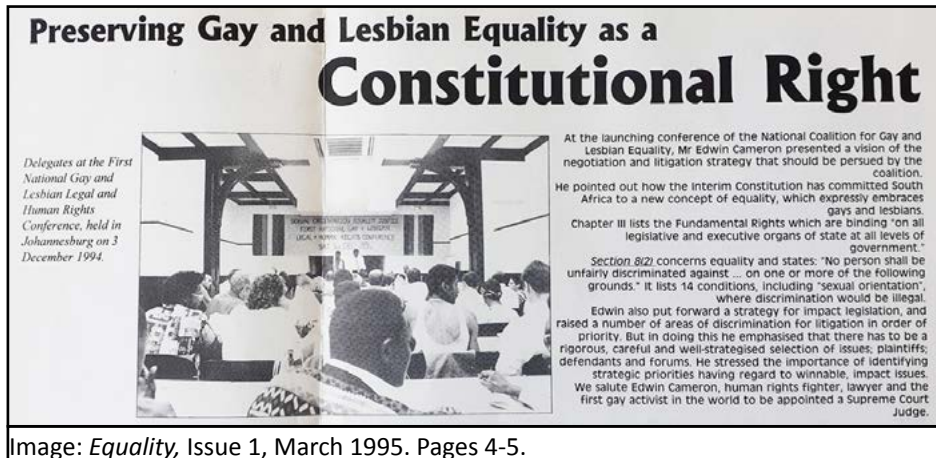


Image: *Equality*, Issue 1, March 1995. Pages 4-5.

The National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) was an association of over 70 LGBTQIA+ organisations in South Africa. Formed in 1994, it fought for the constitutional rights of the community and successfully lobbied for the retention of sexual orientation as one of the grounds for non-discrimination in the new Constitution. It focused on law reform, lobbying and litigation, amongst other things. The NCGLE renamed itself the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project (LGEP) in 1999 which continued to work for LGBTQIA+ rights in South Africa until it ceased operations in 2012.

On the 3rd of December 1994 a ground-breaking conference was hosted by the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) at Wits University. The event was the first national Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Conference, attended by over 80 delegates, representing 33 organisations from across the country. This conference became the launch of the NCGLE, as a national body campaigning for the equality clause in South Africa's new Constitution.

The conference was highlighted in the first issue of *Equality*, the newsletter

of the NCGLE, in March 1995. Phumi Mtetwa wrote: "The highlight of the conference was seeing the unity amongst the various organisations represented". However, in the same article Mtetwa acknowledged the lack of people of colour represented at the conference. In a further show of solidarity and unity, this first issue of *Equality* was sponsored by GLOW and the Dutch Kommittee Zuidlike Afrika.

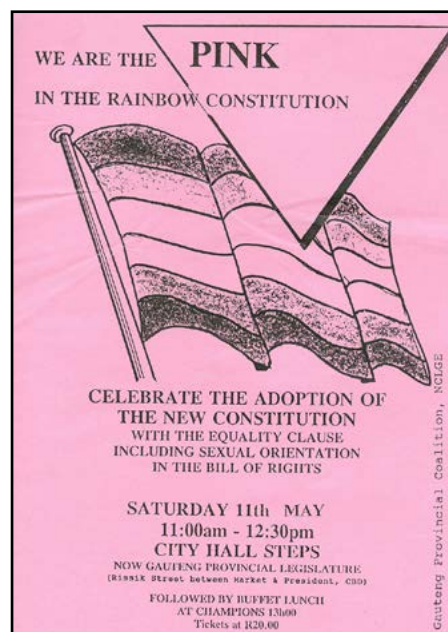
Beyond the Equality Clause, the NCGLE (and later the LGEP) were instrumental in the fight for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the same-sex marriage campaign, same-sex adoption rights, and the recognition of same-sex partners by medical aids and pension schemes, amongst others. All of these legal campaigns were successful, showing how much is owed to the tireless work done by the NCGLE/LGEP.



Image: The NCGLE offices at Con Hill, c. 2000



Image: Posters and flyer produced by the NCGLE in support of the Equality Clause in the new Constitution.



The NCGLE/LGEP collection at GALA is one of our largest. The collection comprises of documents and organisational records of the NCGLE and LGEP, the bulk of which were donated to GALA in 2013 after their offices were closed. The collection includes vast amounts of material relating to the legal cases they were involved in, as well as material produced to bring awareness to their campaigns, such as posters, pamphlets, t-shirts, banners, pins and of course the *Equality* newsletter. As an umbrella organisation, NCGLE/LGEP material also exists across a large number of other collections in the archive.

Linda Chernis
(Archives Coordinator)

BEYOND OUR BORDERS

Can we express solidarity with LGBTQIA+ activist movements beyond South African borders, by being informed, and simply knowing more?

Queer activist movements in South Africa frequently operate exclusively in a South African context. Notably, due to the rise in hate crimes and spikes in violence towards LGBTQIA+ people in South Africa over the past 10 years, activists are understandably focused on addressing the very challenging needs on the ground, and often work in isolation due to challenging circumstances. Due to a number of valid reasons, South African LGBTQIA+ activists often do not have the capacity to extend a helping hand beyond our borders, to see how it might be possible to support LGBTQIA+ activists and queer movements in Africa. In addition, we also face many challenges when xenophobic belief systems infiltrate queer activist movements, as this also prevents solidarity action to extend further than our lived South African realities. There are however, a number of organisations based in South Africa such as JASS, GenderDynamix, Triangle Project, Iranti.org and I AM Ministries to name a few, that have consistently supported activists beyond South African borders and have campaigned for the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons facing persecution in different African countries and contexts.

I want to argue that it is important for South African queer movements, organisations and activists to learn about the various anti-LGBTQIA+ legislations that exist on the African continent. Similarly, it is also crucial to be informed about the various activist movements that are actively working to address

inequality, violence and exclusion on the African continent. I believe that the act of *wanting to know more* or entering into a process of inquiry, can be understood as a political act, and within an African queer activist framework, it is radical to purposefully seek knowledge that extends further than our own perspectives and realities. Such a process of inquiry, of *wanting to know more* also allows for a far more intersectional conceptualisation of oppression in queer African contexts, and therefore opens up the possibility of solidarity action that extends beyond a one-dimensional positionality.

Solidarity is often perceived as an action that is necessary on the ground and is viewed as an act of compassion that requires in-person engagement. Examples of solidarity action may include protesting, visiting families of the victims of hate crimes, comforting survivors of abuse, facilitating sensitivity training, or simply showing up for a friend in need. Solidarity necessitates empathy and finding connection in someone else's struggles, challenges, and taking the time to listen and to show support in various ways. In times of crisis, solidarity can be a most powerful political act that can resist oppressive power structures and encourage new ways of thinking and collaborative solutions to problems. Broadening our knowledge framework beyond a South African context in relation to queer activism can therefore aid in our own pursuits of justice and equality.

How do we broaden our knowledge to show solidarity with African LGBTQIA+ movements?

Let's do a quick Google search! Look up the following, and see what pops up: *Queer Activist Movements in Kenya, Marriage Equality in Namibia, LGBTQIA+ rights in Ghana, Anti-LGBTQIA+ Legislation in Nigeria, Legal Gender Recognition in Botswana.*

Did you find out a little bit more about LGBTQIA+ activism outside of South Africa? Did you broaden your perspective and extend further beyond your understanding of the struggles experienced here at home in South Africa? I hope so! Learning more about these movements and challenges queer communities face beyond our borders can be a radical act of solidarity in itself. To know more, means you can become empowered to share knowledge with others, and thus... raise awareness around the plight of queer African activism in contextual and well-informed ways. You can apply this knowledge to en-





courage solidarity in your own contexts, albeit in the classroom, in the workplace or even during dinner conversations at home with your family. This is a very achievable way to express solidarity.

For those of us who enjoy spending time on social media, there are numerous pages one can follow on Facebook, Instagram and even TikTok! For insta users, consider following the pages of the following organisations to keep up to date with their campaigns: @legabibo, @equalnamibia, @rightify_ghana, @lamdamoz, @panafricailga, @uhaieashri, @galzordaa, @free.block13 (these are but a few organisations you can find online working in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia and Kenya. Some of these organisations work across SADC. There are many more to find, if you start looking beyond a South African - focussed LGBTQIA+ Google search and explore. It might also be worth saying that many of these social media pages warrant a Content Warning (CW) due to the acts of violence which have subsequently

been recorded and shared.

Personally, I have taken an interest in learning about the recent court case that made international news in Namibia, ruling that legal same-sex marriages that are legally recognised outside of the country, are not recognised by law in Namibia. Human Rights Watch (HRW) published an article called: *Namibian Court Rules It Cannot Require Recognition of Same-Sex Marriages: Legal Reform Needed to Protect LGBT Rights* to shed light on this important moment. The article details that there were two cases brought to the Supreme Court in Namibia, by two same-sex couples, declaring discrimination against same-sex relationships. The article states: *"The couples, legally married in South Africa and Germany, had been unable to obtain a work permit and residency permit, respectively, for their non-Namibian spouses and so launched a court case against Namibia's failure to recognize same-sex marriages."* (Thoreson, 2022) Subsequently the ruling of this case raised many questions as the court expressed sympathy and compas-

sion for the couple's position and the presiding Judge apologised and explained that the decision was bound and dictated by Namibia's archaic colonial law system (HRW, 2022). I remember reading this and thinking: "How disappointing!" and then realising that I had no idea about the impact that these discriminatory laws have had on the daily lives of Namibians, and that my South African privilege has played a role in this gap in my own knowledge and understanding. In addition, the challenges faced by activists in this context are nuanced, and the apology from the court indicates that there is a recognition of the fact that these laws need to change.

I started thinking about South Africa's progressive Constitution and how it has informed laws such as the Civil Unions Act, and how much material can be found in the GALA Queer Archives to prove how laborious it was for activists and organisations to achieve this in court. I realise that our siblings in Namibia are fighting so many battles in addition to the recognition of same-sex relationships. My transgender Namibian sisters for example, are fighting to gain access to equal rights and to be protected from violence by the law, and they are protesting outside court in solidarity with the couples who decided to challenge this archaic law system. In summary, solidarity requires a willingness to learn and to listen to the struggles of our community across borders and intersectional identity politics.

[Read more about the Namibian case here.](#)

Genevieve Louw
(Programmes Coordinator)

Featured Fam: SIBONGILE NDASHE

The following are edited extracts from an oral history interview with Sibongile. The interview was conducted over Zoom on the 9th of March 2022. Sibongile was interviewed by Karin Tan (GALA), who was calling from Johannesburg, GP. The full transcript of the interview will be available on request.

Pronouns: she/her

Sibongile Ndashe is a South African feminist lawyer and human rights activist. She was born in 1977 in Nkomazi, Mpumalanga. She left for the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in 1994 where she studied law. This was where she began her journey into social justice work. She is now based in Johannesburg, GP.

Karin (K): Did you study law straight away? Was that your first choice?

Sibongile (S): Well, OK not necessarily my choice. I've always kind of felt very strongly around creative arts. Growing up, the professionals that we grew up surrounded by were policemen, teachers, and nurses. For many parents,

the desire was for their children, to acquire other professions. if you could do maths then you go to medicine, or to become an accountant. It was like our generation needed to come back with what they consider to be better professions than what they had, because they had limited opportunities.. So I wanted to do kind of creative arts. I also like design and the things that I wanted to do were offered at what was previously known as technicons. I had a university exemption and was good at debates that's how I found myself doing law. A desire to do social justice work- that's not the reason why I did law.

K: Could you please share a movie, a book or a piece of theatre that was really influential in your life?

S: In university I was introduced to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. I've always felt drawn to the kind of writings that centres black women. It nurtured my nascent feminism. It laid bare the struggles that women faced and some of them resonated a lot. I just remember reading *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta. I read the book as a 16 year old, crying, and vowing that could never be me. When I read the books I was at the same age as the the protagonists. One helped to surface patriarchy and the other as a warning to cast aside societal expectations. I got these kind of books when I moved to UWC. I think the "Africana" section was at level 7 of the library and I would just go there and get lost. Most of the books that were there, even the set work had very strong feminist themes. It really helped me to appreciate a lot things. Just to start looking at my own context, upbringing, relationships.

K: if you were to be reincarnated, who or what would you like to come back as?

S: I've never been asked that question, I've always heard it being asked of other peo-

ple. (pause) I am a very curious person. So I think I want to be the proverbial bird's eye view of what's happening. One of the things that always fascinates me is the thinking process, when you think about what actually led one to a decision. I would like to see how the brain gives one permission to do or not to do something. The number of times I ask the question "why would you do that?" and I think it's a question that other people ask themselves would be answered. If I could watch the brain that can determine that something is either wrong or right at the point where it makes a decision. I would like to know whether people make decisions because they have limited information, they don't care, it does not matter, it did not occur to them, they wanted to or for whatever reason. I would like to come back as that thing that can see decision making processes. Whenever I see things happen like during the Zondo commission we heard that Nomvula Monkonyane asked Bosasa to buy her 200kgs of beef. Its like, what?! You couldn't ask for a cow? (laughs) how did you get this number? Was it a caterer? Or you just thought, "this will feed all the people I want to feed", what happened first – the opportunity to get beef led to the function or she asked because she had a function organised? So that is how I want to come back, as a person who understands a thought process.

K: What is your favorite way to waste time?

S: Pinterest! Pinterest without a doubt! I can sit there and vegetate for eight hours! I have one of the most impressive Pintres because I spend a lot of time curating it. It is called TIT-FOMBE and it's amazing. It has food, interior design and clothes. This is the second interview where I mention my pinterest. I did another podcast and I mentioned my Pinterest and some of my friends went to look at it and wrote to say, "your pinterest gives me life!". It's the only app that I really care about. I would be sad if it did not exist.



Featured Fam

(extended):

SIBONGILE ON SOLIDARITY

Sibongile is the executive director of the [Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa \(ISLA\)](#) which is a feminist, pan-African organisation based in Johannesburg. They work across the continent on issues of gender and sexuality.

After completing her law degree at UWC, Sibongile worked at the Legal Resource Centre where she completed her articles. She clerked at the Constitutional Court of South Africa and after that, she went on to work at the Women's Legal Centre. She was then headhunted by Interights (International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights), an organisation based in the UK, to lead their Africa work on equality, the focus was on women, LGBTQIA+ and disability rights.

The following are edited extracts from the interview where Sibongile shares some of her insights on [LGBTQIA+] solidarity.

Allyship

To be in solidarity with movements as an ally is to be very clear about the role that you are going to play, so that other people know that this is where you go, this is where you don't go, and the reasons why you won't do. The idea is that you need to have some kind of political analysis and about what it is that you do and how you do and a shared understanding of how social change comes about with the people that you work with. As an ally, the solidarity work that I do have always done on LGBTQIA+ is different from movement leadership that we do with feminist lawyers.

I've always refused invitations to go and speak about the situation of LGBTQIA+ people on the continent. I will call other organisations that identify as LGBTQIA+ actors because the space that I have reserved for myself to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression is where the issues intersection with the the law. The work ranges from legal representation, legal empowerment, development of normative standards and state accountability. This is how I am able to be in solidarity.

I think that lawyers can be very influential as organisers but because lawyers can mistake their role in movements as a leadership role my work has focused on developing movement lawyers who understand the power that they have when working with communities that are on the margins

of the law but understand that they role is to support and empower.

Contextual Analysis

When it comes to working in other countries on the continent, people are at varying degrees of their activism. And I normally talk of two kinds of typologies.

In some countries the movement has had a political voice because the movement was deliberate about being a voice that was doing advocacy and social change on LGBTQIA+ issues. In other countries there are movements that were created with HIV money. HIV as part of a comprehensive public health response is very clear about what it seeks to achieve. It's objectives [are about] public health outcomes and making sure there is prevention and treatment. These are organisations that do service provision work so they have to collaborate with government. They are there doing work that has been brokered by international organisations, like the Global Fund. Sometimes these movements are used interchangeably but they are not and it can be dangerous and counterproductive to act like human rights and public health organisations are the same thing because they have the same actors.

When we come in as human rights actors, we sometimes have to work with these groups even though we don't share a genealogy. We don't necessarily want to collaborate with the state, we actually want to hold the state accountable. We want to confront the state for human rights violations. So thinking about what it means when a movement is organised politically and when a movement is not it is important in terms of what partners can do. Are these the people who are going to go to court and hold their governments accountable or does working with them actually introduce risk that you cannot protect them from?

Are these movement saying "come what may, I am the face of this movement, this is what I want to do and I'm fighting for sexual liberation, I am fighting for my rights, for queer liberation, this is why I am in this movement". This is different from people where you have to reassure them that what they are doing is within the law and they are protected. Sometimes even if the law does not criminalise something, repressive regimes can still take you on some trumped-up charges. Understand the nature of the struggle is important.

These are the things that I have learnt over the year about the importance of doing a contextual analysis on where the work can happen. We also have to think about what it means to do legal empowerment through social movements so they can know when and how to litigate and what kind of issues to litigate on, so no one else is making decisions for them. It is also important to work with lawyers who are trained to be movement lawyers. So kind of "de-lawyering" them so they don't become the stereotypical lawyer that knows it all, but that says, "where do you want to go, and then with my legal skills, I can support you to get the outcome where you want to get to".

Solidarity is a way of organising one's politics

Dawn Cavanaugh, Phumi Mtetwa, Hakima Abbas, Sokari Ekine, Happy Kinyili, Kenne Mwikya, Po Kimani, and the late Joel Nana - we started a thing called Mayibuye. It was outside our organisations, as people who had shared politics on how queer liberation could come about. We used to call it the Church of Our Lorde after Audre Lorde and would meet on Sundays at 7pm and think about solidarity actions in various parts of the continent. This was not a project that was funded. We were people who wanted to have a conversation about how we affect social change from where we are and what we do in our professional and personal spaces. It was a space to deepen our individual politics and to develop consensus on the trajectory of the activism on the continent.

Solidarity is not a project or an event, it's a way of organising one's politics. It's about knowing what the rules of entry are in such a way that we are not paralysed into inaction when emergencies arise. It's about knowing the questions to ask, partnerships to establish, red flags to look out for, moments when guidance should be provided and when to be still. In this way, it is also easy to live in such a way that one's politics are known and visible instead. It's not easy to do intersectional work when solidarity has meant, for some people, swapping homophobia for racism or transphobia for neo-colonialism. Solidarity means refusing to sacrifice politics at the altar of what is considered pragmatic. We want to win but the cost can't be at the expense of other struggles. When done well, solidarity can become a place to practice how we believe the world needs to be.

INTRODUCING GALA'S NEW STAFF

GALA is very excited to welcome some young blood to the team! After a rigorous interview process, and meeting some fantastic people, we would like to introduce our new Intern and Youth Forum Coordinator.



BONKE SONJANI (HE/HIM)
GALA INTERN

Bonke has just moved to Joburg to start his MA in Heritage Studies at Wits University. He comes from UWC where he completed his Honours in History, with a research project titled *"Black, Queer & Marginalized: A feminist analysis of the Fees Must Fall Movement."* Bonke plans to continue and further this research into queer protest while at Wits.

He describes himself as self-motivated, vibrant, and reliable leader interested in education, queer studies, decolonisation, activism and human rights. In his free time Bonke likes to hike, thrift and attend live music concerts.

This is what Bonke had to say about joining GALA: "Through this internship I hope to 'recover', preserve and archive queer narratives and experiences that have been often 'silenced' in South Africa's discursive historiography".

We are so excited to welcome Bonke to the House of GALA!



OBVIOUS NOMAELE (HE/HIM)
YOUTH FORUM COORDINATOR

Obvious is currently completing his Masters in Film and Television at Wits, working on the following dissertation topic: "The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Black Queer Identity Through Mechanisms of Representation and Narrative Devices in South African Media".

He has created films titled *Closet Hookup* exploring abuse in same sex relationships, and a YouTube web series titled [Choice Assorted](#) that have both garnered international attention.

After many years, and a pandemic in between, we bid farewell to Anzio Jacobs as our Forum Coordinator. Who better to take over than a Forum alumni? In addition to attending the Youth Forum as an undergraduate, Obvious also served as a volunteer facilitator in 2018/2019.

A passionate activist, we look forward to seeing what Obvious has planned for the Youth Forum as we slowly emerge from our Covid-19 lockdown bubbles.

[Stay updated with the forum on twitter](#)

QUEER SOLIDARITY: A CALL FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY!

As a black, gay man, queer solidarity for me means the State taking responsibility for the promises made in the Bill of Rights, to guarantee the rights and protection of all citizens in South Africa and to create equal societies that respect the freedom and dignity of all who live in it. The rights of LGBTQIA+ persons are guaranteed and protected by the Constitution; unfair discrimination and harassment based on gender and sexuality are prohibited and recognised as human rights violations under South African law.

However, Sphamandla Khoza, Sheila Lebelo, Motse Moeketsi, Khulekani Gomazi and Lindokuhle Mapu are amongst those gruesomely murdered in the past year because of expressing their gender identities, sexual orientations and going against the social constructs of gender, yet the State has taken no action in ensuring that such hate crimes do not persist in the present and the future.

Whereas the protection against queer hate crimes and human rights violations seems like a progressive strategy on paper, in practice it is entirely different. Queer people continue to be violated daily and it is unacceptable for the government to use the same strategies of solidarity used by individuals. The government should not simply encourage citizens to share posts on social media, sign petitions, and subscribe to donations. There is a need for legislation to be reflected in reality. The State should be dedicated to actions that will ensure that every department, and every state official, commits to social justice and the Constitu-



Placard from GALA's collection of placards and banners. Unknown demonstration, unknown date.

tion. Queer solidarity should therefore be implemented in the form of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in various sectors of society - including education, home affairs and correctional service facilities. SOPs are defined as "a process document that describes in detail the way that an operator should perform a given operation" (Akyar 2012: 368). SOPs will ensure that various actors honour and recognise the constitutional rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, by adhering to specific guidelines that reflect the legislation.

As a queer individual, I had to constantly assimilate to the heteronormativity embedded in South African settings such as schools and state departments fearing the inherent homophobia and hate crimes enacted on the LGBTQIA+ community daily. The implementation of SOPs will ensure that the South African queer youth are not ostracised or discriminated against based on their gender identity and expression and that their rights to human dignity and freedom of

expression are guaranteed and protected. Teachers, government officials, prison warders and other actors should undergo training sessions on understanding sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. This training is especially important in the education sector and should start at the school level. This would be an important step forward for the Department of Education, which until a year ago still had no national guidelines for the accommodation of queer and trans kids in schools.

It is not enough to draft legislation and hope that it will be implemented the way it was intended to be, rather there should be dedicated action to making sure that in every department and every official there is a change that reflects the legislation. That is my vision of national queer solidarity.

Bonke Sonjani
(GALA Intern)

Akyar, I., 2012. Standard operating procedures (what are they good for?). *Latest research into quality control*, pp.367-391.

QUEER SOLIDARITY

Thinking about queer solidarity I'm reminded of the first time I came to university, a flamboyant young boy from rural Limpopo who's always had to negotiate their complex existence given a very homonormative society. I remember the first week of orientation I would find myself astonished by the varied ways people expressed themselves, very bold and unapologetic. Even though I wasn't the only person turning their head for queer reasons, when some people did so out of odium, I was deeply challenged. This set me on a path of self-discovery, learning, and connecting, which soon made me realise that every queer person I had interacted with was actively participating in what I would come to understand as politics of self-expression; however you come to understand that. I found myself in a community of people who wanted to see the same kind of good happen and were determined to actively work towards that vision and maintain it.

This saw me get involved in societies, clubs, and forums before soon realising that I needed to not only equip myself with the sensitive language that would later foster community but also find additional ways to pull my weight in achieving the common objective. The most memorable period and what I would call queer solidarity was in 2019 when the Wits queer and cis-community experienced efforts of transformation. First, the full implementation and rollout of [gender-neutral restrooms](#), and secondly Pride Week made possible by [Activate Wits](#) and collaborative efforts from other student societies, schools, GALA archives, [Wits Transformation](#), and the [Gender Equity Office](#). Having served as a committee member during that period,

we were met with challenges and difficulties that rendered the whole event impossible with some thinking it was too ambitious, however, persistence and understanding politics of [intersectionality](#) saw the event materialise. Comprehending the complexities of how discrimination functions on different aspects and is experienced by the different members of the LGBTQIA+ community on campus meant we could make the event accessible and relatable to all.

With many activities such as talks, movie nights, and picnics, I would say the defining moment of queer solidarity was the turnout at the queer mock wedding. I recall how the Activate team was overwhelmed by the number of people who joined in on the event that we briefly huddled up to reassure each other that it was really happening. I also remember documenting parts of the event with fellow film students as we were working on a documentary titled *Spectrum* that captures and celebrates queer activist milestones within the confines of the university. The wedding was complemented by a die-in, a demonstration in commemoration of queer bodies whose lives we've lost through the fight for human rights. This was completed by the iconic march from the East through to the West Campus and back, stretching the rainbow all through Wits. Following the success of the event, Activate was nominated in the best LGBTQIA+ Student Movement category for the [Feather Awards](#).

Held under the theme 'Busting Binaries' Pride Week allowed us to stand as a community together with allies and advocate for our visibility and rights. The number of people

who were physically in attendance was for us an acknowledgment of the existence of queer people. However, in the wake of Covid-19, efforts that promote the existence of unities of interest, objectives, standards, and sympathies seem hard to come by considering social distancing, further communal precautions, and restricted human contact. Not only has this left many in the community feeling isolated and yearning for meaningful connections, but it has also meant queer solidarity has to devise new ways of digitally extending itself. This means visibility (for some who are not publicly comfortable) and a heightened possibility of social media bullying, with some having restrictions based on the immediate surroundings that don't afford them queer expression, and more importantly the digital divide.

In the faith of answering the question of what queer solidarity means to me, I would say in this digital age it means: retweeting positive queer branded content, sharing and connecting with other queer people, creating media content that raises and politicises issues that are of concern to the community, and most importantly collaborating and finding ways to digitally maintain the footprint of positive queer media content as people continue to become digitally confined. As our former president Nelson Mandela said "we have to act decisively, we must work together. The answer to turning around at the devastating impact of this epidemic lies within us, it is an exceptional disease and requires an equally exceptional response and it is our dearest wish that people across the globe will help." - [World AIDS Day](#), 1 December 2006.

Obvious Nomaale
(Youth Forum Coordinator)

PUTTING DOWN DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

I've told my story quite often in the last month or two, and so I'm not sure how to start it again here, in print. In our "meetings" that's one of the main things we do; tell our stories. How things were, what happened and how things are now. It's all we have: our own experience of how drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping, gambling, overeating — anything that artificially altered our moods — came into and then took over our lives. And how we turned things around.

That sounds easy and straightforward but nothing about addiction is easy or straightforward.

Rather, it's about growing into our own understanding of what really, really happened. What was going on under the surface. What drove our patterns. Our pain. And what our come-to-Jesus moment was. Who Jesus even is.

That might be one of the biggest misconceptions about Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, *anything* Anonymous... That they're religious cults out to convert the weak-of-will to Christianity in their most vulnerable of moments.

For me the opposite was true. I was relieved of my perception that Christianity was the only path to spirituality. And I was given tacit permission to invent, entirely, my own conception of that collective power of the universe.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I don't have a particularly special or unique gay experience. I was born in the late '70s, grew up in a small conservative rural town, brutally came of age in a high school hos-

tel in the '90s and explored my first loves and first lusts in complete solitude and absolute shame.

I believed the bullies and stepped back from who I was. Explored in secret. Learnt to hide. Felt constantly less worthy, inadequate, broken. I believed my own voices that pounded and expounded on the shame of who I was and the shame that it would bring to my family in our small community of farmers and gossipers.

It's hardly a surprise then, that comfort and solace came only when those inside voices were quieted. And the best quiet was the loud music of a dance floor. The best salve was the sacred numbness of getting wasted. First with beers at the bars of my university days. And then the harder stuff at the night clubs and raves of my twenties and early thirties.

I had a lot of fun and those experiences were a necessary passage for me. For most gay guys. It's where we found community; a sense of belonging. Pride and place. Resilience.

It's also where I liberated myself sexually. Yes, under the atomic cloud of HIV and the risk of contagion. Yes, sometimes still in the shadows of darkrooms, cruise spots and bathhouses. I often joke that I actually never want my 20s back. Not for the love of Dorothy. But they were formative and that journey was important.

At some point, I physiologically crossed a Rubicon that I don't believe is possible to reverse. My neuro-reward pathways became dependent on the joy flushes and thrill rushes I'd been pumping

through them with my heavy drinking and drug-taking. I became an addict, an alcoholic.

There are two important things I've learned on this journey. The first is that addiction can only be self-diagnosed. There's no quiz with a scoring that says for certain. No medicine man or woman who can pronounce conclusively. It's something one only knows inside yourself. How does your body and mind REALLY behave when you feed it with substances. Can I always stop at one? Will a thousand be enough? Is the phenomenon of craving triggered the majority of times, creating ever larger negative consequences and possibly even increasing conviction that I should stop. But I never can? Promises and resolutions in tatters...

The other thing that I think we each need to figure out for ourselves, is: What does addiction really mean? What is it, really? Over the ages, it's been called a malady, an allergy, very weak will-power, a pathology, a mental illness. I've heard addicts speak about their "inner" addict, their "addict animal" or their disease in the third person. Is it permanent? Chronic? Treatable? Everybody seems to have a different take on these things. The only universal truth I could probably ascribe to addiction is that, like being gay, it comes with a huge amount of shame and denial.

And the combination of these things — definition and diagnosis, shame and denial — make this an even more cunning, baffling affliction to treat. A very powerful foe indeed.

That's where our stories come in. Sharing with others who stand on



that same battlefield, what it was like for me to first start on this march to sobriety, helps them identify with our common enemy. It also helps me in a therapeutic way, because I get to remember. And to revisit and release that trauma. To talk about that moment I crossed a different Rubicon, into relief. Walked into a room of strangers, addicts, at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Some call it a moment of grace. For me it was the grip of sheer desperation. I was living in New York and had just blasted through yet another line I'd drawn in the sand, of behaviour that wasn't acceptable to me. (It was obviously very acceptable to wasted me...)

Walking the city streets, feeling entirely lost and alone, I googled "Gay AA New York" and called the number on a site in the search results. That call changed my life. The person on the other end of the phone directed me to a venue in Chelsea where an AA meeting specifically for gay people, was about to start.

I oozed awkwardness. Things felt weird and I was completely out of place. But when the person at the front of the room spoke about the four horseman of terror, bewilderment, frustration and despair, I nearly forgot where I was because I also was home. I felt emboldened enough to put up my hand and say something along the lines of not having an idea about what to do

next but knowing I couldn't carry on with how things were. People came up to me afterwards. Hot people. Guys with the light in their eyes turned to full bright. Handing me phone numbers and encouragement, and inviting me to a meeting the next day.

A lot has happened in the 13 years since then. I've not always managed to stay on the path. But I'm back on it now and have a few years of clean time banked again.

What I've learnt is that my life gets exponentially better when I don't have alcohol or drugs in it. I have chapters of thrilling adventures, surprisingly-amazing detours and even a Masters degree certificate on the wall as real evidence of that. Evidence that my life's trajectory changes when I change. And that nothing changes if nothing changes.

[Our principle of anonymity suggest that I don't share my name in media write-ups such as this. There are many good reasons for that. But if you have read this article and want to do something about your drinking and/or drug-taking, please [contact GALA](#) who will put you in direct contact with me. We have online and in-person meetings for the South African LGBTQIA+ community and lots of us eager to help.]

Other links to useful resources:

- [Narcotics Anonymous South African Region](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa](#)
- [LGBTQ Alcoholics in A.A.](#)
- [Lavender Light: Daily Meditations for Gay Men in Recovery by Adrian Milton](#)
- [Engage Men's Health: Where Can I Get Support for Substance Abuse](#)

IF YOU ARE LOOKING TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE IN NEED,

we suggest looking at a new LGBTQIA+ Shelter based in Gauteng and learning more about how to support LGBTI people in Ukraine.



ILGA Europe has put together a very helpful list of groups and organisations that are currently providing assistance to LGBTQIA+ people in Ukraine.

[Click here to access ILGA-Europe's list.](#)



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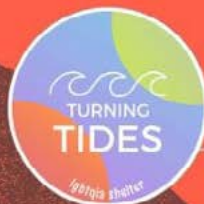
Turning Tides LGBTQIA Shelter
Account Number: 62928599060

Bank: FNB

Branch Code: 252155

Branch: Bedford Gardens

Swift Code: FIRNZAJJ



PayPal: @turningtideslgbt

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Donate to GALA

The GALA Archive is a living archive. This means that we never stop collecting.

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Your contribution matters.

Please contact our Archive Coordinator, Linda Chernis: linda.chernis@wits.ac.za

Donations of books with queer content are welcome additions to the Cooper-Sparks Library that is housed at the GALA offices.

GALA is a non-profit organisation that relies solely on donor funding. Any and all donations are welcome.

You can donate to:

Bank name: Investec

Account name: Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Trust

Account number: 100 1183 4713

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Swift code: iveszajjxxx

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