



The Spicy Anthology:

A Collection
of Writings

Mpho Buntse





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Hoopoe Press

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The Spicy Anthology

(TSA! say this abbreviation twice and you have yourself the sound that the seasoning canister makes when you add a little seasoning)

TSA! is a collection of pieces through which a young, black, resilient activist, scholar and thought leader impacted and subsequently addressed contemporary intersectional struggles.

This collection is selected amongst a body of work by Mpho Buntse who deems this work as having been written or published ahead of its time. This informative supplementary seeks to take the reader through a journey of how a pen and paper helped the author echo the many struggles he advocates for, but also takes him on his own journey of reflecting on the status quo for his platforms: Human rights protection, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ) political representation and visibility, advocacy, and communication for social change. Immerse yourself in learning and unlearning through his experiences, and contribution to the LGBTIQ discourse. The body of work packaged in this anthology is mainly opinions meant to engage you as a reader and prompt you to engage with the text itself. Designed for younger readers everywhere, the book zooms into a reflection on the current state of affairs for every piece selected, this as a way of engaging the youth globally to posture their current and contemporary narrative. TSA is thoughtfully crafted to empower students and youth to be better members of the LGBTIQ community or allies. Engage with the content like never before as each piece ignites curiosity, fosters empathy, and inspires action, making learning an impactful and transformative journey.

Here's some Tsa! Tsa! of that little spice.

Foreword

In a country and on a continent where a long fight still lies ahead for justice and dignity for queer persons, voices and visibility are acutely needed.

Mpho Buntse's book helps answer that need. His is a voice that echoes the struggles of his peers, in evoking our history's struggles for queer equality – while reminding us of the urgent business we still have to do.

I first met Mpho some years ago, when he sought a meeting during my time at the Constitutional Court. His mission embraced practical plans to preserve the legacy of Simon Tseko Nkoli, which drew me to Mpho immediately. For without Simon's courageous and outspoken voice in the mid-1980s, sustained until his untimely death in December 1998, our struggle for queer dignity in South Africa could hardly have started.

Mpho's goal in honouring Simon was to help create a more inclusive, compassionate and just society. What has stood out for me, in interacting with Mpho since then, has been his commitment to LGBTI+ advocacy – which has included confronting difficult questions.

In founding the Simon Nkoli Memorial Lecture, Mpho established a forum not only to honour Simon's courage, but to highlight the current struggles of queer people in South Africa and Africa.

This book is an expression of Mpho's work, sometimes still in process, or draft, yet to be completed. It is also a reflection of his resilience and vulnerability – and most of all, it shows his commitment to hope through action.

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Mpho's writing invites us to add a touch of spice to our lives as we continue our quest for equality in our country and on our continent — a spice of empathy, insight and commitment to justice and dignity and safety for all.

Justice Edwin Cameron

Saturday 6 July 2024

Introduction

I dedicate this book to my parents, Sam Keakopa and Mirriam Keakopa for never giving up on giving me access to education despite not having it themselves. Danko Timer and O'lady. Introduction: Contemporary Reflections and Resonance: A look at the Status-quo

In recognition of the changing landscape, I offer reflective notes to contextualize the status-quo around many of the issues I addressed through the writings in this book. Through this book I explore the nuanced evolution of perspectives, solutions sought, and the ever-shifting status quo. From the hallowed halls of Parliament to the vibrant landscapes of activism and human rights advocacy, each piece in this collection encapsulates a portion of our collective pursuit for change. Despite the timeline of the original publication of the selected pieces, I offer contemporary updates to paint a picture of the status-quo.

Respect Parliament, it's the Voice of the People (*The New Age (TNA) Media, 20 March 2015*). This was an echoing call to uphold the democratic sanctity of our parliamentary institution. As we explore the pages of this opening chapter, the resounding plea to acknowledge Parliament as the resonant voice of the people emerges as an enduring theme, a foundation upon which subsequent discussions unfold. On the 9th anniversary of the piece, I look back at how our parliament has transformed on various fronts. The multiparty nature of the South African Parliament has over the last years promoted a diversity of views coming from different political parties and voices.

This diversity of parties and voices has been ensuring that different perspectives, concerns, and interests are represented, fostering robust discussions, as well as promoting checks and balances within government. This multiparty approach has continued to strengthen the

principles of inclusivity and accountability in South Africa's democratic governance.

Whilst the arrival of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) has drawn criticism from some quarters, mainly for disrupting parliamentary decorum, the EFF's presence has also amplified the importance of addressing socio-economic challenges and ensuring that the voices of marginalized communities are heard.

They added dynamism and a distinct perspective to political debates, pushing for greater accountability and social transformation while also provoking debates about the appropriate conduct within the parliamentary setting. This lack of decorum has come to place the previously unknown committees such as the Powers and Privileges onto the spotlight, this legacy of EFF's disregard for parliamentary decorum has also made the rule book a commonplace in parliament.

The EFF's participation has sparked lively and sometimes contentious discussions, both within Parliament and in the broader public discourse. Their tactics, such as walkouts and disruptions, have drawn attention to specific issues and highlighted the party's commitment to radical change. In just 9 years, the party currently holds 44 from 25 in 2015. The 2024 General Elections is said to test South Africa's multiparty system, and many predict that it may be the year of coalitions, this remains to be seen. The electoral apathy amongst the youth demonstrates a complete lack of voter awareness, bringing into question whether the EFF with its youth-oriented posture will finally get off the "government in waiting" position.

I Cannot Defend Zuma's Decisions Anymore (*Mail & Guardian*, 24 February 2019). This opinion was an acknowledgment of the evolving needle point of opinions and allegiances during the time when the African National Congress (ANC) and the country alike were subjected to the growing corruption and governance challenges under former president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma. In this opinion, the

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ideological transformation of perspectives is illuminated, setting the stage for what was to unfold. The piece captures the essence of our commitment to introspection and the courage to recalibrate our viewpoints. This is a reflection at the time when I was watching while the confidence of our people started dwindling towards our beloved movement.

The ANC took a firm position and later recalled President Zuma. Zuma's recall from office occurred against the backdrop of increasing corruption allegations and legal challenges, including the Constitutional Court's ruling in 2016 that he had violated the constitution. Cyril Ramaphosa's election as ANC leader in December 2017 marked a shift towards addressing corruption and for a moment restored people's hope in the governing party. Zuma's resignation on February 14, 2018, followed the ANC's formal recall on February 13, 2018, reflecting concerns about his impact on the party's reputation and national stability. This pivotal moment illustrated the ANC's responsiveness to corruption concerns and commitment to restoring public trust.

The ANC is currently navigating a complex political landscape characterized by concerns over corruption, internal challenges, and the looming fear for losing the bulk of the 2024 National Election vote. The recall of former President Jacob Zuma in 2018 underscored the ANC's willingness to address corruption allegations, emphasizing its commitment to restoring public trust. However, recent developments within the party have indicated ongoing struggles. The ANC's leadership, led by President Cyril Ramaphosa, has sought to prioritize transparency and accountability while addressing economic and social issues. This is despite the party officially electing all its leagues, including the ANC Youth League (African National Congress), which has been leaderless since Collen Maine's disbandment in 2019. Maine was a staunch supporter of Zuma, which can only be attributable to the fact that the "Thuma mina" train was on a sweeping mission post Zuma's departure. This was just a month or two after resigning from his parliamentary position, ahead of being disbanded as president of the ANCYL.

The party's renewed efforts to tackle corruption have been accompanied by internal debates and power struggles, reflecting the ANC's diverse membership and the tensions between its historical legacy and the need for modern governance. As the ANC grapples with these dynamics, it faces the critical task of balancing its historic role as a liberation movement with the demands of effective governance and public accountability.

Zuma recently started the controversial rival uMkhonto Wesizwe (MK), a party that will contest elections for the first time in 2024. Some polls indicate a possible good polling for the party, threatening EFF hopes of Presidency in waiting or as I saw it, official opposition. I am still puzzled at how he (Zuma) finds it so casual to contest elections with so much controversy, even for that house he wants to go back to.

Letter to Simon Nkoli on His Birthday (*Mambaonline*, 2019). In this letter I admired an icon of the South African gay rights movement. This letter bridges our discourse with the continuum of historical struggles and reminds us of the legacy that propels our present-day endeavours for equity and justice as the LGBTQ+ community. I wrote the letter driven by the urge to share with Simon, one of the people defining my activism, the impact of his fearless activism on us and the country.

The state of LGBTIQ+ organizing in South Africa has seen significant progress over the last 35 years or so. This change is largely attributed to the pioneering efforts of activists like Simon Tseko and Nkoli and key organizations that led these efforts and strides. Simon Nkoli, a prominent anti-apartheid, and gay rights activist played a pivotal role in founding organizations like the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) and the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE), which laid the groundwork for advocating LGBTIQ+ rights.

Nkoli's activism was instrumental in advancing LGBTIQ+ rights, culminating in milestones such as the inaugural Pride March in 1990, which marked the first Pride event on

the African continent. The NCGLE's efforts contributed to the inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected category in South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution in 1996, a groundbreaking achievement that paved the way for legal recognition and protection.

In the years that followed, South Africa achieved several advances for LGBTQ rights, including the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act (2003), allowing individuals to change their sex designation on official documents. The Civil Union Act (2006) legalized same-sex marriage, enabling same-sex couples to enjoy legal recognition and benefits equivalent to opposite-sex marriages.

These victories reflect the resilience of LGBTQ+ organizing in South Africa, driven by a commitment to social justice and equality. Despite progress, challenges persist, such as hate crimes and discrimination. Nonetheless, the legacy of activists like Simon Nkoli and the pioneering organizations continues to inspire ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable society for LGBTQ+ individuals in South Africa.

The Cost of Homophobia in Africa: Hate Sponsored by Historic Fallacies, Omissions, and Silencing of Same-Sex Desiring Communities (June 2020) excavates the profound implications of prejudice. This work traces the shadows cast by historic biases, urging us to confront these realities as we chart our course toward a more inclusive tomorrow.

Today we are seeing exacerbated levels of anti-queer narratives across the continent. This movement is structured for sustenance through global funding that has recently seen some Christian and Islam groups in Africa, advocating for Anti-homosexuality laws. Uganda became the most recent to pass the draconian Anti-homosexuality Bill in 2023, a move that shocked the entire world. Under the bill, it is illegal to be homosexual or fail to report to authorities those that are LGBTQ+.

There is however a new form of pushback riding on the back of the supposed principle of protecting the 'traditional family'. The misconception that homosexuality is a foreign

concept and that it's the results of colonization continue to be the subject of many proponents of the anti-queer movement in the continent.

We continue to see the double standards in how those in power in South Africa find themselves in sometimes compromising places, having to grapple with the question of whether to support queer plight or 'to win elections.' An example of the latter can be seen at how president Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa's 5th president since 1994) missed an opportunity to influence his Ugandan counterpart, president Yoweri Museveni (the 9th president of Uganda who has been in power since 1986) to reject the Anti-homosexuality Bill in Uganda.

In another recent double-standard, EFF Commander-in-chief (CIC), Julius Malema has principally back on his word of solidarity to the LGBTQ+ in Uganda. In a widely publicized march to the Ugandan High Commission in Pretoria, the EFF led by its CIC committed solidarity and a few week post the march hosted a renowned Africanist and respected academic, (whom through his social media spewed homophobic remarks, while welcoming Uganda's Bill as a much needed intervention, even for his country, Kenya) to address its 10th anniversary lecture.

Not Just a Seven-Colour Queer Spectacle: A Reflection on the 31st Anniversary of Pride (Daily Maverick, 2021) serves as an anchor, grounding us in the realm of the LGBTQ+ community's journey. Here, we explore the arc of Pride, acknowledging its triumphs and acknowledging the unyielding challenges that persist. In this piece I offered a comprehensive historical analysis of Pride and how it has evolved to its current posture. In 2023, more than 20 000 people attended the Joburg Pride an increase from 800 people in 1990 when pride was first held in South Africa. This is testament to the growing numbers of the people who deem Pride as their safe space.

South Africa is in a State of Queer Disarray and Must Be Sanctioned (Daily Maverick, 2021) This piece underscored the urgency of action. It illuminated a clarion call to address

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the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community head-on, beckoning us to seek solutions that resonate with the aspirations of a just society. The alarming rate of hate motivated crime in South Africa led to this open letter in which I highlight the lack of political will to address the numerous gay murders in the country at that time.

Since the release of this letter, there has been a number of times the president affirmed the community as well as made commitments. Among others, he has reaffirmed the government's commitment to upholding the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals as enshrined in the South African Constitution, which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our absence in parliament has been central to my disappointment. Having led a campaign to bring to the centre of the ANC issues of Queer representation, the 2024 ANC National list has a record of 3 openly queer and affirming leaders.

The Somizification Discourse: A Theory of the Framing of the Gay Image in the South African Show Business Industry (Unpublished Draft, April 2021) This paper embodies intellectual exploration. The article develops a theoretical discourse deconstructing the narrative frameworks that shape our entertainment industry, especially for the pillars of inclusion and representation. The article is one of my continuous work and endeavour to devise a theoretical discourse that will look at queer visibility in the context of scholarship. The article is centred around one South Africa's long-time media personality, Somizi Mhlongo. Interrogating the media portrayal of gay images and its dynamics.

Pride and Prejudice – The parallels between the LGBTQ struggle histories of the US and SA (Daily Maverick, 2022) This was a commemorative article to mark the 60th anniversary of the New York Stonewall Riots. An event that was to influence much of the world's queer rights movement. In this article I make parallels between the LGBTQ movements between the US and South African. Through this piece I wanted to reflect on

this influence by the US history on our own movement and to reflect on the strides and efforts achieved thus far.

The US government has been an ally of the community through speaking out and condemning the bigotry by anti-queer governments. Travel sanctions have been placed those African leaders perpetuating the anti-queer movement. This has been an affirming stance, reminding us that in history a country was able to change how it viewed the LGBTQ+ to being the most embracing.

South Africa has a strategic partnership with the United States, focusing on strong collaboration in the areas of health, education, environment, and the digital economy.

Open Letter to Netball SA (*Daily Maverick*, 2023) bridges the personal and the communal. It reminds us that change is often instigated at the intersection of passions and collective aspirations. Leading up to the 2023 Netball World Cup, I wrote this open letter as protest against the Ugandan team to be allowed to take part in the netball spectacle, in solidarity with LGBTQ+ people in Uganda. It was even more disappointing for the federation to elect not to address the issue on the sidelines of the tournament.

Although there was no reaction from either party, I called them out on their failure to stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ+. While the world cup continued and Uganda's team travelled to our shores, the LGBTQ+ in that country is under siege from a draconian law that has shocked the world. In the recent development, Ghana became the second country to approve an anti-queer law. I am scared that this may breed a continent-wide movement, where our efforts and strides will be erased. This is currently a movement receiving millions in grants to advance this anti-queer agenda. It remains to be seen how this ripple effect will affect the continent.

LGBTIQ+ Rights Amidst the Middle East Conflict (*MambaOnline*, 2023) This opinion piece was a solidarity piece in which I highlight the plight of queer people at the centre of Israel-Palestine ongoing war. As this aggression continues to destroy families and lives, the LGBTQ+ community (which

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is already living under extreme pushback from the state and people) finds itself isolated and mostly subjected to state sponsored torture. In the piece, I offer a voice of solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ in the Middle East. I share the view that an injustice anywhere in the world, is an injustice everywhere in the world.

As we traverse this collection, we find ourselves immersed in a festival of ideas that speaks to our shared commitment to betterment. Each piece contributes a thread to this ever-expanding discourse, weaving a narrative of exploration, transformation, and a tireless pursuit of a more equitable status quo. Through words and conviction, we hope to inspire, provoke, and illuminate the path forward in a world forever changed by the relentless quest for understanding and change.

Respect parliament, it's the voice of the people¹

This became my first published opinion piece in a national newspaper, although pioneered by a couple of opinion pieces at the UJ Observer (University of Johannesburg's official student newspaper that was discontinued around 2014) where I had my first attempt at practicing journalism.

This piece was triggered by the change in the observance of decorum in our national parliament. This was characterized by the arrival of newcomers, Economic Freedom Fighters in the National Assembly, and the National Council of Provinces, as well as provincial legislatures across the 9 provinces.

I have come to appreciate the multiparty vibrancy in parliament that has over a couple of recent years proved effective in holding the governing ANC accountable.

I have always imagined myself presiding over Parliament. As our democracy developed from strength to strength, I observed how individuals such as Frene Ginwala, Max Sisulu, Gwen Mahlangu- Nkabinde and Nomandiya Mfeketho, who are all former National Assembly Speakers were able to maintain order in the National Assembly.

This shaped my views on how an ideal Parliament ought to work. However, Baleka Mbete's return to Parliament as speaker of the National Assembly has shown me nothing but disappointment. I cannot help but question her neutrality as speaker. Does the way Parliament have turned out have something to do with her obvious bias as its presiding officer?

Our parliament remains an active voice of democracy. This voice should seek to always echo our interests. It was

1 Originally published as *Respect Parliament, Its the voice of the people*, New Age, 20 March 2015.

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founded on the premise of our stellar Constitution– a document that came about because of bloodshed and sacrifice. As a young South African man, I say this without fear or prejudice. Like many young South Africans, I regard myself a beneficiary of our hard-won democracy.

I have been privileged in that in the past few weeks, I have met and engaged with some of the most amazing South Africans – men who walked on the apartheid soil and endured more than their fair share of torture. Each of these men has taught me an important lesson – that I am privileged. These individuals all became activists in the South African struggle, and all have made me reflect on the state of our national government and the future of South Africa.

First it was Dr Thami Mazwai. A former journalist and anti-apartheid activist who taught me to be mindful of the people I serve because different characters come from different backgrounds. The moral of the story is that our government must understand our needs and represent all of us. The job of elected government representatives is to advance the public mandate.

It is no secret that we exist in a society where inequality is the order of the day. As such, we rely on our elected officials to champion our plight. Karl Marx once said: “Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.” We shouldn’t focus on individual needs but to rather serve the collective.

I met veteran journalist and former press ombudsman Joe Thloloe, who emphasized that “every action we do must reflect our values”. Our members of Parliament must always conduct themselves in a manner that reflects high levels of respect – not only to other members of the House, but to their constituencies as well. The recently embarrassing disregard of Parliament’s decorum is an insult to every South African who entrusted their political party with a mandate.

I also interacted with the former Minister of Defence, Charles Nqakula, who told me that during the armed struggle

they did not just use guns but rather did so while chanting the words: “The people shall govern!” – a clause in the Freedom Charter. This was a reminder that their objective was to usher in a new age of South African freedom. I am grateful for their sacrifices.

The lamentable state of our Parliament makes me wonder whether our voices are really being echoed in the house. Does it still champion our interests? Does it remain the historical institution meant to address governance at a national level? It's all too disturbingly reminiscent of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Remember how Napoleon emerged as an utterly corrupt opportunist, Snowball's strategic approach to service delivery and Boxer's battle tactics and ultimate downfall? Our Parliament is positively Orwellian.²

President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma delivered his state of the nation address on February of 2015. Although it touched on the most crucial issues facing us, such as the energy crisis and lack of service delivery, what many South Africans are concerned about is the respect and tolerance that seems completely absent in the fifth Parliament.

The country's economy is under siege; we are at serious risk of losing the little foreign investment that still saw SA as an attractive investment destination. Following the suspension of the Economic Freedom Fighters members of parliament last year, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa pointed out that the late great Nelson Mandela would have been embarrassed at the disorder in the House. However as much I'd like to cling to that boyhood dream of the perfect Parliament, it's hard to disagree; the fathers of our liberation struggle are turning in their graves.

2 The comparison of our Parliament to Orwell's “*Animal Farm*” refers to the characters Napoleon, Snowball, and Boxer, symbolizing corruption, strategic planning, and tragic downfall, respectively.

I cannot defend Zuma's decisions anymore¹

This is another opinion piece that I wrote out of rage because of the inactive response to address the challenges facing the African National Congress through its former president, Jacob Zuma.

It saddens me to find myself in a position where I'm questioning my loyalty to the ruling party. I'm willing to be seen as a sell-out by my fellow comrades, I'm failing to even defend the decisions taken by the president anymore. These past few years, particularly under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma we've seen a totally different ANC. An ANC that forgot about the people and this can never be correct because the ANC that I know champions the interests of its constituency.

Growing up in South Africa at a time when the ANC had just assumed office convinced me that oppression is finally over and that we've realised the dream of the great stalwarts. I did not live to experience the tragedy of apartheid like Oliver Tambo, Chris Hani, Nelson Mandela, Solomon Mahlangu and many others who sacrificed themselves did, but I know that this is not the democratic South Africa they envisioned when they fought for freedom. Our Constitution is viewed by many as one of the most progressive in the world. It was founded on the principle of a free and just society and as such I believe that as an active custodian of this Constitution it is my duty to defend it. Defending the president's mediocrity simply means that I am failing the legacy of great former leaders of the ANC; Tambo, Hani, Mandela and Mahlangu. Under Zuma's

1 Originally published as: I Cannot Defend Zuma's Decisions Anymore (*Mail & Guardian*, 24 February 2019): <https://thoughtleader.co.za/i-cannot-defend-zumas-decisions-anymore/>

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leadership we continue to live with gender/class inequality and a complete lack of accountability.

The ANC played a crucial role at a time when black thought and action was excluded and oppressed. It advocated for an inclusive government of the people as the Freedom Charter stated, “The people shall govern”. In addition to this, is an important and notable provision stating that, “All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country”. Let us be frank my fellow cadres, this stipulation and many aspects of our Constitution have no meaning and bearing anymore.

Oversight work in Parliament is at a snail’s pace due to disregarding decorum by the opposition and the ruling party itself. We are seeing an all-time high when it comes to service-delivery protests and the country is losing investors. This demonstrates a state in a fiasco, a state losing control of its affairs due to reckless decisions taken by the ANC.

ANC leaders and members continue to turn a blind eye to the fact that not only are we losing members and following, but that we’ve deviated from the core mandate and principles of the ANC in pre-democracy. Under Msholozzi’s leadership we’ve seen a dramatic explosion in factionalism within the politics of the ANC. This has been demonstrated through former leaders and stalwarts criticizing the status quo and situation.

I’m not the one to be playing the blame game. I endorsed and voted for Zuma at a time when I believed he is the kind of leader the ANC ought to deploy as per the leadership criteria document known as “Through the eye of a needle”. This is a beautiful document that, when observed from the periphery, warrants for Zuma to be recalled from office. The people of South Africa have lost confidence, and this affects the entire Mass Democratic Movement and allies.

Let me be as frank and critical as I can be, if the ANC is to regain the confidence of the South African people (including my grandmother’s who’s been voting for the ANC since the first democratic elections but now switches the television

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off when she sees Zuma's face) the party should recall the president.

I am not going to point out the obvious and massive errors under Zuma's leadership, but I will be vocal in that the dignity and regard of our Constitution is under siege, and this is the right time for us as friends, supporters, members, and followers of the ANC to be critical about the disastrous situation in South Africa and the ANC.

Letter to Simon Nkoli on his birthday¹

I wrote this letter to observe and commemorate Simon Nkoli's 62nd birthday posthumous. In the letter, I convey to him what has been happening since he passed on. It comes from a place of love, and I relay it in such a way that one would think he is directly receiving my message and would reply. At the time of printing the lecture had just delivered its 8th edition in collaboration with the University of South Africa's College of Human Sciences.

The Simon Nkoli Collective has grown beyond what Nomancotjo and I had anticipated. We have been working with two amazing feminists, Busisiwe Deyi, queer activist and former commissioner of the Commission for Gender Equality and Sheena Magenya, a Kenyan-born researcher and gender activist. In 2022 the lecture remains at UNISA for its 9th edition. This year we brought Magnolia to come attend which was a highlight for this celebration. Since this letter was published by MambaOnline (a queer media outlet) in 2019, Dr Beverly Ditsie launched her foundation. The Dr Bev Ditsie Foundation works to support all endeavors that promote the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of the femme, queer, and gender diverse South Africans by ensuring these communities' mental and emotional wellness. The foundation believes that all discrimination against Queer persons harms their mental health. Sadly, MaNkoli passed on in December 2024. I hope there is great catch up between mother and son.

1 Originally published as: Letter to Simon Nkoli on His Birthday (*Mambaonline*, 27 November 2019): <https://www.mambaonline.com/2019/11/27/love-letter-to-simon-nkoli-on-his-birthday/>

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Dear Simon,

This week you would have grown a year older, you would have added one more visionary year of experience and contribution to our community, but alas, do continue to rest well.

Continue to rest well because your legacy lives on. You probably know that. On your birthday, the world still celebrates your contributions towards queer freedom, HIV/AIDS advocacy, and intersectionality politics. Many are eager to explore your complex form of activism through academia and social barometers and are simply curious to learn how you managed to do it all, especially during that time.

Over the past few months, I have learnt so much about you. Your mother is such a queen. She speaks a lot about you, and I should tell you, she is a walking encyclopaedia about your life. Every time she speaks about your affairs with random white guys, she laughs. She has the memory of each one of them and how they would spoil her just to get her affection as a potential son-in-law.

She's keeping every piece of furniture and cutlery you owned, the many international awards you brought home (you have keys to many world cities). The memories of you during COSAS days, Sharpeville, Justice for Biko campaigns is still fresh to her. At her age, you'd expect her to be subjected to ill health, but Si, she's a strong woman running a household. Your sister hardly talks, she's an introvert. But she likes to laugh; that's how I can tell that your memory makes her happy.

Nomacotsho Pakade (whom we founded the lecture with) and I started a memorial lecture to honour and preserve your legacy. We have not met you personally, but over the past 7 years, we have come to highlight your legacy. We have engaged with you through your spirit and, thanks to Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza, (internationally acclaimed artist and traditional healer) that we have connected with you. Your family is now our family.

Letter to Simon Nkoli on his birthday

MaNkoli says I remind her of you, do I? Or she just misses you... She's giving me the toughest responsibility to continue inspiring change for queers, as you did. A challenge I have taken on. I hope I don't disappoint you.

Knowing the real you through MaNkoli has strengthened my activism and passion for your work. I practice it through the continued engagement, like that you had, with the ANC with the late Nelson Mandela, Cde Phumi Mtetwa and many other comrades you led in your change.

I have traced and engaged most of your friends, comrades, and family and all have said you were an amazing person. There was never a dull moment when you were around, reclaiming spaces and always laughing and making everyone around you smile or laugh. Your bestie is a doctor now and she's been an integral and incredible source for telling your history and story. Yes, Dr Bev Ditsie speaks highly of you Si. She's still grounded in your movement, she tells your story of resilience, Pride, and affirmation in the face of the struggle.

Everyone is stronger, stronger because we live in a future that you carved. Not just for us as queer people, but for many people who continually face victimization because of what defines them differently. I am sure you know that the struggle is not completely won, but we are doing well compared to many of our counterparts. You should be proud of yourself.

By the way, Musioua Lekota went on to start his own party called COPE. It's been doing well in driving a queer narrative in parliament. Popo Molefe is moving between SOEs. Adv Gcina Malindi, your Delmas Treason Trial friend, came to our 2018 lecture, and he's also been really key in sharing with us about you during Delmas Treason Trial.

The LGBTIQ+ (and we are a plus now, in the awareness that sexuality and queer organizing is broad) celebrates you in many ways. The Feather Awards SA have an award dedicated to your work as a queer activist. They recently gave it to your friend, Justice Edwin Cameron. We were all there to celebrate with him; his acceptance speech took everyone down memory

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lane about your resilience. Oh, and he recently retired from the bench.

Your annual lecture has a footprint at the University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria and the University of Stellenbosch and has had a permanent home at Constitution Hill (we all suspect that you may have been detained here at some point, we still aim to confirm this).

As I reflect with you on your birthday, I reflect on the beauty, pain, and sacrifice you made. Aubuti (your mom tells me, this is the name that everyone called you by at home), your work has defined our status quo...

And I wonder what drama you are causing up there...

The Cost of Homophobia in Africa: Hate Sponsored by Historic Fallacies, Omissions and Silencing of Same Sex Desiring Communities

In this essay I explore the history and existence of same sex desiring and the complex dynamics of the history of oppression, violation and silencing of Queer bodies in the continent. I draw an important conclusion that there is a fundamental problem embedded in the many misconceptions about the realities and lived experiences of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Questioning and Queer plus communities. It is because of these misconceptions that the community remains to be subjected to condemnation, violation, discrimination, and silencing.

To misspell some of these misconceptions I position the realities of same sex desiring in precolonial accounts embedded in many vintage textual archives, some mythical, others biblical as well as based on the lived experiences of individuals. I also position 'Queer' visibility within the history of the South African struggle and post-colonial discourse and finally I articulate the contemporary problems the community is subjected to at the hands of state, religious, cultural as well as traditional institutions and spaces because of this entrenched homophobia and transphobia.

I am more interested in the trajectory of queer visibility and to this end there is overwhelming existence of same-sex visibility in many contexts across the global community that continue to shape the status quo for the community. My assertion in this regard remains one of the believe that history is not obsolete and because historical accounts are narrated by people, we can't completely erase the existence and reality of how some histories were tempered with, changed, or told in a bias voice. A classic example of this could simply be this idea

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of human evolution. Human evolution has for many centuries divided science and religion, it is in the wake of the 19th century that the West even questioned the truth of the bible.

Proximity to contemporary knowledge takes us on a journey of the rise of fields of palaeontology and archaeology. Charles Darwin introduces humanity for the first time in 1859 to a plausible possibility that human beings might be descended not from Adam and Eve but from primates, of course many have and still believe this to be hogwash and focus effort on confirming the truth of the bible. One such individual is George Smith, who presented the closest account to the story of Noah and the great flood that wiped humanity off the face of earth.

In his extraditions, Smith also collected an important piece of text that I believe sets the scene for articulating this idea of same sex desiring, The Epic Gilgamesh. Although mythical in nature, The Epic Gilgamesh accounts of a story of a mythical king immortalized in literature, Gilgamesh is portrayed initially as a problematic misogynist who enforces *droit du seigneur*, the idea that pre marriage all brides must spend the night with him. Following concerns about his treacherous behaviour, the Gods bring a friend to distract him. When he meets Enkedu who is initially enraged with his behaviour, they become instantly connected. Enkedu is described here as another strong, wild, and powerful man. The heart of this poem is found in its many gaps and ambiguities. The Epic Gilgamesh also offers Queer Scholars the gradations, although subtle of what developed to be an intimate companionship between two men in a pre-historic context.

Throughout history some men and some women have engaged in romantic and intimate companionships with the same sex. In our collective efforts to demystifying the many misconceptions about same sex desiring we need to start by unpacking these historical contexts as urgency to unlearn and learn about human sexuality, thus media and the academy have an important role to play in deriving and driving this narrative.

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This narrative encompasses a wide spectrum that articulate amongst others decolonizing same sex desiring and the language used to denote Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression. There is a view held that due to the absence of the language theorizing same sex desiring, therefore it is unAfrican and did not exist from time immemorial.

University of KwaZulu Natal Deputy Vice Chancellor and African Sexualities Researcher, Professor Thabo Msibi, in his paper titled “The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa” offers a broader term of Same Sex Desiring individuals as acknowledgement that “same-sex erotic’s, practiced by many people in many different historical contexts, do not always necessarily lead to the emergence of a “gay” identity”, a position he derives from Deborah Amory (1997:5).

The presence of same sex desiring for instance in the continent could be traced through many experiences. Msibi presents evidence that homophobia is not only publicly approved by African leaders but relies on unsubstantiated claims of an imposed homosexual identity, contradictory ideas on morality, and the use of outdated laws, bluntly these are used to erase the history that does and has existed throughout human history.

This global pre time history also explores the works of Sappho, a Greek lyric poet from the Island of Lesbos and believed to have lived between 630 and 570 BC. Her poetry became prolific and esteem amongst many scholars of Hellenistic Alexandria, an era covering the period of Mediterranean history between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the emergence of the Roman Empire. It is also widely believed that the term Lesbian evolves from this context.

Her work became popular in the 6th century and to date her sexuality is still a great subject of debate amongst many sexuality scholars. Although early translations of her

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work were heterosexualised, today Sappho's poetry portrays homoerotic feelings.

We also draw historic lessons from the accounts of many ancient Greek militaries. The Trojan War of the 12th century in particular carries the accounts of male companionship, Homer in the poem *Iliad* tells of a deep and meaningful relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Although many contemporary cinematic portrayals have erased this history, one such film is the movie *Troy* portraying Patroclus as a younger relative of Achilles and no companionship, there is still literary archives to suggest that their relationship exceeded the common bounds of friendship.

Beyond Europe, where Christianity was not present or as prevalent as the 'proclamation of truth' we are continuously reminded that coloniality is not an African issue. Therefore, deciphering queer experiences across the world outside the West confirms the idea that colonization eroded lived experiences and we temporarily find these environments to still shun upon homosexuality.

In Asia for instance homosexuality was historically accepted as part of the local cultures prior to the rise of Christian ideologies. As with the Greek accounts, many ancient legends detail accounts of same sex desiring, particularly through textual archives emerging from the Ming and Han Dynasties where men, in addition to their female counterparts would also take on male lovers. These Asian experiences also account of Japan's pre-Meiji period where Monks and Samurai engaged in same sex relations. In one account relayed by a European missionary

"Your lordship will know that the priests of these kings are generally called byssus. They grow no hair on their beards, dress in a womanly fashion, and grow their hair long and braided, they imitate female speech because they adopt all the female gestures and inclinations. They marry and are received, according to the custom of the land, with other common men, and they live indoors, uniting

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carnally in their secret places with the men whom they have for husbands...”

Religion, bigotry and generally the Western culture and tradition comes from the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cultures, both influences emerge out of the ancient Greek and Roman cultures. Ancient Greece is considered the birthplace of many elements of Western culture including the reality that from as early as the 4th century, Christianity has played a major role in shaping Western civilization. However, contrary to this view anywhere in the world where Christianity was not as prevalent as in the West same sex desiring found expression and societies maintained their sexual codes and vocabularies.

The bigotry of Sodomy to condemn homosexuality.

Through this paper I posit that there are many biblical myths and of these myths I explore the idea of sodomy. The description and emergence of this idea first emerges out of Christian teachings, and not entirely the scripture itself or what it denotes in its original meaning. We are first introduced to this term in the book of Genesis.

Many theologians have derived the use of this word from the city of Sodom and Gomorrah through its destruction by rain of fire as punishment for sin and vice, to date we still hear of many theologians identifying homosexuality as the ground for this retribution by God.

In its truest description, Sodom was not destroyed because of same sex desiring, in fact if we are to focus on sodomy as the act of non-normative sex, much of the evidence still points to an emphasis on a myriad of biblical sexual offences including adultery, fornication, lust and sexual impurity. However not as the basis for the destruction of the city, but because of the lack of hospitality. Today many conservative countries hold the position that Sodomy describe same sex. Professor Nick Grier posit that there are two theological positions:

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“The first, if homosexuals are inherently evil, then that means God created them such; or secondly, the more orthodox and acceptable is the view that all humans are created in the image of God and all that God create is good. Therefore, if God creates homosexuals the way they are, then God must intend that they are an integral part of the human community.”

He notes an interesting point that Jesus did not interpret the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah as sexual, rather speaks across context of sexual sins that we've known people to commit despite their sexuality. Frankly he does not even speak of anything specific in relation to the sin of homosexuality anywhere in the Gospel, in fact a prominent bone of contention here should be the idea that he and the rest of the gospel placed focus on this idea of the gender-binary and reproduction. There is however a general contemporary understanding and position that the idea of Sodomy was not to denote homosexuality, but rather the abuse and stigmatization of strangers or outsiders and neglecting those that are poor and needy. Although the Sodomite's intention in this given context were sexual, this does not entirely imply homosexuality, but rather the exercise of power and violence embedded even in the patriarchy and misogyny seen through our contemporary world. According to Msibi:

“The increased expressions of homophobia in Africa today are not only a reaction to the “personified” and visible homosexual identity, but also a tool for sexism, an attempt to solidify men's position in society”.

According to the book of Ezekiel the inhabitants of this city “had pride, abundance of food and did not come to the aid of the poor” an idea clearly painted through how King Lot received mercy from the destruction because of his unique hospitality among the inhabitants of the city.

Matthew 10 verse 5 confirms and highlight that when Jesus sends out his disciples to preach in Israel, he warns that those who fails to welcome them will be judged harsher than

the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. To this end the conclusion remains according to Grier whether we reject or accept the sexual meaning of sodomy, if the word 'sodomite' should be reserved, to even be used at all to denote those who use sex to dominate, humiliate or inflict terror, then we should reserve the word homosexual in this context for people who love the same sex.

Queering in the Post-colonial Africa

Many African sexuality scholars have all dismissed the famous misconception that homosexuality is un-African. The mistaken claim that anything can even be un-African is anchored on the essentialist supposition that Africa is in its nature a homogeneous environment. This is not true; Africa is and has been characterized by its diversity.

In fact, it is colonization that should be blamed for the suppression of same sex realities in the continent. This project has been driven by European missionaries and ethnographers as a way of introducing and promoting slavery and imperialism. According to Marc Epprecht and Professor Thabo Msibi, linguistically the terminology describing same sex desiring is foreign to the African context, thus making it un-African. However, the practices around same sex desiring far predates colonization. Msibi assert that "colonial influence has always served to erode truth in Africa, mainly by imposing Western norms".

This is also indicative of how Christianity in the main had been used as a tool to condemn homosexuality and by extension we see this manifested through personal and institutional homophobia entrenched in cultural, traditional principles, biases and prejudices carried by many societal leaders driving the political, social, and economic narratives. In Africa we have learnt of many heads of state, the likes of the late Robert Mugabe, former African National Congress president Jacob Zuma, and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, condemning homosexuality on the grounds that it is un-African, evil or non-normative. As Sylvia Tamale rightly puts

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it “It is legalized homophobia, not same-sex relations, that is alien to Africa.”

I argue that the existence of same sex desiring as an accepted social practice has mainly been eroded by the erasure of vocabularies in African Sexualities. There exists a pool of vocabulary that is found in many African languages some have emerged out of a derogatory history, while some have been appropriated, all have different meanings and histories for communities who appropriate and use them.

The point is that the fact that they exist in our traditional languages is enough to dispel the ‘un-African’ myth.

The greater Southern African regions have used words such as *inkotshane* to express same sex between men, while the word for “homosexual” is *adofuro* in Yoruba, a colloquialism for someone who engages in anal sex.

In Nigeria, the word *yan daudu* was used in most Northern parts of the country, a Hausa term to describe effeminate men who are wives to men. The *Nilotico Lango* tribes of Northern Uganda used the term *mudoko dako* to describe an effeminate male who is of a different gender, however, were mostly treated as woman among the Langi people.

In additions to languages, visual evidence has been found through many Bushmen rock paintings portraying men having sex. Many other scholars including Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe have explored many reports of same sex desiring by some African monarchs. King Mwanga II of the Buganda Kingdom of Uganda was widely reported to have been openly gay, Queen Ndzinga joins this list as one of the monarchs who eliminated the gender binary as a ruler and has been reported to have taken men and women as wives. As history progresses, we also see the migration of men from across Southern Africa into South African mining towns, a space that also gave expression to same sex desiring in the wake of colonization.

Queer organizing within the context and history of South Africa

The history of Queer organizing intersects with the history of the struggle for black emancipation in South Africa. The existence and voice of the community had been projected throughout many struggles, including that of black emancipation and freedom. This history follows what has become the most famous example of how the very same struggle perpetuated the silencing and erasure of queer voices and realities. The late stalwart and symbolic leader of the African National Congress, Ruth Mompati when interviewed by Human Rights campaigner Peter Tatchell in 1987 she says:

‘I hope that in liberated South Africa people will live a normal life. I emphasize the word normal... Tell me, are lesbians and gays normal? No, it is not normal. I cannot even begin to understand why people want lesbian and gay rights. The gays have no problems. They have nice houses and plenty to eat. I don’t see them suffering. No one is persecuting them... We haven’t heard about this problem in South Africa until recently. It seems to be fashionable in the West.’

But perhaps this is also an important turning point for the ANC as this would fundamentally surface the questions about homophobia in the ANC and forced the movement to envision embracing gay and lesbian rights for the first time.

This history is followed by another important account through the contributions of anti-apartheid and gay activist, Simon Tseko Nkoli. Nkoli was born on 26 November 1957 in poverty-stricken family, and it is during his early teen years that he directly experienced the harsh realities of the apartheid regime, with constant police invasions at his family home. Having moved between the Orange Free State, Sebokeng, Soweto and ending up in Hillbrow, one would tell that he was shaped by all these experiences.

Nkoli becomes an integral icon when engaging the history of LGBT visibility and organizing in South Africa.

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A courageous leader who despite the silencing of queer expression in and outside the congress movement, lived as an openly gay man while serving this movement that was characterized by great antagonism and held conservative views regarding homosexuality at that time. He became integral in merging the anti-apartheid and gay liberation movements as an effort to express his intersectional voice, and he never neglected this approach. He notably said in 1990:

“I am black, and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into secondary or primary struggles. In South Africa, I am oppressed because I am a black man, and I am oppressed because I am a gay man. So, when I fight for my freedom, I must fight against both oppressions... All those who believe in a democratic South Africa must fight against all oppression, all intolerance, all injustice.”

His idea of intersectionality offers the movement important lessons for striving for equality and complete visibility, through this work he took up white queer spaces and preached inclusivity and the idea of a single movement. As a Queer activist he co-founded notable LGBTQ organizations including the Gay Association of South Africa (an organization that later refused to support him during his detention), the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality and most notably, the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand, a reaction to GASA's white apolitical standpoint and his solution to reconcile both sides of his activism.

It is through his leadership at GLOW that he proposed and led the first ever pride on the African soil with his protégé Dr Bev Ditsie. Prior to this he had served as the secretary of the Congress of South African Students Transvaal branch where he also came out to his comrades, his sexuality became a subject of great debate, however, was allowed to continue serving despite this reality.

This culture of having to defend his sexuality in the ranks of the United Democratic Front and the ANC was something he had been accustomed to during his time in the movement. In

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1984 Nkoli was detained with other 21 activists of the UDF and ANC in what was to be known as one of the longest running trials, the Delmas Treason Trial.

The 22 were on trial for initially leading a protest march against rent increases in the township of Sebokeng, and on 23 September 1984 were arrested while attending the mass funeral of those killed during the protest. In the letters he wrote to his partner, Roy Shepard, Nkoli reflects on the hardships of also having to defend his sexuality to the other comrades he was tried with, to a point where the collective was divided in accepting to be tried alongside himself. At this time Nkoli had already started receiving solidarity support from across the world.

Two years later the trial was declared invalid and Nkoli acquitted of all charges. In post-apartheid South Africa Nkoli together with many other Queer activists including Phumi Mthetwa and Julia Nicol became instrumental in ensuring that the rights of LGBTQI+ people were included in South Africa's new constitution.

He led a delegation of members of the community to meet the late Nelson Mandela when he became president. Nkoli died on 30 November 1998 after

succumbing to HIV-related complications. The HIV/AIDS work also became a space he also advocated for through the Soweto based Saturday Group and the Township Aids Project.

Today his legacy still can't be found in many history books, even in what he called a political home. This home has a great responsibility to immortalize his legacy and that of many anti-apartheid activists who were 'othered' throughout the history of a struggle that recognizes the gender binary politics and erases others.

Despite the numerous constitutional and legislative advances, many LGBTIQ people are still subjected to harsh realities entrenched in homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia by members of society, the state and institutions including cultural and religious spaces.

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In a survey conducted by the Inclusive Society Institute it was found that 59% members of the community experience some form of rejection and or discrimination when wanting to access their cultural rights and 67% faced rejection and discrimination when wanting to express their personal religious beliefs (Buntse & Swanepoel).

Despite this reality, the past 28 years in Africa have been characterized by queer visibility, perhaps this because of the rise of Queer activism and new various other global phenomena such as homonationalism, globalization and the rise in the pink economy across the globe, ideas that I explore deeply in my paper titled *The Somizification Discourse: A Theory of the Framing of Gay Image in the South African Show Business Industry*. For as long as the notions that homosexuality is un-African persist in the continent Queer people will continue to bear the brunt driven by uninformed views about same sex desiring. The community requires better allies who will protect the humanity of all people lead personal initiatives to unlearn without the expectation that the community should conscientize and sensitize them.

The LGBTIQ+ community also remains key in re-telling our history, a history that celebrates diversity, that promotes equality and acceptance, and recognizes the contribution of everyone, regardless of their sexuality.

Not just a seven-colour queer spectacle: A reflection on the 31st anniversary of Pride¹

I wrote this piece to commemorate the 31st anniversary of Pride, in it I revisited the inaugural pride of 1990 and travelled down the democratic dispensation up to the present-day view on LGBTIQ+ pride. I reflect on the strides and efforts by members of the community towards building one of the strongest lobby and activism movements, it is despite this reality that the community is still confronted with many challenges.

“An important and timely reflection on Pride”
- Judge Edwin Cameron

As the local government election campaign ends, we also conclude what has been dubbed South Africa’s Pride Month, October. Pride Month in South Africa has in recent years generated much-needed visibility for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer plus community. Despite the *homonationalism* spectacle and the commercialization of the concept of Pride as we know it, it has both become central in advancing contemporary queer struggles and building on the legacy of what Pride really meant.

Pride month has successfully created key allies for the LGBTIQ+ community in various private and public forums. The private sector has seen corporations such as Uber,

1 Originally published as: Not Just a Seven-Colour Queer Spectacle: A Reflection on the 31st Anniversary of Pride. *Daily Maverick*, 31 October 2021: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-10-31-beyond-a-seven-colour-queer-spectacle-a-reflection-on-the-32nd-anniversary-of-pride/>

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Vodacom, Mercedes, and Levi Strauss, among others, South African Breweries and many others running Pride-focused campaigns with the public sector through various government departments, councils, and legislatures also leading Pride discourse.

Case studies worth noting include that of the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development, through its LGBTIQ+ champion Member of the Executive Council (MEC), Tasneem Motara, has developed an LGBTIQ+ office to mainstream queer and Pride issues under government's programmes. In the Free State, the MEC for Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation, Limakatso Mahasa, has been a great ally for the community since her appointment. Her headquarters became the first government institution in the Free State to hoist the Pride flag.

Pride has highlighted and placed a spotlight on issues of inclusive and diverse workplaces. There have also been Pride activities through some labour unions, with the South African Democratic Teachers' Union leading the pack regarding this visibility and representation with its queer membership. Pride has also heightened the visibility of the plight of the community in mainstream spaces, notably through the media, advertising and bold statements by some political parties and religious fraternities.

Historically, Pride Month marks the celebration of what became the first Pride March ever to take place in the African continent, in 1990. It is worth noting that this Pride became an affirmation of the queer community thus it drove visibility efforts by activists of the time, but more importantly it was a protest to seek to exist in a society that historically erased the community's right to exist in pre-democracy South Africa.

On this 31st anniversary of Pride we ought to reflect on some of the great advances and legislative victories achieved since the dawn of democracy. The recognition and protection of sexual orientation in the Constitution of South Africa remains an important ask from the founding Pride manifesto.

This constitutional recognition and protection has over the years yielded various other pro-queer laws and government policies, including the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act, 2003 (Act No 49 of 2003), allowing individuals to change, under certain conditions, their sex recorded in the population registry; and the Civil Union Act, which came into effect on 30 November 2006, recognizing same-sex marriages, extending the common law definition of marriage to include same-sex spouses, and allowing same-sex spouses to enjoy joint and stepchild adoption since 2002.

We should also reflect on the huge numbers of Pride events that have erupted over the last 10 years. This has become an important franchise of the commemoration of the inaugural Pride as led by Struggle icon and father of the South African gay rights movement, Simon Tseko “Abuti” Nkoli, alongside other activists including Dr Beverly Ditsie and retired Constitutional Court Judge Edwin Cameron.

Although Pride Month has been central in placing queer issues in the public discourse, it has also subjected members of the community to further discrimination, secondary victimization and hate crimes. Since February of this year alone, 20 members of the community have been murdered in hate crimes across the country. However, this has not demoralized the community in its efforts to seek justice while advocating for visibility and representation using tools such as the media and through civil society, interest, and advocacy groups.

Pride has in the last couple of years found itself in mainstream media content and local productions are incorporating queer storylines that are now more accurate in representing the realities of not only trans and intersex persons, but the LGBTIQ+ community in general.

The idea of Pride is characterized by many dynamics, but representation remains critical. We all need to see ourselves or aspects of our reality portrayed accurately in the content we consume. Through representation we have seen tolerance and acceptance levels increase in many of our societies. Political

representation has been at the forefront of the contemporary queer struggle, this as an important vehicle to mainstreaming queer issues in the agenda of government and Parliament.

Although the African National Congress has historically supported the community, it is only recently that the party has been seen to hoist the Pride flag, support Pride activities and speak out about this support through its president. This vocal stance has seen the likes of Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Ronald Lamola recently attending and addressing the Soweto Pride.

In 2020, during the ANC's 109th birthday celebration in Kimberley, the Women's League launched its LGBTIQ+ desk¹, which was followed by provincial desks this year. After this launch and the resulting #Queer4ANC movement, other alliance components such as the South African Student Congress and Youth League have driven the Pride and queer narrative, including the election and appointment of openly queer National Executive Committee members and National Task Team members.

The recently appointed ANC Youth League National Task Team has also been intentional in creating a seat on the table for queer youth, with the appointment of provincial and regional task team members including several queer-identifying youth league members.

The 2021 ANC's local government election campaign is arguably the queerest since 1994, with Pride colours embellishing the campaign trail and images of queer-identifying councilor candidates hanging on poles.

The Democratic Alliance has also positioned itself as a pro-queer political party, becoming the first party to develop a desk dedicated to LGBTIQ+ programmes. The DA Rainbow Network has been central in fostering queer representation through deployment of LGBTIQ+ persons to serve in various legislatures, including Parliament. Zakhele Mbhele is among

the handful of DA Members of Parliament who openly² identify as queer. This is important for driving political representation at the level of policy making. This way, the community will advance its struggle through policy protection. The lack of queer representation in the space of policy development affects this protection – perhaps therefore that is why the Hate Crimes Bill is still in limbo or even why the South African delegation to the United Nations shockingly abstained in a key vote of the UN Human Rights Council to appoint an independent watchdog on sexual orientation in 2016.

Today Pride is the Queer community's political statement and voice. The movement of Pride has enabled the community to build one of the strongest lobby and activist movements in the country. Part of this activism project is seen today as efforts to strengthen intersectionality politics, visibility, and representation as well as inclusive societies

7 Open Letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa is in a state of Queer disarray and must be sanctioned (Daily Maverick, 23 June 2021).

I wrote this letter while emotionally charged after hearing reports of the brutal killing of Sam Junior Mbatha, a vibrant and full of life student leader who was a central voice of the university of North West's student life, a young aspiring media and communication professional who kept the North West University Varsity Cup home games something to look forward to. I met Sam while working as the Project Manager for Youth Engagement at the Southern African Communications Industries Association, I had been visiting North-West University (Mahikeng Campus) to do my regular work with our student chapter there and through a mutual contact we met and exchanged some pleasantries, we spoke about a lot of things while sipping.

We spoke about the state of the LGBT movement, current affairs, postgraduate studies, and many intersectional chats, he drove us in his car to go buy drinks and it is on that

2 <https://www.mambaonline.com/2020/01/13/anc-womens-league-launches-lgbtiq-desk/>

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day when I got to interact with this smart, outspoken, and tenacious Sam (may his Soul rest in eternal peace). This letter is therefore a result of an instant rage from learning about this brutal attack and the many other related incidents across the country. Although no direct reply to the letter was tendered, the Presidency placed urgency on several concerns I raised, including deploying the department of Justice to actively be visible and seen to support the community. I still believe the decision to write this letter was driven by emotion and in the process failed to consider the many efforts by government to address issues faced by LGBTIQ+.

Dear Mr. President

As I pen this letter, I am overwhelmed by a series of emotions. Emotions of great sadness, anger, disbelief, great shock, fear, as well as rage. Like many queer people, Mr. President, I write this open letter to raise an important question about the realities of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Questioning and Queer community in this country. I am confident that when I say we live in great fear, I echo the many voices of hopeless Queer folks across the country living in great and constant fear. I echo the many voices who begged for their lives to be saved just before they were brutally hacked, stabbed, raped, or burnt to death.

This, Mr. President, questions the integrity of whether our judicial and constitutional efforts and law enforcement are at all willing to bring an end to these heinous crimes against humanity.

In fact, speaking of humanity makes me think about how the South African government is deliberate in watching as we contravene key treaties on the protection of human rights. The Declaration of Human Rights for one guarantee protection to all people regardless of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

Mr. President, it is under your leadership that even as an activist I fear for my life. I fear to walk into my demise for living my life. The voices of Queer activism are silenced by instilling this fear. The recent brutal and incessant killings of LGBTIQ+

Not just a seven-colour queer spectacle

persons in South Africa are a deliberate attack not only on our Constitution, but also demonstrates an increasingly obvious lack of political will to address issues of hate crimes head-on as a state.

For many LGBTIQ+ persons, the idea of a progressive Constitution remains just that, an idea. Although you have been vocal in calling out the recent attacks, you are also equally attacked and as custodians (government) of this Constitution you must fight back, it must be made clear through real action.

We have said in numerous proposals to government, one best solution to addressing current challenges facing the community remains to be mainstreaming of LGBTIQ+ issues.

How many lives do we have to lose before implementing a mere directive — it's as though we are asking for a ministry when all we want is the mainstreaming of our agenda in your busy government schedule. Your government is evidently protecting my community through speeches and well-written press releases.

This is evident because innocent lives continue to be taken by hate-driven and motivated criminals. These criminals believe it is okay just to rid South Africa of the LGBTIQ+. If it is not a syndicate then what do we call this horror currently plaguing South Africa?

I think you and I can agree that since your address on Human Rights Day no effort or interventions specific to these attacks have been presented to us or yourself by Minister of Police, Bheki Cele or any of your security clusters. Please take us into your confidence Mr. President; we cannot continue to live every day thinking whether we may be next or not.

The Hate Crimes Bill is gathering dust in Plein Street as members of Parliament come and go. This is the sad reality about the political will to which I am referring. It is because both those houses of Parliament do not have chairs occupied by voices with the Queer lived experience that we must suffer the consequences of that lack of representation.

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Not only is it problematic that for the last 10 years we have not signed into law the Hate Crimes Bill, but it also demonstrates that we do not care about the lives we continue to lose.

Mr. President, I also believe that in your former capacity as chair of the African Union and without fear of sovereign protection, you will agree that our situation could be seen as being at the same crisis point as your Ugandan counterpart's law imprisoning Queer persons in that country. Well, your situation is much worse because it is camouflaged under a beautiful Constitution and legislative frameworks purporting the protection and recognition of the community.

Those who truly believe in the protection of international human rights should sanction South Africa on key relations, transactions, and trade to remind us of these gross human rights violations happening under the country's watch.

Yes, the country's watch, Mr. President. It is fortunate that elements of the faith-based sector have not been silent on Queer issues, but it has been extremely bothersome that some churches have been vocal on exactly what exacerbates the hate directed towards members of the community. Under your watch Mr. President, we have allowed this spewing of hate to take place in many pulpits mounted on the grounds of this constitutional democracy — we have empowered religious as well as traditional authorities to exceptionally hate those who choose to love differently from them.

As far as I am concerned it remains high-level ignorance to hate based on who the other person chooses to love. These institutions, Mr. President, continue to infringe on the many rights that protect Queer people like any other citizen. This disenfranchisement leaves many Queer people with no social structure or support.

In a constitutional democracy that has for the last 25 years claimed to recognize and protect sexual orientation, we still don't have shelters and healthcare unique to the needs of a Queer person. Our public institutions are conscientized

by their understanding of societal problems from a gender-binary lens.

This is secondary victimization to my Queer siblings who are already subjected to victimization by their families and communities.

Institutional homophobia, transphobia and queerphobia present those with Queer antagonist tendencies with the opportunity to exercise hate while justifying it. When a Queer person is killed in this country, their families go through the same emotions associated with the loss of a loved one — their friends, work colleagues and sometimes communities also feel a great sense of loss.

I am most disappointed, but not shocked at all by members of many of our communities who protect and promote LGBTIQ+ hate at every opportunity they receive. The majority of these anti-Queer stances started at churches, taverns, and traditional *makgotlas* and have led to instilling hate, and many have proved fatal.

In a study I co-authored with the Institute for Inclusive Society we uncovered that in the Covid-19 period alone, close to 60% of LGBTIQ+ persons reported mental challenges and difficulty accessing mental health care that is Queer-embracing.

Your government is part of the problem, the public service is in dire need of a policy facelift, our service provision should break the gender-binary ceiling we are subjected to when accessing government services. The transgender community remains side-lined and silenced on their choices regarding the identity and the changes in their government sex marker, in some cases individuals have been waiting for many years since their transitions for Home Affairs to update their identities.

These are a few of the many daily struggles by Queer people when interacting with your government. I call upon you to lead a trajectory that will finally end this conscientized and brutality.

The Somizification Discourse: A Theory of the Framing of the Gay Image in the South African Show¹

This article is still a work of continuous revision. I develop this academic discourse to frame gay representation in the context of South Africa. I do this through investigating the symbolic annihilation of a queer man image, its representation and visibility at the backdrop South Africa's openly queer entertainer, Somizi Mhlongo.

The study uses various other concepts that are deployed in the study of queer issues in the academy as well as Mhlongo's historical journey in the industry. The full article is expected to be released in the first quarter of 2024.

This discourse is an interplay and cross section between the concepts and theoretical framework that attempts to build modern and contemporary understanding of queer studies, they include the Queer theory, Pink Washing, Homonationalism, Celebrity Culture, Fandom and Advocacy.

The study constructs this discourse to establish the creation and portrayal of gay identities by mainstream media in South Africa, television in particular. The study also interrogates this portrayal at the backdrop of gay stereotyping and the way public perception is created either through content or symbolic annihilation.

Stuart Hall suggests "we give things meaning by how we represent them - the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce." It is important to highlight that television as a medium has a mass potential, hence it has the biggest advertising stake, moreover it plays an integral role in driving social change. Its persuasive nature can create public perception and build narratives. This

1 Business Industry (Unpublished draft).

knowledge about the power that television has in the lives of many, requires the medium to always mirror society.

The assumption in this paper, is that the South African television and entertainment show business are constructing two different queer images. Media genres such as news and current affairs rarely report on queer issues, when they do it is often perpetuating stereotypes (i.e., gay men as promiscuous, gay men as amusing and comic, and gay murders). This distinction is however conscious of the progress by commercial channels such as ETV's eNCA and MultiChoice, where content is diversifying, and it is now a commonplace to see gay images during news.

In show business and entertainment, various visual mediums are seeing an emergence and increase in the number of powerful and inspiring gay men, individuals such as fashion icon, David Tlale; Advertising and marketing guru, Sylvester Chauke; Founder of Feather Awards, Thami Kotlolo and Rich Mnisi. The downward however is that, in these middle strata representations, a gay man is viewed as independent, rich, or wealthy, somewhat educated, and well-travelled.

The assumption is that this construction of a gay identity seeks to benefit commercially from a middle-class gay man, this idea of the growing buying power of gay men and the Pink Economy, estimated by the Other Foundation to be between R53 billion and R204 billion (Other Foundation, 2017). The concept refers to the spending power of the LGBTI community and its influence across social spaces and constructs as both a social grouping and economic segment.

The emergence of the concept has prompted brands to be gay friendly and adopt a radical stance that speaks to a gay consumer. This has been demonstrated through numerous Television Advertising campaigns such as the famous Castle Lager's Smash the label, Chicken Licken's Coming Out, and Gillette's First Transgender Shave among others.

Arguably, the resistance and comeback to the media spotlight of South Africa's TV and Radio Personality, Somizi Mhlongo reclaimed the broadcast access for gay people who

have been disenfranchised by mainstream media over the years. Although many, knew Somizi Mhlongo, his second stint in broadcast entertainment included his major project as curator of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup opening ceremony in South Africa and saw MultiChoice's Idols SA ratings hit record highs when he joined the show as one of the judges.

This led to a dramatic increase in the representation of gay images on TV, amongst some of the genres that took advantage of the famous 'Woooo Shaaame' (Mhlongo's famous Idols SA slogan) revolution include soap operas, telenovelas, talk shows and radio shows.

Although his comeback experience was heralded by other major television portrayals such as SABC's Isidingo on screen gay kiss, Threesome's popularity (a 1980's pop gay trio survived by one of its founders, Amstel Maboja after the deaths of the other 2 founding members, Koyo Bala, and Jeff Moyo), he lived through different generations of South African show business.

Mhlongo remains the single most visible pioneer of the new broadcast and showbiz narrative that is gay receptive, yet somewhat stereotypic and paints a typical image of what is gay in the eyes of society. Throughout his entertainment career, he managed to create a radical image of a gay men (both conscious and unconscious) and ultimately opened the industry for other gay men who are musicians, actors, and other media personalities such as Moshe Ndiki, Aron Moloisi, Khaya Dladla, Mzamo Xabashe, Buju Bikwa, Thulasizwe "Lasizwe" Dambuza, Nakhane Toure, Langa Mavuso, Lindokuhle Ntombela, Selby "Selbeyonce" Mkhize, Lindah Majola and many others.

Many of these gay and trans identifying entertainers have been privileged to depict (through their on-screen careers) their real-life identities on television or radio, what remains constant, and problematic is how their different roles paints a single image of what gay looks like according to the framing emerging from the identity of Mhlongo and according to public perception (comic, hairstylist, friend to a group of

girls, promiscuous etc.), whilst we see a different portrayal of a gay image emulated by men that are heterosexual identifying and affirming, this has been seen through a number of storylines and portrayals through heterosexual actors such as Warren Masemola and more recently through Siv Ngesi's allyship drag portrayal.

These portrayals demonstrates that these underlying issues with conditional and stereotypical representation of gay images can present us with an opportunity to learn and unlearn what we thought we knew about human sexuality.

Let's take for instance the storyline of the characters of Senzo and Jason, real names Thami Mngqolo and Zolisa Xaluva on the series *Generations*, created a space for a public discourse. We have also seen the newcomer broadcaster, Moja Love providing the portrayal of varying Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, Expressions, and Sex Characteristics on screen, a victory for queer representation in mainstream media.

Mhlongo is arguably amongst the most talked about celebrities in South Africa. His portrayal is that of wealth, lavish living and flaunting. According to a celebrity lifestyle platform TVSA.com, Mhlongo is in the top 20 of the highest paid celebrities in South Africa.

This depiction of wealth is often stereotyped to generalize the perceived socio-economic status of gay people in different communities. This is evident when the notion of social construction of gay identity is interrogated, the notion supported by Bailey (1998) Castells (1983) and Lauria & Knopp (1985). Keating and McLaughlin (2005: 148) highlight contemporary queer culture as a "lifestyle that uses the language and beliefs of the ideology of consumption."

Since this come back some have viewed Mhlongo's role on the airwaves as an effort to undermine those that are underprivileged. To his defense, Mhlongo recalls the period of his life when he was not making an income. He admits that he does not plan on returning to that period. As with the

assumption in this study Mhlongo is depicted by many as satirical, while condescending, a claim that he disproves.

In his autobiography co-authored with Journalist Lesley Mofokeng, he places the power of his fans at the heart of the revival of his career, he says: “When I get bombarded by fans screaming at me running to me and my patience level runs down, the voice within comes on and says “Somizi remember back then you lost everything, remember these are the people that picked you up and put bread on your table” Despite the negative reception as a celebrity he still commands a huge following and fan base.

This is perhaps because of his radical approach towards queering TV and Radio at all costs. Tyler and Bennett (2009) argue that ‘celebrity’ is an increasingly significant means by which reactionary class attitudes, allegiances and judgements are communicated.

Mhlongo is also often heard affirming his gay identity, his same-sex relationship with former partner, Mohale Motaung-Mhlongo, societal challenges for gay people and growing up as gay during some of the broadcast platforms he has worked for, including Metro FM’s Fresh Breakfast Show, The Bridge on Metro and the many award shows and events he hosts regularly (he has also questioned gender binary through some of his gender bending outfits).

It is then safe to point out that the uncomfortable images of gay are becoming acceptable through the depiction of Mhlongo and in the process, ordinary South African audiences are at the midpoint of acceptance and tolerance for the gay community. Mhlongo’s form of celebrity activism has redefined queer acceptance at the level never imagined before, thus his influence as an openly gay personality has commanded the poor, working, middle and elite classes of society to start the uncomfortable dialogue of sexual identity in the media.

Tyler & Bennett adds that: “In contradiction to claims that the concept of social class has lost its analytical value in the context of contemporary consumer society with the

growing ideological purchase of meritocracy and choice, class remains central to the construction and meaning of celebrity” This ideal is embedded in that celebrities have a massive role to play in social change and contemporary societies.

Somizi Mhlongo has accumulated years of experience in the show business and has seen other celebrities come and go. This experience is largely credited to his relevance towards media consumers both in South Africa and the African diaspora.

The Somizification Discourse centres its argument in that Somizi Mhlongo, as a gay identifying man, with radical mainstream media advocacy on gay identity, social position, relatedness to ordinary persons (men and women, gay or straight, poor, or wealthy, young, and old), entertaining persona and many years of experience is a model of impactful celebrity that benefits the medium and state profit-making and embracing diversity respectively.

He prompted the creation of an ideal image of gay by remaining his true self even at the face of a conservative mainstream media. This image (his image) and representation is today more salient in mainstream media and resonates with mass audience consumption more than previously. The history of queer oriented media, however, has largely been print and niche. Since the rise of men’s lifestyle in the 1980’s mediums such as Pink Tongue, Exit, and Rush have been dedicated to queer news and entertainment.

More recently digital and broadcast platforms such as MambaOnline, GaySA Radio and re-launch of the new Exit, with new editorial philosophy. These mediums continue to bridge the information gap in the queer media space.

Mhlongo’s activism for gay issues has been seen and heard through his career over the years, a scenario to demonstrate this notion is the Madame Gigi era, for many years Madame Gigi became Somizi’s Trans Alter ego. ‘She’ became a popular segment on SABC’s (Intimate Connexionz hosted by Mhlongo and Madame Gigi respectively), an image that became a popular typecasting for gay people by society.

Madamme Gigi has however opened the uncomfortable debates about Trans and non-binary genderqueer categories in many social spaces and was ahead of her time on mainstream media.

This activism is also seen through how Mhlongo demystified negative myths about gay parenting. When Somizi and other TV personality, Palesa Modisakwane revealed their one-night stint and daughter, Bahumi, many people blurred sexuality and gender binary politics, with many believing gays to be double standard in how they practice their sexuality. The final version of the discourse will dive into this subject.

Somizification Discourse and Queer Theory Lens

Queer theory is a new area of study which emerged around the year 1991. Queer theory is seen as both an academic theory and political statement, highly contested, the theory is an exploration of the oppressive power of dominant norms on sexuality and other marginalization. The theory was bred out of the gay and lesbian studies, a relatively new discipline that entered the academy vocabulary around the mid-1980s. The theory according to Judith Butler, focuses attention on the social construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior.

The queer theory underlies the development of the Somizification Discourse in that Somizi in his form of celebrity activism has invested in years of constructing a defiant image of queerness that demystifies the dominant norms regarding human sexuality. Therefore, the use of the queer theory in this regard, justifies the foundation of this discourse at the backdrop of Mhlongo's efforts to queering mainstream media and show business over the years of disenfranchisement.

Somizification Discourse, Pink washing and Homonationalism

Pink washing is coined as a phrase to define a public relations tactic that essentially involves an appeal to queer friendliness,

to counterbalance or ‘wash’ over other questionable practices by the organization. Homonationalism is another relatively new term coined by Jasbir Puar in 2007 and looks at the context of the United States of America, but now can be used to contextualize national homonormativity endeavors.

Homonationalism according to Winer & Bolzendahl (2020) highlights the connection between nationalist ideology and the promotion of LGBTQ + rights. They add that homonationalism refers to processes in which certain Western powers uphold their supposed support of the LGBTQ + community to legitimize nationalist, imperialist, racist, and Islamophobic positions. In its initial development, Puar argued that homonationalism is organized through an “ascendancy of whiteness” that situates “whiteness as a queer norm and straightness as a racial norm”. Puar and other scholars have over the years reimagined and subsequently redeveloped the discourse to calling attention towards emergent global dialogues that increasingly position some nations and populations as “gay friendly” and others as “homophobic”.

Homonationalism according to Puar now refers to “the use of ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for LGBTIQ+ as a barometer by which the legitimacy of, and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated”. Given the above concepts, one can deduce that at the backdrop of the Somization Discourse lies a consideration that has to do with how both the state and its actors (including media) legitimizes the existence and visibility of certain queer individuals to position their acceptance and support of homosexuality. This is clearly seen through how Mhlongo’s network, beyond his family history in show business, is also characterized by his previous and current relationship with the governing ANC and some of its leaders such as Fikile Mbalula.

I conclude this article by highlighting that although the media space and subsequently the show business is transforming to incorporate various other SOGIESC images, it is through Mhlongo’s historic breaking of the glass ceiling for the portrayal of the Queer agenda that defines the current

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status quo. He pioneered for many other spaces such as the Feather Awards to take ownership of Queer representation in the mainstream media. The Feather Awards, now in their 15th year, are broadcasted on national TV, another breakthrough in the screen portrayal of queer identities.

Pride and prejudice – the parallels between the LGBTQ struggle histories of the US and SA¹

June is set aside globally to observe and commemorate Pride in the United States (and beyond) and, to this end, there have been myriad events to mark this month worldwide.

Beyond the remarkable visibility the commemorative events have generated, there is also an important history that remains central in how the month came to be celebrated. Although not part of our Struggle history as South Africa, these events culminated in what we know as Pride Month today, but also how the two histories – South Africa and the US – intersect.

Pride Month commemoration is largely attributed to the 1969 Stonewall uprising and the resulting riots in other parts of the world. In conceptualizing the importance of the day through a contemporary lens, we ought to understand the origins of this history and how it came to be. Perhaps the starting point is the precise watershed moment in the history of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement in the US and beyond.

The story begins in June 1969 (well, at least for the US – for SA, similar events had occurred three years earlier) when revelers and regulars of what is now deemed America's monument and symbol of resistance, the Stonewall Inn in New York City, staged an uprising in protest the harassment and persecution by police of LGBT people.

1 Originally published as: Pride and Prejudice – The parallels between the LGBTQ struggle histories of the US and SA. *Daily Maverick*, 2022: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-06-16-pride-and-prejudice-the-parallels-between-the-lgbtq-struggle-histories-of-the-us-and-sa/>

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The uprising marked the commencement of a movement to outlaw laws and practices that discriminated against LGBT Americans.

Although these sporadic uprisings were to later influence other movements across the globe, in South Africa there had been an event much like the Stonewall riots regarding the raiding of queer social spaces.

The Forest Town raid was a 1966 police raid that targeted LGBT people in Forest Town, Johannesburg. The raid prompted the then government to pass anti- homosexuality laws, with the 1969 amendment of the Immorality Act prohibiting men from engaging in any form of erotic demeanor when there were more than two people present.

For both the US and South Africa, the two events were to be the tipping point for LGBT organizing and uprising against the state.

In 1970, both countries saw some great developments pertaining to the visibility and representation of the LGBT struggle, with the US hosting the first gay Pride, the Christopher Street Liberation Day, on 28 June.

In South Africa, the gay rights movement formed later that year, with gay rights organizations forming coalitions. Although the movement was divided along racial lines, the period still marked some show of resistance against a government that was anti- homosexuality. The movement developed, despite the government's opposition.

The following years have largely been characterized by developments and some impediments to the LGBT movement in both the US and SA. The period between 1979 through to 1994 had seen almost all US states banning same-sex marriage, reversing the efforts by members of the Gay Activists Alliance to demand marriage rights for same-sex couples at New York City's Marriage License Bureau in 1971. This victory had earlier led to the first same-sex marriage license issued by the bureau on 4 June 1971.

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South Africa, on the other hand, has a young history of same-sex marriage recognition compared with its counterpart, the US. It was not until 2006 when Parliament – through former Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka – signed into law the Civil Union Act.

The act became central in setting the scene to allow same-sex marriages the same marital privileges as prescribed by the law of South Africa. In a landmark decision of the Constitutional Court (*Minister of Home Affairs v Fourie*) on 1 December 2005, Parliament was given one year to rectify the inequality in the marriage statutes and signed the amended law just a day before the Constitutional Court's deadline.

This effort was a culmination of the lobbying by the LGBTQ movement – a movement that has over the years asserted its position and struggle for equality, representation, visibility, access to justice and erotic freedom. This became apparent when LGBT activists in South Africa organized the first Pride on 13 October 1990.

Activists including Bev Ditsie, Simon Nkoli and Edwin Cameron pioneered this first Pride march as both a celebration and a political statement. Over the years, Pride in South Africa has taken many shapes and forms, with many other smaller Pride events and activities happening in and outside the month of October.

We cannot devalue the eruption of these forms of Pride and protest, simply because they are what define our contemporary struggle as the LGBTQ, while dedicating the month of October is an act of reflection and highlight of the history of the origins of our very own Pride. This remains central to preserving the legacy of this struggle as well as immortalizing those who died for this recognition.

As in the case of the US, the first Pride on the African continent took place out of a moment of resistance against a system that oppressed not only black people, but also pathologised same-sex love and desiring. It is because of these negative perceptions that societies through their conservative stances erased the histories that positioned the realities of

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the LGBTQ on the continent at the forefront of our collective struggle for equality.

This erasure, coupled with resulting violations and victimization, has seen countries declare harsher laws as a deterrent and penal approach to oppress homosexuality. Although the situation has changed

drastically for the queer communities in both the US and South Africa, the LGBTQ is still confronted with many societal challenges carried by the legacy of this oppression against the community throughout history.

We therefore observe Pride Month as a symbol of resistance and solidarity not just for the two countries, but for the many voiceless queer persons across the globe.

So, next time you see and hear us exclaiming and chanting “Happy Pride Month”, know that we are celebrating an intersectional history of Pride, prejudice, and protest – not just a seven-colour spectacle.

Open Letter to Netball SA¹

Dear Netball South Africa,

As the countdown to the Netball World Cup that you are hosting this July and August continues, I am writing to you to express my concern about Uganda's participation in the event.

While Uganda's netball team is ranked eighth in the world and second on the continent, the Ugandan government is deliberately stripping its citizens of their human rights. The escalating persecution of LGBTQIA+ people in Uganda calls upon all of us to get off our spectator chairs and proactively do something to provide solidarity to the Ugandan LGBTQIA+ community.

It is embarrassing that the president of Netball SA, Cecilia Molokwane, is humbled and filled with extreme joy by the fact that Uganda's games are selling out ahead of the spectacle.

Molokwane and her Netball SA collective seem to be ignorant of the geopolitical issues of the day. If they were not, they would be privy to our current struggle and solidarity efforts with the abuse and disregard of human rights in Uganda, which could potentially lead to loss of lives.

I appeal to Netball SA's sense of logic and reasoning. At a time when the world is looking for solutions that will see Uganda drop this law, you can potentially add to the much-needed pressure meant to agitate President Yoweri Museveni to use his veto power not to sign this bill into law.

The matter of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill is currently a subject of international scrutiny and cause for concern for many sovereign governments, diplomatic

1 Originally published as: Open Letter to Netball SA. *Daily Maverick*, 1 May 2023: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2023-05-01-dear-netball-sa-allowing-uganda-to-participate-in-the-world-cup-makes-you-part-of-the-problem/>

communities, as well as global corporates. This pushback is mainly influenced by the urgency to get Uganda's government to drop this draconian law.

The bill approved by Uganda has far-reaching impacts on the safety of the LGBTQIA+ community in that country and seems to show a ripple effect to influence similar legal reforms in other conservative African countries, as we have seen with the case in the Kenyan parliament.

We are already receiving overwhelming reports of violence, torture, evictions, and ill-treatment, wholly because of the recent passing of this repressive bill by parliament. Perhaps we also need to interrogate Uganda's deliberate disregard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which they are a signatory under their United Nations membership.

In the context of the African Union, President Museveni is bound by various treaties, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which guarantees the principles of equality and non-discrimination before the law.

It further guarantees the right to life, dignity, and physical integrity, protects people from cruelty, degrading or inhuman treatment or punishment, as well as the right to a fair trial before any court.

Furthermore, the government of Uganda is in contravention of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women. Under this protocol, also known as the Maputo Protocol, countries are expected to develop measures geared towards combatting violence against women irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Finally, Uganda is deliberately disregarding the 2014 adoption of Resolution 275 of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. The resolution clearly expresses grave concerns about the increasing violence and other human rights violations, among which is noted murder, rape, or assault based on a person's real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

Open Letter to Netball SA

I am writing to urge you to bar Uganda from participating in the upcoming netball spectacle. This is not a difficult plea, as other federations have taken similar action in defence of human rights in the past.

One historic case in point is South Africa's banning from the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, a decision imposed by the International Olympic Committee due to South Africa's apartheid policy at the time. This reality, coupled with the subsequent expulsion of the South African Olympic Committee in 1970, provides important lessons on how not to be a spectator in the face of human rights violations.

In recent times, we saw Russia's exclusion from taking part in the last Olympics by the International Association of Athletics Federations. The IAAF was justified in barring Russia on the grounds of the humanitarian crisis and their continuing aggression against Ukraine.

Netball SA will be judged harshly by history should it allow the Ugandan team to enter our shores. I am strongly opposed to the idea of neutrality in matters that cut across societal intersections. You cannot be neutral when lives are at stake.

It is increasingly important for sporting federations to pay attention to humanitarian and human rights considerations, as opposed to protecting public relations and so-called neutrality.

Sports are competitive in nature, mired by hate, jealousy, and boasting at the level of both spectators and those engaging in the exercise and delivery of the sporting code. In 1945, George Orwell said, "sport is 'war minus the shooting.'" It is this principle of "prestige" that I believe has a polarising effect when we look at Uganda's participation in this World Cup.

When they win glory, I am simply saying, "there is no glory in marginalizing, erasing, torturing, and violating others in the name of your bigotry."

Orwell was correct to note that international sport mimics war and poses as a peace and unifying effort. I believe

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the Ugandan netball team also carries the responsibility to stand for their human rights and those of the people they represent. They carry the Ugandan flag with pride and will demonstrate prestige for Uganda, its government, and its people.

How are they able to do that at such a volatile time?

Papa De is a Ugandan transgender-affirming person who came to South Africa on an arts residency with their equally trans-affirming son. Papa De is experiencing a double-sword effect because of the current situation in Uganda. Their son is still on a four-year study permit, yet Papa De's visa is expiring in May, and they can only renew it in Uganda.

Due to their involvement in the campaign to speak out against the passing of the controversial "Anti-Homosexuality Bill", Papa De is now facing immediate arrest when they arrive in Uganda. They talk about how they are so desperate to go back home, yet fear putting their family under possible mob justice or arrest under what could be the new law if signed by Museveni after parliament's second ratification.

Papa De's freedom of movement is stripped from them and automatically turned into a fugitive of the state in their own country and an illegal immigrant in another, yet the Ugandan netball team can freely move and enjoy their right of movement and to participate in a country that protects and promotes the human rights of all, including the LGBTQIA+. I implore you to take a stand against human rights.

LGBTIQ+ Rights Amidst the Middle East Conflict¹

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a subject of long-standing turmoil, where tensions and complexities have stained the lives of countless individuals for generations. The period around the late 19th century saw the emergence of a Zionist movement under the leadership of Theodor Herzl (Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist and political activist) at the centre of the movement was the plan to establish a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine, the former Ottoman Empire.

The early stages of this tension laid the foundation for a conflict that would disproportionately affect marginalised communities including women, children and LGBTIQ+ people, thus magnifying existing inequalities and challenges. However, amid these political divisions, the suffering, and the quest for a peaceful resolution, there's a silent, yet profound struggle that often goes unnoticed and spoken of – the plight of LGBTIQ_ individuals in this troubled region.

It is an issue often overshadowed by the broader geopolitical discourse, yet it is one of great importance. As a South African LGBTIQ+ activist, I find it important to shine a light on the experiences of queer people caught in the crossfire, to remind the world that human rights, including LGBTIQ+ rights, must transcend political divides.

Repression and Pinkwashing

It is imperative to highlight the plight of queer people in Gaza amid their dual threats of escalating aggression against the people of Palestine and the ongoing repression of queer bodies. The reality is that conflict is exacerbating the already volatile

1 Originally published as: LGBTIQ+ Rights Amidst the Middle East. *MambaOnline*, 5 November 2023: <https://www.mambaonline.com/2023/11/05/opinion-lgbtqi-rights-amidst-the-middle-east-conflict/>

situation for LGBTIQ+ people, where homosexual relations are outlawed and where being openly queer violates social and religious moral dictates.

Understanding the context of LGBTIQ+ rights in this region is crucial for contextualising the status quo. For many, it's a history marked by silence, fear, and invisibility. The Israel-Palestine conflict has created a unique set of challenges for queer individuals, forcing them to navigate the complex intersection of their sexual orientation with their national, ethnic, and religious identities.

Beyond this intersectional dilemma, is the “pinkwashing” stance driven by Israel. Corinne Blackmer refers to pinkwashing in the context of the conflict as “Israel’s putatively dishonest abuse of its sterling record on LGBT human rights to conceal or ‘whitewash’ its struggles with the Palestinians”.

In essence, Israeli authorities and advocacy groups have been accused of promoting a positive image of Israel’s LGBTIQ+ rights as a tactic to divert attention from criticism of its aggression towards Palestine, thus instrumentalising the LGBTIQ+ community.

LGBTIQ+ rights are human rights, and they are inextricably linked to the broader struggle for equality and justice. In a region rife with political tensions, these rights have been under siege for many years. From discrimination to violence, queer individuals continue to find themselves in precarious situations in Palestine.

Drawing parallels with the apartheid era

Beyond the marginalisation of queer bodies in Palestine, there is also a growing concern that queer people in Palestine remain invisible in their organising. I want to draw parallels between South Africa’s apartheid black organising and the current-day Israel-Palestine conflict. During apartheid, queer bodies and subsequently their struggles and politics were

erased for reasons that placed the gender-binary at the centre of the struggle.

Queer people and their struggles are not spoken of or discussed in many advocacy spaces as they are not expected to be utilised as a functional demographic dedicated to the liberation of Palestine (Abualsaid, 2023). The situation in Palestine almost sounds like the story of the late African National Congress stalwart Ruth Mompati's outburst in a 1987 interview with Peter Tatchell in London, a statement she would later apologise for. Mompati said:

“I hope that in a liberated South Africa people will live a normal life, I emphasise the word normal... tell me, are lesbians and gays normal? No, it is not normal. I cannot even begin to understand why people want lesbian and gay rights. The gays have no problems. They have nice houses and plenty to eat. I don't see them suffering. No one is persecuting them... We haven't heard about this problem in South Africa until recently. It seems to be fashionable in the West”.

There is a salient yet silenced history of how there was a lack of moral consensus among the anti-Apartheid movement amid fears that the gay and lesbian movement would cloud the anti-Apartheid movement, presenting it as weak to the police force.

It's important to acknowledge the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals on both sides of the Middle East conflict. Homophobia and transphobia persist in many parts of the region, making it difficult for queer people to assert their rights. According to Equaldex LGBTIQ+ Equality Index, Palestine is the 8th worst country in the world for LGBTIQ+ rights, whilst on the contrary Israel (mainly due to its Pinkwashing approach) ranks 48th in the world, also being the only Middle Eastern country recognising same-sex unions.

Despite the barriers, there is a growing movement of LGBTIQ+ activists within the region who are working tirelessly to create change. These activists are challenging societal norms, advocating for acceptance, and seeking support from the international LGBTIQ+ community.

A broader global struggle for LGBTIQ+ rights

The struggles of queer individuals in the Israel-Palestine conflict are not isolated. They are part of a broader global fight for LGBTIQ+ rights. The worldwide LGBTIQ+ community must express solidarity, recognising that the struggle for equal rights transcends borders and identities.

Behind the headlines are the stories of brave LGBTIQ+ individuals who navigate the complex maze of identity and conflict. These personal narratives provide a human face to the statistics and controversies we only hear bits and pieces of. They remind us that LGBTIQ+ rights are about people, not just politics.

In 2022 a 25-year-old gay-affirming Palestinian, Ahmad Abu Murkhiye, sought asylum in Israel from Palestine on the grounds of fearing persecution for being gay. Two years later, after returning to Palestine, Ahmad's body was found on a West Bank roadside with his head detached and his body butchered. This is one among the many forgotten stories of the double-sided sword the queer community in Palestine is subjected to under this ongoing conflict.

In the face of a broader divisive political landscape, we should be intersectional in our analysis and solidarity efforts with Palestine. The Israel-Palestine conflict is not just a political struggle; it's a human one. LGBTIQ+ rights are an integral part of this broader fight, and they deserve recognition and protection. By acknowledging and addressing the struggles of LGBTIQ+ individuals in the region, we take a step closer to a more just and inclusive world. Martin Luther King poignantly said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".

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