

**Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance
and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBTQ+) South African women were able to resist intersectional oppression through both their public activism and their intimate social worlds from 1980 to 2010 by analysing the webs of connection between the two. While queer historical literature has indicated there have been various forms of social exclusion and oppression both towards the LGBTQ+ community, and within the community itself, the experiences of women have been underexplored in this body of literature. The research draws on eleven in-depth interviews conducted with LBTQ+ individuals from around South Africa who at some point of their life identified as a woman and were involved in the LGBTQ+ liberation movement. It also includes rich material from the GALA Queer Archives. There are four major findings of this research. Firstly, women who were oppressed by religious institutions based on their sexual orientation experienced intrapersonal identity conflict and rejected either their religious identity or their sexual orientation prior to their negotiation and acceptance of their multiple identities. This reconciliation of identity led to situational compartmentalisation or integration of their identities. Secondly, socialising with other LGBTQ+ individuals played an important role in helping LBTQ+ women to cope with the emotional impact of their multifaceted oppression. Thirdly, the LGBTQ+ liberation movement successfully employed an array of tactics to utilise visibility as a strategy to ensure LGBTQ+ rights, most notably through the Pride Marches and the Out in Africa Film Festival. However, this tactic highlighted the fragmentation within the LGBTQ+ liberation movement due to racism and sexism. Lastly, this splintering led to the development of a more radical and feminist-oriented approach to LGBTQ+ liberation by black lesbian women. These findings are important as they document both queer women's experiences of intersectional oppression both within the LGBTQ+ movement and wider society and the ways in which they exercised agency, resilience, and community building.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABIGALE	Association of Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians.
ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party.
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.
ANC	African National Congress.
APA	American Psychology Association.
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement.
COSAS	Congress of South African Students.
DGFC	Deo Gloria Family Church.
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women.
FEW	Forum for the Empowerment of Women.
GAB	Gay Advice Bureau.
GASA	Gay Association of South Africa.
GASA-6010	The Cape Town branch of GASA.
GHMCC	Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church.
GLC	Gay and Lesbian Counselling.
GLOW	Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand.
HATBC	Homosexuality and the Bible course.

HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus.
HUMCC	Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church.
IAM	Inclusive and Affirming Ministries.
ILGA	International Gay and Lesbian Association.
LAGO	Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression.
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and more.
MCC	Metropolitan Community Churches.
NCGLE	National Coalition for Gays and Lesbian Equality.
NEC	National Executive Committee.
NP	National Party.
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students.
OIA	Out in Africa Film Festival.
OLGA	Organisation of Gay and Lesbian Activists.
S&M	Sadomasochism.
SACOD	South African Congress of Democrats.
SACP	South African Communist Party.
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations.
SRC	Student Representative Council.
UDF	United Democratic Front.

UFMCC	Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.
WLW	Women loving women.
WSW	Women who have sex with women.

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Introduction

The current South African constitution is highly commended for its inclusive and anti-discriminatory nature, particularly in relation to the protection of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer (LGBTQ+) people from unfair discrimination.¹ This legal change is often viewed internationally as an outcome of the negotiations that occurred during the democratic transition in South Africa between 1990 and 1994. The liberation struggle in South Africa is a highly examined topic in South Africa's mainstream and canonical historiography.² Racial segregation and discrimination, and the enforcement of this discrimination through legislation, are key topics in the examination of the liberation struggle in South Africa.³

Within the struggle for South Africa's liberation, the focus of women's involvement and activism has been somewhat limited, though recently there has been a growth in examining the perspectives and experiences of women in the liberation struggle.⁴ For instance, Mamphela Ramphele's "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations"

¹ A note on terminology used in this thesis: the term LGBT was adapted in the 1990s from GLB (gay, lesbian, and bisexual) to include T for transgender people and to describe the broader non-heterosexual and non-cisgender community. The term has recently included Q for queer, which has been used as a derogatory term for homosexual people since the 1800s but has recently been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community since the 1990 Pride Marches as an umbrella term for all sexualities and genders that are not considered the norm in everyday society. While there have been many more additions to this acronym in recent years, this thesis will use the term LGBTQ+ as it is the most commonly used. See: [Jeffrey J. Iovannone](https://medium.com/queer-history-for-the-people/the-lgbtq-acronym-more-than-a-random-collection-of-letters-cd8456e1118d), "The LGBTQ Acronym: More Than a Random Collection of Letters," *Medium*, 5 June 2017 <https://medium.com/queer-history-for-the-people/the-lgbtq-acronym-more-than-a-random-collection-of-letters-cd8456e1118d>.

² Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36*, (London: Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1989).

³ Elizabeth S. Landis, *South African Apartheid Legislation* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Law Journal Company, 1962), William Beinart and Saul Dubow eds. *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*. (London: Routledge, 1995), Mougou Nyaggah, *Development of Apartheid Laws in South Africa, 1910-1948* (Nairobi, Kenya: Dept. of History, University of Nairobi, 1980).

⁴ Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991, Shamim Meer, ed., *Women Speak: Reflections on Our Struggles 1982-1997* (Roggebaai, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998) and Emily Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth & South Africa's Liberation Struggle* (Suffolk, Ipswich: James Currey, an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, 2021).

and Kalpana Hiralal's *"Sisters in the Struggle": Women of Indian Origin in South Africa's Liberation Struggle 1900-1994* examine the power and gender dynamics within the liberation movement and outline the experiences of women within the struggle.⁵ As will become evident, LGBTQ+ political history is still very much a developing field of study. Simultaneously, within the limited historical literature on LGBTQ+ activism, there have been relatively few, substantive analyses of the histories of women activists. It is in this context that this thesis analyses the webs of connection between how lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBTQ+) women in South Africa were able to resist intersectional oppression through both their public activism and their intimate social worlds from 1980 to 2010, and the various ways that this has emerged.⁶

Upon analysing the research that has been done on the LGBTQ+ community and homosexuality, it can be seen that much of this research focuses on the evolution of the criminalisation and pathologisation of homosexuality through religion and psychology.⁷ Historically, religious institutions have propagated negative views about homosexuality as being "unnatural" and immoral.⁸ This view is often linked to six Biblical verses that condemn

⁵ Mamphela Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations" in N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (eds.), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 214-227 and Kalpana Hiralal, *"Sisters in the Struggle". Women of Indian Origin in South Africa's Liberation Struggle 1900-1994* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023).

⁶ The term LBTQ+ is used here to specifically acknowledge the diversity of the participants' sexual orientation and gender identities. Here, it should be noted that while all the participants indicated in their interviews that they self-identified as a woman at some point in their lives, some did not do so by the time I interviewed them. I also use the term women to sign-post this. The G (as in LGBTQ+) has purposefully been removed from the acronym LBTQ+ as while some women who love women use the term gay, it is mostly used by men who love men.

⁷ Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Sin, Sickness & Sanity: A History of Sexual Attitudes*. (New York: Garland, 1977); Paul Robinson, "Freud and Homosexuality" in Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (eds.), *Homosexuality & Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) and Gary Taylor, "Psychopathology and the Social and Historical Construction of Gay Male Identities" in Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitinger (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

⁸ Miller, *Out of the Past*, 465-466 and Henning Bech, "Report from a Rotten State: 'Marriage' and 'homosexuality' in Denmark," in Ken Plummer (ed.), *Modern Homosexualities*. (London: Routledge, 1992) 135.

sexual acts, such as sodomy, in order to preserve the morality of Christianity.⁹ Religious conservatives also promote the supposed unnatural nature of homosexuality due to its failure to lead to procreation.¹⁰

In the late 1860s psychologists such as Karl Heinrich Ulrich and Richard von Krafft-Ebing conducted research on homosexuality in an effort to combat the condemnation of sexuality, arguing respectively that homosexuality was either the manifestation of a third sex or the inheritance of a degenerate gene.¹¹ Krafft-Ebing's work in particular was picked up as a means to pathologise any form of sex and sexuality that differed from the norm. Celia Kitzinger argues that the diagnosis of homosexuality as a medical disease thus deliberately becomes a tool of oppression to utilise against those who failed to conform to the societal heteropatriarchal norm.¹² Kitzinger contends that the pathologisation of sexuality thus took the place of religious institutions in condemning homosexuality.¹³ Which is not to say that religious condemnation ceased to exist, but rather that a medical justification implied the ability that homosexuality was something that could be cured and once cured, one could live a normal heterosexual life.

The stigma and discrimination that many LGBTQ+ people encounter continues to be a highly researched topic even within the context of Africa. Marc Epprecht's work in particular has

⁹ Marc Epprecht, *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa: Rethinking Homophobia and Forging Resistance* African Arguments (London: Zed Books, 2013) 78.

¹⁰ Ronald Nicolson, *The Church and Same-Sex Marriage* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008) 18 and John Corvino, "Why Shouldn't Tommy and Jim Have Sex?: A Defence of Homosexuality" in John Corvino (ed.), *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) 6.

¹¹ Hubert Kennedy, "The 'Third Sex' Theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs". *Journal of Homosexuality*, (1981, 6: 1-2) 103-111 and Celia Kitzinger and Adrian Coyle, "Introducing Lesbian and Gay Psychology" in Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002).

¹² Celia Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (London, England: Sage Publications, 1987) 31.

¹³ Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*, 40.

been highly influential in shedding light on homosexuality in the Southern African region.¹⁴ Epprecht discusses the role colonisation and the introduction of Christianity had in erasing knowledge of same-sex sexualities that existed openly in African communities. Within South Africa, focus has been placed particularly on the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the legislative victories for the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁵ Apart from Mark Gevisser and Justice Edwin Cameron's important work *Defiant Desire*, which was published a year after the democratic elections, that compiled a wide range of LGBTQ+ people's experiences living in South Africa, very few literature exists that continues to do so.¹⁶ The experiences of women in Gevisser and Cameron's book, particularly, is limited; though this is identified as a gap in knowledge by the editors.

In comparison to male homosexuality in South Africa, the analysis of female same-sex sexuality is limited. It should be acknowledged, however, the effort that the GALA Archive, an archive focused on documenting the South African LGBTQ+ community, has had in countering this gap in research by examining the various ways in which female sexuality and gender identity materialise in the South African context.¹⁷ These works serve not only as

¹⁴ Marc Epprecht, *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexualities in Africa* (Harare: Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, 2008) and Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Eric C. Christiansen, "Ending the Apartheid of the Closet: Sexual Orientation in the South African Constitutional Process," *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*. (2000, 32: 997); H. de Ru, "A Historical Perspective on the Recognition of Same-Sex Unions in South Africa," *Fundamina: A Journal of Legal History*. (2013, 19: 2); Pierre de Vos, "The 'Inevitability' of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa's Post-Apartheid State," *South African Journal on Human Rights*. (2007, 23: 3); Graeme Reid, "The Canary of the Constitution: Same-Sex Equality in the Public Sphere," *Social Dynamics*. (2010, 36: 1); Epprecht, *Sexuality and Social Justice* and Zethu Matabeni, Surya Monro and Vasu Reddy (eds.), *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

¹⁶ Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.), *Defiant Desire*. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa, *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men, and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2007); Ruth Morgan, Charl Marais, and Joy Rosemary Wellbeloved (eds.), *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa* (Johannesburg, Gauteng: Jacana, 2010) and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* (Johannesburg, Gauteng: Jacana, 2009).

proof against the ideology that homosexuality is unAfrican, but also details the various manifestations of female same-sex sexuality within the South African context.

An examination of both these bodies of literature indicate that in order to understand LGBTQ+ women's experiences, they need to be read together. This highlights the need for a more holistic view of their lives across the time period discussed in the thesis. In consideration of this, this thesis seeks to expand upon the limited discourse on female same-sex sexuality in the South African context, amplify the efforts of women, particularly LGBTQ+ women, in the struggle for freedom and further explore the private, intimate worlds of LGBTQ+ women that are silenced due to the intersectional oppression of these women in South Africa. In order to examine the impact that this had in shaping and navigating the identity and experiences of LGBTQ+ women in South Africa, I draw mainly on intersectionality, decolonial and black feminist theory.

Gender and Sexuality as a Social Construct

Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the way in which traditional narratives of history have excluded women through its universalistic and essentialist approach to record keeping.¹⁸ By drawing on universalism and essentialism, a narrow and limited understanding of history is created that has a tendency to place men at the forefront of historical events, and in doing so, it overlooks the activism and political involvement of others. This approach is inherently problematic as it assumes the position that identity is intrinsically stagnant and dismisses the complexity of identity construction in society. The concept of intersectionality is imperative in challenging the generalised and essentialist framework on which mainstream historical writing rests.

Intersectionality theory was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African American gender activist and lawyer. This theory examines overlapping social oppressions that specific groups of people, such as African American women, have experienced in the United States of America.¹⁹ Crenshaw argues that the experience of being a black woman cannot be understood separately based solely on that person's race, gender, or sexuality, but must be examined as the interaction of these identities. Similarly Angela Davis, an African American political activist, uses the example of the early women's rights campaigns and the abolitionist movement to show the overlapping social oppressions that black women had to face while fighting for their freedom.²⁰ Indeed, for Crenshaw and Davis, a person's identity is made up of multiple aspects, such as their race, class, gender and sexual orientation, and must be understood within this totality, which shapes their experiences, including those of

¹⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

¹⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*. (1991, 43: 6) 1241-1299.

²⁰ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1983).

discrimination.²¹ Consequently, a universal approach cannot be applied to historical writing, as the existence of intersectional identities, as well as human agency and autonomy, is proof that human experience is multifaceted and recordings of these experiences cannot be generalised.

Similarly, Judith Butler argues that feminism has also been guilty of applying a universalistic approach by insisting that “the term women denotes a common identity”.²² Butler acknowledges the intersectionality of identity and states that identity, particularly gender identity, is constantly fluctuating and transforming throughout different historical contexts.²³ Butler bases this argument on the work of Michel Foucault, who stated that through legislative power, the state is able limit, control and regulate individuals, but it is through this act of regulation that laws are integrated into other institutions (such as medical and religious institutions) to form the norm of society.²⁴ Sylvia Tamale notes that this was possible due to the view of sexuality as being linked, and therefore limited, to the biological process of sex as solely a reproductive act.²⁵ Foucault pronounced that it is in this way that sex, and therefore sexuality, becomes a political category subject to regulation by the state. Thus, the regulation of sexuality was employed strategically by state powers, which consisted of “canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law”, initially under the guise of concern over health, the continuation of lineage and the future of humanity.²⁶

²¹ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins”, 1251-1252, 1265-1269, 1275-1283.

²² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 3.

²³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3.

²⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2 and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 144.

²⁵ Sylvia Tamale, “Introduction,” in Sylvia Tamale (ed.), *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Pambazuka Press, 2011).

²⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, 37, 147.

Foucault discussed how the continuation of lineage and the future of humanity were particularly utilised to control sexuality by focusing on marital relations “which had been established for governing the order of things and the plan of beings”.²⁷ Similarly, the link between reproduction and sexuality, and the regulation of it, meant that women’s roles in a heteropatriarchal society was thus reduced to their ability to procreate.²⁸ Therefore, anything that was considered an infringement against the sanctity of marriage (and the reproduction of children within that marriage), which functioned as the norm in society, was deemed perverse. However, Foucault noted that not all of these were perversions per se, but were rather labelled as such due to the inability of the law to place control over these sexualities in the same way that control was placed over a married heterosexual couple. These perversions were separated into those that breached legislation surrounding marriage and the family such as adultery and incest, and those that went “against the regularity of a natural function” such as homosexuality and intersex individuals.²⁹ The existence of homosexuality as well as intersex individuals disrupts the heteronormative, family-oriented narrative constructed by the state. Foucault also pointed out the way in which the state used sexuality to enforce racism alongside ideologies of social hierarchy by expressing concerns over blood purity and the “triumph of the race”.³⁰ Kitzinger supplements the idea of sexuality being used to implement social hierarchy by stating that the institutionalisation of heteronormativity helps to perpetuate male supremacy.³¹

²⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, 38.

²⁸ Sylvia Tamale, “Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa,” in Sylvia Tamale (ed.), *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Pambazuka Press, 2011).

²⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, 38 – 39. The term intersex is used for an individual who is born with ambiguous genitalia that cannot clearly be defined as male or female. See: Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution* (Berkeley, California: Seal Press, 2017) 32 – 33 and Ruth Morgan, Charl Marais, and Joy Rosemary Wellbeloved (eds.), *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa* (Johannesburg, Gauteng: Jacana, 2010) 6.

³⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, 38.

³¹ Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*, 64.

Ultimately, Foucault's argument details in numerous ways how power structures and institutions are able to enforce societal standards and norms through the law. In this way, sexuality, as well as other identities, are controlled and constructed. The fluctuation of power structures and institutions, such as the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, can lead to additions, removals, and amendments in legislation. Thus, this change in power decrees new societal standards and norms that affect the way in which identities like sexuality are both constructed and deconstructed, including the criminalisation and subsequent decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Based on this theory, sex and sexuality are not fixed aspects of identity but are constructed based on the changes within power structures. In a similar manner, Butler has questioned claims that gender is merely the cultural interpretation of "natural" biological sex.³² Butler's argument that biological sex is a social construct rests on challenging the "presumption of a binary gender system".³³ Compulsory heterosexuality institutionalises a binary gender system of male and female biological sex that regulates gender through the idea of the assignment of masculinity to men and femininity to women. According to Butler, gender is performative, "a doing", that is established through strict sociocultural regulations that enforce "repeated stylization of the body" to produce an appearance that is then labelled as gendered.³⁴

However, Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sivori argue that sexuality and the construction of its identity must not simply be viewed as a universal construction, but rather that sexuality is a Western invention produced by key discourses on "identity, subjectivity, bodies, and

³² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6 -7.

³³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6.

³⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25 – 33.

population control”.³⁵ Wieringa and Sivori state that the emergence of these discourses during colonialism shaped the history of sexuality in the Global South.³⁶ Wieringa and Sivori assert that discussions on sexuality in areas of the Global South, such as South Africa, must not only investigate the colonial understanding of sexuality, but look beyond the colonial meanings of sexuality to explore the “diversity of beliefs, practices, and cultural traditions that shape and challenge sexual meanings and classifications in the context of pre-colonial realities”.³⁷ In doing so, this challenges the Global North-focused notions of a fixed homosexual identity, and instead allows for the fluidity of sexuality and the numerous ways in which it can manifest to be documented. Consequently, Wieringa and Sivori show that when writing on sexuality in the Global South, a decolonised approach needs to be taken to identify the impact of colonisation on ideas of identity, particularly gender and sexuality, in the Global South. Tamale affirms this approach to scholarship around sexuality, but notes that the connection between sexuality, biology and reproduction which has become entrenched into heteropatriarchal society’s understanding of sexuality should be included in contemporary discussions of sexuality.³⁸ This belief, alongside social, political, economic and cultural structures, can create an extra layer of tension in the experiences of identity formation amongst women loving women within the African context. It is similarly important to acknowledge the agency that communities in the Global South have had in moulding their own contextually shaped understandings of sexuality and gender.

³⁵ Horacio Sivori and Saskia Wieringa, “Sexual Politics in the Global South: Framing the Discourse,” in Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sivori (eds.), *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London, England: Zed Books, 2013), 8–21.

³⁶ Sivori and Wieringa, “Sexual Politics in the Global South: Framing the Discourse,” 8–21. The Global South refers less to the geographical location of countries, but rather the socioeconomic and political status of countries who are deemed less developed, due to colonisation and the economic exploitation that they’ve experienced historically.

³⁷ Sivori and Wieringa, “Sexual Politics in the Global South: Framing the Discourse,” 8.

³⁸ Tamale, “Introduction,” in Sylvia Tamale (ed.), *African Sexualities: A Reader*, 2.

The need for contextual understanding in the Global South is similarly explored by Ashley Currier through her examination of visibility strategies within South African and Namibian LGBTQ+ organizing.³⁹ Currier argues that visibility and invisibility are not static positions that are indefinitely held, but rather fluctuating conditions that adapt to changes in the sociopolitical fields that exist around them.⁴⁰ Currier determined that within the Namibian and South African contexts, it was the stance political leaders held towards gender and sexual diversity that defined the type of visibility strategies LGBTQ+ activists developed in their aim towards solidifying legislative LGBTQ+ equality and rights following the democratic transitions of both countries. Currier asserts that while African National Congress (ANC) leaders were supportive of LGBTQ+ rights, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) leaders “publicly vilified homosexuality and LGBT rights and ignored pro-gay legislation already in place”.⁴¹ Subsequently, South African LGBTQ+ activists could utilise visibility more in their activism while Namibian LGBTQ+ activists had to take a more defensive and cautious position in their approach to activism so as to avoid state repression. Currier’s work shows that even within the Global South, the type of visibility strategies used by LGBTQ+ activists were dependant on the political landscape surrounding each nation and thus could not be duplicated, despite the commonalities found between them. Consequently, approaches to LGBTQ+ activism cannot be uniform and need to be explored within the context in which they occur.

³⁹ Ashley Currier, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

⁴⁰ Currier, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*, 7.

⁴¹ Currier, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*, 14.

Contextualising Women's Gendered Oppression within Gay and Lesbian Organisations

During the era of apartheid South Africa, the National Party (NP) government was dominated by the conservative ideology of the Dutch Reformed Church which perceived homosexuality as “unnatural” and “immoral”. This affected LGBTQ+ people of all races and many pieces of legislation were passed criminalising homosexuality.⁴² For example, the Immorality Act of 1927, prohibited same-sex acts as “unnatural” and outlawed sodomy.⁴³ During the 1950s, in an effort to quash interracial relationships, many police raids took place on people suspected of engaging in interracial sex, which also led to the exposure of same-sex relationships. In 1957, the Sexual Offences Act replaced the Immorality Act. Section 20 (A) of this new Act banned men from receiving sexual gratification from other men in public.⁴⁴ In 1966, under the rule of Prime Minister Verwoerd, a police raid in Forest Town, Johannesburg led to the arrest of nine men for “masquerading as women” and one for “indecent assault on a minor”.⁴⁵ This was the largest and most systematised police raid, which had taken place up until that time. The Forest Town Raid marked an important moment in South African LGBTQ+ history as it signified the first time that white LGBTQ+

⁴² While the current dominant socio-historical construct of race in South Africa can be traced back to the colonial period, the Population Registration Act of 1950 passed by the NP government created strict racial categories (White, Black, Coloured, and Indian) under which all South Africans were subsequently classified based on their racial characteristics. Sociopolitical and economic rights were meted out based on these categories leading to racial segregation and discrimination. While I am cognisant of the fact that race is thus a social construct, I refer to my key informants' races due to the way this social category has profoundly shaped their lives and experiences.

⁴³ Ryan Goodman, “Beyond the Enforcement Principle: Sodomy Laws, Social Norms, and Social Panoptics,” *California Law Review* (2001, 89: 3) 676 and de Ru. “A Historical Perspective on the Recognition of Same-Sex Unions in South Africa,” 222-226.

⁴⁴ Goodman, “Beyond the Enforcement Principle”, 679.

⁴⁵ Mark Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom” in Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.), *Defiant Desire*. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994), 30.

men were at risk of oppression and would no longer be able to operate under the benefits of white privilege by conducting their parties in private.⁴⁶

When the Minister of Justice P.C. Pelser publicised his proposal to roll out more punishable anti-homosexuality legislation in 1967, a small group of white, middle-class law professionals established the Homosexual Law Reform Fund (also known as Law Reform), to raise funds and to retain attorneys to oppose the proposed legislation.⁴⁷ In their attempts to challenge the legislation, the Law Reform movement took an essentialist stance, arguing that homosexuality was not a choice, but rather innate to the individual and therefore one should not be penalised for something that could not be controlled.⁴⁸

The group was successful in presenting evidence that persuaded the Parliamentary Select Committee to drop the proposed new legislation. Instead, in 1969, the government made three amendments to the Immorality Act: the age of consent for homosexual men was increased from 16 to 19 years, dildoes were outlawed, and a fine and possible imprisonment was imposed on anyone found guilty of conducting “unnatural” sexual acts.⁴⁹ In 1988, this Act was amended further to prohibit “immoral or indecent” acts between women under the age of 19.⁵⁰ While much of the literature analyses the “men at a party” clause, Gunkel notes that the amendment regarding dildoes often remains unexplored.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Henriette Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2011), 52.

⁴⁷ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 31-32.

⁴⁸ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 53.

⁴⁹ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette*, 47, 2404, 21 May 1969. Act no. 57 of 1969, Immorality Amendment Act and Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 35.

⁵⁰ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette*, 273, 11170, 4 March 1988. Act no. 2 of 1988, Immorality Amendment Act and de Ru, “A Historical Perspective on the Recognition of Same-Sex Unions”, 226.

⁵¹ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 57 – 58.

Gunkel elaborates that while it was never identified by the term ‘dildo’, it generated a lot of discussion particularly surrounding its use in the “sexual practices in which lesbians engaged; in gender transgression, embodied in the ‘Butch’ lesbian; and in the size of the ‘dilders’ (GALA – AM 2656).”⁵² Thus the inclusion of the dildo in the amendment exemplifies both the fear it generated as well as the need for control over women’s pleasure.

Consequently, homophobic beliefs based on Christian-oriented views led to the implementation of legislation that not only institutionalised and criminalised homosexuality, but also ascertained male dominance over LGBTQ+ women. The impact of this led further to the demonisation of homosexuality in South African society and reinforced homophobic Christian beliefs.

As such, in South Africa, the intersection of religion, heteronormativity and patriarchy worked together to foster an environment that not only allowed for homophobia and discrimination to persist, but also hindered LGBTQ+ people from coming out safely.⁵³ This can be seen clearly in the case of the South African Defence Force (SADF) where “conscripts who were suspected of being gay were ‘encouraged to confess their deviance and submit for treatment’”.⁵⁴ Treatment included electric shock therapy, hormonal treatments or various forms of punishment.⁵⁵ However, much of the information on the treatment of the SADF towards homosexuality often gives an account that focuses on the treatment of gay men. This is not to say that LGBTQ+ women were not subjected to aversion therapy or punishment for their sexuality, but rather that these experiences are under recorded and sparse in comparison.

⁵² Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 58.

⁵³ Finn Reygan and Ashley Lynette, “Heteronormativity, homophobia and ‘culture’ arguments in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa”, *Sexualities*, (2014, 17: 5–6), 707–723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714531267>

⁵⁴ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 91.

⁵⁵ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 91.

Although several people, inspired by the gay rights movement in Europe and North America, tried to start a gay rights movement in South Africa in the 1970s, little came of these early attempts, which were small-scale and short-lived due to the lack of community support from LGBTQ+ people and fear.⁵⁶ It was only in the 1980s that developments in the gay rights movement in South Africa gained traction. White gay men, who felt increasingly persecuted by religious and political authorities in South Africa, formed an entity which brought together three pre-existing smaller Johannesburg-based organisations: this entity was the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) which was formed in April 1982 and it had nine branches throughout the country.⁵⁷ GASA was not a political organisation, but a social one, which sought to promote gay solidarity through social activities such as braais, dances, competitions and other social gatherings.⁵⁸ Indeed, this social organisation took a purposefully apolitical stance and through their activities, promoted safe spaces for gay people to socialise and to express their identities. However, this was not the case for the lesbian community due to societal pressure for women to marry. Thus many kept their sexual orientation a secret in order to ensure financial security as several worked in service professions.⁵⁹ The lesbian community did not have the same economic independence of white, gay men as women often earned a lower salary than their male counterparts and had to earn a living in order to maintain an independent lifestyle.⁶⁰ The feminisation of poverty, the gender wage gap, the impoverishment of female-headed households, women's higher

⁵⁶ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom", 39, 43-45.

⁵⁷ The three pre-existing organisations were Lambda, AMO and Unité. For additional information, see de Ru, "Recognition of Same-Sex Unions", 227 and Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom", 48.

⁵⁸ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom," 49-50.

⁵⁹ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom," 21 – 22.

⁶⁰ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom," 22; Kristina Bentley, "Women's Human Rights & the Feminisation of Poverty in South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* (2004: 31, 100): 247-61; Johanna Kehler, "Women and Poverty: The South African Experience." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, (2001: 3, 1) 41-53 and Dorrit Posel and Michael Rogan, "Women, Income and Poverty: Gendered Access to Resources in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* (2009: 81): 25-34.

rates of unemployment and concentration in lower wage work, meant that lesbian parties often took place in cramped flats and balconies.

In this way GASA sought to change “the distorted, prejudiced and uninformed image held by the broader public” about gay people in South Africa by creating an openly gay platform.⁶¹

However, although this organisation suggested, from its title, an open organisation representing all gay people’s interests, in reality, it developed mainly as a middle-class, white, male organisation. Many women and black LGBTQ+ members did not feel welcome.⁶²

This hampered its ability to act decisively which eventually led to its banishment by the International Lesbian and Gay Alliance in 1987 because of its failure to reject apartheid.

Once again, within the LGBTQ+ community and their political involvement a sense of divide, or so-called “party line”, can be seen. As queer historical literature has indicated there have been various forms of social exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community itself, such as instances of white domination and transphobia. Justice Edwin Cameron maps this out by exploring the depoliticisation of Pride over time from a protest march to a social, white-focused parade.⁶³ Through the lens of transgender narratives and oral stories, Ruth Morgan, Charl Marais, Joy Rosemary Wellbeloved, and Robert Hamblin, explore the differences between gender identity and sexual identity within the LGBTQ+ community, and further elaborate on the impact of misrepresentation of transgender identities in queer historical literature.⁶⁴ It can, therefore, be seen that gender oppression occurred in various forms within the movement.

⁶¹ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 51.

⁶² Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 50, 50-54.

⁶³ Edwin Cameron, “Foreword” in Shaun De Waal and Anthony Manion (eds.), *Pride: Protest and Celebration*. (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2006) 4 – 5.

⁶⁴ Morgan, Marais, Wellbeloved, and Hamblin, *Trans*.

However, while common challenges do face LGBTQ+ women, this does not negate human agency which provides individual LGBTQ+ women with unique experiences.⁶⁵ According to Benjamin Barber, "Suffering is not necessarily a fixed and universal experience that can be measured by a single rod: it is related to situations, needs and aspirations."⁶⁶ As such, while these women have shared common experiences, various factors like race, class, gender, sexual orientation and human autonomy and agency have affected their lives differently thus generating a variety of lived experiences.

It is necessary to apply such an approach to this thesis as by doing so, it can contest the colonial homophobia fostered by British colonial legislation in South Africa, which sought to perverse same-sex practices in Africa, but also erased the memory of such practices which has led to the idea of "homosexuality as unAfrican."⁶⁷ Through the preservation of LGBTQ+ stories and narratives, one is able to not only counter this assertion, but also give a voice and protection to those whose histories continue to be removed by such erasure.

⁶⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁶⁶ Benjamin R Barber, *Liberating Feminism* (New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1976).

⁶⁷ Thérèse Migraine-George and Ashley Currier, "Querying Queer African Archives: Methods and Movements". *Women's Studies Quarterly*. (2016, 44); Gabriela Pinheiro and Clare Harvey, "'We Are a Collective, a Lot of Us Together, Standing Up': South African Black Lesbian Women's Activism against Discourses of Blackwashing Homophobia." *Agenda* 33, no. 2 (2019/04/03 2019): 97-112; Wieranga and Sivori, *The Sexual History of the Global South* and Epprecht, *Hungochani*.

Homophobia and the Women's Movement Since the 1980s

The 1980s marked a shift in South Africa towards reorganisation of the anti-apartheid movement, the women's movement, and the gay liberation movement. By drawing on these various movements and their intersection within LGBTQ+ women, a more comprehensive understanding of the struggles that LGBTQ+ women had during this time can be obtained. During the latter half of the 1980s, in a period that saw the strengthening of the anti-apartheid liberation movement, a more inclusive gay activism in South Africa developed.⁶⁸ These organisations represented both gay men and women's interests, as well as the interests of all of South Africa's racial groups. With their commitment to being multiracial, these organisations aligned themselves with anti-apartheid groups, as they believed that their struggles for equal rights were inseparable.⁶⁹

The resurgence of women's organisations in South Africa and the influence of international women's movements led to new arguments about women's roles in the political struggle which contended that the intersectionality of women's identity was an integral part of the national liberation struggle.⁷⁰ This was largely due to the impact of the 1976 Soweto Uprising which led to an influx of young women who began to take a more clearly defined political position in the movement.⁷¹ Another contributing factor was their increasing participation in international feminist conferences which led to women thinking about developing frameworks to mobilise South African women.⁷² This led to the production of

⁶⁸ de Vos. "The 'Inevitability' of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa's Post-Apartheid State," 435.

⁶⁹ Christiansen, "Ending the Apartheid of the Closet: Sexual Orientation in the South African Constitutional Process," 1023 and de Ru, "Recognition of Same-Sex Unions", 227.

⁷⁰ Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 85.

⁷¹ Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 95

⁷² Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 100 – 102.

shorts on women's issues for the ANC radio station and education projects about women's political history.⁷³

While there was a concerted effort to create a more politically active women's movement within the national liberation movement, this effort was solely based towards cisgender heterosexual women. This is due to the predominant rhetoric that homosexuality was "unAfrican" and a western import and can be seen in the case of ANC Executive member Ruth Mompati who stated in an interview with Peter Tatchell in August 1987 that "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".⁷⁴ The implication of this statement, not only shows the prevalence of homophobia within the national liberation movement, but also the belief that homosexuality was a white privileged phenomenon.

The issue of lesbian's isolation and rejection within the women's movement is an important one. An example of this erasure can be seen in the 1995 United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing at which Beverley Ditsie, one of the co-founders of the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), addressed the attendees making her the first African lesbian women to address the United Nations.⁷⁵ Ditsie linked LGBTQ+ rights with women's rights by stating that: "If the World Conference on Women is

⁷³ Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 100 – 102.

⁷⁴ Morgan and Wieringa, *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives*; Rebecca Hodes, "Populist Hatred: Homophobia and Political Elites in Africa," *E-International Relations*, August 1, 2012, <https://www.e-ir.info/2012/07/25/populist-hatred-homophobia-and-political-elites-in-africa/> and Rebecca Davis, "OPINION: Straightening the Record on Mompati and Gay Rights," *Eyewitness News*, November 23, 2016, <https://ewn.co.za/2015/05/19/OPINION-Rebecca-Davis-Straightening-the-record-on-Mompoti-and-gay-rights>. However, it should be noted that Mompati has since apologised for this statement in the foreword of Neville Wallace Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid's *Sex and Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005).

⁷⁵ Jamil F. Khan, "Remembering Is Deliberate: Resisting the Erasure of Bev Ditsie," *News24*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.news24.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/arts/remembering-is-deliberate-resisting-the-erasure-of-bev-ditsie-20200703>.

to address the concerns of all women, it must similarly recognize that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a violation of basic human rights...".⁷⁶

However, Ditsie's speech caused great controversy at the conference on "whether 'sexual orientation' would be recognised in the Platform as an aspect of women's diversity" and mentions of sexual orientation were subsequently removed as "the issue had elicited such strong opposition".⁷⁷ Ditsie also stated that "digitally you cannot type and find [the speech] on the internet, nor in the deep archives" while other statements given at the conference could easily be found online.⁷⁸ This is just one example of the deliberate ways in which LGBTQ+ women's rights and experiences have been erased within the global mainstream feminist movement. While this area of study highlights yet another aspect of the multifaceted oppression that LGBTQ+ women are subjected to, homophobia in the women's movement will not be extensively examined due to the limited scope of the study.

⁷⁶ Cynthia Rothschild and Scott Long, "Written Out: How Sexuality is Used to Attack Women's Organizing" (New York: International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and the Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2000), <https://cwgl.rutgers.edu/docman/violence-against-women-publications/382-written-out2000-pdf/file>.

⁷⁷ Dianne Otto, "Holding up Half the Sky, but for Whose Benefit: A Critical Analysis of the Fourth World Conference on Women," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 6 (1996), 25.

⁷⁸ Khan, "Remembering Is Deliberate: Resisting the Erasure of Bev Ditsie". It should be noted that Ditsie's speech can currently be accessed on the United Nations website: United Nations, "Statement Delivered by Palesa Beverley Ditsie of South Africa International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/conf/ngo/13123944.txt>. However, this information appears to have only recently become part of the public record as it was unavailable at the time of my previous thesis: Kirsten Jade Johnson, "'The Freedom of Wanting to Be Me': An Analysis of Beverley Ditsie's Role in South Africa's Gay Liberation Struggle, 1980s to mid-1990s." (BSocSci Honours Dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2019).

Methodological Approach: Queer Archives and Oral History

This research project used a qualitative methodology to analyse LGBTQ+ women's resistance in South Africa. Qualitative research comprises of in-depth analysis of information that cannot be easily quantified, such as beliefs, ideas, values and opinions and does so through the use of interviews, observations and close textual analysis of primary sources such as written documents.⁷⁹ It is important to note that as qualitative research encompasses findings around people's lived experiences, feelings and emotions, it's incorporation of multiple realities that are time and context dependent make the findings that arise difficult to apply to a largescale generalisation of society.⁸⁰ This is particularly true with regards to small scale qualitative studies such as the one conducting in this thesis. However, a qualitative approach is necessary in order to obtain a holistic understanding of the human experience, the societies in which they existed and the larger structures in which they operated.⁸¹ Other than secondary sources, publicly accessible archival sources such as those located at the GALA Queer Archive at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg contained rich primary sources that were incredibly valuable in this research project.

Using Archives

The GALA Queer Archive (which had previously been known as The Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archive and the Gay and Lesbian Archives prior to that) at the University of Witwatersrand was established in 1997 to combat the exclusion of LGBTQ+ lived

⁷⁹ Natasha Mack, Cynthia Woodson, Kathleen M. Macqueen, Greg Guest and Emily Namey, *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*, (North Carolina: Family Health International, 2005).

⁸⁰ Md Shidur Rahman, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language 'Testing and Assessment' Research: A Literature Review," *Journal of Education and Learning* 6, no. 1 (November 10, 2016): 102–12, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n1p102>.

⁸¹ Rahman, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language 'Testing and Assessment' Research: A Literature Review," 104.

experiences from South African public institutions and state archives.⁸² Any mention of homosexuality within the state archives was subjected to the sociocultural morals and values of the apartheid government of the time which viewed it as criminal, perverse or a form of mental illness.⁸³ Due to its existence as a subdivision of the South African History Archive (SAHA), which endeavours to document and safeguard accounts produced during the anti-apartheid struggle, GALA's formation was cognisant of the political changes that occurred following South Africa's transition to democratisation in 1994.⁸⁴ With this transition to democracy came the inclusion of protection for sexual orientation against discrimination within the post-apartheid South African Constitution in 1996, which also symbolised the transformation of the national government to be more inclusive and representative of its people and provide a space for people who had previously been marginalised in history, such as the LGBTQ+ community.⁸⁵

This shows that archives are a reflection of power structures at distinct historical points in societies and the types of sources kept or discarded from an archival collection highlights this power and its change over time. While the GALA archive plays an important role in subverting the existence of colonial archives that disregard LGBTQ+ history, one must acknowledge Burton's view of archives as "fundamentally unreliable" due to the inherent

⁸² GALA. *History of Gala*. <https://gala.co.za/about/history/>.

⁸³ Graeme Reid, "The History of the Past is the Trust of the Present': Preservation and Excavation in the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa," in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michèle Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh and Jane Taylor (eds.) *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002) 194 – 200.

⁸⁴ Reid, "The History of the Past is the Trust of the Present", 193-208.

⁸⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) 26 and Archille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michèle Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh and Jane Taylor (eds.) *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002) 19-20.

contestation and complexity of archives as a source for historical interpretation.⁸⁶ Achille Mbembe states that documents found in the archive are “pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order”.⁸⁷ Likewise, Burton argues that due to the “messiness of all history”, the archive holds a space for numerous interpretations of archival material to exist simultaneously.⁸⁸ Consequently, all archival material needs to be read “against the grain” in order to identify the gaps, silences, omissions and mistakes in these documents, for even within archives that are representative of marginalised communities, intersectional oppression (particularly against women) persists.⁸⁹

Within the GALA archives, I found collections relevant to my research on LGBTQ+ women’s resistance in South Africa. I drew upon the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) – (GAL 0098) collection. FEW is a non-profit organisation that caters for black lesbian women in South Africa. Through the use of this collection, an understanding of the issues of concern for black lesbians in South Africa was obtained.

I then looked at the records for the Gay Advice Bureau (GAB) /Gay & Lesbian Counselling (GLC) – (AM 2995) which was a counselling service based in Johannesburg that provided support for members of the LGBTQ+ community during the 1990s. I also read through the collection of the Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC) – (GAL 0003), which is a resource that many LGBTQ+ people in South Africa have utilised as a safe space to

⁸⁶ Antoinette M. Burton, *Dwelling in The Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 26.

⁸⁷ Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” 21.

⁸⁸ Burton, *Dwelling in The Archive*, 26.

⁸⁹ Reading “against the grain” is a practice utilised particularly when working with colonial documents that aims to find the voices of the marginalised by questioning the dominant narratives of colonial documents. See: Nathan Sowry, “Silence, Accessibility, and Reading against the Grain: Examining Voices of the Marginalized in the India Office Records,” *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 8, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5070/d482011848> and Jeannette Allis Bastian, “Reading Colonial Records through an Archival Lens: The Provenance of Place, Space and Creation,” *Archival Science* 6, no. 3–4 (2006): 267–84, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-006-9019-1>.

escape criticism by homophobic Christians as GHMCC promotes the unity of all people, regardless of sexual orientation.

I found the records of the National Coalition for Gay & Lesbian Equality (NCGLE)/Lesbian & Gay Equality Project (LGEP) – (AM 2615) highly relevant to my research. This association was crucial in lobbying for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights in South Africa in the new constitution and the removal of discriminatory legislation during the 1990s until 2012, when it ceased operation. Lastly, I consulted the Out In Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival – (GAL0118 (A)) collection, which was a film festival established by the Association of Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians (ABIGALE) and Gays and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) to promote visibility of the LGBTQ+ community as well as serve as a place for LGBTQ+ people to socialise.

Oral Methodology

Additionally, I utilised oral history methodology and conducted and transcribed interviews with key queer individuals involved in the LGBTQ+ liberation movement. Oral history as a methodology has been subjected to criticism for its biased nature due to the personal opinions and beliefs of their narrators as well as “the vagaries and deficiencies of memory”.⁹⁰ However, it would be unfair to dismiss oral sources for their subjective nature when this subjectivity can be found within written sources as well. It is within these oral sources that the construction and fluctuation of social identities can clearly be seen. While I acknowledge Carolyn Hamilton’s argument that the transcription of oral histories can impede upon the fluidity of the source, the raw audios of the interviews with my key

⁹⁰ Carolyn Hamilton, “‘Living by Fluidity’: Oral Histories, Material Custodies and the Politics of Archiving,” in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michèle Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh and Jane Taylor (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*, (Cape Town: David Phillip Publishers, 2002) 212.

informants have been restricted as they contain information that some participants wished to be struck off the record.⁹¹ Furthermore, given the minimal existing content of LGBTQ+ women's lived experiences, these transcriptions are a valuable archival contribution to a topic in which documentation is scarce.

I conducted eleven in-depth interviews from 2021 to 2022 with key informants who were sought out through a number of different methods. The research participants came from a wide variety of ages, races, sexual orientations, and gender identities. This can be seen in Table 1 below. I acknowledge that presenting the participants' demographic details in this way may be misinterpreted as assuming that these identities are fixed, which contrasts with the understanding that identities are social constructions that are in constant fluctuation. The fluidity of identity and its construction and deconstruction, particularly relating to gender and sexuality, is a theme that materialises and is emphatically analysed throughout this thesis. Similarly, racial and ethnical identity should not be assumed as static or fixed categories but are inherently ambiguous and changing.⁹² However, the use of these labels, while contentious, play a large part in the participants' self-identification and the shaping of their experiences. The inclusion of the table below, as well as other tables found throughout this thesis, was a deliberate conceptual decision that I made to illuminate the diversity of experiences amongst the participants rather than an attempt to reduce them to fixed, static categories.

⁹¹ Hamilton, "Living by Fluidity", 219 – 227.

⁹² An example of the way in which racial ambiguity can manifest can be seen in the case of Zainunnisa "Cissie" Gool's mother, Nellie Abdurahman, who strategically played upon the ambiguity of racial identity by presenting herself as coloured during her involvement with the African Political Organisation Women's Guild and white while sojourning in designated "Whites-Only" areas during apartheid. See: Patricia van der Spuy, "Not Only 'the Younger Daughter of Dr Abdurahman': A Feminist Exploration of Early Influences on the Political Development of Cissie Gool." (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2002), 19. Similarly, I very briefly explored the interplay between self-identification and racial ambiguity that emerged among Beverley Ditsie and her family in my Honours thesis. See: Kirsten Jade Johnson, "'The Freedom of Wanting to Be Me': An Analysis of Beverley Ditsie's Role in South Africa's Gay Liberation Struggle, 1980s to mid-1990s." (BSocSci Honours Dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2019), 31.

Apart from their involvement in the LGBTQ+ activist movement, each of the participants had some association with one of the three major urban hubs in South Africa, namely, Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. However, it should be noted that seven out of the eleven participants originated from Gauteng and thus, there is an uneven concentration of experiences originating from this region which may not be applicable to the broader LGBTQ+ experience across the country.

Table 1 Background of oral history participants' details

Participants	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race	Age (2022)
Beulah Durrheim	Cisgender Woman	Bisexual	White	51
Deborah Bell	Cisgender Woman	Lesbian	White	58
Ecclesia de Lange	Cisgender Woman	Lesbian	White	53
Fikile Vilakazi	Gender non-conforming	Lesbian	Black	48
Jade Madingwane	Cisgender woman	Lesbian	Black	32
Nikita Ramkissoo	Femme nonbinary ⁹³	Bisexual	Indian	38
Nokuthula Dhladhla	Cisgender Woman	Lesbian	Black	48
Roche Kester	Cisgender woman	Queer	Indian	34
Sazi Jali	Transgender woman	Pansexual ⁹⁴	Black	27

⁹³ The term nonbinary refers to someone who does not subscribe to the social binary (male and female) alignment of gender identity, roles, and expression. See: Stryker, *Transgender History*, 29 – 30.

Sheila Barsel	Cisgender woman	Lesbian	White	78
Tish White	Transgender, nonbinary genderqueer person ⁹⁵	Panromantic demisexual ⁹⁶	White	33

I found my key informants by contacting known LGBTQ+ organisations for help locating participants, snowball sampling and placing a research call on social media platforms, namely Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, as shown in Figure 1.

⁹⁴ Pansexuality is defined as a sexual and romantic attraction to an individual regardless of their gender orientation. See: James S. Morandini, Alexander Blaszczyński, and Ilan Dar-Nimrod, "Who Adopts Queer and Pansexual Sexual Identities?," *The Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7 (December 2, 2016): 911–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1249332>.

⁹⁵ Genderqueer is often used to describe an individual who deliberately does not conform to gender roles and expressions so as not to be defined by gendered labels. See: Morgan, Marais, and Wellbeloved, eds., *Trans*, 6.

⁹⁶ Panromantic is a label to identify a distinctly romantic attraction to an individual regardless of identity. Demisexual defines that sexual attraction is only experienced by an individual once a romantic bond is formed. See: Morandini, Blaszczyński, and Dar-Nimrod, "Who Adopts Queer and Pansexual Sexual Identities?," 912 – 913.



Figure 1: Call for research participants poster that was placed on social media.

The first method yielded very few participants and most participants were found through snowball sampling and word of mouth with the help of the staff at GALA. The research call that was placed on social media also brought a few participants who predominantly found the advertisement on Twitter.

These individuals do not currently all identify as women but identified as such at some point in their life and thus, despite their current gender identity, documenting their life experiences is still important in understanding women's experiences within the LGBTQ+ movement in South Africa. Each participant also played, and continue to play, an integral role in the LGBTQ+ liberation movement at various stages. Interviews with these participants not only enriched the study, but in conjunction with the archival sources they provide insights into the dynamics and the intersections of the anti-apartheid struggle, the LGBTQ+ liberation movement and LGBTQ+ women's private lives. These interviews ranged between one to three hours long and have all been transcribed, with the consent of all participants, and are included as an appendix to this thesis. In total, these transcriptions amount to 472 pages of this thesis. The inclusion of these transcriptions is an important contribution to queer archives in an endeavour to address the gaps and silences of LGBTQ+ women's experiences in the historical record.

I am aware that this research, as important as it is, deals with issues surrounding race, gender, sexuality, and class that can be traumatic to discuss, such as homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and homophobic hate crimes, and that these topics needed to be handled appropriately, particularly in terms of the oral history interviews that took place. While most of the participants try to shine a light on these issues in society in order to actualise gender justice, I still approached these topics with caution and as such, I had read

the University of Cape Town's Humanities Faculty Ethics guidebook to understand the ethical risks of interviewing people on these experiences, particularly keeping in mind the significant trauma associated with these experiences.⁹⁷ I took measures to ensure that all interviewees signed an interview release form to guarantee signed consent. The interview schedule was provided to the key informants prior to their interviews so they could have time to prepare what they wished to speak about. While some of these questions may appear to have been broad in the interview schedule (which can be found in the appendix), I did tailor these broader questions when speaking to the participants about the organisations in which they participated.

Issues of psychological, emotional, and physical trauma could arise during these interviews and, I took measures to ensure that the participants were comfortable and provided emotional support where necessary.⁹⁸ While I provided the participants with the option to retain anonymity, each participant gave permission for their name to be used and their identities to be revealed which was a deliberate decision made by participants to contribute towards the archive. Similarly, I guaranteed that the participant had the choice to remove information from the record, both during the interview process as well as after, once they had been given their transcribed interview to review. Some of the participants did request for changes to be made and I have respected their wishes and right to confidentiality and have left that information out of the relevant transcripts. Subsequently, the transcriptions included in this thesis have all been reviewed by the participants and the necessary adjustments have been made.

⁹⁷ University of Cape Town Faculty of Humanities, *Guide to Research Ethics: Research with Human Participants* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town).

⁹⁸ Sean Field, "'What Can I Do When the Interviewee Cries?': Oral History Strategies for Containment and Regeneration" in Philippe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane (eds.) *Oral History in a Wounded Country: Interactive Interviewing in South Africa*, (Durban, South Africa: KwaZulu Natal University Press, 2008).

These interviews were all conducted in-line with the government's Covid-19 regulations at the time that I conducted them. As a result, some of the research interviews could not be conducted face-to-face due governmental regulations, social distancing or some key informants who did not feel comfortable participating in face-to-face interviews.

Where/when the national/university guidelines allowed in-person interviews with participants and said participants themselves consented to in-person interviews, then interviews were conducted in person. Alternatively, interviews were conducted via Zoom or Skype. These interviews have been used in conjunction with pre-existing oral history interviews housed at the GALA archive.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is made up of five substantive chapters, in addition to this introduction and the concluding chapter. In this chapter, I outlined my research topic and introduced the broader historical context in which my research falls. I also provided a literature review, discussed my theoretical framework, as well as the research methodology and methods used to examine the interconnection between LGBTQ+ women's public activism and their private worlds.

Chapter One examines the religious oppression that LGBTQ+ women faced during apartheid by closely analysing the correlations and differences of four key informants' lived experiences. It compares and examines the different ways in which these women experienced intersectional oppression and the role their family and various sociocultural community had in perpetuating this oppression. It then explores their continual journey of reconciling their Christianity with their sexuality through identity negotiation from 1980 to present. The chapter discusses the different ways in which religious and sexual identity conflict were explored, namely through rejection of one of the identities before

reconciliation of both identities was achieved. The Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church (HUMCC), Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC) and the Deo Gloria Family Church all played integral roles in the creation of LGBTQ+ affirming religious spaces that, in different ways, allowed the participants to socialise with other LGBTQ+ Christian individuals and, in doing so, helped them to reconcile their faith and sexuality.

Chapter Two analyses the compounded experiences of gender and racial oppression by LGBTQ+ women within various activist movements, namely the anti-apartheid liberation movement, the women's movement, and the LGBTQ+ liberation movement. It also examines the various psychosocial resources LGBTQ+ activists utilised to resist this oppression such as their compartmentalisation of identity within the anti-apartheid liberation movement and the women's movement where experiences of gender oppression and homonegativity transpired. The role of socialising with other LGBTQ+ people in resisting societal discrimination can be seen by examining the formation of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) in 1982, the role it played as a social space mainly for white LGBTQ+ individuals, its development of counselling services for the LGBTQ+ community as well as the subsequent experiences of gender and racial oppression within this space which lead to the withdrawal of many black LGBTQ+ people and LGBTQ+ women from this organisation. Withdrawal of LGBTQ+ activists from LGBTQ+ spaces and organisations is a central theme that emerges during this time which leads to the creation of LGBTQ+ organisations which prioritised intersectionality such as the Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression (LAGO)/Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA) in 1986 and Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) in 1988.

Chapter Three considers the use of visibility as a strategy in lobbying for LGBTQ+ rights through the establishment of Pride Marches and the Out in Africa Film Festival. It also looks at the consequences of increased invisibility on LGBTQ+ people, homophobic hate crimes and the movement to a more radicalised stance by black feminist activists. This was done especially through the use of visual literacy to counter mainstream media's stereotypes of LGBTQ+ women and was largely led by the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) and Muholi. The chapter also continues the discussion on the division within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly amongst white gay men and black lesbian women and the subsequent splits within both the social and activist LGBTQ+ space due to this division. Finally, the concluding chapter restates the overall aims and objectives of the thesis and describes the importance of some of the research findings presented. Furthermore, it reflects upon the value and limitations that this research project has produced in furthering understanding of South Africa's LGBTQ+ history. It also provides suggestions on possibilities for further areas of study within this important area of research, namely, the intersections between LGBTQ+ women activists' social and political worlds.

Chapter One: Examining the Interconnections between Queer Women and Their Experiences with Family, Faith and Society between 1980 – 2010.

This chapter outlines the religious oppression that LGBTQ+ women faced during apartheid and the exploration of their journey in reconciling their faith with their sexuality from 1980 to present. The time period under consideration will be divided into three distinct segments which spotlight specific aspects of this journey and identity negotiation. During the period between 1980 to 1995, I analyse their experiences of homophobia at a family, societal and institutional level through religion and the Church. I examine the ways in which these social and cultural worlds interacted to oppress LGBTQ+ women through the insertion of homonegative attitudes and compulsory heterosexuality, and the psychosocial effects this has on their well-being. From 1995 to 2008, I examine their responses to religious based oppression which includes attending LGBTQ+ affirming churches and socialisation. In this section, I also explain the methods and strategies LGBTQ+ affirming churches and faith organisations used to create an inclusive and supportive space. Lastly, from 2008 onwards, I analyse the religious resistance to the entrenchment of LGBTQ+ rights into the constitution, with particular focus on the Civil Union Act, as well as the growth of religious LGBTQ+ activism.

Exploring the Intersection of Family and Religion in the Development of Homonegative Attitudes and Intrapersonal Identity Conflict, 1980 – 1995

The issue of religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights have been a highly debated topic, especially within the South African context. The South African Constitution's Bill of Rights maintains that neither the state nor any individuals may discriminate directly or indirectly against someone on the basis of their sexual orientation.⁹⁹ Despite this, religion has been, and continues to be, one of the main opponents of the LGBTQ+ community with many religions citing homosexuality as "unnatural" and sinful.¹⁰⁰ The extent of this rejection and discrimination against homosexuality differs between religious denominations, however, studies have shown that Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) are often the biggest proponents of homonegativity.¹⁰¹ Although intrapersonal identity conflict between homosexuality and Christianity is a widely researched and addressed topic, this chapter focuses on dissecting the interaction between Christianity and homosexuality in shaping LGBTQ+ women's identities in a South African context.¹⁰² Though other research participants have at some point belonged to other religious or spiritual backgrounds, none expressed intrapersonal identity conflict from these beliefs. Despite the vast literature on the

⁹⁹ Republic of South Africa, The Constitution Of The Republic Of South Africa, 1996, 6 <https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/saconstitution-web-eng.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Andrew K.T. Yip, "Queering Religious Texts: An Exploration of British Non-Heterosexual Christians' and Muslims' Strategy of Constructing Sexuality-Affirming Hermeneutics," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 47-65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505049000>.

¹⁰¹ Dirk-Jan Janssen and Peer Scheepers, "How Religiosity Shapes Rejection of Homosexuality Across the Globe," *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 14 (October 29, 2018): 1974-2001, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1522809> and Amy Adamczyk and Cassidy Pitt, "Shaping Attitudes about Homosexuality: The Role of Religion and Cultural Context," *Social Science Research* 38, no. 2 (2009): 338-351, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.01.002>.

¹⁰² Nasrudin Subhi and David Geelan, "When Christianity and Homosexuality Collide: Understanding the Potential Intrapersonal Conflict," *Journal of homosexuality* 59, no. 10 (2012), 1382-1402 and E. M Rodriguez & S. C. Ouellette. "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and religious identity integration in the members and participants of a gay-positive church." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* no. 39 (2000) 333-347.

intersections between Christianity and homosexuality, exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ women activists who faced this intrapersonal identity conflict during, as well as after, the apartheid era is an important facet of understanding the ways in which social and cultural worlds have impacted and influenced LGBTQ+ advocacy in South Africa.

To situate this within the South African context, I will draw on research participant interviews that I conducted with Ecclesia de Lange, Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla, Deborah Bell and Reverend Beulah Durrheim. These women grew up in Christian households and each have had to navigate reconciling their identity as a Christian with their identity as women who love other women (WLW).¹⁰³ The specific denominations of Christianity that influenced these women's lives were either Methodism or Pentecostal, though some were involved with both denominations at different points in their lives. Table 2 below summarises the various identities that the participants have and can be used to surmise the different levels of intersectional oppression that they have faced.

Table 2 Background of Christian LGBTQ+ participants' details

Participants	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race	Denomination of Christianity	Age (2022)
Beulah Durrheim	Cisgender Woman	Bisexual	White	Methodist	51
Ecclesia de Lange	Cisgender Woman	Lesbian	White	Pentecostal & Methodist	53
Deborah Bell	Cisgender Woman	Lesbian	White	Pentecostal	58

¹⁰³ Note: the term women who love women (WLW) is used here as not all of these women identify as lesbian.

Nokuthula Dhladhla	Cisgender	Lesbian	Black	Pentecostal	48
	Woman				

It must be noted that although a qualitative approach was taken with this research to invite diverse experiences from the participants, the responses, especially in this chapter, are skewed towards White lived experiences. Although attempts were made to engage with more black LGBTQ+ women, which were often met with positive responses, the reality of being a black LGBTQ+ woman activist in South Africa often led to many of these attempts failing to come to fruition. Black LGBTQ+ women activists are often overworked for very little pay and often experience periods of burnout due to the nature of their work. Many of my attempted interviews with black LGBTQ+ women, as well as some of the interviews that I was able to conduct, were often rescheduled, cancelled or cut short due to the crises (such as counselling emergencies or homophobic hate crime reports) that these activists often have to deal with which can arise unexpectedly. This is a theme which will be explored in-depth further throughout the dissertation.

Religion and its Role in Influencing Homophobic Ideology Within Family

Structures

Societal attitudes during apartheid South Africa was influenced by legislation administered by the National Party (NP) government who strongly favoured a conservative Christian homophobic stance. The societal ideologies of the NP were enforced throughout the family structure and, in turn, further indoctrinated into the interviewees' private lives during their childhood development in the 1980s.

While South Africa is a secular state with a diverse religious population, according to the 2016 South African Community Survey, 78.5% of the population identified as Christians.¹⁰⁴ The 2016 South African Community Survey¹⁰⁵ further breaks down this data into denominations of Christianity with African Independent Church/African Initiated Church as being the most adhered to at 27.4%, followed by Pentecostal/Evangelistic Church at 15.5%. Methodism is the fifth dominant denomination of which 5.5% of the Christian population in South Africa adheres to.¹⁰⁶ The following discussion will centre around participants' experiences with the Methodist and Pentecostal churches due to its frequent emergence in the data collected from interviews with my Christian LGBTQ+ oral history participants.

Pentecostal churches often hold fundamentalist and conservative views with regards to issues of sexuality such as pre-marital sex, abortion and same-sex sexuality.¹⁰⁷ According to de Lange (one of the interviewees), growing up in a Pentecostal household meant that it was very clear "what is right" and "what is wrong" and, like most of the participants, it quickly became very clear that homosexuality was considered by their family as wrong.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Dhladhla stated that she grew up in a Christian household where her and her family's "only focus, when [she] grew up was church, Christianity and God".¹⁰⁹ Dhladhla expanded by stating that due to this, sexuality, let alone homosexuality, was something that

¹⁰⁴ Statistics South Africa, *Community Survey 2016, 2017*, Data First (Pretoria), 10.25828/12sy-yj26 <https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/611/data-dictionary/F23>.

¹⁰⁵ Statistics South Africa, *Community Survey 2016, 2017*, Data First (Pretoria), 10.25828/12sy-yj26 <https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/611/data-dictionary/F23>.

¹⁰⁶ Statistics South Africa, *Community Survey 2016, 2017*, Data First (Pretoria), 10.25828/12sy-yj26 <https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/611/data-dictionary/F23>

¹⁰⁷ Lovemore Togarasei, "Problematizing the Use of the Bible in the Human Sexuality and Pentecostal Spirituality Debate" in Chammah J. Kaunda (ed), *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: Your Body Is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020) 19-34.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 6 June 2022

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 6 July 2022.

was considered wrong to explore and discuss within her household.¹¹⁰ Durrheim, on the other hand, grew up in a Methodist household and stated that even though there was a sense of compassion towards people, the overall stance in her household growing up was that of conservative fundamentalism and the idea that one should not “condone the sin, but love the sinner”.¹¹¹

The responses of my oral history participants show a range of ways in which homonegativity was able to infiltrate into familial structures. This was either done outright, through silence or refusal to discuss the topic or through microaggressions.¹¹² Despite the differences in how this message was portrayed, the underlying theme that came across to the participants within their family structures was that homosexuality was sinful and one could not be LGBTQ+ and Christian.

This can be attributed to the fact that the family, as a structure, plays a unique role in the development and welfare of its members as it is often the link between the public and private spheres of one’s life.¹¹³ The family is thus subjected to the predominant discourses embedded in society while simultaneously upholding and reinforcing these beliefs into the family structure. An example of this is shown by Pamela Scully who explores how, in the Western Cape, the abolitionist movement drew on heteronormative Christianity to challenge slavery by championing that slaves’ personal relationships undermined the developing ideology of “a patriarchal nuclear family with the man as the head of the

¹¹⁰ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹¹¹ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 15 June 2021.

¹¹² Microaggressions are defined as discreet verbal, behavioural or environmental acts of discrimination or prejudice that occur in everyday life to minority groups. See: Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2010).

¹¹³ Maeve Malley and Damian McCann, “Family Therapists with Lesbian and Gay Clients.” in Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: BPS/Blackwell, 2004), 198 – 218.

household and the wife as the moral pillar of family and society.”.¹¹⁴ Following the emancipation of enslaved individuals, “missionaries explicitly used architecture and control of access to resources to encourage particular family and gender formations”, predominantly through marriage.¹¹⁵ In this way, the missionaries, and by extent the Church, played a significant role in establishing heteropatriarchal nuclear families as the ideal in the Western Cape and “giving men authority over women” within familial structures.¹¹⁶ Therefore beliefs, practices and attitudes found within the family structure are often reflective of prevailing views of the larger society, which are encroached upon by heteronormative and homophobic dogma, as well as specific religious, political, class, race and cultural perspectives adhered to by the family.¹¹⁷ Therefore, even though participants would have been exposed to similar societal dogma through state legislation, the ways in which these beliefs were upheld in their everyday life would differ. This is clearly outlined above with the example of de Lange and Dhladhla, who both attended Pentecostal churches that spread the same homonegative message, but the ways in which the message was upheld within the family differed due to other factors such as race, class and culture differences.

Homophobic attitudes were reinforced when the participants attended church. Durrheim stated that despite being surrounded by compassionate Methodist ministers, “it was clear that [sexual] orientation was wrong if it’s not heteronormative.”.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Dhladhla said

¹¹⁴ Pamela Scully, *Liberating the Family?: Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1997) 7; 116.

¹¹⁵ Scully, *Liberating the Family?*, 126.

¹¹⁶ Scully, *Liberating the Family?*, 126.

¹¹⁷ Malley and McCann, “Family Therapists with Lesbian and Gay Clients.”, 202 and Beverly Greene, “Ethnic-Minority Lesbians and Gay Men: Mental Health and Treatment Issues.” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 62, no. 2 (1994): 243–251.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

that “you hear the messages in the church that says this is wrong”.¹¹⁹ Bell recollected that her father was a nondenominational pastor who would preach amongst the poor communities in Cape Town and would often make use of Chick tracts to do so.¹²⁰ Chick tracts included mainstream Christian theology which depicted a set of lessons to follow to ensure that its followers “avoid being sent to hell” through the use of grotesque images.¹²¹ However, Chick tracts have been widely criticised for their attack against other faith groups (such as Islam and Catholicism) and homosexuality, leading to its banning in some countries, such as Canada.¹²² Despite this, Chick Publications, which produce Chick tracts amongst other merchandise, is still in existence and continues to produce Chick tracts that use tactics of distorted images and fear-mongering in order to spread a fundamentalist, heterosexist and homophobic standpoint that left many terrified and convinced they would be sent to hell.¹²³

The religious persecution of homosexuality through Chicks tracts was experienced by Bell (one of my interviewees) when, one day, out of curiosity, she picked up a Chick tract titled *The Gay Blade*, which was Chick tracts first tract on the subject of homosexuality and had been published in 1972.¹²⁴ Bell recalled that it was pink and that it had the silhouette of a

¹¹⁹ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹²⁰ Chick tracts are comic-styled booklets created by Jack Thomas Chick, an American publisher and cartoonist, in the 1960s that taught fundamentalist evangelical gospel. See: Roger Chapman and James Ciment eds., “Culture Wars in America: an Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices, Second Version.” *Reference & Research Book News*. (Portland: Ringgold, Inc, 2010), 109.

¹²¹ Chapman and Ciment eds., “Culture Wars in America: an Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices, Second Version”, 109 and Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism*, (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 41–88.

¹²² Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism*, 49.

¹²³ Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism*, 48.

¹²⁴ Jack T Chick, “The Gay Blade,” Chick.com: The Gay Blade, accessed October 11, 2022, <https://www.chick.com/products/tract?stk=0084>.

man in “pansy positioning”.¹²⁵ Bell stated that reading this booklet had a profound impact on her because:

when you read through it, it was all about how one day the, you know, the LGBT community are going to flaunt who they are, they're going to march in the streets, and they're going to take over the world, and corrupt your children. And, and you know, that the facial expressions of these publications on these comic strips as they would, on these animations that they would draw were terrible, they were horrible. And that stayed with me, because I was like, okay. So I realized, and by reading that I would, okay, you definitely can't be gay and a Christian because even from the pulpits, I'd heard that, right.¹²⁶

The impact of homonegative attitudes can erode attachment and trust within the family structure which in turn may lead religious LGBTQ+ individuals to believe that support and acceptance would not be found within the family. The prevalence of this homophobic rhetoric rampant in their family structures through their interaction with religion subsequently led to many of the participants hiding this aspect of their identity from their families in an effort to maintain heteronormativity¹²⁷.

The Impact of Compulsory Heterosexuality on LGBTQ+ Women and its Effect on Familial Relationships

As articulated in the introductory chapter, identity is made up of various aspects such as race, class, gender which interact with the dominant norms that one is born into at that time.¹²⁸ Within the South African context, the norms that were rampant during the 1980s include a conservative patriarchal structure under which heteronormativity was produced.

¹²⁵ Interview with Deborah Bell, Durban, conducted by author, 27 October 2021.

¹²⁶ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

¹²⁷ Heteronormativity is the standardisation of heterosexuality as the most natural and morally appropriate form of sexuality. See: Finn Reygan and Ashley Lynette, “Heteronormativity, homophobia and ‘culture’ arguments in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa”, *Sexualities* 17, no. 5-6 (2014), 707-723.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714531267>

¹²⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Adrienne Rich's work on *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* argues that patriarchy uses heterosexuality as a means to control women by assuming that an individual is heterosexual from birth and placing societal expectations upon women in order to control women's sexuality.¹²⁹ While the practice of these norms may differ between cultures, the underlying societal expectation of women was that of a subservient position to men with importance placed on heterosexual relationships to encourage the continuation of lineage and the enforcement of traditional gender roles.¹³⁰ Consequently, compulsory heterosexuality reinforces heteronormative ideology and homonegativity through institutionalising what romantic relationships should look like (i.e. heterosexual) and rejecting those who do not meet those standards (LGBTQ+).

These hegemonic societal views on heterosexuality, combined with the religious homophobic doctrine the participants heard at church and within their family unit, led to many participants conforming to the heteronormative gender identity that was expected of them. Rich states that through the utilisation of compulsory heterosexuality, relationships between WLW are "crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise".¹³¹ For example, Dhladhla stated that "issues of [her] sexuality was such a hidden matter" and that from the age of 14, when she realised she liked women, she knew that it was something that needed to be kept a secret from her family.¹³²

In attempts to "pass" as heterosexual, many of the participants remained closeted during their early teenage years and they mentioned that prior to accepting their sexual

¹²⁹ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980), 631–660. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

¹³⁰ Marion Kilson, "Women in African Traditional Religions," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 8, no. 2 (1976), 133–43.

¹³¹ Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," 632.

¹³² Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

orientation, they would date men in an attempt to deny their feelings and prove that they were not homosexual.¹³³ Dhladhla stated that she entered into a relationship with the father of her child because she was “trying to fit into the bigger scheme of things”.¹³⁴ Similarly, Bell expressed that she dated men but that “they're not real boyfriends”.¹³⁵ Based on the preceding information, many of the participants chose to conform to the societal views placed upon them in an effort to appease the expectations of their family, thus hiding and disguising their sexual orientation. Consequently, they were exposed to multifaceted oppression based on both their gender and sexual orientation as their heterosexual relationships, which many of them felt forced into, were readily accepted as they assimilated into pre-existing heteronormative beliefs in comparison to same-sex relationships. Thus, passing highlights the performative nature of gender as it demonstrates the conscious choice that is made by LGBTQ+ individuals to adhere to traditional gender norms that aligns with heteronormative societal expectations.

Ultimately, many LGBTQ+ people remained closeted due to fear of rejection and condemnation by their family and society.¹³⁶ For example, when speaking about her father, Bell mentioned that “[she] was scared of him. And the reason was because of [her] perception of him not accepting [her]. And because whenever [she] was with him, [she] felt guilty being who [she] was.”¹³⁷ Echoes of this sentiment were also felt amongst other participants who realised that being open about their attraction to women would be met

¹³³ “Closeted” or “to be in the closet” is a term used to describe people who have not accepted or disclosed their sexual or gender orientation due to concern over the societal, familial, and personal repercussions exposing this aspect of their identity could bring. See: Jack Drescher, “The Closet: Psychological Issues of Being In and Coming Out”, *Psychiatric Times* 21, no. 12 (2004), <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/closet-psychological-issues-being-and-coming-out>

¹³⁴ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹³⁵ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

¹³⁶ Drescher, “The Closet: Psychological Issues of Being In and Coming Out” <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/closet-psychological-issues-being-and-coming-out>

¹³⁷ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

with judgement, condemnation and exclusion by their parents.¹³⁸ De Lange recalled a conversation that her family had about a crossdresser and how the sentiment towards this person was mocking and discriminatory.¹³⁹ Not only did this fear of not being accepted lead to participants playing into compulsory heterosexuality, but it also created a disjuncture in their relationships with their family.

The Impact of Familial and Church-based Homophobia on Psychosocial Well-being

The oppression experienced by LGBTQ+ people due to heteronormativity, church- and state-mandated homophobia, as well as parents' religious beliefs, impacted LGBTQ+ people's ability to live out their lives freely in society and within their family structure. As outlined by Laura Markowe, hiding an integral aspect of one's identity and not being able to discuss these feelings with anyone can be detrimental to one's psychosocial well-being and relationships with others.¹⁴⁰ Miryam Clough argues that shame creates a rupture in social bonds due to the fear of judgement and rejection and this in turn often leads to a disassociation of what is causing this pain in order to cope.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Koss-Chiono argues that religion is often used as a coping mechanism for life crises that one might experience.

¹⁴² Therefore, a break in the use of that coping mechanism by other individuals (in this case

¹³⁸ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022, Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022, and Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

¹³⁹ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

¹⁴⁰ Laura A. Markowe, "Coming Out as Lesbian," in *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives*, edited by Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger, (Oxford, United Kingdom: BPS/Blackwell, 2004), 63 – 80.

¹⁴¹ Miryam Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁴² Joan D. Koss-Chiono, "Bridges between Mental Health Care and Religious Healing in Puerto Rico: The Outcomes of an Early Experiment," in *Anthropology and Public Health: Bridging Differences in Culture and Society*, ed. Robert A. Hahn and Marcia C. Inhorn, Second (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 221-244.

religious people who hold homophobic viewpoints), can lead to extreme distress and discordance by religious LGBTQ+ individuals.

The impact of constantly being exposed to homophobic religious rhetoric created a sense of unease within the participants as they felt as if they were unable to reconcile the two aspects of their identity which they had been taught to believe were in conflict with each other.¹⁴³ Literature has shown that often when intrapersonal identity conflict is experienced, the re-negotiation of Christian identity manifests in diverse ways and at different points in time.¹⁴⁴ Research has found that there are four main approaches to these responses: rejection of religious identity, rejection of sexual identity, compartmentalisation of identities and integration of identities. Ntombana, Towa and Phuza situate this idea into a South African context by explaining that this choice does not inherently denote a complete severance or disruption from religious identity, but rather that a strategy is employed where Christian identity is often re-evaluated over sexuality.¹⁴⁵ As intersectional identities create unique lived experiences and are constantly being shaped and reshaped by the context in which they exist, so too do approaches used to address intrapersonal identity conflict differ between participants and between time periods.

¹⁴³ Subhi and Geelan, "When Christianity and Homosexuality Collide," 1382–1402.

¹⁴⁴ Mark Henrickson, "A queer kind of faith: Religion and spirituality in lesbian, gay and bisexual New Zealanders." *Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal* 2, no. 2 (2007): 57-70; Luvuyo Ntombana, Nombulelo Towa and Nobubele Phuza, "Queer spirituality of black lesbians in Bloemfontein, South Africa." *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (2020): 76-84; Edward F. Lomash, Tabria D. Brown, and M. Paz Galupo, "'A Whole Bunch of Love the Sinner Hate the Sin': LGBTQ Microaggressions Experienced in Religious and Spiritual Context," *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 10 (2018): 1495-1511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1542204> and Rodriguez and Ouellette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay-Positive Church," 334 – 335.

¹⁴⁵ Ntombana, Towa and Phuza, "Queer spirituality of black lesbians in Bloemfontein, South Africa," 83.

Intrapersonal Identity Conflict Negotiation, Rejection and Its Impact on Familial Kinship

Both de Lange and Bell surmised that there was a period in their life which they call a period of rebellion, where they distanced themselves from the Church upon realising that they were attracted to women and that this was something that would not be accepted by their religious community.¹⁴⁶ This disconnection from their faith, which they viewed to be unaccepting and disproving of their sexual orientation, in turn produced a detachment from their family. De Lange described how her family “were not very happy” with her refusal to go to church and that she “didn’t respond to any invitations from [her] family”.¹⁴⁷ For de Lange, this ultimately led to her completely breaking ties with her family and leaving South Africa in 1990 to pursue a relationship she had with another woman. Similarly, Bell stated that she would avoid her father because she had felt shame not only for being attracted to women, but also from moving away from her faith.¹⁴⁸

However, the distance between family members was not only enacted by the participants, but also by their families once the participants disclosed that they experienced same-sex attraction. Bell stated that for a period of time her father also kept his distance from her.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Durrheim stated that:

...When I told my biological dad, he burst out in tears. He’s a Baptist preacher and I had just gone- his daughter had just gone and destroyed his life. Uh, he cannot since I’ve come out- I actually came out to him because I wanted him to choose to come to the wedding or not. And ever since then, and I was married for eleven years, uhm he doesn’t know how to talk to me anymore. He just doesn’t know how to handle his daughter being gay.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021 and Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Deborah Bell, 6 June 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Deborah Bell, 6 June 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

While one could postulate that these particular reactions were expressed as both Bell and Durrheim had fathers who were Christian ministers, Dhladhla also experienced a similar reaction from her family who did not hold positions of authority in the Church.

For Dhladhla, this disconnection from her faith and family became much more apparent after she was exposed by elders in her church as a lesbian. For most of her youth, Dhladhla attended a charismatic, Pentecostal church based in Soweto where she grew up.¹⁵¹ Like many other charismatic Pentecostal churches located in South Africa, Dhladhla recalled that many of the teachings given in the Church were those that conformed to hegemonic patriarchal and heteronormative cultural ideologies. These ideologies not only applied to the rejection of homosexuality, but also to anything that was viewed as “not Godly”, including participation in the anti-apartheid riots that were prevalent at the time.¹⁵²

Consequently, these messages and teachings became entrenched within Dhladhla’s family and therefore within Dhladhla’s own psyche resulting in her internalisation of homophobia.

As a result, this created a lot of uncertainty in Dhladhla’s early development and she stated that it was a “confusing period of [her] life” as her internal struggle with her sexuality was simultaneously in contention and compliance with the message being portrayed by the church and her family at the time.¹⁵³

As mentioned previously, remaining closeted can cause significant distress in an LGBTQ+ individual’s life, thus causing isolation and loneliness due to fear of rejection by family and society.¹⁵⁴ The lack of support and understanding of her struggle was not only evident in her

¹⁵¹ Soweto was established as a large predominantly black residential area, named as such due to its placement to the southwest of Johannesburg. See: William J.P. Carr, *Soweto: Its Creation, Life and Decline* (Braamfontein: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1990), x.

¹⁵² Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁵³ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁵⁴ Markowe, “Coming Out as Lesbian,” 72.

relationship with her family and the church, but can also be seen in her friendships with her peers at school. Though her recollection of these friendships are fond, she recalled often feeling displaced in conversation as she had to hide her attraction to other girls and had often not been exposed to the same romantic and sexual experiences of her heterosexual friends.¹⁵⁵ According to Dhladhla, her struggle with acceptance of her sexual orientation as well as homophobic attitudes from the church and her own family meant Dhladhla felt that she “needed to change because it felt like [she] was the odd one in the midst of other people who were normal”.¹⁵⁶

By the time she was 18 years old, Dhladhla had become well acquainted with hiding her sexuality from those close to her and from the Church. However, it was during this time that she met another lesbian while at church who openly stated that she was struggling with reconciling her sexuality and her faith. Dhladhla recalled that “nobody wanted to be around that person” nor did they accept her.¹⁵⁷ However, as Dhladhla was also struggling with reconciling her own sexuality and faith, she approached this person and they became friends and bonded over their internal struggles with their identities. Research indicates that close female friendships can be integral not only in providing support and comfort to lesbians, but also in facilitating the development of negotiating sexual identity.¹⁵⁸ While this relationship provided Dhladhla the intimacy and support she needed to help mitigate the psychosocial effects of the loneliness and alienation she experienced in her other intimate relationships, it did not resolve her internalised homophobia.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁵⁸ Christine Griffin, “Girls’ Friendships and the Formation of Sexual Identities,” in Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: BPS/Blackwell, 2004), 45 – 62 and Mary E. Hunt, “Lovingly Lesbian: Toward a Feminist Theology of Friendship,” in Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas (eds.), *Sexuality and the Sacred, Second Edition: Sources for Theological Reflection* Vol 2nd ed, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) 183 – 196.

Within the Pentecostal Church, religious practices such as prayer and fasting are taught to congregants in an effort to seek forgiveness for their sins.¹⁵⁹ Dhladhla says that she and her friend would often pray excessively or fast in an effort to “rid” themselves of their feelings for the same sex.¹⁶⁰ Unlike Bell and de Lange, Dhladhla’s initial approach to resolving her identity conflict was to increase her religiosity and alliance to the church in an effort to change her sexual orientation. A possible hypothesis for the difference in approaches to negotiating the conflict between sexuality and religious identity could be due to the additional complexity of black African sexuality. Much research has already been conducted on the construction of modern African sexuality and concludes that through colonisation and missionary projects, African sexuality (particularly African female sexuality) has been controlled and reformed to promote heterosexuality, child-rearing and family life as fundamental to social order, and this outlook is still prominent in many African cultures.¹⁶¹ Subsequently, pressure to adhere to the heteronormative standard entrenched in the family may have been experienced on both a religious level as well as a cultural level for Dhladhla.¹⁶²

However, the bond that Dhladhla had formed with her friend was misinterpreted by the elders of the church who believed that they were engaged in a romantic relationship. The bond formed between Dhladhla and her friend was viewed as a threat to the patriarchal and

¹⁵⁹ Tebogo Sewapa, “‘Can a Queer Be Born Again?’: The Experiences of the LGBTQ+ Pentecostals at Grace Bible Church, Soweto,” in Chammah J. Kaunda (ed), *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism*. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 281–303.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁶¹ Basile Ndjio, “Sexuality and Nationalist Ideologies in Post-colonial Cameroon,” in Sasika Wieranga and Horacio Sivori (eds.), *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. (London: Zed Books, 2013) 90 – 105 and Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹⁶² It is important to note here that this view was not expressed by Dhladhla but is merely a tentative theory that I am offering as to why such different approaches were taken by the participants. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of the research, other black lesbian lived experiences are missing; therefore, it is difficult to ascertain if this is a conclusive pattern. This could possibly be an area of further exploration by future researchers.

homonegative structures embedded within the church and consequently, they were excommunicated by the Church. The utilisation of shame and exclusion is common in African Pentecostal churches as a means to chastise and punish sexual behaviour which they view as religiously immoral. While what is defined as immoral may differ between churches, behaviours which would be deemed to require moral enforcement often include premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, the use of condoms, HIV/AIDS status, and homosexuality.¹⁶³ Although this behaviour is common in African Pentecostal churches, according to Dhladhla, her excommunication was not handled in the same manner as other excommunications in her church. She stated that:

normally, when someone is excommunicated from the church, their family, uh, get to be called but in our cases, my family was not called, the visitors were not asked to leave the church, or the children. So we were made to stand in front of the church and then the, the elders, the men told everyone in the church that women must be scared of us, must really stay away from us, because what we have, and what we are, is, is, is a demon that is [a] transferable type like that.¹⁶⁴

As a result, this act publicly exposed Dhladhla's sexual orientation to both her family and her church community in an attempt to ridicule, shame and condemn her homosexuality.

Silence as a Parental Reaction to Disclosure of LGBTQ+ Identity

Being publicly outed was both a shock for Dhladhla and her family. For Dhladhla, at this stage, she had not come out nor accepted her sexual orientation and was confused as to why a platonic friendship was being interpreted as a romantic one.¹⁶⁵ For Dhladhla's family,

¹⁶³ Melissa Hackman, *Desire Work: Ex-Gay and Pentecostal Masculinity in South Africa* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018); Robert C. Garner, "Safe Sects? Dynamic Religion and AIDS in South Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000): 41–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161951> and Damaris Seleina Parsitau, "'Keep Holy Distance and Abstain Till He Comes': Interrogating a Pentecostal Church's Engagements with HIV/AIDS and the Youth in Kenya," *Africa Today* 56, no. 1 (Fall, 2009): 44–64. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/keep-holy-distance-abstain-till-he-comes/docview/221141997/se-2>.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

however, the church's elders' accusations were taken as fact and they did not listen to Dhladhla's explanations. Dhladhla recalled that "from that day on, [they] did not have a conversation about it" and the topic went unmentioned in her household.¹⁶⁶ Research has shown that silence is a common parental reaction to their children coming out.¹⁶⁷ For many, silence can be viewed as cause for concern and a lack of acceptance from their parents. However, silence as a parental response is much more complex than this due to the diverse reasonings that motivate such a response. Such reasonings may include a family's difficulty to vocalise emotions, an unspoken sign of approval or disapproval, a marker of shock or an issue of sexuality as a taboo topic.¹⁶⁸ Emmanuel Mayeza contextualises this into a South African context through an examination of black South African LGBTQ+ identifying youth from rural communities' experiences in coming out and parental responses.¹⁶⁹ Mayeza's study concludes that within a rural black African context, silence is often due to the taboo around discussions on sexuality. Hence, discussion of sexuality, especially same-sex attraction, may be viewed as disrespectful by parents.¹⁷⁰ As discussed previously, sexuality was a taboo subject within Dhladhla's household. Subsequently, the culmination of religious, cultural, and societal homophobic oppression ultimately resulted in Dhladhla experiencing further isolation, rejection and loneliness therefore increasing her own internalised homonegative beliefs.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁶⁷ Diana D. van Bergen, Bianca D.M. Wilson, Stephen T. Russell, Allegra G. Gordon, and Esther D. Rothblum, "Parental Responses to Coming out by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Pansexual, or Two-Spirited People across Three Age Cohorts," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 83, no. 4 (November 3, 2020): 1116-1133, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12731>.

¹⁶⁸ van Bergen, Wilson, Russell, Gordin and Rothblum, "Parental Responses to Coming out by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Pansexual, or Two-Spirited People across Three Age Cohorts," 1124 – 1125.

¹⁶⁹ Emmanuel Mayeza, "South African LBTPQ Youth: The Perceptions and Realities of Coming out and Parental Reactions," *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 17 (2021, 17: 3): 292-303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428x.2021.1897051>.

¹⁷⁰ Mayeza, "South African LBTPQ Youth: The Perceptions and Realities of Coming out and Parental Reactions," 300. This is also stated by Dhladhla earlier in the chapter, see footnote 12.

While Durrheim was not met with overt silence, she also felt some distance from her family especially when she announced her engagement to her now ex-wife. Durrheim stated that the majority of her siblings did not attend her wedding and one brother mentioned that he was glad that she was “not going against God directly by having it in a church”.¹⁷¹ While her mother and eldest brother were in attendance at the wedding, Durrheim notes that her mother would not discuss Durrheim’s romantic relationship with any of her friends or family members and went so far as to hide pictures of Durrheim and her ex-wife as well as include Durrheim’s name on a church prayer list for homosexuality.¹⁷² The impact of this was extremely painful for Durrheim, who realised that her sexual orientation was not only rejected by her family, but was barely tolerated.

The Utilisation of Conversion Therapy as a Tool in Resolving Intrapersonal Identity Conflict

Conversion therapy, alternatively referred to as reparative therapy, is the implementation of various strategies that attempt to “cure” non-conforming sexual orientations to that of a heterosexual one to enforce heteronormativity and traditional gender roles. Such strategies can include “psychoanalytic therapy, prayer and spiritual interventions, electric shock, nausea-inducing drugs, hormone therapy, surgery, and various adjunctive behavioral treatments”.¹⁷³ The belief that sexual orientation can be changed stems from the Western medicalisation of homosexuality which pathologised homosexuality as a disease or illness borne from religious affliction or psychiatric disorder.¹⁷⁴ While homosexuality has been de-pathologised as a psychiatric disorder by the American Psychology Association (APA)

¹⁷¹ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

¹⁷² Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

¹⁷³ Timothy F. Murphy, “Redirecting Sexual Orientation: Techniques and Justifications,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 29, no. 4 (1992), 501–523. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3812700>.

¹⁷⁴ Arvind Narrain, and Vinay Chandran, *Nothing to Fix: Medicalisation of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. (New Delhi, India: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2016) and Jack Drescher, “I’m Your Handyman: A History of Reparative Therapies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 36, no. 1 (1998), 19-42, https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v36n01_02

completely removing homosexuality as a mental illness in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* (DSM) in 1987¹⁷⁵ and the World Health Organization removing it from its *International Classification of Diseases* in 1993¹⁷⁶, the concept of homosexuality as a disorder continues to pervade many societies, including African ones.

Douglas C. Haldeman argues that often when a homosexual individual comes from a staunch conservative and religious close knit family, the loss of support can result in the individual resorting to conversion therapy in an effort to alter their sexual orientation and identity to integrate back into the community.¹⁷⁷ Haldeman states that for some religious LGBTQ+ individuals, the changing of one's sexual orientation is more realistic than abandoning their religious structure which is so ingrained into their identity.¹⁷⁸ The basis of his findings comes largely from his cases with American gay men who have experienced some form of conversion therapy and include some who have been harmed during this process. Haldeman clearly states and clarifies that these cases, however, should not be viewed as representative and generalised, particularly to the experiences of women. Indeed, it would be difficult to apply the experience of a Western gay men to that of South African LGBTQ+ women. However, the utilisation of religion to enforce oppressive beliefs can cause comparable psychosocial distress in religious LGBTQ+ individuals who rely on religion and their family structure as a source of comfort and support, regardless of the variations in context and specific tactics employed. It can be assumed that the loss of these support

¹⁷⁵ Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 465-466 and Celia Kitzinger and Adrian Coyle, "Introducing Lesbian and Gay Psychology," in *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives*, Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives* (Oxford, United Kingdom: BPS/Blackwell, 2004), 1 – 29.

¹⁷⁶ Kitzinger and Coyle, "Introducing Lesbian and Gay Psychology," 13

¹⁷⁷ Douglas C. Haldeman, "When Sexual and Religious Orientation Collide: Considerations in Working With Conflicted Same-Sex Attracted Male Clients," *The Counseling Psychologist* 32, no. 5 (2004): 691-715, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000004267560>.

¹⁷⁸ Haldeman, "When Sexual and Religious Orientation Collide," 694.

structures can exacerbate feelings of low self-esteem and internalised homonegativity which may lead some individuals to turn to conversion therapy in order to be accepted back into the community.

An example of this can clearly be seen in Dhladhla's case where she had been excommunicated from the church based on her sexuality and was experiencing tension within her family who were "carrying some form of a shame" after her sexual orientation had been publicly exposed by the church.¹⁷⁹ Thus, in an effort to fit in and be viewed as normal, Dhladhla and her friend refused to boycott the church and continued to attend. This was only allowed on the basis that the church would pray over them and "cure" them of their sexual orientation.¹⁸⁰ The lack of communication from her family as well as the shame and guilt that she had felt from being publicly outed was a very isolating and confusing experience for Dhladhla who felt that this was the only way to be accepted by both her family and the church, which played a pivotal role in her life.

Within the Pentecostal church homosexuality is viewed as demonic, and divine intervention through the use of prayers and exorcism are promoted as tools which can be used to drive demonic spirits away and deliver people from same-sex attraction.¹⁸¹ For six months, Dhladhla and her friend were "prayed" over by the church every Friday night at her house. This time consisted of Dhladhla and her friend having to pray and fast in an effort to alter their sexual orientation and repent, as well as receive beatings from the church community who treated them like "animals" and did not allow them to defend themselves from their attacks.¹⁸² This was because the church members construed Dhladhla's screams as

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁸¹ Sewapa, "Can a Queer Be Born Again?", 281–303.

¹⁸² Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

communication from the demon rather than Dhladhla's own suffering. Not only was being repeatedly subjected to violence weekly for six months a painful process for Dhladhla, but she also expressed that "at some point in the prayer, people tried to get fingers into [her] private parts" and this act was largely done by men.¹⁸³ This treatment physically, emotionally, and sexually violated Dhladhla and did not cure or alter her sexual orientation but, instead, worsened her pre-existing difficulties in reconciling conflicting aspects of identity and created more psychological distress. Eventually Dhladhla and her friend lied to the church community and informed them that the prayers had worked, they were healed and no longer expressed those feelings of same-sex attraction. This allowed Dhladhla to attend church without having to be subjected to physical and emotional violence, however she stated that this acceptance back to church was not a full acceptance and that she was always treated like the "odd one" afterwards.¹⁸⁴

Unfortunately, Dhladhla's experience with religious conversion therapy in South Africa is not a unique one. In a 2019 global report conducted by OutRight Action International¹⁸⁵, it was found that within sub-Saharan Africa, religion, family, and culture were the major motivators behind the practice of conversion therapy.¹⁸⁶ The report noted that in the African context, religion was the largest perpetuating factor that drove respondents to seek out conversion therapy. Subsequently, religion was weaponised through apartheid state legislation and through its role in interpersonal societal connections to persecute religious

¹⁸³ Amy Bishop at OutRight Action International, *Harmful Treatment: The Global Reach of So-Called Conversion Therapy*, (New York, 2019), <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/global-reach-so-called-conversion-therapy>.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

¹⁸⁵ OutRight Action International, which was formerly known as the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), was founded in 1990 and is an LGBTQ+ human rights non-governmental organisation which works closely with LGBTQ+ people in the Global South to document the human rights violations experienced in these regions. See: OutRight Action International, "About Us: Our Story," Outright Action International, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://outrightinternational.org/about-us/our-story>.

¹⁸⁶ Bishop at OutRight Action International, *Harmful Treatment*, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/global-reach-so-called-conversion-therapy>.

LBTQ+ women in South Africa into submitting to heteronormativity and traditional gender roles. However, it should be noted that as each lived experience is unique, the degree to which this is experienced varies among individuals.

Another predominant approach taken up by many Pentecostal churches throughout Africa is ex-gay ministry.¹⁸⁷ The ex-gay movement consists of people and organisations who encourage LGBTQ+ people to suppress their same-sex desires and instead pursue heterosexual relationships to promote heteronormativity. Much of the scholarship surrounding ex-gay ideology focuses on men and hegemonic masculinity, therefore it is important to analyse the impact ex-gay ministry has on LBTQ+ women.¹⁸⁸ While some scholarship has been produced on the influence of the ex-gay movement and its impact on exacerbating anti-gay rhetoric in Africa¹⁸⁹, this is also an area where further exploration is warranted. At the time of writing, Melissa Hackman's *Desire Work: Ex-Gay and Pentecostal Masculinity in South Africa* is the only work that explores ex-gay ministry within the South African context.¹⁹⁰ The focus of this work is placed predominately on white gay men, and some Coloured gay men, from Cape Town, which Hackman notes is due to the marginalisation of women in ex-gay ministry. However, it plays an important role in detailing how ex-gay ministry promotes the idea that heterosexuality can be achieved through hard work and learning how to mimic behavioural patterns found in heterosexuals

¹⁸⁷ Hackman, *Desire Work*, x – xi.

¹⁸⁸ Christine Robinson and Sue Spivey, "Putting Lesbians in Their Place: Deconstructing Ex-Gay Discourses of Female Homosexuality in a Global Context," *Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (September 23, 2015): 879-908, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci4030879>.

¹⁸⁹ Zambian pastor and scholar, Kapya Kaoma, has been highly influential in these discussions on the ex-gay movement's influence in increasing anti-gay rhetoric. See: Kapya Kaoma, "The Paradox and Tension of Moral Claims: Evangelical Christianity, the Politicization and Globalization of Sexual Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Critical Research on Religion* 2, no. 3 (2014): 227-245, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303214552571> and Kapya Kaoma, "Op-Ed: American 'Ex-Gay' Movement Paves Way for Global Harm," *The Advocate*, May 2, 2013, <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2013/05/02/op-ed-american-ex-gay-movement-paves-way-global-harm>.

¹⁹⁰ Hackman, *Desire Work*, 3.

in a South African context.¹⁹¹ Hackman's work highlights how the objectification of women is utilised by ex-gay ideology to enforce sexist hegemonic social norms of compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Despite the lack of LGBTQ+ women's voices, insight can be gained into how ex-gay ministry seeks to control women's sexuality, impose traditional gender roles, and oppress LGBTQ+ women. My research, therefore, provides original insight into women's experiences of ex-gay ministry in South Africa.

The rise of ex-gay ministries began in the 1970s in the United States, largely as a response to the increase in feminist and gay rights movements at the time.¹⁹² One of the most prominent ex-gay ministry organisations was Exodus International, a non-profit ex-gay Christian umbrella organisation that was founded in 1976. At its peak, it was aligned with at least 150 international ministries which propagated ex-gay ministries in various forms.¹⁹³ Exodus International's president, Alan Chambers, later recanted its views that conversion therapy was able to change one's sexual orientation. He testified that, as someone who was an ex-gay, he was acutely aware that conversion therapy did not work and apologised for the pain it had caused thousands of LGBTQ+ people.¹⁹⁴ One of ministries aligned with Exodus International in South Africa was the Rhema Bible Church.¹⁹⁵ The Rhema Bible Church was founded in 1979 by Ray McCauley in Johannesburg after McCauley had attended bible school in Oklahoma.¹⁹⁶ Oklahoma is one of the many states in the Southern

¹⁹¹ Hackman, *Desire Work*, 39 -63.

¹⁹² Hackman, *Desire Work*, x.

¹⁹³ Lynne Gerber, "Grit, Guts, and Vanilla Beans: Godly Masculinity in the Ex-Gay Movement," *Gender & Society* (2015, 29: 1): 26-50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214545682>.

¹⁹⁴ Gerber, "Grit, Guts, and Vanilla Beans", 30 and Erik Eckholm, "Rift Forms in Movement as Belief in Gay 'Cure' Is Renounced.," *The New York Times*, July 7, 2012, sec. A, 9, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/07/us/a-leaders-renunciation-of-ex-gay-tenets-causes-a-schism.html>.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

¹⁹⁶ "What We Believe," Rhema Bible Church, accessed October 16, 2022, <https://www.rhema.co.za/pages/what-we-believe>.

United States that forms the Bible Belt¹⁹⁷ of America; a region known for its socially conservative religious belief system. Thus, it could be assumed that through the attendance of Bible school in the Bible Belt, McCauley was able to diffuse anti-gay rhetoric from the conservative American ex-gay movement to South Africa.

Between 1994 to 1995, de Lange had felt a calling to be ordained as a minister. At this point, however, she was still experiencing difficulty accepting her identity as both a Christian and a lesbian. She discussed the various approaches she had taken to try and accept both aspects of her identity, such as celibacy.¹⁹⁸ When these approaches did not work, she decided to attend a “support group” at Rhema Bible Church that she had learnt about through a friend. De Lange stated that during her time with the Rhema Bible Church “support group” much of the time was spent convincing her that she would one day be able to have a husband and children. This could be done through praying and reading texts that described what a “Godly” woman should look like.¹⁹⁹ The idea of a woman’s function in society as solely for reproductive purposes is instilled both within conservative American pro-family rhetoric and within African society. Within conservative American Christianity, known as the U.S. Christian Right, “traditional family values” are idealised through the construction of the “natural family” which consists of a heterosexual man and woman and their biological offspring.²⁰⁰ Homosexuality is therefore viewed as a degradation of traditional family values and the natural family structure thus contributing to breakdown in society. Similarly,

¹⁹⁷ The term Bible Belt was coined by American journalist, H. L. Mencken, in the 1920s to describe the area in the United States where religion is immersed and ingrained into culture through the practice of literal Biblical readings by influential religious leaders. See: Joseph L. Locke, *Making the Bible Belt: Texas Prohibitionists and the Politicization of Southern Religion* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

²⁰⁰ Haley McEwen, “Weaponising Rhetorics of ‘Family’: the Mobilisation of Pro-Family Politics in Africa,” *African Journal of Rhetoric* 10, no. 1 (2018): 142–178 and Doris Buss and Didi Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2003).

importance is placed in many African societies on heterosexuality and the continuance of biological lineage.²⁰¹ The intertwining of these ideologies enforced heterosexuality as the ideal to ensure the continuation of the traditional family and ancestral lineage.

Consequently, ex-gay ministry, which utilises these ideologies, diminishes women's role in society to merely that of wives and mothers whose only contribution is their reproductive capabilities while simultaneously demonising homosexuality.

While the conversion therapy experiences of Dhladhla and de Lange were extremely traumatic, they, unsurprisingly, did nothing to alter their attraction to women. The failure of being able to adhere to heteronormativity and traditional gender roles despite efforts to do so in numerous ways left many of the participants unsatisfied. De Lange explained it as belonging to a sect that you try to immerse yourself in, in an attempt to align with the homonegative attitudes and heteronormativity, until "you walk into a wall and you find or you hear something else and it starts evoking different thoughts and ideas in your mind and you find a new way".²⁰² Subsequently, for many of the participants, efforts to rid themselves of their sexual orientation due to the oppression they faced on societal and institutional levels were unsuccessful and many of the participants instead attempted new ways to integrate their identities.

²⁰¹ Marc Epprecht, "'Hidden' histories of African Homosexualities," *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* (2005); Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montréal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) and Kaoma, "The Paradox and Tension of Moral Claims," 235.

²⁰² Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

Resolving Intrapersonal Identity Conflict Through Integration: LGBTQ+ Affirming Churches and Socialisation, 1995 – 2006

The shift in South Africa from apartheid to democracy runs almost parallel to many of the participants' own experiences of re-examining their approach to their intrapersonal identity conflict. As identities are dynamic and in constant fluctuation so too can the approach which a religious LGBTQ+ person chooses to negotiate their identity conflict change. This segment will explore the shift from the various approaches taken by the participants earlier in their life to the attempts to integrate their sexual and religious identities. According to Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy, issues around the acceptance of homosexuality within the Church stem from the deep entrenchment of heterosexism which influences the way people "read the Bible, write theology, preach sermons and practise pastoral care".²⁰³ Germond and de Gruchy believe that acceptance of homosexuality can be found through listening to the stories of LGBTQ+ Christians.²⁰⁴ This not only identifies and exposes the ways in which heterosexism manifests within religious teachings, but also helps to empower other LGBTQ+ Christians to share their stories too. Similarly, E. M. Rodriguez and S. C. Ouellette found that learning new ways to read Biblical literature, self-acceptance and socialisation with other LGBTQ+ religious individuals were key factors in helping with the integration of religious and sexual identity.²⁰⁵ For the participants, this integration was largely found through interaction with LGBTQ+ affirming churches, learning new ways to interpret Biblical scripture and

²⁰³ Paul Germond and Steve De Gruchy, *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: David Philip, 1997).

²⁰⁴ Germond and De Gruchy, *Aliens in the Household of God*, 4.

²⁰⁵ Rodriguez and Ouellette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay-Positive Church," 344.

socialisation with other religious LGBTQ+ individuals, though the ways in which this occurred are varied and vast.

Integration of Identity Through LGBTQ+ Affirming Ministers

While undergoing conversion therapy, de Lange was also actively trying to become ordained by the Church. However, when she approached a church within her denomination and explained that she had received a calling to become a minister, she was rejected because she did not have a husband. According to the pastor of this church, de Lange would not be able to be ordained because she had “to have a husband because he’s your head”.²⁰⁶ This statement serves as an example of the way that institutionalised sexism that exists within religious structures works to oppress women by denying their autonomy and value unless it is in relation to a man. This response angered and frustrated de Lange, ultimately causing her to leave the Charismatic denomination in the early 1990s. While searching for a new place of worship, de Lange became more aware of feminism and women’s challenges and struggles which eventually led her to be reacquainted with the Methodist Church in the mid-1990s which had been ordaining women since 1976.²⁰⁷ It was at a Methodist Church where de Lange met an affirming minister who helped her to reconcile her inner conflict between her religious beliefs and her sexual orientation by showing her new ways to interpret Biblical scripture. De Lange had also started to engage with more literature regarding sexual ethics, theological interpretations and perspectives. While the priest’s stance and interpretation of homosexuality in Biblical scripture was not the official stance of the Methodist Church as a whole, it was poignant in de Lange’s journey to reconcile her views and beliefs in relationship to herself. De Lange described her journey of reconciling her faith and sexuality

²⁰⁶ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

²⁰⁷ De Lange stated that she used to attend a Methodist Sunday School in her early childhood while living in Richard’s Bay and was therefore familiar with it.

as a process of “confronting, deconstructing, constructing and continuously working” on finding ways to affirm her identity as a Christian and as a lesbian.²⁰⁸

Dhladhla shared a similar experience to de Lange whereby her understanding of the Bible and its stance on homosexuality changed upon meeting an LGBTQ+ affirming minister. In the early 1990s, about a month after she had stopped being prayed for by the church, Dhladhla described being gangraped by a group of men. When she reached out to her church community for support during this time, she was shunned and informed that this was a punishment by God for her attraction to women:

...[T]he person who picked me up from the police station, then called everyone, all the members of the church and everyone, to come so they came to pray for me. So in that meeting, or in that prayer moment, where now everyone know, got to know what happened to me, then I was told that God was punishing me, God was telling me that it was wrong to be having relationships with women so I needed to be taught some lesson- I don't know, what was the that moment of the lesson that I needed to learn from that experience. And I was hurt.²⁰⁹

Deeply hurt by this reaction from her church community, Dhladhla attempted suicide as she could not cope with the trauma she had experienced. Low self-esteem, lack of self-acceptance, compounded with a loss of support system and rejection, are often viewed as key indicators that can lead to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts by LGBTQ+ individuals.²¹⁰ However, Dhladhla survived her suicide attempt and decided that there must

²⁰⁸ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²¹⁰ Ian Rivers, “Developmental Issues for Lesbian and Gay Youth,” in Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger (eds.), *Lesbian & Gay Psychology: New Perspectives* (Oxford, United Kingdom: BPS/Blackwell, 2004), 30 – 44; Marian Nell and Janet Shapiro, *OUT OF THE BOX: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, (Johannesburg: The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2011); Markowe, “Coming Out as Lesbian,” 69; Ian Marsh, “Queering Suicide: The Problematic Figure of the ‘Suicidal Homosexual’ in Psychiatric Discourse,” in Burkhard Scherer (ed.), *Queering Paradigms* (New York, New York: Peter Lang, 2009) 141 – 160 and Alex Müller, “Scrambling for Access: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality of Healthcare for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in South Africa,” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 17, no. 1 (May 30, 2017): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-017-0124-4>.

be a reason as to why she survived, which led her to believe that she needed to re-assess and reinterpret her relationship with God and religion as:

that God that they, these people have told me about is the one that I don't want, I'm not gonna worship that kind of a God, I actually want to worship some other God, who is loving, who will love me the way I am, because I have tried everything I knew at that time.²¹¹

This made Dhladhla realise that she needed to find more LGBTQ+ people to bond and share experiences with. She was eventually contacted by someone who brought to her awareness the establishment of an LGBTQ+ affirming church which they believed would help Dhladhla to resolve her issues and no longer try to attempt suicide.²¹² Thus, Dhladhla was led to Reverend Tsietsi Thandekiso who helped Dhladhla with her struggles of self-acceptance, rejection, abuse that the church had subjected her to, and her rape, which Dhladhla explained was a long and overwhelming experience and journey.

Integration of Identity Through LGBTQ+ Affirming Churches

Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church

Reverend Tsietsi Thandekiso was a theologian who founded Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church (HUMCC) in 1994 after he had been ejected from the Student Christian Movement upon discovery of his homosexuality.²¹³ HUMCC later became affiliated with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), an international LGBTQ+ affirming denomination, after Thandekiso's death from an AIDS-related illness²¹⁴,

²¹¹ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²¹² While Dhladhla makes no mention of who exactly this person is, one can presume that it is someone from within her community who was aware of Dhladhla's situation.

²¹³ Graeme Reid, *Above the Skyline: Reverend Tsietsi Thandekiso and the Founding of an African Gay Church* (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2012).

²¹⁴ The reason for Thandekiso's death was initially not spoken about. See: Paul Mokgethi-Heath, "How Have MCC Churches Assisted with HIV/AIDS Awareness and Education in South Africa?," MCC, September 25, 2020,

and is one of three MCC churches operating within South Africa.²¹⁵ While HUMCC was not the only LGBTQ+ affirming church in South Africa at the time²¹⁶, due to its largely black congregation, it played a significant role in opposing hegemonic views that homosexuality was un-African and un-Christian. This was due to HUMCC's approach of combining African tradition and Christian ritual with LGBTQ+-affirming ideology to affirm and cater to all aspects of an individual's identity.²¹⁷ As such, HUMCC played an important role in the LGBTQ+ liberation movement in South Africa during the 1990s.

In 1994, HUMCC rented a room, of the Harrison Reef Hotel that was initially on the second floor before moving to the seventh floor, in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. This hotel had been a known LGBTQ+ space since the 1970s as it had hosted numerous gay bars such as the Skyline.²¹⁸ HUMCC hosted a number of activities for the LGBTQ+ Christian community such as Bible study, counselling sessions, prayer groups as well as social events such as the Mr. and Ms. HUMCC pageant competition.²¹⁹ Dhladhla mentioned that, for her, this experience was quite overwhelming because she had not been exposed to a church experience that affirmed and accepted her identity as a lesbian.²²⁰ Prior to HUMCC, Dhladhla explained that she did not have many opportunities to meet people who were like her and that were

<https://visitmccchurch.com/portfolio/how-have-mcc-churches-assisted-with-hiv-aids-awareness-and-education-in-south-africa/>.

²¹⁵ Reid, *Above the Skyline*, 196 and Cheryl Potgieter and Finn Reygan, "Disruptive or Merely Alternative? A Case Study of a South African Gay Church" *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* (2011, 17: 2) 58 -76.

²¹⁶ Other LGBTQ+ affirming churches operating at the time include Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church and Deo Gloria Family Church Durban, which will be discussed in greater depth further in the chapter. Other collections of churches or Christian communities include ABIGALE (a Kimberley-based church), the Gay Christian Community (a Johannesburg-based religious network) and Gay and Lesbian Christian Outreach (a religious network based in the Western Cape) which can be found at found at the GALA Queer Archive (hereafter GALA). However due to the time constraints of this project, I was unable to engage with these collections. Furthermore, other LGBTQ+ affirming churches surely also existed at this time, but it is difficult to provide an accurate, detailed list as records of these are sparse.

²¹⁷ Reid, *Above the Skyline*, 5.

²¹⁸ Reid, *Above the Skyline*, 6.

²¹⁹ Reid, *Above the Skyline*, 9.

²²⁰ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

experiencing similar struggles to her. Therefore, it was difficult for her to adjust to this new way of living and approach that worked to integrate her identities instead of condemning her:

...So, my first year and second year, I think, to until up to year two, it was a very hard time. Because I'm not- I, I was not used to these things and gatherings and now I'm exposed to this different world that have all these different kinds of things so... But now with HUMCC, now, you had to honor the fact that there's many people who would have parties: their birthday parties, we'll celebrate their weddings, or, you know, different kinds of celebrations. So, then I got to learn.²²¹

Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church

Other participants, such as Durrheim, shared a similar experience of finally being accepted in a religious space. Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC) is another LGBTQ+-affirming church located in South Africa that is affiliated with the UFMCC. Located in Cape Town, it was founded in 1983 and functions as a safe haven for LGBTQ+ Christians.²²² Durrheim recollected that she initially became involved with GHMCC as a congregant with her ex-wife and had attended church services a couple times before she was asked to preach there.²²³ For Durrheim, being able to openly exist as a WLW in a church space was an incredibly healing experience. Durrheim stated that she was able to publicly hold her ex-wife's hand, allowed to receive communion and to openly exist at GHMCC in a way that would not have been possible at a Methodist church.²²⁴ This was a pivotal and emotional moment for Durrheim who stated that "[she] cried because it was so healing for

²²¹ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²²² Potgieter and Reygan, "Disruptive or Merely Alternative?", 61.

²²³ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

²²⁴ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

[her] to know that [her] orientation was not an issue in this spiritual space which [she] value[d] so much".²²⁵

Like HUMCC and other MCC churches, GHMCC takes the stance of situating its teachings on the principles of equality and inclusion to create a space that is accepting of all people. GHMCC incorporate a variety of ways of doing this such as having unisex restrooms as shown in Figure 2²²⁶, and opening its doors to all types of people including heterosexuals, homeless people and sex workers.²²⁷ In doing so, it aims to be inclusive to all people, regardless of identity, by treating them with dignity and respect in the hope that it can ultimately lead to a reduction in overall discrimination and oppression in society.



Figure 2: GHMCC Gender neutral bathroom sign

²²⁵ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

²²⁶ GALA, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC), GAL 0003, GHMCC gender-neutral bathroom sign.

²²⁷ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

Issues Occurring in LGBTQ+ affirming spaces.

However, this is not always easy as even within LGBTQ+-affirming churches, my participants noted that issues of racism, sexism, classism, patriarchy and rejection of certain LGBTQ+ identities (such as bisexual and transgender) emerged.²²⁸ Durrheim recalled an instance of difficulty within GHMCC whereby some congregants felt hesitant to hold hands, a common practice in the church at the end of mass, with homeless people, and that it took time to work through these issues of overcoming societal biases and beliefs.²²⁹ Dhladhla recalled a similar issue of accepting different identities that she had to overcome once she had joined HUMCC. Dhladhla acknowledged that the first few weeks upon joining HUMCC were challenging for her as she had to unlearn a lot of the homophobic ideology that had been ingrained into her, but HUMCC also served as a space that taught her about different identities such as transgender, intersex, and bisexual identities which ultimately helped her to be more inclusive of people:

So everything about it, that space taught me a whole lot of things. So all my reference, it's, it's like that, because I had to learn that there's lesbian, who are masculine, who are feminine, there's bisexual people, who I had hard time to accept [laughs], because of how I used to believe that you have to choose, I had to learn about trans people, I had to learn about intersex people, I had to learn about humanity, and how we all are, you know, we all connect in one way or another.²³⁰

While participants acknowledged that issues surrounding the emergence of sexism, racism, and rejection of certain LGBTQ+ identities within LGBTQ+-affirming churches is something that needs to be tackled, churches like HUMCC and GHMCC were, and are still, important, especially in South Africa, in challenging the homophobic monolithic approach to Christianity that is undertaken by many hegemonic churches in South Africa.

²²⁸ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²²⁹ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

²³⁰ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

Integration of Identity Through Socialisation with Other LGBTQ+ Christians and The Establishment of Deo Gloria Family Church Durban

For Bell, however, this reconciliation of her faith and her homosexuality was established through socialising with other LGBTQ+ Christians. Bell initially rejected discussions around Christianity and homosexuality that would occur naturally during conversations and socialising with other LGBTQ+ people, but in 1990 Bell began engaging more in these conversations. Bell attributed this partly to a conversation she had with a Methodist woman who encouraged her to return to the Church and reject the Church's and her family's teachings of condemnation of homosexuality.²³¹ This in turn led Bell to create a church group which consisted mainly of LGBTQ+ women that she had known as well as other people who she had met while socialising who had questions regarding their faith and their sexuality.

This group initially consisted of 12 people, though Bell stated that the intent of this was not particularly for a religious experience, but rather a group of friends coming together to pray and discuss the issues of integrating their faith and sexuality as a group.²³² Despite Bell's stance that this was not a form of activism, LGBTQ+ individuals meeting to discuss experiences of oppression and condemnation is in itself a political act.²³³ Bell's church group was also a space for community building and kinship structure formation, which, as Catherine Saalfeld states is important as "queers don't necessarily have their family of origin to support and nurse them" and have to create other ways to access a sense of

²³¹ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²³² Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²³³ Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political." In *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. Shulamith Firestone, and Anne Koedt (eds.), (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970).

community.²³⁴ The creation of these kinship structures allowed for social connections and mutual support to occur and demonstrates yet another example of LGBTQ+ women's resilience. Within this space, Bell and her church group explored their faith together in a variety of ways such as being mentored and taught by numerous LGBTQ+ affirming pastors on how to read and interpret the Bible in a way that was affirming of their identity. While the group was offered the opportunity to become affiliated with multiple church groups such as UFMCC, Bell declined this offer as she believed that the group needed to have a South African identity.²³⁵ This was a valid concern as seen in an analysis provided by Cheryl Potgieter and Finn Reygan, whose findings of GHMCC show that there was a distinct American influence in the text and no dominant South African theme apparent.²³⁶ Potgieter and Reygan draw attention to the lack of discussion around the prevalence of polygamy in African society and the absence of South African terms relating to homosexuality or gender identity in the GHMCC. Instead Bell and her group were mentored by Bishop George Ervin from the Methodist Church who Bell stated, "took many risks in exploring this" by inviting the group to open nights at his church which "opened a can of worms for him".²³⁷ Eventually in 1997, Bell established the Deo Gloria Family Church (DGFC) in Durban; taking the name of another LGBTQ+-affirming church in Pretoria, which eventually closed down for reasons the participant was reluctant to discuss.²³⁸

²³⁴ Michelle Galloway, "Interview: Rights, activism and the power of film," *AIDS Bulletin*, date unknown, 31 in GALA, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection (hereafter OIA Collection), GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

²³⁵ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²³⁶ Potgieter and Reygan, "Disruptive or Merely Alternative?", 68 – 69.

²³⁷ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²³⁸ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

Tactics LGBTQ+ Affirming Churches Use to Combat Homophobia

Queer Theology and Reinterpretation of The Bible

LGBTQ+-affirming churches and ministers have used many strategies to counter oppressive hegemonic teachings used by churches to affirm its congregants and other LGBTQ+ people. Queer theology is an approach to Christian theology that provides a space for LGBTQ+ communities and people to explore and discuss religion and homosexuality.²³⁹ Often this approach has been applied by LGBTQ+-affirming churches and ministers through contextual readings of the Bible. Dhladhla explained that she has done this by locating specific stories that are used by mainstream churches to condemn homosexuality, like Sodom and Gomorrah, by unpacking these stories within the context of the era that these stories were written in and providing interpretations of the overall message of these stories instead.²⁴⁰ Similarly at DGFC, Bell ran a course from its inception called Homosexuality and the Bible (HATBC) which allowed people to explore the Bible in relation to faith and sexual orientation.²⁴¹ This is a core course that is taught annually at DGFC or when necessary and can also be found on the DGFC YouTube channel.²⁴² Other courses include issues of rejection as well as emotional and spiritual healing.

However, in the interviews for this study, it emerged that homosexuality is not the only aspect of identity that is looked at in this way by LGBTQ+-affirming ministers. Bell and Dhladhla stated that they have applied this way of interpreting the Bible to issues of gender

²³⁹ Finn Reygan, "'Love the Sinner, Not the Sin?' Sexual and Gender Diversity in Faith Communities," *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no.1 (2016): 1-5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3471>.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²⁴¹ This is a core course at Deo Gloria Family Church and has taken on various titles since its inception as a reflection of the evolution of societal changes in understanding and terminology. The course is currently called Reconciling Our Faith and Sexual Orientation. Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021, and Deo Gloria Family Church, "Can I Be LGBTQ+ & Christian? HATBC (Homosexuality & the Bible Course) - Deborah Bell," YouTube (YouTube, June 25, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGJiZ_Z3tklnzdgNyLvUiKyrj55X4fjf6.

²⁴² "DGFC Church (Deo Gloria Family Church)," YouTube, https://youtube.com/@dgfc?si=oM_pY4Pt_CFnAQc.

as well. Bell has done this by locating stories of women in the Bible, drawing attention to the issues of patriarchy and the treatment of women as second-class citizens during this time and challenging these notions.²⁴³ Similarly, Dhladhla was involved in a project on gender-based violence which discussed instances of violence against women in the Bible, dissected these issues and drew similarities between the treatment of women and LGBTQ+ people in the Bible.²⁴⁴ These are some of the methods that my participants have discussed using within their churches to create an LGBTQ+ affirming environment and help alleviate issues of internalised homophobia experienced by their congregants.

Collaborative Work with LGBTQ+ Organisations and Pride

Another way in which LGBTQ+-affirming churches and ministers have countered the hegemonic and oppressive views of religion is through working with other LGBTQ+ organisations. Bell recounted that upon its establishment, DGFC aligned itself with the Durban Lesbian & Gay Community & Health Centre. The Durban Lesbian & Gay Community & Health Centre was launched in August 2001 and began operating in 2002. Since then it has aimed to empower LGBTQ+ people by providing services, support and training which assists in various aspects of their lives.²⁴⁵ This is particularly important as LGBTQ+ individuals in South Africa are often at high risk of negative mental health and psychosocial wellbeing as well as sexually transmitted infections.²⁴⁶ Bell stated that DGFC and Lesbian & Gay Centre became very integrated with each other by working together on Durban's annual Pride march as well as other events. This connection has been, and continues to be, especially necessary as LGBTQ+ organisations are scarce in Durban.

²⁴³ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²⁴⁵ Margaret Roper and Eric Richardson, *Durban Lesbian & Gay Community & Health Centre: Gender HIV/AIDS Analysis* (Fitzroy, Victoria: Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, 2005).

²⁴⁶ Müller, "Scrambling for Access," 2.

Similarly, Durrheim and GHMCC have been involved with Cape Town's annual Pride march, though Durrheim stated that Pride in Cape Town has often been a disputed issue for her and her community. The politics of Pride in South Africa has been a contentious issue as many LGBTQ+ people have felt that the current Pride marches no longer reflect or address the issues of the LGBTQ+ community as previous Pride marches had done.²⁴⁷ This has culminated in the separation of many LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly black women, from the mainstream Pride march. Durrheim stated that her, and therefore GHMCC's, official stance has been to attend both Pride marches; the mainstream celebratory Pride led by gay men as well as the more recent Khumbulani Pride which has held a black queer activist stance.²⁴⁸ Durrheim stated that at both Prides, her presence has often been met with resistance and hesitance. Due to her choice to attend Pride marches in her official capacity as a Church minister, Durrheim expressed that she has been viewed with suspicion as many LGBTQ+ individuals may interpret her presence there as one of condemnation against the community.²⁴⁹ Hackman's work highlights that avoidance by the larger LGBTQ+ community may be a common experience for religious LGBTQ+ individuals who often feel ostracised because of their religious beliefs.²⁵⁰ Durrheim conveyed that she has experienced a similar hesitancy and resistance at Khumbulani Pride, though she stated that she felt that this had more to do with her presence as a White person than as a Church minister. This experience has been shared by members of her congregation, who are predominantly Coloured and White, of which some have chosen to no longer return to Khumbulani Pride.²⁵¹ Despite this,

²⁴⁷ Shaun De Waal and Anthony Manion (eds.), *Pride: Protest and Celebration* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Fanele, 2006).

²⁴⁸ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

²⁵⁰ Hackman, *Desire Work*, 30.

²⁵¹ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

Durrheim stressed that her presence at Pride as an affirming LGBTQ+ minister is more important than politics and division within the LGBTQ+ community.

However, the emergence of racial tension at Pride is not a new phenomenon. Shaun De Waal and Anthony Manion's collation for *Pride: Protest and Celebration* unpacks many black LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences with racial divisions that emerge during Pride. The most common issue of contention centres around the location of Pride and subsequently, the lack of access many black LGBTQ+ individuals have to Pride. The first ever Pride march in South Africa was organised by the Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand (GLOW) in 1990 in Johannesburg. It commenced from the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) in Braamfontein and proceeded through Hillbrow; a neighbourhood known for its tolerance and inclusivity, especially towards the LGBTQ+ community.²⁵² However, in 2002, Pride moved to the white, middle-class northern suburbs of Johannesburg and was centred around Zoo Lake due to the increase in individuals partaking in Pride and became more commercialised with the introduction of LGBTQ+ bars and clubs investing in funding Pride.²⁵³ This moved Pride further away from black townships, subsequently, increasing travel expenditure for the black LGBTQ+ community in South Africa. The commercialisation of Pride was further cemented with the introduction of an entrance fee to Zoo Lake in 2004, turning what was once a free, accessible march to an exclusive event hidden behind a paywall, thus further alienating black LGBTQ+ individuals from Pride celebrations. The exclusion of black people from Pride due to this commercialisation and relocation only

²⁵² De Waal and Manion, *Pride: Protest and Celebration*, 7 and Kirsten Jade Johnson, "'The Freedom of Wanting to Be Me': An Analysis of Beverley Ditsie's Role in South Africa's Gay Liberation Struggle, 1980s to mid-1990s." (BSocSci Honours Dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2019), 59.

²⁵³ De Waal and Manion, *Pride: Protest and Celebration*, 8.

serves to further homophobic arguments that homosexuality is unAfrican and a “white disease”.

The period between 1995 to 2008 essentially served as an important era in the process of obtaining democracy in South Africa as well as the process of developing an integration of identities for the participants through the utilisation of LGBTQ+ affirming ministry and churches. This was an important period for the participants in reconciling their intrapersonal conflict and finding ways to cope by socialising with other religious LGBTQ+ people and uncovering strategies to reinterpret Biblical scripture. In doing so, it provided the participants with ways to cope with the psychological impact of the oppression they had previously experienced. It was also an integral part of the participants learning experience of the LGBTQ+ community; with many participants stating that during this period of their life, they constantly had to unlearn past homophobic teachings and relearn ideas of inclusivity and acceptance. These lessons not only provided internal support, structure and acceptance to the participants but also allowed them to then, in turn, implement these coping mechanisms and structures to other religious LGBTQ+ people.

The Passage of LGBTQ+ Legislation and its Impact on Societal Attitudes from 2006 Onwards

After the ratification of the 1996 South African constitution which firmly secured LGBTQ+ rights and protection, much progress had been made by the LGBTQ+ liberation movement in tackling and reforming legislation which sought to criminalise LGBTQ+ people in South Africa. Guided by the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) during the late 1990s, numerous pieces of legislation were passed in South Africa to affirm LGBTQ+ people's right to equality. However, this development was not without opposition, much of which came from religious fundamentalist organisations such as the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP). The ACDP has been a major opposition to the obtainment of equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community since the inclusion of sexual orientation as a grounds for non-discrimination in the Equality Clause. According to research found in the NCGLE archival material, the ACDP believed that the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Equality Clause would be exchanging one form of evil, in this case apartheid, for another, homosexuality.²⁵⁴ One of the most contested LGBTQ+ affirming acts by religious fundamentalist groups in South Africa was the Civil Union Act.

The Civil Union Act and Marriage as a Form of Activism

The Civil Union Act was passed in 2006, making South Africa the fifth country in the world to recognise same-sex marriage.²⁵⁵ According to Fikile Vilakazi, one of my interviewees who

²⁵⁴ GALA, Wits, National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) Collection, AM 2615 (a), Folder I-A Organisational Records, I-A2 Reports and Reviews, A2.2 Reports – various, Draft Report on Constitutional and Other Lobbying, 1995.

²⁵⁵ Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion, and Shaun De Waal (eds.), *To Have and to Hold: The Making of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Fanele, 2008).

was a part of the Civil Union campaign, a large part of the opposition to the same-sex marriage campaign came from religious fundamentalist organisations such as the ACDP, traditional leaders and Muslim religious fundamentalists. Such opposition either took the form of arguments that marriage was inherently a religious act or that marriage was inherently for the purpose of procreation.²⁵⁶ Despite this opposition the NCGLE were able to sway some religious organisations.²⁵⁷ The passage of the Civil Union Act was a tremendous victory for LGBTQ+ rights in South Africa, allowing same-sex couples access to the same rights and privileges that heterosexual couples had held in terms of marriage. However, Dhladhla recalled that the passage of this Act was met with much outcry from the religious community and that “a lot of churches [organized] themselves into being against the Civil Union”.²⁵⁸ Simultaneously, outcry was also heard from the LGBTQ+ community as many, including some of my participants, felt that the Civil Union Act was not true equality with many feeling that a separate Act echoed sentiments of societal division expressed during apartheid.²⁵⁹

The theme of conflict between homosexuality and religion emerged once again in the oral history interviewees, on a structural level, as religious institutions have been allowed to decide whether they wanted to perform same-sex marriages based on their religious beliefs.²⁶⁰ Even if LGBTQ+ affirming ministers could be found within a denomination, they remain unable to register as a marriage officer and perform ceremonies unless the broader

²⁵⁶ Pierre De Vos, “The ‘Inevitability’ of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa’s Post-Apartheid State,” *South African Journal on Human Rights* 23, no. 3 (2007): 432-465, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19962126.2007.11864931>.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 8 August 2022.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, 6 July 2022.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022 and De Vos, “The ‘Inevitability’ of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa’s Post-Apartheid State,” 459 – 461.

²⁶⁰ It should be noted that this exemption is also allowed to state marriage officers see Mikki Van Zyl, “Beyond the Constitution: From Sexual Rights to Belonging,” in *The Prize and the Price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa*, Melissa E. Steyn and Mikki Van Zyl (eds.) (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2009), 364-380.

denomination registers as a whole.²⁶¹ A year after the Civil Union Act had passed, many churches in South Africa had chosen not to conduct and officiate same-sex unions. At the time there were only five licenced ministers who were able to officiate same-sex unions.²⁶² Consequently, LGBTQ+ affirming churches and ministers played a significant role in marrying same-sex couples during this time.

The Role of LGBTQ+ Affirming Churches in Conducting Same-Sex Marriages

Dhladhla mentioned that HUMCC had been officiating same-sex marriages long before the Civil Union Act had come into existence. These were known as commitment ceremonies at which the union would be blessed and same-sex couples would receive a certificate acknowledging the blessing of their union.²⁶³ Dhladhla blessed her first commitment ceremony in 1998, after she had been co-elected as the pastor for HUMCC following Thandekiso's death. Later, Dhladhla, along with Reverend Janine Preesman and Paul Mokgethi, conducted the first legally sanctioned same-sex marriage in South Africa.²⁶⁴

Bell and DGFC also played an influential role in helping to address the challenges that arose for same-sex couples who wanted to get married. This included working alongside activist organisations as well as partaking in numerous radio and press interviews to push the cause from a religious perspective.²⁶⁵ Bell recounted that Home Affairs posed many challenges for them when DGFC were trying to register as a church to allow their ministers to marry:

²⁶¹ Helen Kruuse, "Conscientious Objection to Performing Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa", *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 28, no. 2 (2014), 150–176, <https://doi.org/10.1093/lawfam/ebu001>

²⁶² Futhi Ntshingla, "Ministers Ask: to Bless Same-Sex Unions," *Sunday Times*, May 13, 2007, 5.

²⁶³ Nokuthula Dhladhla, "A Bright Future for Lesbian and Gay Christians - Interview with Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla," in *To Have and to Hold: The Making of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa*, ed. Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion, and Shaun De Waal (Auckland Park, South Africa: Fanele, 2008), 232–234.

²⁶⁴ Dhladhla, "A Bright Future for Lesbian and Gay Christians", 232.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021. Bell mentioned an article that ran in the Sunday Tribune and commented on the ludicrous nature of title used. See: Sibusiso Ngalwa, "Lesbian Pastor Longs to Hear Wedding Bells," Independent Online, July 25, 2004, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/lesbian-pastor->

...So it took a long time, there was big resistance from Home Affairs. We struggled with, with getting this done, I spent hours on the phone with Home Affairs, often daily, it took a lot of time away from the Church for me... But we did a lot of work in that sense, in pushing back on them and phoning them. And, you know, they took their time about it, they tried to stop the registrations for us getting our ministers licensed and eventually we would get some of the other activist organizations involved with us to say, [on] the legal side, to say you can't do this. You have to let Deo Gloria, you know, the ordained ministers... because there are none in Durban that are willing to do it. And Home Affairs gave us... I would go there time and time again and I would have such struggles with them.²⁶⁶

Bell would also encounter same-sex couples who either were not religious or not Christian, that would reach out to her for help because marriage officers at Home Affairs would not allow them to marry or would “lose” same-sex couples’ marriage registers.²⁶⁷ This demonstrates that despite the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights, LGBTQ+ people continued to be persecuted and treated unjustly based on religious beliefs and heteronormative social norms.

The Conflict Between Religious Freedom and LGBTQ+ Rights in South Africa

Despite the efforts of LGBTQ+ affirming churches and ministers to be inclusive, they have still remained isolated from mainstream churches for their stance in supporting homosexuality. However, religious organisations such as Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) exist to try and bridge the gap between mainstream church communities and religious LGBTQ+ people. IAM is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) established in 1995 by Reverend Pieter Oberholzer.²⁶⁸ For de Lange, IAM provided a “safe space” for her during her long interpersonal conflict with the Methodist church. IAM’s aim is to work with religious

[longs-to-hear-wedding-bells-218011](#). While I could not find the original newspaper article, I was able to access it on Independent Online.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Deborah Bell, 27 October 2021.

²⁶⁸ IAM Ministries, “Remembering IAM’s Past, Celebrating the People,” IAM Ministries | Inclusive & Affirming Ministries (IAM) - Cape Town, South Africa, June 30, 2022, <https://iam.org.za/remembering-iams-past/>.

communities to be more inclusive by creating a dialogue that empowers LGBTQ+ people.

This is done in a variety of ways, such as sensitisation training for companies and the police on issues of race and gender-based violence, anti-bias workshops, human sexuality workshops and comprehensive sexuality education for schools.²⁶⁹

While finally coming to terms with her identity as both a Christian and a lesbian, de Lange began her process of becoming an ordained minister in the Methodist Church. During this time, in 1999, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa began having discussions around homosexuality and its place within the church before finally releasing a statement in the early 2000s that declared it to be welcoming to all people.²⁷⁰ During her time at seminary, de Lange met her then wife and they began living together at the church manse, before she was finally ordained in 2006 and began working as a minister.

Due to the Methodist Church's unclear stance on homosexuality in their statement, de Lange viewed this as an opportunity to come out to her congregation by announcing her engagement to her then partner as she felt that she was "killing [herself] slowly by keeping silent".²⁷¹ For de Lange, this was not a display of activism, but rather a show of love and commitment to her partner which was warmly welcomed by her congregation.²⁷² However, as a public figure within the church community, de Lange's personal intentions to express her joy with her congregation quickly became politicised. De Lange's announcement to wed was not received well by the Methodist Church who suspended de Lange for a breach of

²⁶⁹ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022 and Wessel Bentley, "A decade of the same-sex debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (2001-2011)," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38 (2012), 2005-2220.

²⁷¹ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

²⁷² Ecclesia de Lange, "Rev. Ecclesia de Lange: 'I Lived in Denial of Who I Am and I Settled for a Life of Celibacy and Secrecy.'" Salzburg Global Seminar, September 22, 2020. <https://www.salzburgglobal.org/news/fellows/article/ecclesia-de-lange-i-lived-in-denial-of-who-i-am-and-i-settled-for-a-life-of-celibacy-and-secrecy>

clause within days of her making the announcement.²⁷³ Between 2010 to 2011, during the Church's internal arbitration, de Lange was found guilty and was dismissed as a minister in the Methodist Church.

In turn, de Lange turned to the courts for assistance on the basis of unfair dismissal. This case was momentous in that it brought to light the conflict between religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights in South Africa. This process began in 2012 with the High Court in Cape Town, then the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein, before finally appearing at the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg in 2015.²⁷⁴ Throughout this process, the court kept referring de Lange back to the internal arbitration process within the Church before it ultimately dismissed the appeal on the basis that courts cannot intervene on matters of internal rules and doctrines of the church to which members have voluntarily committed themselves.²⁷⁵ According to the ruling, the Church had the right to practice its religion and members of said religion had to conform to the "dictates, precepts, ethical standards and moral discipline which that faith exacts".²⁷⁶ Ultimately, this ruling not only endorses religious-sanctioned homophobia and heteronormativity, but does so at the expense of LGBTQ+ people's right to equality.

Durrheim's experience as a minister prior to joining GHMCC further illustrates how the Methodist Church of Southern Africa has not been as welcome to all as it has claimed.

Durrheim stated that in her experience as a minister she realised that even though the

²⁷³ Ecclesia de Lange, "Ecclesia's Journey" Inclusive and Affirming Ministries, 2009, <https://iam.org.za/ecclesias-journey/> and de Lange, "Rev. Ecclesia de Lange: 'I Lived in Denial of Who I Am and I Settled for a Life of Celibacy and Secrecy'".

²⁷⁴ Interview with Ecclesia de Lange, 6 June 2022.

²⁷⁵ Constitutional Court of South Africa (Johannesburg, South Africa). *De Lange v Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for the time being and Another* (CCT223/14) [2015] ZACC 35; 2016 (1) BCLR 1 (CC); 2016 (2) SA 1 (CC) (24 November 2015) <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2015/35.html>

²⁷⁶ Constitutional Court of South Africa (Johannesburg, South Africa). *De Lange v Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for the time being and Another* (CCT223/14) [2015] ZACC 35; 2016 (1) BCLR 1 (CC); 2016 (2) SA 1 (CC) (24 November 2015) <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2015/35.html>

Methodist Church had a vague stance on homosexuality, it was clear during conversations with other church leaders that they were not tolerant or accepting and that it was imperative for her to hide her sexual orientation for her own safety.²⁷⁷ This contradicted with Durrheim's experience of the Methodist Church as a tolerant and progressive Church. As such, Durrheim did not rush to come out but slowly came out over time to people she felt she could trust:

I didn't come out to the larger congregation, only to each- we were a large church, so [I came out] to each colleague within the church and within the circuit, which means the different Methodist churches in the area. I came out to them, one by one by one, and then suddenly my contract at the church ended unexpectedly.²⁷⁸

Durrheim stated that she was traumatised by this experience not only due to her sudden dismissal, but also the fact that she had lost her friends and support system. Consequently, this shows that while the Methodist Church has claimed to be welcome to all and to have a progressive stance, this tolerance and acceptance has not been extended to its ministers and clergy members.

Thus, not only did religion play a vital role in oppressing LGBTQ+ women during apartheid through state legislation, but it also enforced societal norms of heteronormativity and homophobia. This was experienced acutely by participants who grew up in Christian-based households and were actively involved in the Church community. While the participants' experiences were unique, many similarities can be found in their journeys through intrapersonal conflict that their identities as LGBTQ+ women and religious members created. The occurrence of intrapersonal identity conflict and the methods the participants used to overcome this conflict such as LGBTQ+ affirming churches, ministers and religious support

²⁷⁷ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Reverend Beulah Durrheim, 15 June 2021.

groups depict the ways in which religious LGBTQ+ people cope with this conflict and resisted oppression. However, while the establishment and implementation of the 1996 constitution in South Africa was a huge victory in securing LGBTQ+ rights in South Africa, religion continues to influence societal norms which enforce hegemonic beliefs of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and homophobia. In light of the above, the passing of LGBTQ+ affirming legislation has done little to alter the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ women in South Africa in traditional religious spheres. Therefore, religious LGBTQ+ affirming spaces and LGBTQ+ organisations are still needed to ensure protection from discrimination. However, these are not the only spaces in which LGBTQ+ women face discrimination, as will be shown in the next chapter, which highlights the gender discrimination that LGBTQ+ women face in liberation movements and society at large.

Chapter Two: Intersectional Blindness: Experiences of Gender and Racial Oppression Within the South African LGBTQ+ Activist

Community between 1970 – 1995

This chapter explores the various types of gender and racial oppression encountered by lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBTQ+) people within the anti-apartheid liberation movement, the South African women's movement, and the LGBTQ+ liberation movement from 1970 to 1995. The chapter deals largely with the experiences of LBTQ+ women within various activist movements, the types of oppressions they faced and analyses the ways in which they navigated and resisted that oppression. It focuses specifically on the diverse experiences of gender and racial oppression LBTQ+ women faced both socially and institutionally such as sexism and gender and racial microaggressions and how these played out in different ways based on the intersection of their identities. While gender oppression is a universal experience that many LBTQ+ women are exposed to, these experiences differ based on sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, the experience of oppression for a cisgender heterosexual woman, is different to that of a woman loving women (WLW), and both of these experiences are different from the experience of a transgender woman and a gender nonconforming individual. Lastly, it will look at the multifaceted approaches that LBTQ+ women utilised in order to combat this oppression which include: socialising; compartmentalisation of sexual and gender identity; detangling from the social sphere where oppression was experienced and the creation of new LGBTQ+ organisations that focused on the intersectional issues that LBTQ+ women faced. In order to situate this within the South African context, I will be drawing on archival research, secondary sources, and

research participant interviews that I conducted with Fikile Vilakazi, Sazi Jali, Sheila Barsel and Jade Madingwane. Table 3 below briefly outlines the differences between these participants with regards to their multiple, intersecting identities.

Table 3 Background of my LGBTQ+ participants' details

Participants	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race	Age (2022)
Fikile Vilakazi	Gender non-conforming	Lesbian	Black	48
Jade Madingwane	Cisgender woman	Queer	Black	32
Sazi Jali	Transgender woman	Pansexual	Black	27
Sheila Barsel	Cisgender woman	Lesbian	White	78

Examining The Nuanced Appearances of Gender Oppression, Racism and Homophobia Within The Anti-Apartheid Movement and The LGBTQ+ Community, 1970 – 1985

The issue of gender discrimination within the liberation movement, the women's movement, and the LGBTQ+ activist movement in South Africa has not gone undocumented. A common practice in activist movements was to rally around a specific identity and for many anti-apartheid activists, this was their racial identity as black people and the discrimination they faced from the apartheid government. Consequently, emphasis was not placed on issues of gender, largely due to the domination of men in leadership positions within the anti-apartheid activist movement.²⁷⁹ Due to this, there was a great emphasis in the anti-apartheid movement on a broader national liberation from racial and class oppression.

Experiences of Gender Oppression in the Anti-Apartheid Liberation Movement

Numerous scholarly works have discussed the treatment that many women, particularly black women, experienced in these political spaces and the various ways in which these women resisted and yielded to oppression in the anti-apartheid liberation movement.²⁸⁰ However, it should be noted that within these spaces, reports of women's participation in gender oppression towards other women has also been observed. This is due to the hierarchies that exist within sexist structures which can often lead to some women having

²⁷⁹ Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 3 – 19.

²⁸⁰ Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), Shamim Meer, ed., *Women Speak: Reflections on Our Struggles 1982-1997* (Roggebaai, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998), Mamphela Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations" in N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (eds.), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 214-227 and Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority*.

even a partial role in the disenfranchisement of other women within the same organisation. The dichotomy of the complexities between resistance to and participation in gender oppression within activist structures is addressed directly by Mamphela Ramphele, a black female anti-apartheid activist, who stated that during her time in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), she “soon learnt to be aggressive towards men who undermined women, both at the social and at the political levels”.²⁸¹ Women’s involvement within the liberation has historically been undermined, which Ramphele exhibited in her account of her involvement in the BCM where she was told that she did not understand politics and that “disrespect from little girls like [her]” would not be tolerated.²⁸² This type of sexist attitude towards women was common within liberation movements and, as stated by Ramphele, women often had to develop ways to cope with the dismissive treatment that they experienced. Additionally, many women within the movement had to deal with the men in the movement’s perception that their women activist counterparts were available and open to romantic relationships simply because they were not romantically involved with anyone.

The Impact of Male Homosociality in Intensifying Oppression Against Women Within Activist Movements

Ramphele has highlighted the ways that men would flatter women in the political movement and call them the exception to the rule of women not being able to be both intelligent and beautiful at the same time. However, this could sometimes create feelings of superiority amongst women activists who viewed themselves as “different” from other

²⁸¹ The Black Consciousness Movement was a social and political movement during the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa that focused on uniting South African people of colour against the white apartheid government which sought to oppress and divide society on the basis of race. See: Ashwin Desai, “Indian South Africans and the Black Consciousness Movement under Apartheid,” *Diaspora Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015), 37-50 and Sipho Buthelezi, “The Emergence of Black Consciousness: An Historical Appraisal,” in N. Barney Pitso, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumwana and Lindy Wilson (eds.), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 111 – 129, 218.

²⁸² Ramphele, “The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations”, 218.

women in the movement which, in turn, reinforced sexist beliefs and ideologies. Ramphele has also acknowledged the role women played in reinforcing gender roles within the BCM due to their cultural beliefs, thus largely unchallenging sexism and gender discrimination within the movement.²⁸³

Scholars such as Sedgwick, Gunkel and Storr attribute this phenomenon to male homosociality. Sedgwick defines male homosociality as “social bonds between persons of the same sex”, in this case men, which create structures for male bonding which not only enforces gender inequality, but is also characterised by “intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality”.²⁸⁴ Therefore, a clear distinction is made between homosexual and queer men and heterosexual men, with heterosexual male bonding emerging as the dominant masculinity in society.

However, it should be noted that this hegemonic masculinity is dependent on historical and social contexts and is constantly shifting. Therefore not all men, especially those from marginalised groups like gay or black men, would have access to this power in the wider societal structure. Similarly, acts that allowed men to bond together were done at the exclusion of women within this structure but “not all women are discriminated against and subjugated in the way at the same historical and cultural moment”.²⁸⁵ Ramphele highlighted this by speaking on how women within the BCM had to be “tough, persistent, and to hold [their] own in public and private debates” to receive an honorary male status.²⁸⁶ Merl Storr argues that the disempowerment of women by other women is a common practice by

²⁸³ Ramphele, “The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations”, 219.

²⁸⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 26.

²⁸⁵ Henriette Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2011), 85.

²⁸⁶ Ramphele, “The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations”, 218 – 220.

women, especially heterosexual women, as the social, economic, political and cultural inequalities between women and men within hegemonic society lead to women acting in the interests of men to gain access to these resources.²⁸⁷ This is confirmed by Ramphele who stated that women in the BCM who were given an honorary male role often looked down on women within activist ranks who “played traditional roles” such as being assigned the responsibility of providing food at meetings, workshops and conferences as well as being expected to clean up after these events.²⁸⁸ Consequently, male homosociality contributes towards a gender hierarchy which reinforces the oppression of women, not only by men, but occasionally by women as well.

Intersectional Blindness Within the Anti-Apartheid Movement

However, Ramphele was not alone in noticing the blindness that the anti-apartheid movement had with regards to other types of oppression and discrimination in society. This issue was also raised by Fikile Vilakazi, one of my oral history interview participants. Vilakazi, like many of my other black oral history participants, grew up in Soweto, Johannesburg with her extended family. However, many members of her family were not always present at home as they were either working or “they were running away from the police”.²⁸⁹ While Vilakazi does have many memories of Soweto as being a very animated, communal space to grow up in, she acknowledged that it was also a very “strange environment” to be brought up in due to apartheid.²⁹⁰ Vilakazi attributed this to the fact that the apartheid system ultimately led to a fractured family structure, as most of the time the adults, such as her grandmother who was a domestic worker, were often working and not at home which led to

²⁸⁷ Merl Storr, *Latex and Lingerie: Shopping For Pleasure at Ann Summers* (Oxford, England: Berg, 2003), 47 – 49.

²⁸⁸ Ramphele, “The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations”, 219 – 220.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 8 August 2022.

²⁹⁰ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

“absences of parenthood” and “absences of bonding”.²⁹¹ According to Vilakazi, this created a “zombie space” in which she, and the other children in her family, developed self-reliance as they would have to look after themselves and figure out things like meals on their own.²⁹² However, for Vilakazi, having adults in the house did not automatically fix these problems and, for her at least, caused problems of a different kind.

Vilakazi stated that there was a lot of anger within her household, which she retrospectively attributes to the apartheid system and the experiences of racial oppression that many of the adult members of her family were exposed to. The oppressive force of the apartheid system was experienced by many black people, and especially those living in townships such as Soweto. This created a lot of frustration and exhaustion throughout the day which was internalised and lingered when her family members came home from work, creating a palpable air of tension which Vilakazi could not understand at the time as a child. Thus, while Vilakazi described her relationship with her family as being a close one filled with many happy memories, she acknowledged that there was also a large element of violence within the household. This ultimately led to Vilakazi detaching herself from being confined to her home and spending time on the streets of Soweto with her friends instead.²⁹³

Vilakazi described growing up in Soweto as being a part of a “completely politically vibrant society”.²⁹⁴ Indeed, Soweto had often been a site of protest, with the 1976 Soweto Uprising protest over the apartheid government’s policy to implement Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools being the most notable protest.²⁹⁵ Due to this, many people in

²⁹¹ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

²⁹² Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

²⁹³ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

²⁹⁵ Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu. “Chapter 7: The Soweto Uprising – Part 1: Soweto”. *Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*. (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006) 334-336.

Soweto, according to Vilakazi, “[grew] into activism... without even noticing that [they] are in this path, because that was just the way of life”.²⁹⁶ While Vilakazi did not align herself with a specific anti-apartheid organisation, she stated that she was a part of the anti-apartheid movement when she was younger. Based on this involvement with the anti-apartheid movement, Vilakazi noticed, like Ramphele, that there was a blindness by many anti-apartheid activists to intersectional oppression and stated that:

...Ideas of discrimination, and ideas of prejudice, were clearer when we spoke about race, but as soon as we needed to talk about anything else that is not race, somehow those ideas disappeared in the minds of, of liberation fighters. And it’s the same questions in the same struggle we’ve had around patriarchy, you know, there’s just the inability and this erasure, and this blindness to the intersections of systems of oppression, you know. So the anti-apartheid movement had that thing, it had that easy blindness to other kinds and other forms of violations, whereas they could see clearly through race, they just couldn’t see clearly through sexual orientation, through gender identity and so on.²⁹⁷

It is from this quote by Vilakazi that I have drawn on the idea of intersectional blindness which I believe to be an unawareness to other types of oppression due to the absence of direct exposure to a specific facet of identity that is oppressed under hegemonic societal structure. For instance, one can propose that men within the anti-apartheid movement would not be sympathetic to the struggles and issues of gender oppression that women within the movement face, as gender was not an area in which they were severely oppressed. The above statement by Vilakazi, a black queer woman, coincides with Ramphele, a black straight cisgender woman, and shows that the poor and sexist treatment of women within the anti-apartheid liberation movement was not a unique, singular experience but to some extent a standardised treatment experienced by many black women involved in the anti-apartheid movement. Ramphele attributed this largely to black African

²⁹⁶ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

traditional and cultural gender roles being transposed into the BCM and anti-apartheid liberation movement as a whole.²⁹⁸ However, as I will show in the next section by analysing the experience of Sheila Barsel, a white woman that was involved in the anti-apartheid movement, gender oppression within the anti-apartheid liberation movement was not limited to culture and tradition, but rather an experience for many women and gender non-conforming activists across race groups.

Sheila Barsel, one of my oral history interview participants, is a well-known and prominent female figure within the anti-apartheid liberation movement.²⁹⁹ Barsel also grew up in Johannesburg, but within white middle-class suburbs such as Rosebank and Parktown which she viewed as a “kind of Jewish ghetto”.³⁰⁰ While Barsel stated that this was not like a real Orthodox Jewish ghetto, it had a similar feeling in the sense that it was a space inhabited by many Jewish families which Barsel and her family had some interaction with. Barsel described the neighbourhood as “quite conservative” and that even within her own family there was a hesitancy to enter into political discussions, despite her father’s interest in intellectual pursuits (specifically with regards to Jewish history).³⁰¹

Barsel attributed this largely to her uncle and aunt’s connection to the liberation movement, specifically with the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) which ultimately led to them being banned by the state.³⁰² This created a strain within the family which was exacerbated by the restrictions

²⁹⁸ Ramphela, “The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations”, 219.

²⁹⁹ Barsel is her maiden name. She is also often referred to as Sheila Lapinsky in other texts and works which is the surname of her late husband, but she has since reverted back to using her maiden name.

³⁰⁰ Interview with Sheila Barsel, Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 7 September 2022.

³⁰¹ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁰² Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022. Barsel clarified that though both her aunt and her uncle were put on trial under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, her aunt was the only one of the two who had joined the SACP and found guilty. The charges against her uncle were dropped and he was acquitted. For

placed upon Barsel's aunt and uncle during their state banning. Topics involving politics were not discussed particularly around Barsel's teenage and young adult years due to her family's, specifically her father's, fear of their safety. Subsequently, Barsel's contact with her father's side of the family was limited due to the political restrictions placed on her aunt and uncle, and also because her father "was terrified" that political involvement and discussion would lead to the rest of the family being placed in jail or being banned by the state.³⁰³ However, this did not deter Barsel, who felt a longing to be a part of her aunt and uncle's family, particularly because of the "fascinating discussions they had at the dinner table" and the disconnect she felt with her own family as the youngest of three children.³⁰⁴

Barsel felt she "wasn't actually a part of that family" and attributed her feeling of disconnection from her own immediate family to both an "incest connection with a grandfather" as well as an "intense attachment" to her family's black "female servant".³⁰⁵ According to Barsel, the incest connection that she had with her grandfather was not recognised by her family, and largely ignored. In comparison, Barsel suspected that her nanny was aware of what had occurred between Barsel and her grandfather and that she would try to protect Barsel:

And the African woman, I think she realized because my grandfather would visit on a Sunday, that's when all the stuff happened and I think she realized that on Mondays

further information on this trial, known as The 'Fischer' Trial, see: Z. Nkosi, "The 'Fischer' Trial," *The African Communist* Number 22 Third Quarter (1965), 46 – 55 <https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/acn22650001997800002219657>.

³⁰³ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022. The family in question here is Barsel's own immediate family. The word servant that is used by Barsel in the interview is an outdated term and is no longer used in the contemporary context but is included in this discussion to serve as an indicator of the past attitudes and terminologies used towards black people at the time. However, Barsel also refers to this woman as her nanny in some parts of the interview and therefore, I will continue to refer to her as such throughout the remainder of the thesis.

when she came back, there was something different with me. And then she disappeared. And I was distraught.³⁰⁶

While Barsel acknowledged that her aunt and uncle's involvement in the liberation struggle played a significant role in shaping her activism, she is of the belief that her activism was more primarily shaped by her attachment to her nanny. She felt a disconnect between being told that she was not allowed to view her nanny as human, however from her point of view and personal experience, her nanny was her protector who she shared closeness with, a closeness she did not experience with the rest of her family.

Upon her enrolment at the University of the Witwatersrand, Barsel was exposed to a more direct approach to activism through the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) local committee when the Student Representative Council (SRC) President at the time "anointed" her on the spot due to the fact that Barsel was studying Science and the local committee needed a Science representative.³⁰⁷ It was through this that Barsel started interacting with many other people of colour on a more personal, one-on-one level, which she believed "opened up [her] eyes to what was happening in a way".³⁰⁸ This highlights the differences in how Barsel and Vilakazi became involved in the anti-apartheid movement; Vilakazi through environmental exposure due to her location and surroundings based on her race and Barsel through social exposure through her involvement in NUSAS. However, this distinction between white activists and black activists in the anti-apartheid movement is not necessarily a new one, but rather one that has been addressed by many scholars such as Steve Biko, who stated:

³⁰⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022. The National Union of South African Students was an anti-apartheid movement that was open to all race groups and focused on the needs of university students. However, despite its inclusive racial approach, it consisted largely of white students.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

The liberals view the oppression of blacks as a problem that has to be solved, an eye sore spoiling an otherwise beautiful view. From time to time the liberals make themselves forget about the problem or take their eyes off the eyesore. On the other hand, in oppression the blacks are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment. There is a struggle to get out of the situation and not merely to solve a peripheral problem as in the case of the liberals.³⁰⁹

This denotes a key difference between white and black anti-apartheid activists. This is not to state that Barsel's work and involvement in the anti-apartheid movement did not play an integral role in the road towards democracy in South Africa, but simply to highlight upon the various ways in which individuals were exposed to the anti-apartheid movement. Despite this difference in initiation into the anti-apartheid movement, Barsel's involvement provides further enlightenment into how women's voices and perspectives were overlooked within the anti-apartheid movement.

Barsel stated that, like many anti-apartheid organisations, NUSAS consisted predominantly of men in leadership positions but that "when you went to a Congress... there were quite a lot of... there were some females there."³¹⁰ Overall, Barsel stated that while the NUSAS organisation were not explicitly anti-women, she did not think that they were overtly supportive of women either.³¹¹ This shows that regardless of the racial and cultural differences of various anti-apartheid organisations, the treatment and view of women within these organisations was consistent throughout the movement as a whole and speaks to a larger, societal view of women as inferior to that of men.

³⁰⁹ Steve Biko, *I Write what I Like*, edited by Aelred Stubbs, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987), 22.
<https://www.proquest.com/books/i-write-what-like/docview/2138581947/se-2>.

³¹⁰ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³¹¹ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

The Role of Anti-Apartheid Movements in Mobilising and Politicising Women

It should, and has been, acknowledged that the anti-apartheid liberation movement played an important role in mobilising and politicising women to focus on the intersectional issues of gender, class and race that affected women.³¹² A clear example of this can be seen with Barsel, who stated that she only became involved with the women's movement due to her political involvement with the United Democratic Front (UDF) and later, the African National Congress (ANC).³¹³ Meer has stated that despite the existence of a women's division in many anti-apartheid organisations and the inclusion of non-sexist clauses in anti-apartheid organisations' constitutions, women's issues were not taken seriously and that this was rather a strategy to link the grassroots struggle run by women to the national liberation struggle.³¹⁴ Consequently, while the anti-apartheid movement was important in politicising women, it did so for its own benefit rather than interest or concern in women's liberation.

Experiences of Homonegativity in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Women's Movement

Like women's issues, LGBTQ+ issues and rights were not considered important within the anti-apartheid movement. These issues in particular were often kept hidden due to homonegative views within the anti-apartheid movement. In this section, I will draw heavily on the experiences of male homosexual activists within the anti-apartheid movement due to the scarcity of knowledge on LGBTQ+ women's experiences in this space, which further reinforces the hidden nature of homosexuality within the anti-apartheid liberation movement.

³¹² Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 21.

³¹³ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³¹⁴ "No to Rape – Soweto women march against rape", *SPEAK*, 1990 in Shamim Meer, ed., *Women Speak: Reflections on Our Struggles 1982-1997* (Roggebaai, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998), 87, 119.

Suppression of Identity Within the Anti-Apartheid Movement

The denial of the belief that there was a legitimacy to fighting for the rights for the LGBTQ+ community can be seen clearly when, as mentioned earlier, in an interview with Peter Tatchell in 1987, Ruth Mompati, a prominent woman activist in the ANC, stated that “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”.³¹⁵ This was said alongside other homonegative statements as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter. It is in this context that many LGBTQ+ people involved in the anti-apartheid movement often hid their sexual orientation. Barsel corroborated this theory by stating that within NUSAS, one of the male leaders was homosexual but that “if people knew about the person they kept it hush-hush”.³¹⁶ Similarly, in *Defiant Desire*, Simon Nkoli, a prominent gay anti-apartheid activist, recalled the negative reaction other anti-apartheid activists had upon discovery of his sexual orientation.³¹⁷

During his time with the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the Delmas Treason Trial, once Nkoli disclosed his identity as a gay man, meetings were held daily to discuss his capabilities in the movement because of his sexual orientation.³¹⁸ Nkoli stated that concerns around his sexual orientation and his role in the anti-apartheid movement centred around “that homosexuality was un-African, that [they] cannot accept [being] led by a gay person; and that [he] had been dishonest by hiding this vital information.”³¹⁹ Ultimately, Nkoli felt that his coming out and disclosure of his identity as a gay man affected

³¹⁵ Mmanaledi Mataboge, “Struggle Icon Ruth Mompati Mothered The Movement,” The Mail & Guardian, May 15, 2015, <https://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-15-struggle-icon-ruth-mompoti-mothered-the-movement/>.

³¹⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³¹⁷ Simon Nkoli, “Wardrobes: Coming Out as a Black Gay Activist in South Africa,” in Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.), *Defiant Desire*. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994), 249-257.

³¹⁸ Nkoli, “Wardrobes: Coming Out as a Black Gay Activist in South Africa,” 253 – 255.

³¹⁹ Nkoli, “Wardrobes: Coming Out as a Black Gay Activist in South Africa,” 253.

his work in the anti-apartheid movement, as he became more hesitant to raise his suggestions because he felt that he was not being taken seriously.³²⁰

From Nkoli's experience, it can be seen that male homosociality creates a structure which reinforces hegemonic masculinity, but that not all men are included in this structure. In this case, Nkoli's homosexuality created a divide between him and the heterosexual members of the anti-apartheid organisation and led to doubt in his ability within the movement; a problem he did not have prior to the discovery of his sexual orientation. While Nkoli's account is from the perspective of a black gay man in the anti-apartheid movement, his experience of coming out and the reaction with which he was met with, can help one to ascertain what type of reaction an openly woman loving women (WLW) in the anti-apartheid movement would be met with.

While Barsel was not able to provide an in-depth discussion of the topic due to her limited interaction with the women's movement, she stated that there were many women within women's organisations, such as The Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), who were lesbians but hid their identity.³²¹ FEDSAW was established in April 1954 in Johannesburg when multiple women's organisations decided to unite themselves under one body.³²² FEDSAW has been recognised for the significant role that it played in the national liberation struggle through its linking of women's rights and liberation to the national anti-apartheid liberation struggle, as well as its multicultural stance and its "rejection of colour consciousness".³²³ Despite, its supposedly welcoming and progressive nature, FEDSAW was

³²⁰ Nkoli, "Wardrobes: Coming Out as a Black Gay Activist in South Africa," 253.

³²¹ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³²² Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 153 – 164 and Bev Orton, *Women, Activism and Apartheid South Africa: Using Play Texts to Document the Herstory of South Africa* (Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing, 2018).

³²³ Orton, *Women, Activism and Apartheid South Africa*, 27.

not a place in which LGBTQ+ women could openly exist which Barsel acknowledged by stating that “none of them were out as lesbians, but they were substantial numbers of lesbians in... those organizations.”³²⁴

The combination of Ramphele, Barsel and Meer’s accounts of the experience of sexism and discrimination against women in the anti-apartheid movement, Nkoli’s experience of homophobia within the anti-apartheid movement and Barsel’s insights on the concealment of lesbian identity within women’s organisations, it would not be farfetched to conclude that the anti-apartheid movement was a very unsafe space for an openly LGBTQ+ individual to be in. In fact, Vilakazi noted that the anti-apartheid movement prior to the early 1990s was a hostile environment to be in for anyone who did not fit into the expected heteronormative standards.³²⁵

Experiences of Racism and Gender Oppression Within Early LGBTQ+ Organisations

The anti-apartheid movement, however, was not the only political space in which LGBTQ+ women could not openly exist. Despite its claim of being apolitical, the existence of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) as an LGBTQ+ social organisation was a political act as homophobic legislation was still in effect and actively enforced upon at the time of GASA’s establishment in 1982.³²⁶ Its role as a social organisation allowed LGBTQ+ people a space to openly express their identity and socialise with other LGBTQ+ people with the premise that it would help to change “the distorted, prejudiced and uninformed image held by the

³²⁴ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³²⁵ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

³²⁶ Mark Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom,” in Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.), *Defiant Desire*, (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994), 48 – 62.

broader public” towards LGBTQ+ people in South African society.³²⁷ Thus GASA attempted to use visibility as a way to challenge societal notions, a strategy that is utilised deliberately and mastered by later intersectional LGBTQ+ activists that will be discussed in extensive detail in the following chapter.

Endemic Racism Within GASA

Nevertheless, this inclusion and unity was not always extended to all members of the LGBTQ+ community. Gay activists such as Nkoli were vocal about their experience within GASA as black members and the exclusion they faced within the organisation. Despite belonging to the organisation, many black members in GASA were often met with racism both within the larger LGBTQ+ community and within GASA itself. In “A Different Fight for Freedom”, Gevisser draws on Nkoli’s experience of being turned away from LGBTQ+ clubs regardless of having a GASA-issued slip confirming his identity as a GASA member which should have, therefore, been his exclusive admittance into these clubs based on his connection to the organisation.³²⁸ However, this treatment was not limited to gay clubs and bars, but also found within the GASA white membership itself who viewed the black GASA members as too noisy and considered reducing the inclusion of new black GASA members for fear of theft.³²⁹

Barsel became involved with GASA in 1983 largely due to isolation and in hopes that she would be able to find people that she had something in common with and whom she could share her recently discovered sexual orientation with. While Barsel’s experience in GASA deals mainly with the sexism within the organisation, which will be discussed in-depth later

³²⁷ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 51.

³²⁸ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 52.

³²⁹ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 52.

in the chapter, she was also acutely aware of the racism within the organisation and stated that racism was one of the reasons why she ended up leaving GASA:

I mean, the, the, the, the older white men, many of them came looking for a black fuck, you know? ...white older men were, were being predatory on young black men and of course, it was a financial, it was a slavery thing that the white men were after... So the racism was endemic and it was actually just the whole thing of, of, of male supremacy and white male supremacy. Because the white man were top of the pile. It was hectic. It was very hectic. That's part of the reason that put me off GASA.³³⁰

These above examples contradict GASA's insistence that it was a nonracist apolitical organisation; a fact that was further proven during its failure to support Nkoli during his arrest, as this would have aligned GASA with the anti-apartheid liberation struggle.

Systemic Sexism Within GASA

Comparably, LGBTQ+ women who were members of GASA were likewise met with discrimination within this social organisation. While GASA was a predominantly white male organisation, in 1983 Barsel became the chairperson of GASA-6010, GASA's regional branch in Cape Town. This was through the previous chairperson offering her the position of chair, which Barsel accepted. However, she described the 15 months during which she was chairperson of GASA as "hell" largely due to her female identity.³³¹ Being the female chairperson of a predominantly male organisation was a very isolating and alienating experience for Barsel, who found herself having to put up with numerous misogynistic comments from the male members of the committees throughout her reign as chairperson and as one of the few woman members of GASA.³³² However, it was also at these meetings

³³⁰ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³³¹ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³³² Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022. Unfortunately, Barsel did not provide distinct examples of what types of misogynistic comments were made in the interview.

that Barsel met her partner, Julia Nicol, at a GASA meeting in 1984.³³³ Barsel stated that her relationship with Nicol was a very close and intense one, though the sexual aspect was not a large part of their relationship and contemplated if this could be because they, perhaps, both were on the asexual spectrum to some degree.³³⁴ Consequently, in this way, GASA was able to serve its function as a socialising space for Barsel. As an anti-apartheid activist, Barsel noted that while GASA did not personally align with her values and political beliefs, the organisation did serve an important function within the LGBTQ+ community at the time with regards to creating a socialising space for the community despite not everyone being able to access these spaces as discussed previously.

Early LGBTQ+ Organisations and the Psychosocial Resources They Utilised to Support the LGBTQ+ Community

Psychosocial Resources Provided by GASA

Barsel commended GASA's attention to the LGBTQ+ community's need for psychosocial support which was done through the creation of a newsletter and the establishment of a counselling service.³³⁵ Nicol, Barsel's partner, was involved in the production of the GASA newsletter. The newsletter was created to help navigate people through their sexual identity by "reaching out to people who were... unsure of their homosexuality or... who

³³³ Nicol lived with a severe disability and passed away in 2019. While her involvement with GASA and in the LGBTQ+ liberation movement is important, it is not covered in this thesis due to the limitations of the project. However, her activism and life story can be found at the GALA Queer Archive in the Julia Nicol collection.

³³⁴ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022. It should be noted that this was just a thought that Barsel had on the nature of their relationship and the lack of sex within it, and not confirmation of Nicol's actual sexual identity. Asexuality can be defined as a lack of sexual or erotic attraction for another person. See: Anthony F. Bogaert, *Understanding Asexuality* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) 21 – 22.

³³⁵ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

were isolated” and Barsel stated that “Julia [Nicol] did an outstanding job... in that regard”.³³⁶

In 1982, the GASA-6010 members met to discuss establishing a counselling service which would later become the Triangle Project.³³⁷ The Triangle Project is an LGBTQ+ non-profit organisation that ensures the enforcement of the constitutional right to freedom against discrimination based on sexual orientation. It also focuses on counselling, sexual health care services and outreach programmes.³³⁸ The counselling service was initiated in 1983 during which the majority of the clientele base was established through word of mouth until the GASA-6010 made a formal link with Lifeline Western Cape and implemented a 24-hour counselling service through use of radio paging services.³³⁹ Barsel was unable to provide exact details of what types of issues and concerns were brought up with the counselling service, as her role in it was purely from an organisational standpoint as the chairperson of GASA at the time. However, she surmised that the concerns were probably very similar to the ones that the Triangle Project deals with today, such as “isolation, homelessness, being thrown out of home, those sorts of things...”.³⁴⁰ It is almost ironic that support for isolated LGBTQ+ individuals, Barsel’s entire reason for joining GASA, was given towards outside LGBTQ+ individuals but not practiced within the organisation itself.

Although Barsel was not actively involved in the practical aspect of counselling, she believed that the majority of the people accessing the counselling service were white, gay men and

³³⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³³⁷ GALA Queer Archive (hereafter GALA), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), The Gay Advice Bureau (GAB) / Gay & Lesbian Counselling (GLC) Collection (hereafter GAB/GLC Collection), AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, GASA 6010 Counselling Services Interim Report, 25 January 1986.

³³⁸ See: “Our History,” The Triangle Project, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://triangle.org.za/our-history/>.

³³⁹ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, GASA 6010 Counselling Services Interim Report, 25 January 1986 and GASA 6010 Counselling Services Report for the Year Ending, 29 February 1984.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

that there were few, if any, LGBTQ+ women who made use of the service.³⁴¹ Barsel also noted that the view by GASA members towards transgender people was “tolerant but [she didn’t] think it was affirming”.³⁴² Consequently, while the resources GASA provided were important and necessary to support the LGBTQ+ community, this psychosocial support seemed to mainly benefit white, gay men. However, this issue is not limited to GASA, but something that can also be seen by another LGBTQ+ counselling organisation that existed at the time, the Gay Advice Bureau, which later became known as Gay and Lesbian Counselling.

The Gay Advice Bureau/Gay and Lesbian Counselling

The Gay Advice Bureau (GAB) was established in 1982 and provided counselling services on LGBTQ+ related issues via telephone calls and letter writing.³⁴³ Since its inception GAB handled approximately 7000 counselling calls and 21000 information calls.³⁴⁴ From my own calculations, around 732 calls were from LGBTQ+ women who required counselling.³⁴⁵ In fact, by 1984, GAB had identified that the most common problems from clients were from Afrikaans gay men who had difficulty reconciling their religious and sexual identity.³⁴⁶ The other most common problem that clients experienced was trying to find emergency accommodation.³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁴² Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁴³ GALA, Wits, GAB/ GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.1 Committee, Contract Between GAB Management Committee and GAB Counsellors.

³⁴⁴ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.1 Committee, GLC Chairperson’s Annual Report, 29 August 1998.

³⁴⁵ This figure should be regarded as an estimate as it is derived from my personal analysis and handling of the data based solely on GAB Counselling Reports that were demarcated as female and not an officially confirmed number. Some of the counselling reports within the collection did not specify the gender of the person that was receiving counselling thus creating a variance in the exact figure of LGBTQ+ women who received counselling at GAB.

³⁴⁶ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.5 Meetings, 11 January 1984 Counsellor’s Meeting Minutes.

³⁴⁷ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.5 Meetings, 11 January 1984 Counsellor’s Meeting Minutes.

In 1984, GAB assisted with 26 calls and walk-ins from LGBTQ+ women who needed counselling.³⁴⁸ Counselling themes that occurred were issues of identity, acceptance, loneliness, relationship issues (such as cheating, break-ups and abusive relationships), incest, alcohol and drug abuse, suicidal ideation and religious issues.³⁴⁹ Two of the women that received counselling had issues with being discriminated against based on their sexual orientation: one was kicked out of her accommodation after her landlord learnt she was gay, the other's husband found out that she had had an affair with a woman and wanted to divorce her and was threatening violence towards her and the other woman involved.³⁵⁰

While this identifies some of the issues that LGBTQ+ women were dealing with at the time, the data collected is quite limited in comparison to the multiple files and GAB Counselling Reports on gay men's issues and concerns during this time. Similarly, GAB also identified that there was a disconnect in being able to provide adequate services to black LGBTQ+ individuals, regardless of gender.

The Problem with Community Based Counselling by LGBTQ+ Organisations

As outlined above, many early organisations were unable to provide counselling and psychosocial resources to all members of the LGBTQ+ community and, in fact, these resources were mainly utilised by white gay men. As many researchers have pointed out, this is largely due to the utilisation of psychology as a weapon to enforce the cultural, economic, social, and political structures that shape it in order to control those who do not fall in line with the dominant societal structures of the time.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 2.1 Counselling Reports, 1984 Files.

³⁴⁹ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 2.1 Counselling Reports, 1984 Files.

³⁵⁰ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 2.1 Counselling Reports, 1984 Files.

³⁵¹ Tiffany F. Jones, "Promoting Unequal Access in South Africa? Contemporary Assertions of Community-Based Mental Services and the Legacy of Community Psychiatry from the 1940s to the 1960s," *Kleio* 38, no. 2 (2006),

Within the apartheid context, psychology was influential in the implementation of oppression by enforcing power structures such as racism, homophobia, sexism and classism. However, Tiffany F. Jones argues that within the South African context, attempts have been made to implement community-based psychology and psychiatry and move past the traditional disciplinary practices to address resource problems that many mental health practitioners and institutions faced. However, this has often left, and continues to leave, communities of colour neglected due to the racial structures that existed, and continue to exist, at the time.³⁵²

This can clearly be seen in the case of GAB who received numerous letters for counselling, with many of these letters being sent by black LGBTQ+ people as they did not have access to a telephone to receive counselling.³⁵³ The majority of these letters dealt with feelings of isolation and while the responses were given by the GAB counsellors to the best of their abilities, many of the counsellors felt that they were unable to provide adequate support to their black clients due to language barriers, particularly with their clients who communicated in isiZulu.³⁵⁴ It should also be noted here that due to the form in which counselling was utilised by many black LGBTQ+ people, in other words through letters, meant that there would have been a delay in resolving their issues in comparison to the instantaneity of counselling over a telephone call.

Consequently, even though attempts were made by GAB to provide black LGBTQ+ people with the psychosocial support that they needed, this support was limited due to the

166 - 167, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00232080585380041> and Celia Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (London, England: Sage Publications, 1987).

³⁵² Jones, "Promoting Unequal Access in South Africa?", 168.

³⁵³ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.2 Constitution and Organisational Overview, GAB: Gay and Lesbian Counselling Report, date unknown.

³⁵⁴ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.5 Meetings, GAB Supervision Meeting Minutes, 18 January 1993 and Folder 2.1 Counselling Reports, 1992 Files.

prevalent racial structures that existed which worked to intentionally hinder black people's access to resources in general, in order to ensure their continued oppression. While GAB was aware of the lack of psychosocial resources available to black LGBTQ+ individuals and made an effort to address this deficit, it cannot be stated with certainty that this stance was also one adopted by GASA based on various accounts, both within this project and other scholarly works, that have addressed the racism that permeated within GASA at the time.³⁵⁵

Subsequently, while these LGBTQ+ organisations did offer psychosocial resources to support the LGBTQ+ community at the time, the main beneficiaries of this support were white, gay men. Racism and sexism were still pervasive within these organisations. So too within anti-apartheid organisations, claims of non-sexism were made, but as shown above, these were not practiced within the organisation itself. Issues that did not deal solely with the main identity that the organisation congregated around were overlooked within these spaces and considered to not be of importance. Ultimately, within these organisations, there was a separation of identity, though it can be postulated whether this separation was intentional or not, it is one that appears to be universal in organisations with a predominantly male leadership.

³⁵⁵ Another reason that this cannot be said with certainty is due to the limitations of this project, I was not able to look through the GASA Collection at the GALA Archives.

A Closer Examination of the Shift Towards a More Multifaceted

Approach to Activism, 1985 – 1995

Besides the isolation that she experienced, Barsel also became frustrated with GASA due to its supposed apolitical stance. As an anti-apartheid activist who had been banned by the state in 1973, Barsel, and many other members of GASA who were a part of the anti-apartheid struggle, became increasingly vexed with GASA's conservative, yet reactionary, stance. Barsel became involved with the UDF at this time but did not mention it to GASA as:

It was apolitical as hell! You know, and if you talk, if you said the word ANC, they would run a mile, or UDF they'd, they'd run a mile. They were completely reactionary. They were completely-, the most of them might have been, would be in the progressive party at the time...³⁵⁶

Thus, Barsel and a few other members in GASA who were politically affiliated with the national liberation struggle, left GASA and established Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression (LAGO) in 1986.

Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression (LAGO)/ Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA)

LAGO was also partially founded in response to the declared state of emergency in June 1986.³⁵⁷ Barsel described the demographic of LAGO as "Mainly men... mainly white";

³⁵⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022. When discussing LAGO/OLGA, Barsel did not make much mention of how many LBTQ+ women were involved in the organisation. During the interview, Barsel's main focus was on the issues of racism within the organisation more than issues of gender oppression.

³⁵⁷ Derrick Fine and Julia Nicol, "The Lavender Lobby: Working for Lesbian and Gay Rights Within the Liberation Movement," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (Braamfontein, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1994), 269 and Zanele Muholi, *Faces + Phases: 2006-14* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2014), 343.

however, the formation of this group marked the shift in the convergence of the LGBTQ+ liberation movement with the anti-apartheid liberation movement.³⁵⁸

This connection between the two movements was a pinnacle moment as it highlighted the intersection between race and sexuality, two movements which, as outlined above, previously existed, to a certain extent, in isolation from each other. As evident, this was not a true separation between the groups but rather a conscious choice made by LGBTQ+ individuals involved in both movements that were formed by the societal and cultural beliefs of the time. Race and sexuality, as Henriette Gunkel argues, are inherently interlinked and cannot be viewed in separation from each other due to the apartheid government entwining race and sexuality together through the regulation of racial segregation through state legislation to ensure racial purity within the white community.³⁵⁹ This demonstrates that despite these movements' fixation on only one aspect of identity, due to the nature of South African legislation, freedom from oppression would not have been able to be truly obtained unless all facets of oppression were confronted with.

LAGO's goal was the "establishment of a non-racial South Africa free of all forms of oppression, focusing in particular on the oppression of lesbians and gay men."³⁶⁰ Despite largely consisting of a white demographic, LAGO's founders were frustrated at both the lack of a political stance by gay organisations such as GASA, and also at the treatment of LGBTQ+ people in the anti-apartheid movement in the Western Cape. According to Barsel, the organisation decided in 1987 to change their name to the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA) so as to make the organisation seem more political and "be much more in

³⁵⁸ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁵⁹ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 28 – 31.

³⁶⁰ Fine and Nicol, "The Lavender Lobby," 269 – 270.

line... with the way political organizations were naming themselves.”³⁶¹ This primarily had to do with OLGA’s application for affiliation with the UDF in 1989, one which was met with “giggles” and “disbelief”, but was ultimately accepted due to the credence of its founders like Barsel and Ivan Toms, who were widely acknowledged for their role in the anti-apartheid movement.³⁶² Despite OLGA’s open alliance with an anti-apartheid organisation, many black people did not feel as though they truly belonged to the organisation, which eventually led to the establishment of the Association of Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians (ABIGALE) in 1992.³⁶³

The Association of Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians (ABIGALE) and its Break Away From OLGA

ABIGALE was co-founded by predominantly black and Coloured LGBTQ+ individuals, of which included Midi Achmat, Theresa Raizenberg and Zackie Achmat, each of which had been involved with anti-apartheid activism. As a black-led organisation, ABIGALE was dedicated to being explicitly political and nonracist to ensure that its largely black working class members had access to the same psychosocial resources as other LGBTQ+ individuals in Cape Town.³⁶⁴ ABIGALE’s more militant approach to activism has been well documented and can clearly be seen in the case of ABIGALE organising a picket protest outside of Strawbs, a gay nightclub which ABIGALE claimed to be racial discriminatory towards its black patrons.³⁶⁵ Despite ABIGALE’s break away from OLGA due to “people [feeling] that there wasn’t space for not white people” and the challenges that this break created at the time,

³⁶¹ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁶² Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 75.

³⁶³ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022 and Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom”, 79.

³⁶⁴ Mandisa Mbali, “Gay AIDS Activism in South Africa Prior to 1994,” in Vasu Reddy, Theo Sandfort and Laetitia Rispel (eds.), *From Social Silence to Social Science: Same-Sex Sexuality, HIV & AIDS and Gender in South Africa*, (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2009), 80 – 99.

³⁶⁵ Mbali, “Gay AIDS Activism in South Africa Prior to 1994”, 92 and Taghmeda Achmat, Theresa Raizenberg, and Rachel Holmes, “Midi and Theresa: Lesbian Activism in South Africa,” *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 3 (2003), 643–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178732>.

Barsel believed that ABIGALE were “absolutely excellent and they did amazing work.”³⁶⁶

Regardless of these differences, both OLGA and ABIGALE played an important role in lobbying for LGBTQ+ rights in the 1990s, which will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

The Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand

The late 1980s similarly led to the establishment of the Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand (GLOW) by Simon Nkoli on the 9th of April 1988, following his acquittal from the Delmas Treason Trial.³⁶⁷ Nkoli wanted to establish an organisation that combined the intersection of identities of homosexuality and race; identities that were neglected within both the anti-apartheid movement and the LGBTQ+ community. In doing so, Nkoli created a space for black LGBTQ+ people to socialise and discuss all aspects of their identity. As Gunkel argues, black LGBTQ+ organisations like GLOW are important because it allows black LGBTQ+ people a space in which they can “come out” and embrace their identities as both black people and LGBTQ+ people, as well as allow them to “come in” to a subculture that was previously denied to them, both as black people in the LGBTQ+ community and as LGBTQ+ people in the anti-apartheid movement.³⁶⁸ This space was particularly important to people like Beverly Ditsie, who found it to be an inclusive political space where she was able to socialise with people who shared both her political values and beliefs and her non-heterosexual identity, two aspects which, like many black LGBTQ+ activists at the time, had previously been neglected.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁶⁷ Beverley Palesa Ditsie, *Simon & I*, YouTube, 53:40, posted by “Steps For the Future”, 29 August 2016, <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=simon+%26+i+youtube+bev+ditsie&&view=detail&mid=D55698FF1DF8D82EF600D55698FF1DF8D82EF600&&FORM=VRDGAR>.

³⁶⁸ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 67.

While other LGBTQ+ organisations existed largely to provide opportunities for socialising only, GLOW incorporated the duality of socialising and politicisation into its structural framework as an organisation. Ditsie and Donné Rundle, one of GLOW's co-chairs, have both recalled that there would often be meetings held that focused on politics which would eventually culminate in "partying the whole night".³⁶⁹ While it is unclear exactly where these meetings took place, clubs in Hillbrow, most notably Skyline, were often frequented by LGBTQ+ activists and provided a space in which LGBTQ+ activists' political lives and social lives could intertwine and merge.³⁷⁰ However, GLOW also played an important role in educating its black LGBTQ+ members on terminology and LGBTQ+ issues in a political sense.

The Problem of the Usage of Westernised LGBTQ+ Labels in the South African Context

Midi Achmat stated that another large part of ABIGALE's formation was that OLGA was "too intellectual" and that "[n]o-one in OLGA took the time to explain the basics".³⁷¹ Similarly, Ditsie felt that she was not as knowledgeable about the terminologies and specific LGBTQ+ issues that many of the older members of GLOW were discussing and felt like she had a lot of "catching up" to do.³⁷² In her documentary, *Simon & I*, Ditsie mentioned how she "didn't know words like gay or lesbian" and just thought that she was "very odd" growing up.³⁷³

This was not a unique experience to Ditsie, as many of my oral history interview participants also reported being unaware of LGBTQ+ labels and identities. For example, Barsel stated that "...if [she] had to label [herself], [she] would've been... bisexual but moving towards

³⁶⁹ Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 14: 46 – 14:55 and Donné Rundle, "Our Biggest Concern Was That There Would Only Be Twenty or Fifty People..." *Pride: Protest and Celebration*. Shaun De Waal and Anthony Manion eds. (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2006), 20.

³⁷⁰ Graeme Reid, *Above the Skyline: Reverend Tsietsi Thandekiso and the Founding of an African Gay Church* (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2012). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the hotel in which Skyline was situated was also an area in which the Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church (HUMCC) hosted religious services for LGBTQ+ people.

³⁷¹ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom", 79.

³⁷² GALA, Wits, The Beverley Palesa Ditsie Collection (hereafter BPD Collection), AM2903 (B) Folder G, Beverley Ditsie Interview Transcript, 12.

³⁷³ Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 06:19 – 06:23.

asexuality” but that she “didn't know what it was called then”.³⁷⁴ Likewise, Sazi Jali stated that she “always knew [that she] was different... But because of the terminology, [she] didn't have the terms to call [herself] as a transgender person”.³⁷⁵ This speaks to a broader concern that many scholars have addressed on the transference of modern, Westernised LGBTQ+ terminology and identity labels to the African context.

Both Epprecht and Massad argue that the usage of Western LGBTQ+ labels plays a role in reinforcing Western control over African sexuality and identity.³⁷⁶ Epprecht explains that this is often due to the difference in the understanding of sex and what was considered sexual acts. Understandings of sex in African cultures were historically viewed as penile-vaginal penetrative sex, often with the intent of procreation.³⁷⁷ As such, other sexual acts such as oral sex and masturbation would not be viewed as sex with the same understanding that it was viewed by the West. This difference is important in understanding the ways in which cultural context plays a role in defining how sexuality and sexual identity are viewed.

Massad, likewise, speaks on the existence of same-sex intimacies, within the specific context of Arab culture and same-sex intimacy between men. However, Massad places this component of Arab culture in conflict with Western human rights activism, specifically the LGBTQ+ human rights activism associated with the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, which he calls the Gay International.³⁷⁸ Massad does not deny the existence of same-sex intimacy,

³⁷⁴ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Sazi Jali, Johannesburg, South Africa, conducted by author, 27 January 2022.

³⁷⁶ Marc Epprecht, “Gender and Sexuality,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Africa*, ed. Adeline Marie Masquelier and Gaurav Gajanan Desai (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago press, 2019), 127–44 and “Slim Disease and the Science of Silence: The Erasure of Same-sex Sexuality in “African AIDS” Discourse, 1983 – 1988,” *Jindal Global Law Review* 4, no. 2 (2013), 174 – 208 and Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

³⁷⁷ Epprecht, “Slim Disease and the Science of Silence,” 185 – 186.

³⁷⁸ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 161.

but rather attacks Western activism's need to publicly name and "expose" the existence of homosexuality within Islamic and Arabic cultures in an attempt to "help 'liberate' Arab and Muslim 'gays and lesbians' from the oppression under which they allegedly live".³⁷⁹ Massad disputes that this poses risks to Arabs in three main ways; firstly it assumes a LGBTQ+ identity based on same-sex intimacy thus imposing a Western identity onto individuals who may not identify as such.³⁸⁰ Secondly, in inflicting this Western understanding of homosexuality, it erases the unique ways in which same-sex intimacy is explored in a way that is not threatening to the heteronormativity of Arabic society. Lastly, in enforcing these labels and identities onto Arabic people who engage in same-sex intimacy, it leaves them at risk to state-imposed homophobia and violence, which Massad notes "...[it] is not same-sex sexual practices that are being repressed by the Egyptian police but rather the sociopolitical identification of these practices with the Western identity of gayness."³⁸¹ To surmise, this shows not only why people such as Ditsie, Barsel and Jali were unfamiliar with the terms, but also shows how the adoption of these terms can be problematic in the South African context.

Female Same-Sex Intimacy and Women Who Have Sex With Women

Many scholarly works have explored the topic of female same-sex intimacy and women who have sex with women (WSW) in Africa.³⁸² Within the South African context, female same-sex

³⁷⁹ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 162.

³⁸⁰ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 163.

³⁸¹ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 183.

³⁸² The term women who have sex with women is used here to describe women who engage in sexual acts with other women but may identify as heterosexual. See: Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa, *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men, and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2007) and Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*.

intimacy has largely focused on sweetheart/amachicken/mummy-baby relationships.³⁸³

These female same-sex relationships are discussed by Fikile Vilakazi in my interview with her, but I will firstly address the existing literature that deals with this phenomenon. These relationships have normally consisted of same-sex intimacy between one younger and one older girl and are commonly located in boarding schools, specifically all-girls schools, girls-only activity clubs and townships.³⁸⁴ In an interview with Tanya Chan Sam, Bongie, a member of GLOW's Lesbian Forum, spoke about her experience in an amachicken relationship when she was sent to an all girls' boarding school.³⁸⁵ Amachicken was used to refer to younger girls who had just transferred to the boarding school and who were looked after by the older girls that were there. Bongie explained that the phrase 'amachicken' is outdated terminology and she often referred to the relationship as sweethearts instead, however more recently these relationships have taken on the term of mummy-baby relationships.³⁸⁶

Mummy-baby relationships were a form of same-sex kinship that began as friendships and would often include physical intimacies such as holding hands and kissing, and sometimes sleeping in the same room together.³⁸⁷ These relationships were known by the teachers at the school, but very few attempts were made to stop the existence of them, which one of Gunkel's participants hypothesised to be due to the fact that many of the female

³⁸³ It should be noted that these relationships are all inherently the same, but the names of them have changed over the years. See: Kerry Frizelle, "Foregrounding Diverse African sexualities," *Psychology in Society* 45, (2013), 73-76 http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1015-60462013000200011&lng=en&tling=en and Tanya Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," *Defiant Desire* Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron eds. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994), 186 – 192.

³⁸⁴ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 117.

³⁸⁵ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 186 – 188.

³⁸⁶ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 186 and Frizelle, "Foregrounding Diverse African sexualities," 74.

³⁸⁷ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 186.

authoritative figures at the school had probably been in similar relationships at that age.³⁸⁸

Similarly, Vilakazi stated that it was a big part of the subculture of Soweto that she grew

into:

You know, when I grew up, and becoming kind of the street vibe, it was just something that was there. And I think that maybe even people before as perhaps our mothers or you know, and so on, perhaps practiced that subculture, because it was there. It was part of society. And what used to happen is, if you saw a woman that you really were attracted to, and you wanted them to be your baby, or to be your mama, you would just - I remember how a group of us would sit in the street, waiting for, you know, women that are passing by and we would all tease each other and the others would say, oh my gosh, I liked that one and you've been seeing her for, been seeing her for quite a number of days, perhaps or months and you want to approach them, then we would just encourage one another, you know, just go for it, go and ask her you know. And that's how it would happen and you just jump and you stop them, can I please talk to you, I really like you blah blah blah, you know, it was fun. And really, that's how these relationships happened. It was really just like that, you know, and, and, and in the end, you realize that these people have managed to, to get into this mama-baby relationship. And it was not always monogamous, you know, some, some of them that will be there and not all of it, not all of it also was sexual. Some of them would eventually get sexually involved and others would just be platonic relationships.³⁸⁹

Mummy-baby relationships often co-existed alongside heterosexual relationships with men, as Bongie outlined in her experience with being in an amachicken relationship with someone who had a boyfriend.³⁹⁰ Similarly, Sibongile, who was another one of Sam's participants, indicated that she had also been in a relationship with another girl at boarding school, but that this girl withdrew from the school as she had become pregnant.³⁹¹ These two examples show that female same-sex intimate relationships could, and did, coincide comfortably alongside heterosexual relationships and were not seen as challenging the heteronormative standard. However, Gunkel argues that it is through this supposed lack of

³⁸⁸ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 121.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

³⁹⁰ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 187.

³⁹¹ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 192.

threat to the heteronormativity that these relationships can often stand as sites of resistance to gender norms as they can be, but are not always, relationships in which female same-sex sexuality can be explored.³⁹²

It should be noted, however, that while these mummy-baby relationships did share female same-sex kinship, each of these relationships were unique and therefore do not all follow the same dynamics. This is highlighted in Gunkel's interviews with participants of past mummy-baby relationships which show that these relationships could range from little to no intimacy to being explicitly sexual in nature.³⁹³ However, many of these participants stated that they did not disclose with their friends if the mummy-baby relationship had changed from a non-sexual intimate kinship to a sexual relationship, largely because many of them believed that this was a common aspect of the relationship.³⁹⁴ Gunkel argues that such forms of female same-sex intimacy are often allowed to exist within African cultures as they are often seen as a form of "non-sexual love".³⁹⁵

Subsequently, within African cultures, there is a distinct difference between mummy-baby relationships and WLW relationships and the response to it. This difference could explain how and why despite both growing up within Soweto, Fikile Vilakazi and Nokuthula Dhladhla, another one of my interview participants whose experience I have discussed in the previous chapter, had such vastly different experiences and reactions by the community to their same-sex friendships. According to Vilakazi, mummy-baby relationships and the acceptance of them was not just limited to her and her household but:

³⁹² Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 105.

³⁹³ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 119 – 120.

³⁹⁴ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 119 – 120.

³⁹⁵ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 132 – 133.

...it was broader than my family, you know. I mean, I can also just share similar sentiments for example, in the family house of this woman that became my first lover, or that I think of as my first woman lover, that the environment was pretty much the same, I could just walk into her house, sleep over at her place, there was just no questioning and no problem whatsoever. It was not just the two of us, there are many of us, of our friends as well, you know, because this was some kind of a subculture, we were living in also different suburbs, you know, different areas of Soweto that were doing the same thing. We were never attacked, we were never really, you know, uh challenged until far later in life when homophobia became rife generally in, in society.³⁹⁶

But if mummy-baby relationships were as ingrained into Sowetan culture, as Vilakazi states, then why was Dhladhla not given the same treatment and instead subjected to extreme acts of violence from the community? I propose that the key to the difference in their treatment by the Sowetan community was due to Dhladhla's friendship with someone who announced herself as a lesbian. In my view, this seems to be an important aspect in the acceptance of female same-sex intimacy within Sowetan African culture. The distinction is also pointed out by Chan Sam's interview participant Bongie whose sweetheart did not want to entertain an amachicken relationship with Bongie if she was a lesbian.³⁹⁷ From these examples, it can be ascertained that female same-sex intimacy may only be accepted if there is no connection to homosexuality.

However, as in the case of Arab culture as discussed by Massad, Gunkel draws attention to the fact that the increase in knowledge of these relationships often puts these forms of kinship, and the women who engage in these kinships, in danger of being subjected to homophobic attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, knowledge production around this issue creates somewhat of an unresolvable paradox as it presents information on the types of intimacies that can occur within cultures that have a homonegative stance, as well as breaks

³⁹⁶ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

³⁹⁷ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 187 and Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 109.

away from the Western essentialist ideology that sexuality and sexual intimacies can only fall within the binary of being heterosexual or homosexual. However, in doing so, it not only places African sexuality under the colonial gaze once again, but also risks increasing social stigma around the relationship and therefore the very existence of these relationships. Consequently, while it is understandable that Ditsie and many others were not aware of specific LGBTQ+ terminology and issues, this must be viewed with the understanding that the terminology that they were unaware of was, more often than not, related to a Western LGBTQ+ political identity.

LGBTQ+ Organisations and Lobbying for Equal Rights

It should be noted that 1989 was a pivotal year for the LGBTQ+ liberation movement. As mentioned earlier, it was the year OLGA officially became affiliated with the UDF. It was also an integral year for GLOW's strategy in lobbying for LGBTQ+ inclusion as it had become clear that change was about to be implemented soon with the ANC and the National Party (NP) entering into discussions and a move towards negotiations between the two parties.³⁹⁸ For GLOW, the strategy that they believed would be the most impactful in securing LGBTQ+ rights would be one of visibility.³⁹⁹ One issue that the organisation had been circling around during their meetings was the idea of a politically driven LGBTQ+ march as a guaranteed way to ensure visibility.⁴⁰⁰

The First Pride March in South Africa and Visibility as a Form of Activism

This eventually culminated in the first South African Pride march in 1990, following the release of Nelson Mandela, as well as other political prisoners, and the unbanning of all

³⁹⁸ P. Eric Louw. *The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of Apartheid*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

³⁹⁹ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 67.

⁴⁰⁰ Rundle, "Our Biggest Concern", 20.

political organisations by F.W. De Klerk.⁴⁰¹ This was recognised by GLOW as an opportunity to implement tactics to create greater visibility for both race and LGBTQ+ rights into action, something that had previously only existed in theoretical and hypothetical talks. Nkoli was certain that they would receive support from the ANC, due to his and other prominent LGBTQ+ activists' involvement in the liberation movement.⁴⁰² However, many people, such as Ditsie, were concerned by the idea of coming out of the private safe space that GLOW provided into the streets to publicly march for LGBTQ+ rights because she felt that this would stigmatise GLOW members and paint them as targets for attack.⁴⁰³ Due to this, on the 13th October 1990, when the first Gay and Lesbian Pride March took place in Johannesburg, brown paper bags were provided for people to wear who were worried that they would be subjected to homophobic attacks or who were worried about being identified as they had not come out yet but still wanted to show support for the march.⁴⁰⁴

Despite being met with homophobic protests, the march was considered a success by GLOW as at least 800 individuals showed up in support of LGBTQ+ rights. It was also here where Nkoli gave his famous speech that captured the intersectionality of black LGBTQ+ identity and entwined the anti-apartheid liberation movement with the LGBTQ+ liberation movement:

This is what I say to my comrades in the struggle who ask me why I waste time fighting for moffies and this is what I say to white gay men or women who ask me why I spend so much time talking about apartheid when I should be fighting for gay

⁴⁰¹ Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948-1994*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁰² Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 17: 45 – 17:51.

⁴⁰³ GALA, Wits, BPD Collection, AM2903 (B) Folder G, Beverley Ditsie Interview Transcript, 12 and Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 18:17 – 18:20.

⁴⁰⁴ Rundle, "Our Biggest Concern", 22 and Mark Gevisser and Graeme Reid, "Pride or Protest?": Drag Queens, Comrades, and the Lesbian and Gay Pride March," *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron eds. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994) 280.

rights. I am black and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into secondary or primary struggle, they will be all one struggle.⁴⁰⁵

The march was successful in creating visibility and garnering attention from the media, leading to many other successful Pride Marches led by GLOW after the 1990s, each centred around a specific political message. Ditsie and Nkoli both played an active role in using this media attention to their advantage to lobby for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights into the new constitution that was being drafted. Their strategy included GLOW running workshops, creating and distributing pamphlets and generally educating their constituency about the LGBTQ+ community, specifically topics surrounding HIV/AIDS, safe sex and racism.⁴⁰⁶ Ditsie, in particular, created visibility for black lesbians by writing articles on various topics with regards to the LGBTQ+ community, appearing on radio and television programmes, both locally and internationally, which led to many black lesbians coming out because they “saw Bev on TV”.⁴⁰⁷ This led to an increase of lesbians involving themselves with GLOW, and through “informal meetings and discussions” eventually led to the establishment of the Lesbian Forum in early 1992.⁴⁰⁸

The Lesbian Forum and Gender Discrimination Within GLOW

This organisation existed largely to address lesbian issues such as “creat[ing] support structures for lesbians, creat[ing] an information network for and about lesbians, put[ting]

⁴⁰⁵ The term moffies is a derogatory slur used in South Africa to define gay men. See: Dhianaraj R. Chetty, “A Drag at Madame Costello’s: Cape Maffie Life and the Popular Press in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Defiant Desire*. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron eds. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994), 127n2 and Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 20:00 – 20:30.

⁴⁰⁶ Kirsten Jade Johnson, ““The Freedom of Wanting to Be Me”: An Analysis of Beverley Ditsie’s Role in South Africa’s Gay Liberation Struggle, 1980s to mid-1990s.” (BSocSci Honours Dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2019), 62.

⁴⁰⁷ Johnson, ““The Freedom of Wanting to Be Me,”” 62 – 63.

⁴⁰⁸ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, LGBT Organisation Newsletters 1993 – 1995 (File 3), Lesbian Forum’s Wet Velvet Newsletter, 2.

lesbianism on the political agenda and enjoy being lesbian.”⁴⁰⁹ Like many other LGBTQ+ organisations, it centred itself mainly around socialising but also interacting with various forms of media such as books, films, theatre and poetry.⁴¹⁰ The use of contemporary media as a form of activism seems to be used largely by WLW, and will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

The creation of the Lesbian Forum within an LGBTQ+ organisation bears resemblance to the establishment of women’s groups within the anti-apartheid movement. Hence, similar thinking could be drawn as to the treatment of women within GLOW: being deemed by male leaders to be useful in contributing to the numbers of the movement, but whose issues were not taken seriously. This is reflected in lesbian activists’ statements such as “now I’m very involved in GLOW, but I only like the Lesbian Forum and the things they do. When there are men at GLOW functions they tend to take over and this is true for all of them, black or white. They only think of themselves.”⁴¹¹ This shows that despite gay men’s understanding of intersectionality and intersectional oppression, this oppression was still not understood in relation to women. However, this lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ women’s issues was not only found within GLOW but in other organisations as well, most notably the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE).

Structural Discriminatory Issues Within The National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality

The NCGLE was an organisation founded by a multitude of LGBTQ+ organisations, which included GLOW, OLGA and ABIGALE, in 1994 to collaborate and unionise the LGBTQ+

⁴⁰⁹ GALA, Wits, The GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, LGBT Organisation Newsletters 1993 – 1995 (File 3), Lesbian Forum’s Wet Velvet Newsletter, 1.

⁴¹⁰ GALA, Wits, The GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, LGBT Organisation Newsletters 1993 – 1995 (File 3), Lesbian Forum’s Wet Velvet Newsletter, 2.

⁴¹¹ Chan Sam, “Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef,” 188.

community into securing the retention of the anti-discrimination against sexual orientation clause (as included in the Interim Constitution) into the Final Constitution.⁴¹² Much scholarship has covered the legislative lobbying of the NCGLE in depth and as such, my overview of this segment of the LGBTQ+ liberation movement will be brief.⁴¹³

The NCGLE became an umbrella body which encompassed up to 78 organisations that committed themselves to lobbying for LGBTQ+ rights by first retaining the Equality Clause in the Final Constitution of the new South Africa and then targeting specific homophobic legislation to ensure LGBTQ+ equality.⁴¹⁴ As an anti-apartheid activist and also one of the founders of OLGA, Barsel was appointed as a part of the first Executive of the NCGLE.

According to Barsel, one of the most difficult challenges that the NCGLE encountered was tackling the homophobia within the ANC and educating people on the LGBTQ+ community as “there's always that kind of underlying thing of people's level of homophobi[a], which varied obviously, some people were more homophobic than others”.⁴¹⁵

Another challenge that Barsel mentioned was ABIGALE's split from OLGA because “OLGA was seen to be dominated by white people”.⁴¹⁶ This was particularly difficult at the time as the NCGLE had employed a strategy to try to minimise the differences within the LGBTQ+ community to appear as a united front to secure the retention of the Equality clause in the

⁴¹² GALA, Wits, The National Coalition for Gay & Lesbian Equality (NCGLE)/Lesbian & Gay Equality Project (LGEP) (hereafter NCGLE/LGEP Collection), AM 2615, Folder 1A Organisational Records, Short Description of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality.

⁴¹³ Pierre De Vos, “The ‘Inevitability’ of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa's Post-Apartheid State,” *South African Journal on Human Rights* 23, no. 3 (2007): 432-465, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19962126.2007.11864931>, Eric C. Christiansen, “Ending the Apartheid of the Closet: Sexual Orientation in the South African Constitutional Process,” *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*. (2000, 32: 997), H. de Ru. “A Historical Perspective on the Recognition of Same-Sex Unions in South Africa”. *Fundamina* (2013, 19: 2) 222-226 and Neville Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid (eds.), *Sex and Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: Double Storey, 2005).

⁴¹⁴ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 71.

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

constitution.⁴¹⁷ However, issues of race were not the only differences that were present within the NCGLE. This was clearly expressed in a report compiled by Marian Nell and Janet Shapiro which analysed the success of the NCGLE.⁴¹⁸ In this report, Nell and Shapiro's investigation found that racism was a large aspect of many black people's experiences within the NCGLE with the view that it was "an elitist group of white males" and a place where black people were only being used as "tokens".⁴¹⁹

Likewise, the report also found that many members and affiliates of the NCGLE were subjected to sexist attitudes within the Coalition with expressions such as "sexist misogynist pigs" and "it is clear that only male voices are listened to" being stated by members from both the female affiliate and National Executive Committee (NEC).⁴²⁰ The general belief held by women in the organisation was that women's voices and opinions were silenced and dismissed, even women in authoritative positions, point towards the oppression of women within a movement that was supposed to be reflective of the intersections of identities.⁴²¹

As has been demonstrated, gender oppression persisted throughout both the private and public spheres. Despite the resistance towards oppressive beliefs in South Africa, gender oppression persevered within the anti-apartheid movement and the LGBTQ+ liberation

⁴¹⁷ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 71.

⁴¹⁸ GALA, Wits, The NCGLE/LGEP Collection, AM 2615, Folder A2 Organisational Records, Reports and Reviews, NCGLE Reports (File 1), Taking the Struggle Forward: An Evaluation of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, prepared at the request of the NCGLE National Executive Committee by Nell and Shapiro cc July/August 1999.

⁴¹⁹ GALA, Wits, The NCGLE/LGEP Collection, AM 2615, Folder A2 Organisational Records, Reports and Reviews, NCGLE Reports (File 1), Taking the Struggle Forward: An Evaluation of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, prepared at the request of the NCGLE National Executive Committee by Nell and Shapiro cc July/August 1999, 30.

⁴²⁰ GALA, Wits, The NCGLE/LGEP Collection, AM 2615, Folder A2 Organisational Records, Reports and Reviews, NCGLE Reports (File 1), Taking the Struggle Forward: An Evaluation of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, prepared at the request of the NCGLE National Executive Committee by Nell and Shapiro cc July/August 1999, 31.

⁴²¹ GALA, Wits, The NCGLE/LGEP Collection, AM 2615, Folder A2 Organisational Records, Reports and Reviews, NCGLE Reports (File 1), Taking the Struggle Forward: An Evaluation of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, prepared at the request of the NCGLE National Executive Committee by Nell and Shapiro cc July/August 1999, 31.

movement. Even organisations such as GLOW, which expressed the need for an intersectional approach to oppression, continued to silence and diminish women's voices, as demonstrated above. There have been many instances of this that have been reported, but the departure of Ditsie from the organisation in 1995 was a pivotal moment both within GLOW history, and also within LGBTQ+ liberation thereafter.

Resistance by LGBTQ+ Women to Gender Oppression Within Intersectional LGBTQ+ Movements

During her time in GLOW, Ditsie had become increasingly aware of the gender oppression within GLOW, such as the lack of black lesbians in leadership positions in the organisation.⁴²² Thus, Ditsie shifted her attention more towards the issues of black lesbian women. While the increased visibility in the LGBTQ+ community, specifically black LGBTQ+ people, was important in securing the Equality Clause in the constitution that prevents discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, it came at the expense of their increased exposure to stigma and homophobia, particularly in relation to black lesbian women who lived in the townships.

One of Ditsie's first experiences of this was after the 1990 Pride March. The "Jackrollers gang" was a prominent group of men in Soweto who were known for targeting people that they knew or suspected of being lesbian to "put [them] right".⁴²³ This type of violence towards lesbian women specifically is commonly referred to as 'corrective rape', however, I, like many other scholars writing on this issue, hesitate to use this phrase as it implies that there is something about lesbians that needs to be corrected.⁴²⁴ As stated by Pumla Dineo

⁴²² GALA, Wits, BPD Collection, AM2903 (B) Folder G, Beverley Ditsie Interview Transcript, 15.

⁴²³ Chan Sam, "Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef," 187 and Steve Mokwena, "[The Era of the Jackrollers: Contextualising the rise of the youth gangs in Soweto](#)," Paper presented at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Seminar No. 7, 30 October 1991.

⁴²⁴ See Sarah Boeshart. "Hate Crimes and Corrective Rape". *Encyclopedia of Rape and Sexual Violence*. Merrill D. Smith ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018) 175-188.

Gqola, “rape is a crime of power” that is most often than not subjected to those who “...defied their societies prescriptions on appropriate feminine behaviour.”⁴²⁵ As such, violence against LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly LGBTQ+ women, has more to do with the attempt to control and enforce hegemonic gender identities.

Gunkel argues that this is why butch women remain the predominant target of homophobic hate crimes as they are often the most visibly non-conformist in their expression of their gender identity, and thus a threat to the hegemonic gender structure and norms.⁴²⁶ In a study with black lesbians in South Africa, Marlene Arndt and Helena Hewat found that most of the lesbians they interviewed feared their sexual orientation being exposed and would often take extra measures to ensure their safety.⁴²⁷ This would include taking extra care in the way that they presented themselves, such as how they dressed or behaved in public, and also limiting affectionate displays with their partner in public. Jade Madingwane, one of my oral history participants, addressed that this is a situation still applicable in the current context due to her work as an LGBTQ+ activist.⁴²⁸ Madingwane stated that she had to stop her partner from showing any affectionate displays in the township:

I remember a time where my partner was accompanying me to an Uber and she wanted to kiss me and I was just like, no, that's not going to happen. I don't know if I'm a target because it's so rough currently, you know.⁴²⁹

Accordingly, Ditsie's public activism in order to secure and ensure LGBTQ+ rights heightened her visibility, thus leaving her even more vulnerable to such attacks. Her public appearance

⁴²⁵ Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Auckland Park, South Africa: MFBooks Joburg, 2018), 11, 23.

⁴²⁶ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 88.

⁴²⁷ Marlene Arndt and Helena Hewat, “The Experience of Stress and Trauma: Black Lesbians in South Africa,” *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 19, no. 2 (2009): 207–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2009.10820280>.

⁴²⁸ Madingwane's work in activism will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

⁴²⁹ Interview with Jade Madingwane, Johannesburg, South Africa, conducted by author, 3 February 2022.

on television programmes led to a group of men surrounding her house and stating that she should come out so that they could “teach her a lesson”.⁴³⁰ While this experience was extremely terrifying for Ditsie, it also increased her dedication to fighting for black lesbian rights.

Her increased involvement in promoting black lesbian interests was met with resistance from male GLOW members:

...[L]esbian issues, she felt, were being ignored. “I remember at one meeting saying: ‘Why don’t we start with the lesbian issues?’ Then being told: ‘No, those are not as important.’” Even when she raised the alarming news that lesbians were being attacked, raped and murdered, she was sidelined. “I would constantly say: ‘Something else is going on here that is over and above the level of discrimination that gay men face.’ And again, I was disregarded.”⁴³¹

In 1995, Ditsie was invited to give an address at the United Nation’s Fourth World Women’s Conference on the 13th of September 1995 in Beijing.⁴³² This was an excellent opportunity for Ditsie to speak not only on LGBTQ+ issues, but to also link LGBTQ+ rights and equality to women’s rights and equality. However, she was met with opposition from the men in GLOW, including Nkoli, who constantly questioned her need to speak at a women’s conference and felt that it was unnecessary to do so.⁴³³ Nonetheless, this was an important moment not only for Ditsie, as an individual, but also an important opportunity to challenge the notion that “homosexuality is un-African”, something that was asserted by some

⁴³⁰ Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 23: 46 – 24:04.

⁴³¹ Aamna Mohdin, “Beverley Ditsie: The South African Woman Who Helped Liberate Lesbians Everywhere,” *The Guardian*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/20/beverley-ditsie-the-south-african-woman-who-helped-liberate-lesbians-everywhere>.

⁴³² Ditsie, *Simon & I*, 36:10 – 37:13 and Nickita Maesela, “‘I Didn’t Know I was Making History’: Bev Ditsie on UN Speech”. *City Press*. 21 June 2019. <https://city-press.news24.com/News/i-didnt-know-i-was-making-history-bev-ditsie-on-un-speech-20190621>.

⁴³³ GALA, Wits, BPD Collection, AM2903 (B) Folder G, Beverley Ditsie Interview Transcript, 19.

delegates from other African countries.⁴³⁴ While Ditsie's feelings towards the men in GLOW had grown increasingly bitter due to their lack of concern for LGBTQ+ women's rights and equality, the GLOW men's reaction to her attending and addressing the Beijing Conference was the breaking point that led to Ditsie's separation from GLOW.

An article in *SPEAK*, a women's political magazine in South Africa that focused on women's issues, addressed the sexism experienced by LGBTQ+ women in LGBTQ+ organisations as well.⁴³⁵ Megan Pillay, who was interviewed by *SPEAK* and was a member of GLOW and the Lesbian Forum, stated that due to the rampant sexism found within GLOW, the Lesbian Forum broke away from GLOW and that lesbians who joined the new organisation experienced a greater level of comfort and belonging from no longer being surrounded by the sexism within GLOW.⁴³⁶ However, some lesbians who were a part of the Lesbian Forum continued to also remain members of GLOW.

This separation from GLOW can, and should, be seen as a sign of resistance to oppression and not a form of weakness. As mentioned earlier, Barsel also broke away from GASA due to her experience of sexism within the movement. Subsequently, both Barsel and Ditsie actively resisted the oppression that they faced by removing themselves from the spaces in which they experienced discrimination based on their gender. In doing so, Barsel and Ditsie, amongst other LGBTQ+ women who left organisations in which they experienced oppression, utilised separation as a way to cope with the emotional impact of the oppression they were experiencing. In this case, both Barsel and Ditsie also established their own organisations

⁴³⁴ Collen Lowe Morna, "A World First for GLOW Member," *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg, Gauteng), 15-21 September 1995 and "UN Delegates Split on Lesbianism". *Medicine Hat News* (Medicine Hat, Alberta), 14 September 1995.

⁴³⁵ Rosalee Telela, "No women's land", *SPEAK*, 1994 in Shamim Meer, ed., *Women Speak: Reflections on Our Struggles 1982-1997* (Roggebaai, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998), 113.

⁴³⁶ Telela, "No women's land", 113.

which took a more intersectional approach so as to limit experiences of multifaceted oppression while actively fighting and rallying against the oppressive apartheid system and legislation which sought to oppress them on multiple levels.

Overall, this marked a turning point in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, specifically for black LGBTQ+ women. The culmination of the stifling of LGBTQ+ women's voices, opinions and issues within both the anti-apartheid movement and the LGBTQ+ liberation movement, led to a more radical feminist approach to fighting against LGBTQ+ discrimination, which will be reviewed at length in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Feminist LGBTQ+ Resistance to Gender Oppression Through the Use of Contemporary Media between 1994 - 2005

This chapter will explore the use of contemporary media such as film and photography as a form of activism and resistance to oppression experienced by lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBTQ+) individuals who self-identified as women at some point in their lives. It serves as a continuation from the previous chapter by further exploring and analysing the use of public visibility as a form of feminist activism and evaluating the success of this type of activism as well as the ways in which this impacted the lives of LBTQ+ activists, particularly those involved in LBTQ+ women's issues. Due to the nature of the topics of visibility and media, a large component of the chapter will also address and expand further on homophobic hate crimes against LBTQ+ women, particularly those against black LBTQ+ women in townships. It will look at various organisations, with specific focus on the Out In Africa Film Festival (OIA) and the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), and the ways in which these organisations used contemporary media as both a form of resistance against homonegative attitudes and as a socialising space. Lastly, it will look at the work of individuals such as Beverley Ditsie and Zanele Muholi and the role they played in pioneering contemporary media as a form of intersectional feminist and LGBTQ+ activism and resistance.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁷ It should be stated that while I have introduced Muholi as Zanele Muholi, as this is the name under which the majority of their works exist, I was informed during my time at the GALA Queer Archives by a staff member and a close friend of Muholi's, that this is not their preferred name and will address them solely as Muholi from this point onwards to ensure respect towards them and their identity. Exceptions will be made only in regard to referencing past works by Muholi under which their previous name was used.

Visibility as a Form of Activism and the Impact of the Out In Africa Film Festival, 1994 – 1996

In the previous chapter, I discussed the LGBTQ+ liberation movement's strategy of utilising public visibility in order to ensure that LGBTQ+ rights were included in the nation's move towards democracy and freedom. One of the ways in which this was done, as highlighted in the previous chapter, was through Pride marches. This was a very strategic move that sought to address two main stereotypes around homosexuality: the first being the idea that homosexuality was "unAfrican" and the second being that only a small group of people were homosexual.

The organising of the first Pride March by the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) in 1990 was successful in combating and addressing these issues through visibility, as it was supported by a diverse group of 800 individuals in attendance.⁴³⁸ This first Pride March served as a useful method to gain visibility while also delivering a political message. Shaun de Waal and Anthony Manion have stated that the first 1990 Pride and the subsequent Prides that followed were "unequivocal protest march[es] in the tradition of other South African marches of the time, which demanded the recognition of rights" and which placed "continued pressure" on the African National Congress (ANC) to ensure that LGBTQ+ rights were included in the South African constitution.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Mark Gevisser and Graeme Reid, "Pride or Protest?": Drag Queens, Comrades, and the Lesbian and Gay Pride March," *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron eds. (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994) 280.

⁴³⁹ Shaun de Waal and Anthony Manion, "Introduction," in *Pride: Protest and Celebration*, ed. Shaun de Waal and Anthony Manion (Johannesburg, South Africa: Fanele, 2006), 6–10.

According to Fikile Vilakazi, one of my oral history participants that I focused on in a previous chapter that was involved in numerous LGBTQ+ organisations, in order to ensure that their efforts for recognition of LGBTQ+ rights would be successful, LGBTQ+ organisations had to set aside their differences to appear as a united front.⁴⁴⁰ Vilakazi stated that in the early stages of organising, Pride was designed to be a place of expression and acceptance, regardless of the internal politics amongst the various civil society and non-governmental LGBTQ+ organisations. To do this, LGBTQ+ organisations would rally together for two weeks prior to the Pride march and be deliberate in how they went about generating media attention and coverage for Pride events.⁴⁴¹ This was done so as to not diminish government awareness of LGBTQ+ rights and needs, but also to create a space of belonging and acceptance for the LGBTQ+ community at large. This continued lobbying, with Pride as a large part of the visibility campaign, eventually led to LGBTQ+ rights being included into the 1994 Interim Constitution.⁴⁴² In order to ensure the retention of the equality clause in the Final Constitution, LGBTQ+ organisations continued to use visibility as one of its main strategies, leading to the creation of the Out In Africa South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (OIA).

The Establishment of the Out in Africa Film Festival and its Role in Increasing Visibility Through Film

OIA was established in 1994, following the inclusion of the equality clause into the Interim Constitution, initiated largely by GLOW and the Association of Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians (ABIGALE), with the purpose being for it to be used as a platform to promote and encourage LGBTQ+ visibility in South Africa as well as contribute to the retention of the anti-

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 8 August 2022.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

⁴⁴² De Waal and Manion, "Introduction," 7.

discrimination clause in the Bill of Rights.⁴⁴³ The significance of the festival having been established by GLOW and ABIGALE must be noted for two reasons. Firstly, both of these organisations were black-led LGBTQ+ organisations who largely operated at a grassroots level. Secondly, at this point, Beverley Ditsie was still involved with GLOW and, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, played a large role in black lesbian visibility through film, such as her documentary *Simon & I*.

The late 1970s marked a turning point in the anti-apartheid liberation movement with an increase in political activity. Due to the apartheid government's severe repression of political organisations and activists, many of the activists were in exile and the anti-apartheid movement moved underground.⁴⁴⁴ This culminated in the increase of grassroots and underground based alternative media which comprised of content that countered the mainstream media at the time which promoted pro-apartheid propaganda. This type of alternative media included various types of media such as newspapers, community radio stations and pamphlets.⁴⁴⁵ Although Meer noted that this method of political resistance often did not include the views, struggles and attitudes of women (and it can similarly be stated that the oppression of LGBTQ+ individuals were often similarly ignored), as ABIGALE and GLOW consisted of anti-apartheid activists such as Simon Nkoli and Midi Achmat, it is reasonable to assert that they would have implemented these practices and strategies to counter the oppression they were subjected to as LGBTQ+ individuals.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ GALA Queer Archives (hereafter GALA), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection (hereafter OIA Collection), GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A1 Governance, Manifesto of The Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee and Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee.

⁴⁴⁴ Shamim Meer, ed., *Women Speak: Reflections on Our Struggles 1982-1997* (Roggebaai, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998).

⁴⁴⁵ Meer, *Women Speak*, 9.

⁴⁴⁶ Meer, *Women Speak*, 9. This largely took the form of print media through organisational newsletters such as the Glowletter, GLOW's newsletter which was first issued in 1989 originally to inform GLOW members of

The existence of OIA was initially to serve three main purposes which it outlined in its manifesto.⁴⁴⁷ This was to draw national attention and focus to the campaign for retention of the anti-discrimination clause. The main idea was that drawing a large crowd of LGBTQ+ people would draw public visibility to the community and therefore serve a political agenda to retain gay and lesbian equality within the Final Constitution. The second purpose was to utilise increased LGBTQ+ visibility as a means to educate the public on what LGBTQ+ lives and relationships looked like, while also providing a space for LGBTQ+ people to freely express themselves and their identity. Lastly, its purpose was to serve as a place to educate and encourage people, especially LGBTQ+ people to engage in safer sex practices to prevent HIV/AIDS infection. Figure 3 below shows the full OIA manifesto.⁴⁴⁸

GLOW events taking place. See: GALA, Wits, The GLOW Collection, GAL0001, Folder A, Newsletters and Publications, A1.1, Newsletters (Glowletters/News), Glowletter No. 1, 1989, 1. Other publications such as *Link/Skake!*, which later became *Exit*, and *Outright* can also be found at GALA.

⁴⁴⁷ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A1 Governance, Manifesto of The Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee.

⁴⁴⁸ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A1 Governance, Manifesto of The Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee.

Manifesto of the Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee

The OUT-IN-AFRICA Film Festival Committee is a not-for-profit voluntary association formed to support gay and lesbian equality and visibility and promote gay and lesbian film makers in South Africa. It is governed by an independent committee drawn from gay and lesbian organisations including the Gay & Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) and the Association of Bisexuals Gays and Lesbians (ABIGALE) in Cape Town.

The Gay and Lesbian Film Festival has three main purposes:

- * As the largest public gay and lesbian event with a national presence, the Film Festival focuses attention on and forms part of the campaign for the retention of the clause in the Bill of Rights that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Freedom of sexual orientation is a basic right that is being increasingly recognised internationally. It is important that gay and lesbian equality continue to be recognised in South Africa. The Film Festival provides an important focus that will assist in keeping issues pertaining to gay and lesbian equality on the political agenda.
- * The Film Festival promotes gay and lesbian visibility. Gay and lesbian communities suffer from marginalisation and *invisibility* stemming from long standing social and legal prejudice and discrimination. Unlike other groups against which society has traditionally discriminated, this invisibility is a unique form of discrimination which affects us. It prevents us from conducting our relationships and declaring our identities openly and forces many of us to lead a secretive, hidden existence. The Film Festival is the premier event which shows and explains many aspects of our lives to the wider public. The Film Festival is therefore a vital means of influencing and educating public opinion, both heterosexual and homosexual, towards acceptance of gays and lesbians as equal members of society.
- * Gay and lesbian communities internationally have played a leading role in pioneering effective HIV/AIDS education. Much of this work has been through the development of AIDS media. Through the choice of films and ancillary events the Film Festival plays an important part in promoting safer sex and AIDS awareness amongst gay and lesbian communities in our country. Gays and lesbians in all communities have to be encouraged to develop appropriate approaches to promoting safer sexual practices. The Festival, with its range of HIV/AIDS related films is an invaluable resource in promoting this consciousness, allowing people here to learn from, draw on and adapt international experience.

PATRONS

Barbara Hammer, Greta Schiller, Isaac Julien, Evita Bezuidenhout (Pieter-Dirk Uys).

Figure 3: Manifesto of the Out In Africa Film Festival Committee

The manifesto explains the unique way in which the LGBTQ+ community was discriminated against through invisibility as “it prevent[ed] us from conducting our relationships and declaring our identities openly and force[d] many of us to lead a secretive, hidden existence.”⁴⁴⁹ Gevisser outlines how this invisibility particularly impacted women loving women (WLW) who experienced more pressure to keep their sexuality hidden due to the heteronormative gender norms such as marriage and subsequently led to clandestine gatherings that often took place in private dwellings rather than public venues.⁴⁵⁰

The OIA Film Festival also had three main objectives. This included creating a space for film screenings that applied to the LGBTQ+ community, assisting with the promotion and distribution of South African LGBTQ+ filmmakers, and establishing a LGBTQ+ video resource library.⁴⁵¹ These were of the outmost importance to the OIA committee especially so as to allow for education in the LGBTQ+ community through the use of film and video, but also to provide LGBTQ+ individuals interested in filmmaking the opportunity to promote their own work. The hope was that the Festival would, in turn serve as an establishment where the unique lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in South Africa could be shared, as well as operate as an archive to combat the erasure of South African LGBTQ+ history and homophobic arguments that homosexuality is “unAfrican”.⁴⁵² ABIGALE and GLOW also believed that the film festival would help to create an increase in tolerance towards homosexuality. Jack Lewis, the co-director of the Out In Africa Film Festival, stated that he believed that the constitutional clause alone would not change people’s attitudes towards

⁴⁴⁹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A1 Governance, Manifesto of The Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee.

⁴⁵⁰ Mark Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom,” in Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (eds.), *Defiant Desire*, (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994) 19 – 22.

⁴⁵¹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A1 Governance, Out-In-African Film Festival Committee.

⁴⁵² GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A1 Governance, Out-In-African Film Festival Committee.

homosexuality, but more homosexual representation in the media might help in changing societal attitudes towards homosexuality.⁴⁵³

In order to achieve this feat, OIA aligned itself with Ster-Kinekor Cinemas to screen the films and videos. Some found this surprising given the popular view of the time that Ster-Kinekor was “the pillar of Afrikaner orthodoxy.”⁴⁵⁴ Another journalist, Philip Altbeker, also noted the impact that this festival would have on the film scene in general as previously mainstream movies that were adapted from plays or novels that contained even the slightest hint of homosexuality, often went to great extremes to ensure that any homosexual aspect was erased in the movie adaptation.⁴⁵⁵ As such, the OIA film festival was an important event both politically and socially for the LGBTQ+ community.

Prior to the Festival’s establishment, organisations such as the Gay Advice Bureau (GAB) often hosted theatre and film nights, however, these plays and films did not seem to be specifically LGBTQ+ oriented or contain LGBTQ+ themes and were, instead, often geared towards raising funds for the organisation and creating a space for socialisation amongst the LGBTQ+ community.⁴⁵⁶ The Lesbian Forum, however, seemed to be one organisation that was an exception to this as it often used art to serve as a form of political message,

⁴⁵³ Mark Gevisser, “Coming Out of the Celluloid Closet,” *The Weekly Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg, South Africa), 3 – 9 June 1994 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁵⁴ Adrian Monteath, “Gay SA Comes Out of The Closet”, *Weekend Star* (South Africa), 25 – 26 June 1994 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁵⁵ Phillip Altbeker, “Film Festival the Product of Tolerance and Pride: Review/Film SA Gay and Lesbian Film Festival,” *Business Day*, (Parktown, Johannesburg), 24 June 1994 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁵⁶ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.5 Meetings, GAB Counselling Meeting Minutes, 21 September 1992 and GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 1.5 Meetings, GAB Counselling Meeting Minutes, 16 November 1992.

expression and socialisation through, for example, the Lesbian Forum Theatre Group hosting performance pieces and Lesbian Forum members reading banned literature at GLOW fundraising gatherings.⁴⁵⁷ This was particularly important as much LGBTQ+ literature, such as *The Advocate*, a world-renowned gay news magazine, was banned during apartheid.⁴⁵⁸ If a person was caught with banned literature, it would be confiscated by the police and sometimes a fine would have to be paid. Consequently, the reading of banned literature was a powerful political move as it resisted legislation through the use of art while simultaneously educating black LGBTQ+ people on LGBTQ+ literature which would otherwise have been inaccessible to them. The importance of these types of events being led by black lesbian women should be noted here, as the use of art as a form of activism seems to be a common strategy that is employed by black LGBTQ+ women, something which will be unpacked in greater detail later on.

According to Marc Epprecht, LGBTQ+ films and videos that were initially produced were done so with the intention of educating people on various aspects of LGBTQ+ life.⁴⁵⁹ The OIA Film Festival was not an exception to this tradition, and in fact, used it to its advantage. The OIA Committee recognised the dual function that the film festival played in providing a socialising space as well as an educational space and stated that:

The Festival has a special communication function because it is accessible not only to gay and lesbian people but to anyone interested in the films and videos screened. It thus provides a meeting place at which ideas and experiences are revealed and

⁴⁵⁷ GALA, Wits, The Gay Advice Bureau (GAB) / Gay & Lesbian Counselling (GLC) Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, LGBT Organisation Newsletters 1993 – 1995 (File 3), Lesbian Forum's Wet Velvet Newsletter.

⁴⁵⁸ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, Know Your Rights Booklet by the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cape Town.

⁴⁵⁹ Marc Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa?: The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), 150.

information imparted about almost every conceivable aspect of gay and lesbian life.⁴⁶⁰

Thus the OIA Film Festival not only provided a space for LGBTQ+ people to socialise, but also for people who would not normally have access to LGBTQ+ spaces, such as cisgender heterosexual people, to enter into the space. It thus merged two parts of society that usually existed somewhat separately to each other. In doing so, it therefore allowed heteronormative society into the space in order to educate them on LGBTQ+ life with the rationale that this exposure would have increased tolerance towards homosexuality and equality.

The Film Festival centred around a different theme every year but mostly spotlighted around a wide range of topics about LGBTQ+ lived experiences such as issues around relationships, for example romantic relationships, familial relationships and work relationships.⁴⁶¹ Other topics involved the experience of coming out, issues around sexual intimacy, the effect of the AIDS pandemic as well as paying tribute to significant LGBTQ+ figures.⁴⁶² The films included in the festival were chosen to create a public forum and discussion on wide-ranging and diverse LGBTQ+ issues, such as lesbian and gay relationships, lesbian and gay sex, homophobia and discrimination, gay and lesbian rights, the age of consent and the LGBTQ+

⁴⁶⁰ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 1. The 3rd SA *Otherwise* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, The Mission of The Festival.

⁴⁶¹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 1. The 3rd SA *Otherwise* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, The Mission of The Festival.

⁴⁶² GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 1. The 3rd SA *Otherwise* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, The Mission of The Festival.

communities response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.⁴⁶³ In this way, the Film Festival was able to operate as a political, social and educational space.

Challenges Faced by Out in Africa

The OIA Film Festival set out to include films in the festival that covered a wide range of topics to generate a public forum and discussion.⁴⁶⁴ Gevisser mentioned that the festival contained content that might have made many people, including LGBTQ+ activists, uncomfortable. Gevisser also noted that this is a strategic ploy by Jack Lewis and Nodi Murphy to showcase and represent the wide variety of LGBTQ+ people as well as explore both the positive and negative experiences of homosexuality.⁴⁶⁵ An example of a type of film that could have been met with a negative response is *Female Misbehavior* (1992). *Female Misbehavior* consists of four short documentaries, lasting between 10 to 30 minutes, that address topics of transsexuality, pornography, sadomasochism (S&M) and bondage, and feminism.⁴⁶⁶ The film is a compilation of different ways in which mainstream sexuality is challenged and explores “sexual deviation up against mainstream feminism and orthodox female heterosexuality”.⁴⁶⁷ This is initially shown through an interview with Dr Camille Paglia, who has challenged feminist theory and the impact it has on the everyday women’s life.

⁴⁶³ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁶⁴ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁶⁵ Gevisser, “Coming Out of the Celluloid Closet”.

⁴⁶⁶ *Female Misbehavior*, Directed by Monika Treut (1992, Germany), VHS <https://youtu.be/grdB-QytlJs?si=sVFPHlx3ZAKy4JWr> and Randy Turoff, “Female Misbehavior,” V2_ Lab for the Unstable Media, April 2, 2023, <https://v2.nl/works/female-misbehavior>.

⁴⁶⁷ Turoff, “Female Misbehavior,” <https://v2.nl/works/female-misbehavior>.

However, the next two short documentaries are a lot more explicit in their depiction of sexual deviation and contain scenes that would probably have been quite shocking to its viewers. An example of this would include footage of Annie Sprinkle, a pornstar, displaying her body and using pornography as a way to educate people more on the female body which she does in many ways, but most notably by spreading herself open with a speculum and inviting a live audience to view her cervix while explaining its function to said audience.⁴⁶⁸ In the short documentary on bondage, there are cuts to people at a festival half-naked with chains and collars on. Consequently, due to the conservative nature of South African society, it is understandable how this may have come across as jarring to many South Africans viewing this at the OIA Film Festival.

Criticisms by the Public

This can clearly be seen in the OIA archival material which contains hate mail and complaints received that were largely religious in nature with many organisations, churches and individuals viewing the festival as a promotion of sin and moral decay.⁴⁶⁹ This was not the only religious resistance that the festival encountered. The Film Festival saw the first stirring of a right-wing campaign when 300 fundamentalist Muslims and Christians picketed outside the Monte Carlo cinema in Cape Town.⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, there had been rumours that there would be protests at the Rosebank Constantia Cinema by homonegative heterosexuals, but there was no evidence of any such demonstration.⁴⁷¹ However, complaints also came from Christian LGBTQ+ individuals who believed that the festival needed to take a more modest

⁴⁶⁸ *Female Misbehavior*, Monika Treut, <https://youtu.be/grdB-QytIJs?si=sVFPHlx3ZAKy4JWr>

⁴⁶⁹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.2 Complaints and Hate Mail.

⁴⁷⁰ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁷¹ Monteath, "Gay SA Comes Out of The Closet".

approach with fewer explicit films which they believed solidified the view that the LGBTQ+ community is promiscuous.⁴⁷²

In spite of this resistance, it is easy to see why such a film would have been picked by the OIA Committee if it wanted to be truly representative of all aspects of the LGBTQ+ community. The bondage documentary shed perspective on the ways in which bondage and S&M granted those who participated in it a form of emotional security and comfort, as well as a way to express their sexuality.⁴⁷³ This element of the documentary speaks to the different ways in which sexuality is expressed and that this expression is natural. Given that this film was screened during the period in which the OIA were still lobbying for equal rights and inclusion in the anti-discrimination clause, it addresses the way in which they, as LGBTQ+ people in South Africa, were also looked down upon due to their difference in sexuality. Regardless of the reasoning behind the committee's decision to air *Female Misbehavior*, as well as many other films of a similar nature, the unique perspectives of individuals guarantees that not every person viewing a film would have the same opinion on it.

For example, in the 1995 Annual Report, the OIA listed *Bar Girls* (1994) by Laura Hoffman as "an example of the kind of film that our audiences really wanted to see."⁴⁷⁴ These were films that were not "issue based" but simply a narrative of the lived experiences of lesbians. In comparison, Pratibha Parmar's film *Warrior Marks* (1994), which focuses on female genital mutilation, generated a strong reaction from the audience with a lengthy discussion

⁴⁷² GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.2 Complaints and Hate Mail.

⁴⁷³ *Female Misbehavior*, Monika Treut, <https://youtu.be/grdB-QytIJs?si=sVFPHlx3ZAKy4JWt>.

⁴⁷⁴ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

afterwards.⁴⁷⁵ A similar response was received by Catherine Saalfeld's *Divas in Training* (1995), which focused on LGBTQ+ youth from Manhattan and led to extensive discussion after its screening. From OIA's report on audience reactions to these three films alone, one can see the unique and varied responses LGBTQ+ audiences had to films. This is reiterated by Sheila Barsel who attended many OIA festivals and stated that:

I went there often. And some of the films I enjoyed, some of them irritated me. Some of the politics in the films irritated me. Some I thought were delightful. So I think like any film festival, you know, some work for you and some don't.⁴⁷⁶

This is also displayed in the archival material, in which OIA received a letter with some criticisms of the festival that many of the festival participants lamented on, and as well as suggestions on ways to improve the structure for the next festival.⁴⁷⁷ These concerns included the fact that many people felt that the majority of movies showcased were more "art films" and documentaries, and while it noted that these were interesting and important, many people felt that there was a lack of films that centred around gay/lesbian life.⁴⁷⁸ Figures 4 to 6 below contain the list included in the letter with the reasonings as to what these films meant to the South African LGBTQ+ community.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁵ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 7 September 2022.

⁴⁷⁷ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1996 General Correspondence, Letter to Out-In-Africa Committee from Michael Hobson, 12 January 1996.

⁴⁷⁸ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1996 General Correspondence, Letter to Out-In-Africa Committee from Michael Hobson, 12 January 1996.

⁴⁷⁹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1996 General Correspondence, Letter to Out-In-Africa Committee from Michael Hobson, 12 January 1996.

2)

PROGRAMMING (Choice of films shown)

Here, again, people kept on accosting me and saying things to the effect of "All these Art Films are fine, but I want to see a MOVIE, a real old fashioned 'fillum', especially a gay/lesbian or one orientated that way"

At this point, let me make it clear that, for many years, I ran the Wits University Film Society and then the combined Wits/Johannesburg Film (JFS) Society. so I DO understand many of the problems you face, of availability, high product rentals, rights availabilities, probable late arrival of films, you name it..! (not to mention keeping everyone happy!)

Then and perhaps more to the point, you are rightly concerned with both showing as wide a spectrum as possible of the whole gay experience and by thus doing, opening eyes and lessening prejudice.

However, there are certain suggestions which I would like to make, some based on what all those ex WFS/JFS members said to me and some of my own.

These are to have a few sub categories, even if these are not always clearly so labelled. Such as:

1) "THE MOVIES THAT MADE US"

By which is meant those films commercially screened, even as long as 30, 40, 50 years ago and which, even if not ostensibly gay (they couldn't be then) allowed a lot of us now older people to identify either with a character or situation and so allowed us to hope.

You and your advisers, helpers, friends, etc. might well have other suggestions, but as a first-off here is:

- a) The Green Years (UK 1946), with a young Dean Stockwell and Tom Drake. Of course, the two boys in the film loved each other, even if not comprehended by themselves. So many of us understood that when, seeing it as teenagers, we were just beginning to understand...
- b) Shane (US, 1953). There will be arguments on this one, but here again so many now mature gay men seeing this as youngsters just KNEW that it wasn't only hero-worship which young Brandon de Wild felt for mature Alan Ladd.
- c) Suddenly Last Summer (Us, 1959). Both Tennessee Williams (original play) and Gore Vidal (screenplay) knew something about gay life, even if this gripping movie turned out somewhat melodramatically - with shining performances from such gay icons as Elizabeth Taylor, Katherine Hepburn and the wonderfully sensitive Montgomery Clift.

Figure 4: Letter from OIA attendees with feedback and suggested films for the next festival

- d) Hemingway's Adventures of a Young Man (US, 1962). Again, nothing ostensibly gay, but the beautiful young Richard Beymer weeping at the railway siding as his friend went off to be a soldier **WAS** everyone of us.
- e) California Dreaming (US, 1979). Dennis Christopher wasn't "one of the (beach) boys" because, we all guessed, he was one of us boys. Faintly erotic and moving in a quiet way.
- f) Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (US, 1958). Tennessee Williams again, with the "fag-hag" deluxe, Elizabeth Taylor giving a great performance and a beautiful young Paul Newman (about whose private life there was never a suspicion of gayness. Married to that gorgeous Joanne Woodward?!) playing a character whose gayness (more in the play than in the movie) is heavily suppressed.
- g) Compulsion (US, 1959), well, Leopold and Leob may not have been lovers but, psychotic murderers that they were, it was always heavily hinted at. And as played by Dean Stockwell and Bradford Dillman, could one just not **SEE** them as lovers?
- h) Sunday, Bloody Sunday (UK, 1971) Glenda Jackson and Peter Finch (who had recently played Wilde with distinction in "The trials of Oscar Wilde") both in love with a gorgeous Murray Head. As in "Compulsion" this character, however, was hardly sympathetic.
- i) Rebel Without a Cause (US, 1955). Hardly a gay film, rather one about alienation, but no young gay man, or boy, seeing it then could doubt that the Sal Mineo (who was to die in 1971, aged 25, in a NYC gay bashing) character was in love with James Dean, ever beautiful and startlingly talented.
- j) The Boys in the Band (US, 1970). A miracle had happened! At last, a mainstream movie about a recognisable group of gay friends in a situation which was unequivocal in it's gayness. Mart Crowley's actually not very good play was actually improved, somehow, in the movie. The original Broadway cast give totally believable performances.
- k) La Cage aux Folles (Franco-Italian, 1978). Another miracle! an uproariously funny movie, on general and very successful release, about a gay couple ("married for years, my dear") and a bunch of drag queens. A tad misleading to the aunties out there in Main Street, USA and High street UK and Hoofweg RSA, who now thought **ALL** gay men were, even if only secretly, drag queens.

Figure 5: Continued list of suggested films

Film Festivals, of course, must show new and interesting films, not just revivals (if such available, anyway), but if, as I've suggested these were grouped under the heading of, say, "The Movies that made us", there might be a considerable impact. More straight people might also be tempted to see them, too, although "Apologia" should not be the key. **OPENLY** gay and lesbian films, with no apologies are really your keynote, but do give some thought to what I have suggested. Further titles here could be, randomly listed:

- a) Entertaining Mr Sloane
- b) Victim
- c) Death in Venice
- d) Butley
- e) The Damned
- f) The Music Lovers
- g) Staircase
- h) Midnight Cowboy
- i) Cruising
- j) Kiss of the Spiderwoman
- k) Maurice

YOU COULD PROBABLY MAKE A LONGER LIST THAN I EVER COULD. (California Suite, Deathtrap, Partners, etc, etc.). However, do consider a few more "mainstream movies" than last year's festival "Philadelphia" and this year's "Stonewall", highly commendable though they were. Just imagine how a younger group of gay men, who would not have seen them, would just **LOVE** "Cage" and "Torch Song Trilogy".

My list hasn't included mainstream lesbian films, but consider, too, the original, "Mädchen in Uniform" and it's remake "Girls in Uniform", "The Children's Hour", and "The Killing of Sister George". Maybe even "Private Benjamin" and "The Group", "Lianna", "Therese and Isabelle", "Thelma and Louise", "Desert Hearts", "Little Britches and Annie ... something ,etc.".

Garbo in "Queen Christina" (1933) played a famous monarch who cannot factually be stated to have been lesbian, **BUT...** just to see that face again, in Cavalier garb, oh! Like just to see, again, just once more, Ingrid Bergman (certainly not a lesbian) as Joan of Arc (Maxwell Anderson's not Shaw's. **AND** with Jose Ferrer and Cecil Kellaway in the cast).

The movie stars whom we all thought were just too good to be true, but never knew (how could we, they weren't "out" **THEN**, and few have come out since then) if they were gay.

- 1) Montgomery Clift, born 1920 and died young at 46 in 1966. Sensitive, warm, always a good actor. And a "sister" of Liz's, which said much.
- 2) Anthony Perkins, born 1932 and still around. Gangly, cute and the quintessential "Mommy's boy" in Hitchcock's 1960 "Psycho".

Figure 6: Further suggestions by the OIA audience

Many of the older LGBTQ+ people who attended the festival complained about the late times in which certain films were shown. They also appealed for the screening of films that they grew up on, such as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), which they believed to be representative of homosexuality, were shown in conjunction with newer LGBTQ+ films. However, it should be noted that the list of films that were suggested largely include gay male films as well as films that were not explicitly gay, but many felt had a homoerotic subtext to them.⁴⁸⁰ The letter does acknowledge and list some WLW films that could be shown as well, but largely focuses on male homosexuality. Here too the WLW films suggested, like *The Children's Hour* (1961) and *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), aren't openly homosexual films, but rather have homoerotic undertones. With each film suggestion the letter expands upon the meaning behind why these films had significance to the South African LGBTQ+ community. For example, it listed *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) as "hardly a gay film, rather one about alienation..." that many LGBTQ+ people could relate to despite the lack of LGBTQ+ representation, but rather due to the stigma and loneliness depicted within the film.⁴⁸¹ Lastly, the list attests to some of the more fastidious details surrounding the structure and organisation of the event itself.

The suggestions, especially regarding the dismay of the amount of art films and documentaries shown at the festival, are particularly interesting. While the existence of OIA was largely justified by the need of a large event that spotlighted the existence of LGBTQ+ people in South Africa, there seemed to be somewhat of a dichotomy between the festival itself and the participants. GLOW and ABIGALE intended to use OIA as a space to educate

⁴⁸⁰ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1996 General Correspondence, Letter to Out-In-Africa Committee from Michael Hobson, 12 January 1996.

⁴⁸¹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1996 General Correspondence, Letter to Out-In-Africa Committee from Michael Hobson, 12 January 1996.

both LGBTQ+ people and larger society about the everyday struggles that LGBTQ+ people faced. The overtly political message that was portrayed through the use of films shown seems to have been out of favour with the LGBTQ+ community itself. It is difficult to theorise exactly why this may have been the case and if this disappointment came from the majority of the audience or just a smaller group who felt this way. A possible hypothesis could be that the OIA's focus on showing videos of the many atrocities that LGBTQ+ people faced as a source of education, could have been emotionally taxing for its LGBTQ+ audience who may have been subject to these oppressive experiences in their everyday lives.

However, another possible hypothesis could also do be that the majority of the OIA attendees were white and middle class.⁴⁸² Films like *Warrior Marks*, for example, which addresses the concerns and issues that largely black African women dealt with, would therefore not be something to which a white, middle class LGBTQ+ individual could relate to. This is akin to a statement iterated by Glenn Belverio, an American journalist, whose documentary *Glennnda and Camille Do Downtown* alongside Camille Paglia, while screened at the OIA Film Festival in 1995, was rejected by other LGBTQ+ film festivals.⁴⁸³ According to Belverio, the LGBTQ+ community can be "the most discriminatory and elitist people" and found organisers of film festivals to be particularly "narrow-minded".⁴⁸⁴ While this may be a broad claim made after experiencing rejection, it has been shown throughout this thesis that white, middle class LGBTQ+ people in South Africa were discriminatory towards black LGBTQ+ people before. Pratibha Parmar, a British filmmaker who was invited to the OIA Film

⁴⁸² GALA, Wits, National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (hereafter NCGLE) Collection, AM 2615 (a), Folder I-A Organisational Records, I-A2 Reports and Reviews, National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, December 1994 – December 1995.

⁴⁸³ Al Patrick, "Award for Gay Documentary," *Tonight* (New York, United States), 9 November 1995 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

⁴⁸⁴ Patrick, "Award for Gay Documentary".

Festival and whose documentary *Warrior Marks* was a topic of much discussion as mentioned above, stated that control of the media lay “in the hands of a few white male heterosexuals” and that “queer festivals are essential for many filmmakers, especially lesbians and people of colour, because it is often the only place we can get our work screened and affirmed.”⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, while some may have felt that it would have been better to have the more mundane, daily experience of the LGBTQ+ community represented in the films displayed at OIA, having only these types of films would be counterintuitive to the OIA Film Festival narrative of being a space in which both socialising and education could occur.

Lack of Representation in Films

Women Loving Women

In their search for films to screen at the first ever OIA Film Festival, Nodi Murphy and Jack Lewis, the co-directors of the Film Festival, were shocked by the vastness in LGBTQ+ films that were available. However, they noted that the majority of these films were directed towards gay men on 35mm film, while films for LGBTQ+ women were sparse in comparison and existed mainly on 16mm film and video.⁴⁸⁶ Therefore, while OIA made a conscious decision to display an equal number of titles for LGBTQ+ men and women, the films for women were often of an inferior quality. In fact, Murphy mentioned that the staff of OIA had gone to lengths to ensure that films by women and about women received as much

⁴⁸⁵ Jaspreet Kindra, “Raising Gay Rights in the Indian Diaspora,” *The Leader* (Durban, South Africa), 17 November 1995 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report and Gevisser, “Coming Out of the Celluloid Closet”.

⁴⁸⁶ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

exposure as possible.⁴⁸⁷ While the OIA committee made sure to implement equality between the amount of lesbian and gay films shown, they noted that there was a larger selection of films for gay men than there were for lesbians which they attributed to the fact that gay men had greater access to disposable income than lesbians and the fact that there are more films and videos “made by and for gay men than lesbians”.⁴⁸⁸ Subsequently, the OIA committee was conscious of the fact that lesbian visibility in South Africa was an area in which growth and attention was needed.

This lack of lesbian visibility can further be seen in a letter the OIA Committee received of thanks and support for the Film Festival.⁴⁸⁹ This letter also contained a query as to whether there was a pre-existing lesbian film library in South Africa, as the library that the person had visited in Johannesburg only consisted of two films pertaining to lesbians (*Desert Hearts* (1985) and *The Killing of Sister George* (1968)) and consequently the author felt quite deprived that there was not more film in South Africa that contained lesbian themes.⁴⁹⁰ This lack of representation, in turn, further marginalised South African WLW from being able to have ease of access to media, outside of the OIA Film Festival, that represented them, not only within the LGBTQ+ community and space but also to the larger South African population.

⁴⁸⁷ KR, “Focus: Films For Women About Women Made By Women,” *The Cape Times* (Cape Town, South Africa), 1 July 1994 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁸⁸ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

⁴⁸⁹ Gay and Lesbian Archive (hereafter GALA), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1995 General Correspondence, File 3 of 5, Letter from Pretoria Dykes to Nodi Murphy from Out-In-Africa, date unknown.

⁴⁹⁰ The letter does not specify the library that is being spoken about. GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.1 1995 General Correspondence, File 3 of 5, Letter from Pretoria Dykes to Nodi Murphy from Out-In-Africa, date unknown.

It was also noted by the committee that lesbians showed a greater inclination to attend films about the gay male experience which was not reciprocated by gay men towards lesbian films and believed it to be a “curious anomaly”.⁴⁹¹ This statement highlights the gender divide that has been, and continues to be, prevalent within the LGBTQ+ community and the types of sexist microaggressions that many LGBTQ+ women had to deal with, and continue to deal with, in the LGBTQ+ community. Kitzinger has argued that the idea of a united LGBTQ+ community is simply an assumption made by heterosexual individuals and that solidarity between the two communities is barely reciprocated:

...lesbian and feminist political and cultural organizations, whether or not they seek or accept male membership, have little if any gay male support. Many lesbians have left the ‘mixed’ gay movement in protest at gay men’s sexism, obsessive sexual activity, phallocentrism and lack of political awareness (Stanley, 1982).⁴⁹²

Concrete examples of this have been given throughout this thesis, particularly in the previous chapter. This was also reaffirmed by a number of my oral history interview participants but can be summed up as viewing the LGBTQ+ community to be a “classist, hyper sexist, homonormative space that is ultimately serving one demographic [white, middle class gay men]”.⁴⁹³

South African LGBTQ+ Community

However, this was not the only area in which representation was lacking. A review of the 1994 OIA film festival stated that there were no South African components that were shown

⁴⁹¹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

⁴⁹² Celia Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (London, England: Sage Publications, 1987), 62 – 63.

⁴⁹³ Interview with Tish White, Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 8 July 2022.

at the festival, with all the films coming from abroad.⁴⁹⁴ Further, in an interview, Isaac Julien, a black gay British filmmaker who was invited to the film festival, noted that “in gay cinema black characters simply don’t exist”.⁴⁹⁵ The lack of representation for black people in LGBTQ+ cinema can be used as rhetoric in the argument that “homosexuality is unAfrican”.

Subsequently, just as there was a need for films for LGBTQ+ women by LGBTQ+ women, so too is there a need for film and documentation of black LGBTQ+ people by black LGBTQ+ people.

In an effort to alleviate this, the OIA initially ran an amateur film-making competition in 1994 and then film-making workshops and programmes in successive film festivals with the collaboration of the Department of Arts and Culture to encourage young filmmakers to make more indigenous films.⁴⁹⁶ It was due to this reason that Barbara Hammer, one of the four guest film directors at the first OIA Film Festival, was invited as a guest not only because of her ability to successfully create films on a low budget, but also because she was seen as a pioneer in exploring women’s sexuality and especially rejecting notions of women as passive, asexual beings.⁴⁹⁷ This programme was limited between 12 to 20 candidates and the focus was on the experience of being LGBTQ+ before and after apartheid. Hammer held two workshops, in Soweto, Johannesburg and Gugulethu, Cape Town. These workshops

⁴⁹⁴ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, The Open Closet Newsletter No 9, July 1994.

⁴⁹⁵ Andile Xaba, “Gay, Black, British Filmmaker is Excited to be in The Motherland,” *The Argus* (Cape Town, South Africa), 8 July 1994 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁹⁶ GALA, Wits, GAB/GLC Collection, AM 2995, Folder 3.1. Partnerships and Networking, The Open Closet Newsletter No 9, July 1994 and GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A2.2 Complaints and Hate Mail, Letter to Urban Brew Multimedia Productions, 4 November 1998.

⁴⁹⁷ It should be noted that the OIA Committee initially only invited two guests to attend the festival but hosted four directors in total which highlights the popularity and interest in the South African LGBTQ+ community from abroad. GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994 and KR, “Focus: Films For Women About Women Made By Women.”

consisted largely of young female aspiring independent film/video makers.⁴⁹⁸ Hammer also filmed a lot of footage surrounding the OIA Festival with the intention to make a short film on the South African LGBTQ+ community which was titled *Out in South Africa*.⁴⁹⁹

However, Hammer's film, which was displayed at the following OIA film festival, was not met with a positive reception by the South African LGBTQ+ audience, which can clearly be seen in a review made by Karen Rutter which implied that Hammer's take on South African LGBTQ+ lives made a mockery of the people it documented.⁵⁰⁰ According to Rutter, Hammer showcased LGBTQ+ individuals from the townships as "exotic specimens" and used the film to establish herself as a pioneer into "unsophisticated darkest Africa".⁵⁰¹ Lastly, Rutter advised audiences not to view this film at the OIA festival as she believed it to be "too cringe for a South African to watch and take seriously" and was clearly made with an overseas audience in mind.⁵⁰² Hoffman stated that in her view as a producer, she felt as though many LGBTQ+ reviewers had a tendency to be very negative towards "homosexual and lesbian films", which she believed was due to the personal political beliefs of the reviewers creating a standard that was not applied towards heterosexual films.⁵⁰³ This statement was met with backlash by some reviewers, who felt that critique was not only necessary, but would in fact

⁴⁹⁸ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁴⁹⁹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1994 Annual Report, Report on the First South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, June – July 1994.

⁵⁰⁰ Karen Rutter and Peter Frost, "Arts: Arquette at His Best," in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

⁵⁰¹ Rutter, "Arts: Arquette at His Best".

⁵⁰² Rutter, "Arts: Arquette at His Best".

⁵⁰³ Jacquelyn Swartz, "'Labours of Love' Deserve More Support, says Bar Girls writer-producer," *People* (Johannesburg, South Africa) in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

raise the standards of LGBTQ+ cinema instead of compromising on them.⁵⁰⁴ This speaks to Parmar's statement in an interview that the "positive/negative image debate is an intricate one", which reiterates the fact that using visibility as a form of activism does not always elicit a positive reaction and can, in fact, do more harm than it does good.⁵⁰⁵ Rutter's review and Hammer's *Out in South Africa* are a good example of this as while *Out in South Africa* documented the establishment of the festival and the lives of LGBTQ+ people in South Africa who do not get a lot of positive media coverage, it did so in a way that sensationalised and undermined their lived experiences.

This disjuncture between Western and South African perceptions of the South African LGBTQ+ community were not only highlighted with the films shown, but also during the filmmaking workshops. The second OIA Film Festival workshop set out to help "aspirant filmmakers to experiment and learn" and included a five day workshop to "conceive of, prepare, shoot and edit" a very short film to promote equal rights and tolerance.⁵⁰⁶ Workshops were prepared for both Cape Town and Johannesburg; however there was a substantial disparity of reception by the communities. While the Cape Town workshop was met with an "overwhelming" response and "oversubscribed", the call for the Johannesburg workshop was barely met and it was eventually decided that it should be cancelled.⁵⁰⁷ The

⁵⁰⁴ Untitled article, *The Cape Times* (Cape Town, South Africa), 10 November 1995 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

⁵⁰⁵ Eric Miller, "Sister Act," *Sunday Life* (South Africa), 24 December 1995 in GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

⁵⁰⁶ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

⁵⁰⁷ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

majority of the Cape Town participants were black and had not handled video equipment prior to the workshop.⁵⁰⁸

One of the participants, Rafiek Mammon, enjoyed the process but questioned the need for foreign filmmakers as facilitators of the workshop and the OIA's commitment to uplifting and empowering local filmmakers.⁵⁰⁹ Mammon suggested this was due to the language barrier that existed between the facilitators and the participants as there were some complications with understanding terms and concepts. Consequently, while the OIA was making an active effort to increase LGBTQ+ visibility, specifically black LGBTQ+ visibility, this was perhaps not the most effective way in which to do so as the introduction of the Western perspective to a South African context did not seem to yield the most positive results and left many feeling as though a South African perspective was needed for the depiction of South African experiences.

It is because of this that films such as Beverley Ditsie's *Simon & I* (2002) are so important given the initial attempts to produce South African LGBTQ+ filmmakers. *Simon & I* is a documentary written and directed by Ditsie, a black South African lesbian, that depicts the relationship between her and Simon Nkoli, the leader of GLOW, and their combined contribution to the LGBTQ+ movement.⁵¹⁰ The documentary maps out much of Ditsie's life, including her activism, and aspects of LGBTQ+ activism, such as the sexism she experienced from male members from GLOW, that were not spoken of often. It is important to note that

⁵⁰⁸ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

⁵⁰⁹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 2. Report on the 2nd Outstanding SA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

⁵¹⁰ Beverley Palesa Ditsie, "Simon & I", *YouTube*, 53:40, posted by "Steps For the Future", 29 August 2016, <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=simon+%26+i+youtube+bev+ditsie&&view=detail&mid=D55698FF1D F8D82EF600D55698FF1DF8D82EF600&&FORM=VRD GAR>

the significance of Ditsie's film was that in creating a record of her own life, and her own perception of her relationship with Nkoli, Ditsie's work did not perform for a foreign audience in the same way that Hammer's work seems to do but simply details a period of activism that was simply not included in mainstream South African historiography.

The Shift in South African LGBTQ+ Activism, 1996 – 2002

It should be noted that a substantial period of time passed before a shift in visual activism took place in the early 2000s. Within this time frame, the new South African constitution, which included the Equality Clause ensuring LGBTQ+ legal protection, was passed in 1996.

This change brought with it many other changes within the LGBTQ+ community. The OIA Committee decided that they would restructure the third Film Festival based on past experience with the other OIA Film Festivals, financial constraints as well as feedback that they received from their patrons.⁵¹¹ Due to the financial constraints, the OIA committee decided to decrease the line-up and run the festival over a shorter period of time.

Subsequently, only 21 titles were planned for the third OIA Film Festival which was 11 titles less than what was shown at the previous year's Film Festival.⁵¹² The Festival was also reduced to two weeks, with one week in Cape Town and one week running concurrently in Johannesburg and Pretoria, ultimately removing Durban from the festival schedule.

The Switch From (Pride) March to Mardi Gras

Structural changes also materialised within the mainstream Pride March. While the marches were still used as a way to lobby for LGBTQ+ rights, in 1996 the march included a mardi gras

⁵¹¹ GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 1. The 3rd SA *Otherwise* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Recommendation for 1996/97.

⁵¹² GALA, Wits, Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection, GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 Annual Reports, Out in Africa Film Festival Committee 1995 Annual Report, 1. The 3rd SA *Otherwise* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Recommendation for 1996/97.

“emphasising the celebratory aspect of Pride”.⁵¹³ The increasing move towards a more celebratory Pride began to create a lot of resentment within the community as many felt that this element distracted from the very real problems faced by black LGBTQ+ individuals. This, alongside the change in the Pride March route choice, altered the demographics of those who began to attend mainstream Pride which Ditsie speaks on in communication with Henriette Gunkel:

... [I]f we march through the inner city we’ve got visibility. If we march through the inner city we’ve got more black people. If we march through the inner city, you know, we’re being seen, we’re being vocal. But that threatens your white population who feel unsafe in the inner city, who would then would wanna go into the suburbs. So Pride moved to suburbia for a number of years and it was 90% white and they had a great time! But nobody saw them because they were marching through the little suburbs to a park where they had a party which is then really the essence of a Mardi Gras.⁵¹⁴

Migration Away From Mainstream Pride

Ditsie then further expands upon why this caused her, as well as many others (including most of my key informants), to move away from mainstream Pride. While legal victories were being won to ensure LGBTQ+ rights, these legislative victories were not being actualised in the lives of black LGBTQ+ South Africans:

Because actually, we’re still living in the same situations. Lesbians are still getting raped, gay people are still getting beaten up everywhere, you know. So when they may want to celebrate and have a Mardi Gras but actually we’re still marching. For us it’s still about visibility, for us it’s still about basic human rights on the ground which we’re not getting...⁵¹⁵

⁵¹³ de Waal and Manion, “Introduction,” 6.

⁵¹⁴ Henriette Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2011), 73.

⁵¹⁵ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 74.

This view was supported by many of my key informants such as Barsel who was disgusted by the shift in mainstream Pride and viewed it as another “pick up scene”.⁵¹⁶ Roché Kester, one of my interview participants, on the other hand believes that the debate around Pride, especially in Gauteng, is a lot more nuanced.⁵¹⁷ Kester makes the argument that just because one type of Pride exists, does not mean that the other cannot and urges the importance of visibility:

And I think that it's also a major expression of a different kind of freedom, in what you can celebrate on pride, you know, what is the messaging behind it? Is it political? Just because... is it not political just because it's a party? But then that also speaks about, you know, the gathering of community and visibilising the community. So that, in essence, is also a political act. And so I don't think there can be a monitoring of what is deemed political in the queer space and how, how it should, what the, you know, the, the measuring stick should be for activism.⁵¹⁸

This must also be viewed with the understanding that visibility had been a strategy used by political activists to ensure LGBTQ+ rights, as well as the fact that many of the initial intersectional LGBTQ+ organisations existed to serve both the social and political needs of their constituents at the time. In this way, black LGBTQ+ people were, and continue to be, routinely excluded from mainstream LGBTQ+ activism and therefore had to find new ways to take up space within the LGBTQ+ community which will be discussed shortly through the work and activism of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) and Muholi.

Homophobic Hate Crimes and the Hypervisibility of Black WLW in the Media

However, this did not mean that black LGBTQ+ visibility disappeared completely from mainstream media. In fact, this visibility instead turned towards the continuous reporting of homophobic hate crimes directed largely towards black LGBTQ+ individuals, specifically

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022.

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Roché Kester, Johannesburg, South Africa, conducted by author, 18 January 2022.

⁵¹⁸ Interview with Roché Kester, 18 January 2022.

within townships which has been termed “corrective” or “curative” rape. While the term “corrective” rape is often used to describe rape enacted against black LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly in mainstream media, it should be highlighted that this term does not “cure” or “correct” LGBTQ+ people of their sexual orientation and should instead be understood as a way in which heteronormativity is enforced upon LGBTQ+ individuals.⁵¹⁹ For this reason, I will instead use the term homophobic hate crime when discussing the rape of LGBTQ+ people with the intent of altering their sexual orientation.

Rape, as Pumla Gqola writes, is used as a way to regulate and control women and “what has been dubbed ‘curative’ or ‘corrective’ rape is a manifestation of this desire to control, monitor and police all aspects of women’s lives”.⁵²⁰ Gunkel notes that masculine presenting, or butch, lesbians are often targeted in homophobic hate crimes as their visible nonconformity to heteronormative definitions of what women and femininity should look like is deemed to be punishable for its supposed violation of a societal binary gender structure.⁵²¹ This is supported by Celia Kitzinger who argues that homophobic people often hold traditional, stereotyped views on women leading to an increase in homophobia displayed towards women who break these rules.⁵²² The epidemic of violence towards women lead to an upsurge of organisations focused on women’s safety, such as FEW.

⁵¹⁹ Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Auckland Park, South Africa: MFBooks Joburg, 2018).

⁵²⁰ Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, 92.

⁵²¹ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 85 – 88.

⁵²² Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*, 57.

The Radicalisation of LGBTQ+ Feminist Activism, 2002 Onwards

The Forum for the Empowerment of Women

FEW was co-founded by Muholi and Donna Smith to promote and protect the rights of LGBTQ+ women as well as provide a safe space for women to organise and meet.⁵²³ It is based in Johannesburg and aims to provide “autonomy, dignity and equality in all aspects of their life, both in the private and public domains”.⁵²⁴ FEW set out to achieve this in numerous ways, most of which combined lobbying with visual activism. In 2003, FEW, in collaboration with Behind the Mask and the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project, ran the ‘The Rose Has Thorns Campaign’.⁵²⁵ It was aimed at lobbying for a hate crimes legislation in South Africa. FEW, along with other organisations, offered victim support, provided police and other service workers workshops on dealing with victims of hate crimes and worked towards implementing the Hate Crime Bill. The campaign ran until 2006.⁵²⁶ It also included a storytelling element as part of the project that gave LGBTQ+ people a space to share their stories and life journeys with people.⁵²⁷

The Establishment of Soweto Pride as a Safe Space for Black Women Loving Women

FEW also established Soweto Pride in 2004 to provide a space for black lesbians to create visibility, amplify their voices and engage with the larger Sowetan community.⁵²⁸ It is still in existence and the programme begins on Heritage Day every year and starts with cultural

⁵²³ Zanele Muholi, *Faces + Phases: 2006-14* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2014), 346.

⁵²⁴ GALA, Wits, The Forum For the Empowerment of Women (hereafter FEW) Collection, GAL 0098, FEW pamphlet.

⁵²⁵ GALA, Wits, FEW Collection, GAL 0098, Folder A2 Funding – FEW Report 5th Edition, March 2005.

⁵²⁶ GALA, Wits, FEW Collection, GAL 0098, Folder A3 – The Rose Has Thorns Anti-Hate Crime Campaign, The Rose Has Thorns Anti-Hate Crime Campaign Pamphlet and The Rose Has Thorns Anti-Hate Crime Campaign document.

⁵²⁷ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵²⁸ “Soweto Pride, Heritage & Film Festival”, Forum For The Empowerment of Women. Accessed August 29, 2022. https://few.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=120 and Muholi, *Faces + Phases: 2006-14*, 347.

activities and movie screenings. It then moves on to the march on the second day, followed by political and edutainment programmes. Soweto Pride provides a space for black LGBTQ+ bodies in the townships but was also established largely to address the fact that mainstream Pride in Johannesburg remains inaccessible to black LGBTQ+ people.⁵²⁹ Many of the interview participants that resided in Johannesburg mentioned their move away from the Joburg Pride March to Soweto Pride. For many this shift occurred after the incident that took place at Joburg Pride when the One in Nine campaign members asked for a minute of silence to remember Black lesbian hate crimes and the lives that had been lost through these atrocities.⁵³⁰ This was a grievous moment for black lesbians who were met with hostility by white gay men. Many black lesbians like Jade Madingwane were attacked by white gay men for trying to draw awareness to the brutalities and hate crimes that many black queer women face on a daily basis.⁵³¹ As such, many black LGBTQ+ women began resonating more with Soweto Pride because it is a free Pride and that it included, and continues to include, a political programme similar to the initial Pride marches held in South Africa.⁵³² It is also a space that celebrates black LGBTQ+ identities in a township where homosexuality is often met with homophobia or ignorance.

Visual Literacy Training in Combatting Stereotypical Depictions of Black LGBTQ+ Lives.

FEW also hosted a handful of projects construed around visual literacy as an empowerment initiative. Catherine Saalfield asserts that imparting knowledge on visual and media literacy skills to communities that are oppressed by mainstream media plays an important role in

⁵²⁹ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵³⁰ Muholi, *Faces + Phases: 2006-14*, 353, Interview with Nikita Ramkissoon, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, conducted by author, 29 June 2022 and Interview with Tish White, 8 July 2022.

⁵³¹ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵³² Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

resistance.⁵³³ According to Saalfeld, visual literacy training provides these communities with the tools to recognise how mainstream media is “used to bring people down” and, through this understanding, people can create media that resists this misrepresentation and discrimination.⁵³⁴ In this way, media, which is often used as a weapon of oppression to enforce societal norms and values, thus becomes a tool for resistance.

Initially in 2004, FEW trained 14 unemployed lesbian women in photography skills so as to document their lives as Black lesbians who live in townships as well as allow them to contribute to the creation of knowledge.⁵³⁵ The project was taught by Muholi and funded by Kodak, with the final product exhibited in Museum Africa.⁵³⁶ By 2006, FEW launched a booklet on the photographic experience of the Visual Literacy programme. From its establishment up until now, FEW has trained 52 women in Visual Literacy with priority given to women from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵³⁷ FEW established a research programme called The Black Lesbian Memory Project or the “Making Herstory” workshops.⁵³⁸ This involved 8 Black lesbian women who were trained with digital cameras to document black lesbian lives so as to control the narrative of black lesbian women in the media and establish an archive to counter the predominant narrative that homosexuality is unAfrican.

⁵³³ Michelle Galloway, “Interview: Rights, activism and the power of film,” *AIDS Bulletin*, date unknown, 31 in GALA, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection (hereafter OIA Collection), GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

⁵³⁴ Michelle Galloway, “Interview: Rights, activism and the power of film,” *AIDS Bulletin*, date unknown, 31 in GALA, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Wits), Out in Africa: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Collection (hereafter OIA Collection), GAL0118 (A), Folder A Organisational Material, A4 1995 Annual Report, 3. Media Report.

⁵³⁵ GALA, Wits, FEW Collection, GAL 0098, Folder B1 Newsletters, FEW Reaching Out to Many Newsletter January – September 2004, pg. 2

⁵³⁶ GALA, Wits, FEW Collection, GAL 0098, Folder A2 Funding, FEW Report 5th Edition, March 2005.

⁵³⁷ GALA, Wits, FEW Collection, GAL 0098, Folder B1 Newsletters, FEW Reaching Out to Many Newsletter February – June 2006.

⁵³⁸ GALA, Wits, FEW Collection, GAL 0098, Folder A3 Workshops, Conferences etc, Subfolder A3.2 Making Herstory 2007 and Jean Brundrit, “Township Herstory.” *Mail & Guardian*. Johannesburg, South Africa. September 18, 2008.

Comparing Counselling for the LGBTQ+ Community to Counselling for Activists

This coincided with another strategy FEW employed in providing a counselling service for their constituency and they made sure to pick out LGBTQ+ friendly psychologists.⁵³⁹ As mentioned previously, this was something that was not as accessible for black LGBTQ+ people, particularly those from townships. This was found to be extremely useful as stated by Kekeletso Khenani, a Black lesbian who, in 2002, had been raped numerous times and had found no help from the police or support groups who were majority white based but was able to find support from FEW.⁵⁴⁰ Although funding was readily provided for FEW's constituency, funds were not made available for the staff at FEW. While the FEW staff are allowed to access these psychologists as well, they would have to pay out of pocket which was not practical as they are not paid enough to afford affirming psychologists and consequently have been exposed to psychologists who either hold homophobic views or lack understanding on the issues activists face.⁵⁴¹

One such example can be seen with Madingwane, a current staff member at FEW, who stated that while a psychologist she used to frequent was not explicitly homophobic, the experience of attending therapy was very exhausting for her as she constantly had to explain her work as an activist. As such, what should have been a therapeutic experience for Madingwane, became a learning space for the psychologist and not a space that could allow Madingwane to simply offload her problems and experiences as an LGBTQ+ activist or simply as a lesbian:

⁵³⁹ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵⁴⁰ Malena Amusa, "This Rose Has Thorns." *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg, South Africa), May 5, 2005.

⁵⁴¹ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

...I think she was more than anything she was interested in my sexuality more than the problem I had come there for; you know. It was okay, but it just been felt like a learning session, rather than a therapy session for myself. Um, she'd be shocked when I'd say LGBTI. She'd be like oh my God what is that? What does that mean? You know, it was so funny because, like, okay gal, I'm literally here for you now. So she'd always just really be shocked when I say hate crimes, when I say the work that I do is exhausting, she'd just always just be shocked, you know.⁵⁴²

As a result, LGBTQ+ conferences often hold healing sessions and meditation spaces to allow activists a space to talk about their feelings and vent their frustrations.⁵⁴³ For many activists, activist spaces often exist as therapeutic spaces as well. Fikile Vilakazi stated that the activism circle is a place of therapy for many LGBTQ+ people because of the way in which they engage with the struggle and contribute to activism. For Vilakazi, she felt that that space had helped her so much in healing past wounds that she had around her identity and orientation.⁵⁴⁴

Muholi

While one can certainly attribute FEW's visual literacy workshops to Muholi, it would not be farfetched to hypothesise that the strategy of using visual activism in all of its various forms discussed above was one influenced by Muholi overall. Muholi was born in a township in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal called Umlazi in 1972.⁵⁴⁵ They were born to a Zulu mother who worked as a domestic worker and a Malawian father that was a tradesman who passed away after they were born.⁵⁴⁶ Like many black people, employment options were limited for Muholi and "...art, it's like a waste of time because art has never been recognized fully",

⁵⁴² Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵⁴³ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Fikile Vilakazi, 8 August 2022.

⁵⁴⁵ Zanele Muholi, *Zanele Muholi: Only Half the Picture*, ed. Sophie Perryer (Cape Town, South Africa: Michael Stevenson, 2006).

⁵⁴⁶ Raquel Willis, "Zanele Muholi Forever Changed the Image of Black Queer South Africans," *Out Magazine*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.out.com/art/2019/4/23/zanele-muholi-forever-changed-image-black-queer-south-africans>.

which led to them to taking on whatever jobs that they could to survive.⁵⁴⁷ In 2003, Muholi attended a photography program at the Market Photo Workshop, an internationally respected school founded by David Goldblatt, which they completed in 2004. During this time, they developed skills and techniques that allowed them to document their constituency in a way that did not sensationalise black LGBTQ+ people.

Muholi's aim was, and continues to be, resistance against the depiction of black LGBTQ+ people in mainstream media which either "demonized LGBTQ+ community members" or "made light of the brutal violence and murders happening all over".⁵⁴⁸ Gunkel gives an example of how mainstream media puts black lesbians at risk when reporting on homophobic hate crimes towards black LGBTQ+ women, subsequently trivialising the cruelties committed towards them.⁵⁴⁹ When reporting on the murder of Zoliswa Nkonyana in 2006 in Khayelitsha, a township in Cape Town, *The Sunday Times* published a photograph of Nkonyana and her friends alongside the article on Nkonyana's death – this picture included Nkonyana with 3 of her friends and identified them as belonging to a lesbian soccer club in Khayelitsha.⁵⁵⁰ In doing so, *The Sunday Times* put Nkonyana's friends, and possibly other members of the soccer club that were not depicted, at risk of homophobic violence by clearly labelling them as lesbians and making them easy targets.

This kind of representation in mainstream media fuelled Muholi to produce their first solo exhibition, *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture* at Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004 which focused on "documenting the stories of rape and hate crime survivors and [their] interest in

⁵⁴⁷ Willis, "Zanele Muholi Forever Changed the Image of Black Queer South Africans".

⁵⁴⁸ Willis, "Zanele Muholi Forever Changed the Image of Black Queer South Africans".

⁵⁴⁹ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 74.

⁵⁵⁰ Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, 81.

intimate black and white photography”.⁵⁵¹ Muholi’s work on hate crime survivors has received a lot of attention for the way in which it protests against sensationalised depictions of hate crime survivors by also allocating incredible sensitivity to the people in which they capture.⁵⁵² This can be seen in “Hate Crime Survivor I”, as seen in Figure 7, where Muholi depicts a close up portrait of an individual with their hands resting gently in their lap.



Figure 7: Muholi's *Hate Crime Survivor I*

The positioning of the hands, as well as the multiple hospital bracelets attached to them, is reminiscent of a similar pose by prisoners who are often depicted in handcuffs.⁵⁵³ Guilt

⁵⁵¹ Willis, “Zanele Muholi Forever Changed the Image of Black Queer South Africans”.

⁵⁵² Kylie Thomas, “Zanele Muholi’s Intimate Archive: Photography and Post-Apartheid Lesbian Lives,” *Safundi* 11, no. 4 (September 23, 2010): 421–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2010.511792>, Kathryn Smith, “Zanele Muholi,” Stevenson, 2006, https://archive.stevenson.info/artists/muholi/articles/2006_kathryn_smith_art_sa_vol_4_issue_3_%202006_page_75.pdf, Marcus Bunyan, “Exhibition: ‘Zanele Muholi’ at Tate Modern, London,” web log, *Art Blart* (blog), May 22, 2021, <https://artblart.com/tag/zanele-muholi-only-half-the-picture/> and Irina Turner, “Comprehending Gender Issues Through Photography?: A South African Case Study” (VDM, 2008).

⁵⁵³ Muholi, *Zanele Muholi: Only Half the Picture*, 18.

radiates off of the photograph despite the fact that no facial expression can be seen in this picture. This correlates with many survivors of homophobic hate crimes' experience of being told and feeling that they "brought the violence upon themselves", such as Nokuthula Dhladhla's experience which was mentioned earlier in this thesis.⁵⁵⁴ In this way, Muholi is able to document the life stories of those who have been subjected to homophobic hate crimes and capture their story and emotions, without doing so in a way that further traumatises the individual or puts them at further risk of being subjected to homophobic violence.

However, as stated by Gqola, Muholi's work resists "endeavours to name, tame and classify".⁵⁵⁵ Subsequently, Muholi's work is not limited to solely documenting the stories of hate crime survivors but also works to enlighten on the lived experiences of black LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those from townships, as well as challenge hypersexual stereotypes of lesbian sexuality by normalising it.⁵⁵⁶ This can clearly be seen in Muholi's work, "Mamu", which, as depicted in Figure 8 below, shows a cropped photograph of two individuals

⁵⁵⁴ Thomas, "Zanele Muholi's Intimate Archive", 10.

⁵⁵⁵ Pumla Dineo Gqola, "Through Zanele Muholi's Eyes: Re/imagining ways of seeing Black lesbians," in Zanele Muholi, *Zanele Muholi: Only Half the Picture* (Cape Town, South Africa: Michael Stevenson, 2006), 83.

⁵⁵⁶ Gqola, "Through Zanele Muholi's Eyes: Re/imagining ways of seeing Black lesbians," 87.

walking together with their pinkie fingers interlinked.



Figure 8: Muholi's Mamu

The individuals are in matching outfits of black tops and camouflage pants. As only their lower halves are on display, it would be difficult to place these individuals identities, if not for the title “Mamu” which is reminiscent of the term mummy-baby. This photo simply depicts the ordinariness of WLW relationships by portraying domesticity and, in doing so, normalises WLW relationships in the heteropatriarchal eye by showing attributes of the relationship such as the matching outfits and hand holding that can also be found in heterosexual relationships.

LGBTQ+ Activist Problems That Need to be Addressed

However, as much as the activist space is healing for many activists, it is also a place that can have a negative impact on their wellbeing, particularly with regards to the inner conflict that persists within these spaces. Many LGBTQ+ organisations/spaces often experience conflict for various reasons and there is a lot of disharmony within the LGBTQ+ activist space. This is

particularly prevalent with black LGBTQ+ activists who are often subjected to racism by white-led organisations. For example, FEW initially wanted to collaborate with a white-led organisation for their Criminal Justice System Project but felt insulted and degraded by the organisation who insinuated that FEW was too incompetent to carry out a big project because they did not have degrees or a Director at that moment in time.⁵⁵⁷ It has also been stated that many feel that sometimes organisations chase the glory and fame from bigger projects instead of working together harmoniously. Madingwane mentioned that often FEW would want to collaborate on a project with another LGBTQ+ organisation, only for that organisation to steal their idea and implement it without FEW.⁵⁵⁸ Many younger LGBTQ+ activists feel as if this kind of disharmony mainly comes from older activists.⁵⁵⁹

Consequently, many of the interview participants felt that there was a lot of work still left to do to fully actualise LGBTQ+ rights and protection in South Africa, especially for black LGBTQ+ people in reality. However many, like Barsel, noted that there also seems to have been a shift in the movement in the sense that people and organisations have begun working in silos and there's a substantial amount of isolation that can be found in the movement.⁵⁶⁰ Barsel felt that this isolation is particularly felt by LGBTQ+ women and that there needs to be more unity within the community but acknowledges that this viewpoint is somewhat utopian.

In summary, using visibility as a strategy by LGBTQ+ activists to lobby for the inclusion of the antidiscrimination clause in the final South African constitution was highly successful. The use of the Out in Africa Film Festival and Pride Marches were able to garner much attention

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022.

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with Jade Madingwane, 3 February 2022 and Interview with Sazi Jali, Johannesburg, South Africa, conducted by author, 27 January 2022.

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with Sheila Barsel, 7 September 2022

and resist the narrative that the LGBTQ+ community consisted of mainly white individuals who were not subjected to experiences of oppression. Despite the shortcomings of OIA and Pride, the importance of these events in South African LGBTQ+ history need to be noted for their ability to create both a space of socialising and education that sought to challenge the invisibility that the LGBTQ+ community experienced under discriminatory state legislation which helped to pave the way for LGBTQ+ rights to be won.

However, these victories were not realised for all people in the LGBTQ+ community, particularly not for black LGBTQ+ women. While racism and sexism have been prevalent forces within the LGBTQ+ community, these were most acutely felt at Pride Marches following the institution of the 1996 Final Constitution. The change in routes to be more suburban meant that many black LGBTQ+ women were no longer able to access Pride freely and easily. The decrease in political messages of Pride was another driving force that turned many black LGBTQ+ women away from mainstream Pride, particularly as the plight against the hypervisibility and homophobic hate crimes enacted against black LGBTQ+ women were not being championed by mainstream Pride. Black LGBTQ+ women adapted to the lack of support from the larger LGBTQ+ community in a similar way discussed in the previous chapter, by removing themselves from spaces in which they faced oppression and creating their own space which incorporated both feminist and intersectional ideals. This space was championed by those like Muholi and FEW and continued to use visibility as a tactic to counter the hyper visible representation of black LGBTQ+ women in mainstream media, as well as draw attention to the homophobic hate crimes perpetuated against black LGBTQ+ women in a way that does not retraumatise the survivors of such attacks. While visibility has been, and continues to be, a successful strategy in resisting oppression by combining the documentation of the intimate lives of LGBTQ+ people with public activism, the underlying

racism and sexism that persists within the LGBTQ+ community has led to the creation of silos amongst LGBTQ+ organisations and spaces and therefore does not guarantee the protection of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly black LGBTQ+ women, from discrimination.

Conclusion

This dissertation has undertaken a comprehensive analysis into the various ways in which LGBTQ+ women have faced oppression through both state legislation and in their social and cultural worlds. It investigated the infiltration of homophobic legislation into the private family sphere, particularly through religion. In its navigation of the approaches utilised to reconcile the religious and sexual identity conflict of my participants, either through rejection of sexual or religious identity, it illuminated LGBTQ+ women's experiences with conversion therapy in South Africa. This dissertation has also identified socialising as the main web of connection between LGBTQ+ women's public activism and private, intimate worlds. It has been explicitly demonstrated throughout this thesis the way in which socialising has served as a resource utilised by many LGBTQ+ women to combat their intersectional oppression, but that it was also within these socialising spaces that oppression transpired.

Attempts to minimise these experiences of oppression through the withdrawal from oppressive spaces and the creation of social spaces that focused on the intersections of identity have been important in negating multifaceted experiences of oppression. However, this has led to fragmentation within the LGBTQ+ activist space with many LGBTQ+ organisations working "in silos" that ultimately left black LGBTQ+ women vulnerable to discrimination. This fragmentation is particularly highlighted when analysing the success of visibility as a strategy for lobbying with regards to the establishment of the Out in Africa Film Festival and Pride Marches. The experience of racism and sexism within the LGBTQ+ liberation movement led to the formation of a more feminist-oriented approach to LGBTQ+ liberation by black lesbian women whose discrimination was amplified due to their

increased visibility. These findings are important to South African LGBTQ+ historiography, as they document both the ways in which LGBTQ+ women's experiences of intersectional oppression manifested within the LGBTQ+ community and society at large, as well as how LGBTQ+ women employed tactics of agency, resistance, and community building to cope with their experiences of oppression.

As discussed in the first chapter of the thesis, which engages with LGBTQ+ women's experiences of, and responses to, religious oppression, legislation passed during the apartheid-era under the rule of the National Party (NP) was influenced by the government's adherence to conservative Christian ideologies that promoted homophobia by labelling it as "unnatural" and "sinful". As Foucault argued, legislation thus becomes the societal norm to which one must adhere in order not to be subjected to punishment by the state.⁵⁶¹ In this way, legislation is simultaneously able to exist in both a national context as well as filter itself down to penetrate into, and influence, family structures. This indoctrination of Christian morality can clearly be seen within each of my Christian participants' households, despite none of them subscribing to the Dutch Reformed Church denomination that was linked to the NP. However, the way in which this stigma is upheld within the family unit is not universal, but also influenced by the various cultural, racial and class perspectives of the family. As a result, homonegative societal norms are able to both affect an LGBTQ+ individual in their public and private worlds and fragment their feelings of trust and security within the family structure. As in the case of my key informants, this can cause intrapersonal identity conflict as a person's sexual identity comes into dispute with their religious identity,

⁵⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 144 – 147.

leaving many feeling as though their only option to fit into the heteronormative standards of society is to suppress their sexual identity.

Subsequently, the 1980s under NP rule in South Africa was entrenched in conservative patriarchal norms and values that enforced the expectation of heteronormativity through compulsory heterosexuality. The expectation to comply to heterosexual romantic and sexual relationships led to many of my participants dating men in an effort to appease their family as well as hide their sexual identity for fear and condemnation by their family. This could ultimately lead to a heavy psychological impact upon the religious LGBTQ+ person as two major emotional support structures, their family and their faith, became spaces of oppression. It is in this context that the religious LGBTQ+ person attempted to reconcile their supposed conflicting identities.

Reconciliation of intrapersonal identity conflict is widely researched, particularly in relation to Christianity, however this thesis offers a South African perspective on this topic as it discusses underexplored aspects of LGBTQ+ women's experiences with conversion therapy as a way to resolve intrapersonal identity conflict. It is in examining these experiences of conversion therapy that the role that intersectionality plays in LGBTQ+ women's oppression in different social and cultural worlds is highlighted which I have attempted to demonstrate in this thesis. Although Dhladhla and de Lange both attended Pentecostal churches and experienced homonegativity and the churches' attempts of "curing" them of their sexual orientation, the context in which this occurred plays a large role in how experiences of oppression manifested. Within this scope of analysis, the influence of the cultural values of the Pentecostal church's community is discernible in the way in which oppression against these women occurred. As Dhladhla attended a black African Pentecostal church, she was

subjected to experiences of shame and exclusion upon discovery of her sexual orientation. She was also exposed to violent beatings by the church community on the assumption that the key cause for her sexual orientation was due to demonic possession. In comparison, de Lange's experience was shaped around the American construct of ex-gay ministry which centred around pro-family, fundamentalist values that promoted the idea of a traditional, "Godly" women through prayers, readings and teachings. While the trauma and emotional distress this has caused my key informants must be acknowledged, their stories are also pivotal in illuminating a relatively unexplored area of research. Although ex-gay ministry is a predominant form of conversion therapy within the African continent, at the time of writing this thesis, the experiences and accounts of it within a South African context are severely limited and did not encompass the experiences of LGBTQ+ women. Further exploration into this territory could contribute insights and understanding into the ways in which LGBTQ+ women's oppression occurs in the religious private sphere.

Ultimately, this thesis highlights the important impact socialising within LGBTQ+ affirming religious spaces had in empowering religious LGBTQ+ women in reconciling their faith and their sexual orientation. This is not to say that this was an easy, simple fix in resolving their intrapersonal identity conflict, but rather that this was an influential psychosocial resource that provided my key informants with new tools such as exploring Biblical scripture with new perspectives and surrounding themselves with other religious LGBTQ+ people.

Churches such as Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church (HUMCC), Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC) and Deo Gloria Family Church (DGFC) have played, and continue to play, a vital role in creating LGBTQ+ affirming religious spaces in South Africa that has allowed for the healing of religious trauma for many of my participants through their inclusive practices. Involvement in these spaces has, in turn, allowed my

participants to implement these coping mechanisms and teachings to other religious LGBTQ+ people.

Despite this, religious institutions remain one of the largest opponents to the passage of LGBTQ+ affirming legislation, most notably in the case of the Civil Union Act in 2006. What I have attempted to demonstrate in this thesis is that religious resistance to homosexuality heavily impacts the ways in which LGBTQ+ women experience oppression in both the public and private spheres, and thus debunks the premise that LGBTQ+ women are fully protected under anti-discriminatory legislation. However, the limitations of only having access to the experiences of Christian LGBTQ+ women makes it difficult to surmise if this statement also stands true for LGBTQ+ women that belong to different faiths. It would be interesting to investigate if Christian-influenced apartheid legislation impacted LGBTQ+ women of other religions, how this possible oppression may have manifested in their lives and the ways in which LGBTQ+ women from other religions navigated this legislation.

In turning attention to the second chapter dealing with intersectional blindness in terms of race and gender within the South African LGBTQ+ activist community, we must, firstly note that racially discriminatory apartheid legislation was another major facet in the oppression of LGBTQ+ people of colour. The anti-apartheid movement was the driving force behind South Africa's transition to democracy, but it also existed as a site of oppression for many women activists within it, especially those who were LGBTQ+. I argue that to fully understand how a movement centred on liberation was able to partake in oppression, it is crucial to acknowledge the heteronormative and patriarchal views that were predominant in society at the time and how these beliefs contributed to experiences of discrimination in the movement. Due to the domination of men in leadership positions in the anti-apartheid

movement, aspects of intersectional oppression (such as gender oppression or discrimination based on sexual orientation) were disregarded as minor in comparison to the broader focus of national liberation from race and class oppression. I posit that this can be attributed to some activists' intersectional blindness, or lack of unawareness of other people's experiences of oppression due an unshared facet of identity that is also discriminated against within wider society.

While women's involvement in the anti-apartheid liberation movement has often been overlooked in historical literature, it has been taken up by feminist scholars and it is within these texts that the dismissive, sexist treatment of women within the anti-apartheid liberation movement have been increasingly illuminated. Although a large majority of the contributions to unpacking the gender discrimination within the anti-apartheid movement have come from cisgendered, heterosexual women, these claims were reasserted by my key informants, such as Barsel and Vilakazi. The disregard for the inclusion of non-sexist clauses found in many anti-apartheid liberation organisations by their own male members and the continual perpetuation of sexism within the movement could be seen as foreshadowing of the continued discrimination against women even after the implementation of the Final Constitution.

Oppression based on sexual orientation was another aspect of discrimination within the anti-apartheid liberation movement, though there have been relatively few accounts of these experiences and those that have emerged are largely from the perspective of gay men within the movement. This silence can be attributed to the homonegative views that were rife within the anti-apartheid movement, forcing many LGBTQ+ people to keep their sexual identity hidden. Of particular note is the experience of Simon Nkoli, a prominent male anti-

apartheid and LGBTQ+ activist. His treatment after his comrades learnt about his sexual orientation provides insight into how his disclosure of sexual orientation within the anti-apartheid liberation movement led to questions about his capability and role in the movement.

This type of reaction caused many LGBTQ+ activists to compartmentalise their sexual identity within the movement in order to avoid discrimination. Compartmentalisation of identity is a common psychological tool that was utilised by many LGBTQ+ activists to cope with the emotional impact of being surrounded by homonegative beliefs, especially when working in collaboration with other movements such as the anti-apartheid liberation movement and the women's movement. This can be seen in Barsel's discussion of the lack of openly LGBTQ+ women in FEDSAW, a significant anti-apartheid women's organisation. In relation to later periods, other participants acknowledged their lack of disclosure of their sexual or gender identity in spaces that they knew to be homophobic and/or transphobic. Due to this concealment of identity, it is difficult to comprehensively attest to the experiences of openly LGBTQ+ women within the anti-apartheid movement: this is a significant area in which further exploration is needed to enhance our understanding of LGBTQ+ women's lived realities in the past.

However, the anti-apartheid and women's liberation movement were not the only places where LGBTQ+ women experienced oppression. The LGBTQ+ liberation movement also had a significant impact in generating their oppression, particularly based upon race and gender. The racial discrimination within the formation of the early LGBTQ+ organisations has been heavily documented, especially the involvement of GASA in perpetuating this discrimination. Although GASA allowed black LGBTQ+ people to join its organisation, it largely existed as a

social organisation and space for the South African LGBTQ+ community and took an apolitical stance. This stance was innately contradictory as the establishment of GASA in the 1980s, a period in which discriminatory laws against homosexuality were still in operation, made its existence political in nature. Thus, GASA's stance was entirely self-serving and upheld the beliefs and opinions of its white, middle-class members. This is reiterated in its failure to protect its black members from experiences of racism both within and outside of the organisation, with its lack of support of Nkoli during the Delmas Treason Trial serving as the prime example of its true political alignment.

In comparison, the experiences of LGBTQ+ women within GASA is not as widely documented, presumably due to its lack of a prominent female membership. However, Barsel, who served as a chairperson in the GASA-6010 branch in 1983, provided a detailed account of the misogyny that was rife within the organisation which isolated and alienated her from a space whose sole purpose was to function as a socialising space for members of the LGBTQ+ community. It therefore seems almost ironic that an organisation that contributed to the oppression of many of its black and female members established a counselling service for the LGBTQ+ community (which later became the highly impactful Triangle Project): this service was to help them cope with the psychosocial impact of societal discrimination against homosexuality. In evaluating Barsel's overview of GASA's counselling service as well as the records of the Gay Advice Bureau/Gay and Lesbian Counselling, one can see that these services were mainly utilised by white gay men and thus LGBTQ+ women had to utilise and develop other ways of coping with the impact of their multifaceted oppression.

What this research has shown is that disengagement and removal from social spaces in which oppression occurred was a popular tool utilised by many LGBTQ+ activists. This is

clearly seen in the formation of LAGO/OLGA in 1986 and GLOW in 1988. These organisations also made a conscious choice to address the experiences of intersectional oppression within the multiple liberation movements by linking the LGBTQ+ liberation struggle with the anti-apartheid movement. Due to the prevailing homonegativity within the anti-apartheid movement, this alignment was only accepted due to the leadership of prominent LGBTQ+ anti-apartheid activists such as Nkoli and Barsel. Barsel's account especially shows the flippancy of the anti-apartheid movement in supporting the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in South Africa when met with OLGA's request to affiliate itself with the UDF.

Despite OLGA and GLOW's intentions to create spaces that highlighted the importance of the intersection of identity to show that true freedom could not occur without sexual orientation equality, they were not able to truly encapsulate and resist the multifaceted nature of oppression. Subsequently, although affiliated to the UDF, OLGA was a largely white, middle-class organisation and many black LGBTQ+ people did not feel as though it was truly representative of their struggles and felt isolated within the organisation. This culminated in many leaving the group to found ABIGALE which consisted of mainly black and Coloured working class members and took on a more militant approach towards lobbying for equality. Despite this split, OLGA and ABIGALE were both integral to the formation of the NCGLE and were key contributors in lobbying for the decriminalisation of homosexuality and subsequent LGBTQ+ affirming legislation.

Similarly, although GLOW aimed to be an inclusive space that prioritised both the political and social aspects of LGBTQ+ life, pockets of exclusion existed within it. This exclusion has particularly been highlighted by Ditsie who felt self-conscious of her lack of knowledge on LGBTQ+ terminology within GLOW. This is fundamental in signifying the need for the

decolonisation of queer theory as it highlights the concern with the unquestioning induction of Western-influenced LGBTQ+ terminologies and labels in the African context. The use of uncritical Western labels disregards the multifaceted ways in which sexuality transpires within the South African context and dismisses local understandings of sexuality and sexual acts. By doing this, the cultural context in which sexuality emerges is eroded and a stagnant ideology of sexuality is presented where it can only be situated within the homosexual/heterosexual binary. In evaluating same-sex female intimacies, I contest this binary representation of sexuality and instead posit that sexuality must be understood within the cultural context in which it occurs. Furthermore, there needs to be a consideration of an individual's expression and labelling of their own identity.

Ditsie also became cognisant of the gender oppression within GLOW, especially towards black LGBTQ+ women, who she noticed rarely occupied leadership positions within GLOW. Another cause of concern for Ditsie was GLOW's overall dismissal of lesbian issues, a concern that exponentiated with the mounting homophobic attacks against black lesbians. This increase in homophobic hate crimes and harassment perpetuated against lesbians can be linked to the enhanced exposure of the LGBTQ+ community as a strategy in lobbying for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights, an occurrence which Ditsie experienced firsthand following her appearance in support of LGBTQ+ rights on television. Following the lack of support shown by GLOW's male members towards Ditsie for her attendance at the 1995 Beijing United Nation's Fourth World Women's Conference, Ditsie withdrew from involvement with GLOW. Her withdrawal further cements the argument that the abandonment from LGBTQ+ social spaces in which oppression occurs was both a psychological and resistance strategy utilised by LGBTQ+ women. Thus LGBTQ+ activist spaces existed, and continue to exist, as places in which LGBTQ+ women can further their public activism and political platform as well

as their kinship with other LGBTQ+ activists, but these spaces can also be sites of their oppression. I argue that this form of retreat should not be viewed as a failure on the part of LGBTQ+ women, but rather a way to resist experiences of intersectional oppression on both a public scale (through their activism) but also within their intimate lives and social circles (through involvement and socialising with other LGBTQ+ activists who perpetuated oppression). Likewise, the compartmentalisation of identity and its concealment should be seen as necessary strategies to cope with the emotional impact of existing within anti-apartheid and feminist activist spaces. Although these strategies may have contributed to widening gaps in knowledge of LGBTQ+ women's experience within the anti-apartheid and women's liberation movements, they must be understood as a necessary means of survival in a heteronormative, patriarchal society which punished women for their failure to adhere to these societal norms.

Analysis of the effectiveness in the utilisation of visibility as a strategy used by LGBTQ+ activists in lobbying for equal rights thus becomes a site of complexity which I argue in Chapter Three. LGBTQ+ activists adopted numerous approaches in enhancing visibility as a strategy. Due to the limitations in scope, this thesis has only focused on two approaches, mainly the Pride Marches and the Out in Africa Film Festival. Visibility strategies such as the use of sports, particularly soccer, are equally as important and would make a rich site for exploration for future researchers.

LGBTQ+ Pride Marches in South Africa have been extensively covered within South African LGBTQ+ historiography but must still be included in discussions of visibility as a lobbying strategy as they are markedly the first attempt in deliberately negating the stereotypes of homosexuality as "unAfrican" and that it consisted of only a small group of individuals. The

attendance of at least 800 individuals at the first Pride March organised by GLOW in 1990, as well as the growth in attendance at successive Pride Marches, thereafter, have been instrumental in pressuring the ANC to recognise the need for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights in both the Final Constitution and subsequent legislation.

In a similar vein, the Out in Africa Film Festival was founded by GLOW and ABIGALE in 1994 as a further driving force in the retention of the anti-discrimination clause in the Final Constitution by promoting LGBTQ+ visibility. Mainstream media has been identified as an instrument used in the enforcement of societal standards and norms, which is particularly shown in the removal of any mention of homosexuality in films adapted from novels and plays that alluded to homosexuality. In Chapter Three, I outline how GLOW and ABIGALE utilised the OIA Film Festival as an alternative media source to educate the public on the diversity of LGBTQ+ lives and relationships and challenge homophobia within society. OIA was cognisant from its conception that the inclusion of the anti-discrimination clause into the Final Constitution would not be enough to change society's homonegative perception of homosexuality, but strongly advocated that the increase of the LGBTQ+ community within mainstream media through a film festival would be a significant contributing factor. Despite the expansiveness of material on OIA at GALA, some of which can be seen in Figure 9 below, very little has been discussed on its contribution to acting as a political and social space for

the LGBTQ+ community.



Figure 9: A portion of the OIA Collection at GALA

It should be noted that the image in Figure 9 is not fully representative of the extent of the OIA collection located at GALA. Not only was GALA restricted to requesting a limited amount of archival material at a time, but in view of the project's scope limitations, I only reviewed OIA archival material up until 2000. The full archival collection continues up until 2014 at which point OIA ceased operations and the sheer density of this information would be a rich area for further exploration.

Like many other LGBTQ+ spaces of the time, the OIA served as a political and social space, though GLOW and ABIGALE set out to ensure it also served as an educational space. Within its manifesto, it highlighted the importance of visibility to countermeasure years in which the LGBTQ+ community had to conceal their identity and their relationships due to the homophobia prevalent within society. OIA declared itself to be a site of resistance, not just for the retention of the anti-discrimination clause into the Final Constitution (though this was a principal contributor to its existence), but also a place of visibility and solidarity for

the LGBTQ+ community to fully express themselves, their identities and their intimate relationships.

OIA was deliberate in ensuring that the films shown at the festival encompassed all aspects of the LGBTQ+ community, a stance that often made many people uncomfortable. Due to this, it was highly critiqued both outside of the LGBTQ+ community as well as by LGBTQ+ members within the community. I assert, however, that this was an ingenious strategy by the OIA Committee as it championed and highlighted the multifaceted manifestations of sexuality which paralleled their rationale for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights and protection in the Final Constitution. Unfortunately, the OIA were not able to be fully representative of both black LGBTQ+ people and LGBTQ+ women. Despite their best efforts to maintain a balance between representation of both gay men and LGBTQ+ women, an effort that the OIA Committee strove for, films about LGBTQ+ women were limited and often of inferior quality in comparison to films about gay men. I believe that this does not signify the failure of OIA in the representation of LGBTQ+ women, but rather showcases the subtle nuances of gender discrimination against women within the larger LGBTQ+ community. The lack of representation of LGBTQ+ women and WLW relationships in LGBTQ+ film meant that not only were LGBTQ+ women unable to access a sense of validation and inclusivity through media in the same way that gay men were able to, but also that understandings of the experiences of LGBTQ+ women and their relationships were further hidden and marginalised. The absence of gay men in attendance of LGBTQ+ women's films that were featured at the OIA Film Festival should also be noted as further evidence of the misogyny prevalent within the LGBTQ+ community.

Similarly, representation of films containing black LGBTQ+ people, particularly within the South African context, were found to be lacking. It should be noted that the OIA was proactive in attempting to alleviate this exclusion by hosting numerous filmmaking workshops throughout the tour of the festival. However, these workshops were often run by international film makers and directors that OIA invited as guests. I have showcased how this created a disjuncture within the workshops as their participants felt a disconnect between the Western perspectives of the workshop facilitators and that the use of local filmmakers in hosting these workshops would be both empowering and better representative of the community it was documenting.

It is in this context that the work and contribution of FEW and Muholi play a substantial role in revolutionising the way in which visibility has been utilised as a strategy through the implementation of a more radical, feminist approach to visual literacy: a phenomenon that is also discussed in the third chapter. Due to the earlier implementation of visibility as a lobbying strategy taken up by LGBTQ+ activists, black LGBTQ+ women became increasingly visible in an effort to combat the idea that homosexuality was “unAfrican” and that it was an identity exclusive to white people in South Africa. However, this made black LGBTQ+ women hypervisible and vulnerable to the attacks of homophobic individuals who believed that they could “cure” LGBTQ+ women of their sexuality. As demonstrated earlier, the attacks against LGBTQ+ women were dismissed within predominantly male LGBTQ+ organisations, like GLOW, which led to the formation of FEW in 2002 who sought to address this oppression of black lesbian women located in the townships.

FEW undertook the challenge of lobbying for further protection of black lesbians against hate crimes, offering victim counselling as well as conducting training workshops for police

and other service workers in dealing with survivors of homophobic hate crimes. FEW also implemented projects such as Soweto Pride, an ongoing Pride March established in 2004 to counter the decline of a purposefully calculated political message in mainstream Pride. It also executed visual literacy training programmes for its constituency facilitated by Muholi, a prominent LGBTQ+ visual activist and co-founder of FEW.

Muholi's training at the Market Photo Workshop led to the development of skills and techniques within photography that allows them to document their community in a way that does not sensationalise or trivialise their subjects. Muholi's work thus resists and challenges mainstream media's portrayal of black LGBTQ+ women which solely spotlights the homophobic attacks against black LGBTQ+ women in a way that not only belittles the severity of the crimes committed against these women, but also places the victims, and often those associated with them, at further risk of attack. In comparison, Muholi's work is formidable in its ability to capture the stories and emotions of those subjected to homophobic hate crimes in a way that is sensitive of the survivor and is done in a manner that refuses to retraumatise the individual. Consequently, Muholi should not only be lauded for their individual work, but also for their influence in FEW's visual literacy programmes which allowed black LGBTQ+ women to take control of the documentation of their own narratives as well as establish an archive that combats against the claim of homosexuality as unAfrican.

Overall, visibility as a strategy utilised by LGBTQ+ activists is an incredibly complex double-edged sword. While the increase in visibility was highly instrumental in ensuring the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights into the Final Constitution in 1996, this had a negative impact on LGBTQ+ activists, particularly black LGBTQ+ women, who became increasingly targeted due to their visibility. What was initially showcased and utilised as a tool to normalise the public

expression of sexual orientation and LGBTQ+ intimate relationships, ultimately led to black LGBTQ+ women activists having to conceal this aspect of their identity, particularly in the townships, due to fear of attack.

While this project has presented valuable insight on the intersectional oppression that LGBTQ+ women have faced, and continue to face, within state legislation as well as their intimate and private lives, these forms of oppression remain endemic within societal structures and LGBTQ+ organisations. The continued lack of support by male LGBTQ+ activists and racism within the LGBTQ+ community has left black LGBTQ+ women isolated and forced to rely on and develop numerous coping mechanisms to deal with the psychological and emotional impact of their multifaceted oppression. It should be acknowledged that not all of these coping mechanisms have been beneficial to the wellbeing of these women and must be understood in terms of the context in which they occur. Based on this analysis I believe that the current LGBTQ+ affirming legislation does not seem to be very successful in protecting LGBTQ+ women from discrimination and though this may be a formidable challenge, especially given the isolation that LGBTQ+ women activists experience within the LGBTQ+ movement, continued resistance is imperative in safeguarding LGBTQ+ women in South Africa from intersectional oppression and homophobic hate crimes.

My hope is that this thesis is able to contribute to the dismantling of heteronormative, homophobic and patriarchal ideologies that persist both within society and academia that continue to marginalise and oppress LGBTQ+ women in South Africa. However, this thesis is not without its limitations, some of which have been addressed throughout my argument. Most notably, the limited experiences of Coloured LGBTQ+ women are derived mainly from secondary sources and not oral history interviews that I conducted. This exclusion was not

deliberate and attempts were made to hold interviews with Coloured LGBTQ+ women, but, as stated earlier, activism places a high demand on female LGBTQ+ activists' lives and many, though interested, were unable to create availability for interviews.

Similarly, the time, length and scope constraints of this project meant that many themes and areas of research mentioned by the participants such as issues of lesbian intimate partner violence and the impact of HIV/AIDS amongst LGBTQ+ women could not be explored. This, however, does not negate their importance in LGBTQ+ women's lives and are areas that warrant exploration by future researchers. Likewise collections at GALA, such as the Julia Nicol collection, were unable to be explored due to time limitations of the research.⁵⁶² This collection in particular may have furthered the understanding of LGBTQ+ women's experiences within the anti-apartheid movement and early LGBTQ+ organisations.

My research was further impacted by the University of Cape Town's library fire. I had identified collections at the University of Cape Town's Special Collections archives that would have been extremely useful to supplement my research into black LGBTQ+ women's resistance, but these unfortunately became either lost or were unavailable at the time I conducted my research. While I believe my research, especially the inclusion of oral history interviews, is important in contributing to replenishing valuable accounts that have been lost, I encourage future researchers to take up the challenge to expand in gathering LGBTQ+ women's oral histories to aid in addressing this great loss.

In undertaking a holistic approach towards exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ women from the late twentieth-century to the first decade of the twenty-first century, this project has uncovered how the public and private spheres have historically operated to oppress LGBTQ+

⁵⁶² Julia Nicol was active in the anti-apartheid liberation movement, Barsel's partner and one of the co-founders of OLGA.

women through state legislation's institutionalisation into societal norms and standards. This work brings attention to the influence of culture, race and class in producing multiple manifestations of oppression and in its highlighting of LGBTQ+ women's experiences of intersectional oppression and resistance, it is innovative in as much as it sheds light on these phenomena in relation to religious institutions, LGBTQ+ activist and social spaces and endeavours aimed at enhancing visibility (such as Pride, OIA and visual activism). This thesis provides in-depth insight into the historical oppression of LGBTQ+ women, their experiences of navigating this oppression and how this oppression continues to marginalise and silence LGBTQ+ women in South Africa despite the passing of LGBTQ+ affirming legislation. Ultimately, it offers a significant contribution to the history of gender and sexuality in South Africa in so much as it demonstrates LGBTQ+ women's resilience and community-building in resisting oppression in both LGBTQ+ activist and social spaces and wider society.

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Folder A2, Funding

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Folder A3, Workshops, Conferences etc

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Folder A3.2 “Making Herstory” 2007:

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Folder A5, Annual Reports

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Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

Interview 1: Beulah Durrheim

Name of the Interviewee: DURRHEIM, Beulah [BD]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, Kirsten [KJ]

Date of Interview: 15 June 2021

Place of Interview: Claremont, Cape Town, South Africa

Number of tapes/recordings: 2

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, Kirsten

Date Transcribed: 25 June 2021 – 22 July 2021

Recording 1:

00:00:00: Introductions

KJ: [Pause]Uhm... so... my name is Kirsten Johnson, and this is my interview for my Masters Research project. Uhm... if you don't mind could you state your name, your age, and your pronouns?

BD: Uhm Beulah Durrheim. Uh, my pronouns are she/her/hers and...

KJ: Age.

BD: Age. Forty-nine, turning 50 soon. [laughs]

KJ: [chuckles] So you were born in 1971?

BD: Correct.

KJ: Like my mom.

BD: [laughs] Well there you have it.

00:00:36: Family background

KJ: Uhm so, in terms of, like, your family and where you grew up, do you want to speak a bit about that?

BD: Right, so... uhm... my main growing up happened in Kempton Park [Gauteng], near the airport. Uh, from about Standard 2, which is the old language. That's Grade 4.

KJ: Oh okay.

BD: [laughs] Uh, we moved there, and my dad moved quite often...we moved around a lot, prior to that in the Eastern Cape. From place to place to place. So, I went to, I think, three different primary schools before I ended up in Kempton Park. Uhm, and uh... middle class, white suburb area and uhm, yeah...I'm not sure what else to say.

KJ: Uhm, okay. How did you feel during all those moves?

BD: You know, it, uh, made me a very shy child. Very withdrawn, cause I couldn't uh, this is probably irrelevant, but one of my memories of the school that I moved to in Kempton Park, was that I had a different school uniform, and I was laughed at for that. And already, up at that point we had moved so much, so my confidence wasn't very high. So, I think it really knocked my confidence quite a bit. And it made me a more introverted person, so.

KJ: Yeah, and then in the sense of community, were you able to build a community if you were moving around so much?

BD: I didn't do well with friendship building. I built one or two friends...uhm...and my main friendship building happened through church in my teenage years and my young adult years. That's where I really started becoming part of a group.

KJ: And your family in general? Were they part of the community? Did they interact with your neighbours?

BD: No. No. My mom was very active in the church, but more as an attendee, then later as a musician. Uhm...so I was probably more active than my family in church and my dad, uhm, didn't go to church at all and didn't involve himself in community environment at all.

KJ: Uhm, so, what exactly did your parents do? What was their occupation?

BD: My mom was a music teacher [chuckles]. So, she taught from home. So, in the afternoons into the early evenings, she was always teaching. And my dad, an accountant. So, he worked morning 'til night and came home, uh, you know, almost like clockwork. Uh, but generally just tired and exhausted by the time he got home.

KJ: Right and how do you think that affected your relationship with them?

BD: I did struggle. My dad was a very strong person, with a very strong personality in the home so we all kind of dashed around when he got home. Uhm, so that wasn't an easy relationship at all. And then my mom, uh, because she was working, I ended up playing a lot of her roles in the household. I had three brothers, uhm, and so I ended up being mini mom in her place, which kind of made us on some levels equal, you know, because she trusted me to play her sidekick role. But that's pretty much our relationship.

KJ: Okay. So, are you the oldest?

BD: I am the second oldest, but my older brother is mentally handicapped, so in a sense I was the oldest really.

KJ: That makes sense. So, what were the conditions that you grew up in like? You said that you stayed in like a white suburb, middle class suburbs. Can you think of any instances of how it might differ from today, living then versus now?

BD: Uhm, well, certainly in my schooling. My schooling was pure white, so no racial interaction. My suburb, uhm, folk of different races came in and left, so they didn't live there. Uhm...[pause] it was perfectly normal for me to see drivers as white folk and hardly ever as people of colour, of vehicles. So, it kind of became strange when I started seeing people of colour with vehicles. My only saving grace was, as a church, I was exposed in my teens and my young adult years to what was called a Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope, and I was then taken to other areas to experience different cultures and different conditions. And I think that opened my eyes very much, opposite to where my family views were at the time.

KJ: Do you mind elaborating a bit more on what your family's views were?

BD: My dad; very conservative. Politically, he was leaning towards the left wing of things. Uhm, and my mom, to some degree, with the Afrikaner background, everything, also limited perspectives. Uhm, our domestic worker had different cutlery and crockery and toilet, so unfortunately that was something that I witnessed, and didn't fully understand.

KJ: Did you feel like there was a difference at the time?

BD: Yes.

KJ: So, you were aware?

BD: I was aware enough in my teen years to go wait a minute, there's something not right with this picture. Uhm, but I wouldn't dare argue with my parents, children had no voice at home.

KJ: Seen, not heard. [chuckles]

BD: [chuckles] Ja! Exactly! So therefore, I wouldn't dare challenge the views.

KJ: Right, and what was your parents' relationship like?

BD: With each other?

KJ: Yeah.

BD: Uhm, I would say not necessarily healthy at all. My mom was divorced, this was her second husband and, uhm, he was very domineering, and she was, to a large degree, scared of him. So, I would say that was that relationship wasn't one of equal. She only, in her later years, challenged my dad when he physically beat me, uhm, so badly that she needed to get external opinions on things, and that's when she realised, she has to stand up against him.

KJ: That's quite [pause] awful to hear, I'm so sorry about that.

BD: Ja, it certainly is part of what shaped me.

KJ: Right. Do you want to speak more on it or skip over it?

BD: Uhm, no not at all. I would say it made me afraid of authoritative figures. So, already I was shy and introverted, and then you add that fear of authoritative figures. Uhm, also masculine figures, I was uncomfortable with. For many years, if any male or person just touched me gently, on my leg or whatever, I would pull back as a reaction. So, physically I had a reaction and uhm, ja, in terms of the other side of abuse, I had physical and... physical

abuse from my father and I had the emotional abuse from my mother. So, I didn't trust adults all that well. And I also started shaping my own views, because I realised that those views are not healthy and there's something wrong with the way they do life, and I don't want to repeat that. I do know that they came out of abusive backgrounds, unfortunately, from their cultural heritage and the generation that they came out of. I know my father had abuse from his mother, and my mother had abuse from her mother. So, I started understanding things a bit better.

KJ: Basically, normal generational trauma?

BD: Mhm. [chuckles]

KJ: So, in terms of... Okay so you were moving around a lot, and then did you eventually settle?

BD: Yes. So, basically when I got to Grade 4, that was the last time we moved areas. So, then I stayed in Kempton Park for most of my upbringing, and left home in my early adulthood, uh, to start my career so basically...remind me of the question, I really went on a tangent.

KJ: [chuckles] No it's ok.

BD: [chuckles] Did I settle? [laughs] I was so busy describing it. Uhm, yes so, I would say physical roots took place. Emotional relational roots took place within the church. And that became another saving grace for me because I gathered with older young people, so they were all generally, probably, between uh you know, three and eight years older than me. So, I had more mature influences and that was really good for me. Ja.

00:10:51: Relationship with the Church

KJ: So...Uhm...I mean...I'm kind of jumping a bit but do you want to speak more about like your spirituality and religion, because you've brought it up a couple times.

BD: Yes! I know. It's quite prominent. I realised in your questionnaire that it is my story [chuckles]. Yes, so basically spiritually, uhm, I grew up in a Methodist background with a lovely minister. Lovely bunch of ministers, actually, uhm, who had a more affirm-...not affirming...compassionate concern for people which really came through strongly. Uhm, and so that felt right for me, but in terms of my orientation, I didn't think that... I didn't know my orientation, until I was in my thirties where it became really clear for me. But prior to that, uh it was clear that orientation was wrong if it's not heteronormative. So, I wasn't exposed to anyone that was gay, no one was speaking affirmingly, affirmatively about it. It was definitely a subconscious truth that that is wrong.

KJ: And...uhm, how would that...so...sorry uh. Obviously, there's a lot of rhetoric about homosexuality being a sin.

BD: Right.

KJ: How did you kind of work through that juxtaposition?

BD: Yes so, basically my first encounter with a woman that I didn't anticipate, it was more her initiative than mine. Uhm... it made me feel really guilty. At that stage, I was already doing pastoral work and I went and repented at the communion table privately with God saying, "I'm so sorry that I've done this" and I made a clear decision to end it physically and this was not right. Uhm, but then later when I moved to another church, uh when I moved to the Cape, and I met my ex-wife, that would be my second encounter. By then I'm like but is this wrong? Uhm and I started going on my own journey, if it feels so right how can it be so

wrong? Uhm, again it was clear at that point that the Church won't accept this as the truth. I really struggled with that in terms of theology. I went to people to get advice, uhm, and I also went for counselling to work it out for myself. Not from someone who necessarily understood, but they allowed me to tell my story and that was very healing. Uhm, and then I started realising that just because people interpret the Bible a certain way, and you can interpret the Bible in many different ways to say what you want it to say, I realised that that's not going to be the place where I find peace. And so, it became more of an internal thing that I did for myself, is to say the Church isn't God, the Bible isn't God, but as long as I have authenticity in myself that's what's important.

KJ: So, the churches that you went to were Methodist?

BD: Mhm.

KJ: I'm actually a bit surprised they were quite... because normally Methodist churches are known to be quite relaxed compared to like Catholic and Anglican churches.

BD: Right.

KJ: Did you encounter any homophobia... like not directed at you, but before you came out? Did you encounter anyone saying anything homophobic around you?

BD: Yeah, I would have to say that because I was within the spiritual realm, I was involved with other churches etc. I knew the overall feeling was homophobic. Uhm, within Methodism they didn't have a clear stance on it being okay so therefore it was underlyingly not okay. So basically, there were some people who said stuff in a way that I knew I had to hide my orientation. Uh, and there were places where I had to go and preach and minister, where it was clear that I had to hide away who I am. And so, ja, prior to my coming out, it

was clear it was not safe to come out even though the Methodist church is one of the more progressive on some levels, like giving women positions of power, they were not progressive and clear on this particular topic.

KJ: Not to sound like a psychologist, but how did that make you feel?

BD: [chuckles] Well, being a counsellor of other people and constantly hearing... I believe two things when I was growing up in the church and it was my message of my own wellbeing was number one "truth sets you free". So, the more honest and real you are, the more free you are. The other one was "God loves you". SO those were two clear messages that I thought were the foundation of any Church, certainly any Methodist church. But, in reality, it's not so true and that's when I started realising its contradicting my deepest understanding of what I was **taught** the Church to be. In fact, those messages were over and over messages that set me free to be a more confident human being, to explore my talents and no longer be shy and withdrawn, to become a leader and all that. So, I felt very safe, until I realised that this particular conversation is not safe, uhm, and that I would be risking if I did come out. So, I think that was really where I struggled.

00:17:17 Family's Opinions on Homosexuality

KJ: And in terms of your family, uhm, what was their thought process about homosexuality and how did that affect you when you started to realise that you weren't heterosexual?

BD: Right. Ja, so, I knew my mom would struggle because she's fundamentalist in her Christian belief, very cut and dry, black, and white. So, I knew she would struggle, but she also leans toward compassion. Which's probably been a reasonably overall experience that I've had is that people lean to understanding grace, which means give people leeway, don't

condone the sin, but love the sinner, which is a term I hate. Uh and my mom pretty much had that approach. She actually came to my wedding, which I knew would be a big thing for her to do. When I told my biological dad, he burst out in tears. He's a Baptist preacher and I had just gone- his daughter had just gone and destroyed his life. UH, he cannot since I've come out- I actually came out to him because I wanted him to choose to come to the wedding or not. And ever since then, and I was married for eleven years, uhm he doesn't know how to talk to me anymore. He just doesn't know how to handle his daughter being gay. So that was a struggle for him. My stepdad passed away when I turned twenty-one. Thankfully, I didn't have to deal with his wrath on the issue, but I'm very sure he would have not condoned. [chuckles] Very sure.

KJ: So, you're saying that your biological father has a problem with it, and it seems like it's affected your relationship, especially on his side, do you feel like it's affected your relationship with him on your side?

BD: Well, I think that journey is an interesting one because I took the initiative to try and have a better relationship with him. Our relationship, basically throughout my upbringing was a phone call at birthdays and a phone call for Christmas. So, he, to me, was a distant uncle kind of being, he never really was my father to me. But I wanted to ground my background as to who am I as a result of who my dad is. I made an effort in my adult years to visit him, to go and make a connection. Uhm, by the time I told him, I had already learned that the people's response is not my responsibility. I learnt it the hard way because I came out one by one to people that I cared about, and I made that a very long and painful journey for myself. but by the time I told my dad, I had learnt that I am not responsible for making other people comfortable, or making them feel better, or helping them through their

response and that was quite healing. So, when he burst into tears, it was hurtful, but I kind of had also let it go, you know. It's sad, it's a sad loss that he doesn't know how to deal with it. Uhm, I'm still trying to pursue a relationship with him, but he's battling to reciprocate.

KJ: Do you need to take a break?

BD: [shakes head]

KJ: It must be very hard...because family, especially with a Christian background are supposed to be supportive and loving. So, I can imagine how awful that must have felt...

00:21:15: Coming Out.

KJ: Do you want to speak more about like when you sort of...you've already touched on this subject a bit. When did you realise exactly that you were not heterosexual? Was it like a eureka moment or was it like a steady process?

BD: I truly would have to say it was because of my two female encounters that I had, and the second one becoming my wife in the end, it was in meeting someone that it became all the more clear for me. And then, I had to deal with my two loves in my life. One was a human love, and the other was a spiritual church love, and they were both extremely important to me. And that was when I started battling to figure out...So it was really in my...I met my ex-wife, we were friends for a couple of years and then we transitioned physically [chuckles] and then we both had to realise well what does this mean for us. And that's when both of us went into a couple of years of trying to figure out who are we, and I went to counselling to figure out 'is this me?' and then I figured this is me so then how does this now work with my spiritual work and my church work. Uhm, and I lost the church work at the cost of choosing

my ex-wife which was incredibly painful, because my question was why can't I have both.

That I had to choose one and then lose the other.

KJ: Especially when it's so fundamental to who you are as a person.

BD: Absolutely.

KJ: How did the rest of your family react to your coming out, like your brothers, your larger family?

BD: Right. Uhm... Well, my one brother said that he was grateful that the wedding wasn't in a church. It was outside, we had it outdoors in a nature reserve, he felt that at least I'm not going against God directly by having it in a church. Uhm, and he didn't attend. Another brother of mine chose not to attend. Uhm, and my mom brought my elder brother with her, but he is very much influenced by her. So basically, their understanding is that it's wrong, and I find that very painful on a very deep level. Even though I understand where they're coming from, I find it very painful that they think that I am intentionally sinning, uhm, and they don't get that this is who I am. They don't celebrate me... it almost makes them more superior to me, because they're *accepting* it and that's very painful. Uhm, but I'm relieved that she came to my wedding and that she made the effort to be part of it. Our family is very... dysfunctional [chuckles], probably like most, but in terms of extended family we're very disconnected. So, for me, my core family was the only one that I was really concerned about: my mother and my brothers, and my father. The extended family didn't even really exist for me.

KJ: And uhm, friends?

BD: That was interesting because a lot of my friends were within the church, because naturally that was where I would've sort of find friends and build friendships. So, when I left the Methodist church in Somerset West, as a result of coming out, I didn't come out to the larger congregation, only to each- we were a large church, so to each colleague within the church and within the circuit, which means the different Methodist churches in the area. I came out to them, one by one by one, and then suddenly my contract at the church ended unexpectedly. I was traumatised by that. But what it meant was that I left the church quietly and people didn't really know why I left, and I didn't make a big fuss about it, I was just traumatised by it. And I now, gently over time as I've come out on Facebook, and as I've been a part of an inclusive church and opening myself more, more people have come back out of the woodworks, and I now know who don't care that I have been married to a woman etc. They still love me for who I am, and I can comfortably interact with them. So that's really how I would say my friendships sort of happened.

00:26:36 Support Systems

KJ: So obviously there's all of this hurt and pain happening, from being rejected or not really accepted by your family, and you mentioned that you also went to counselling. Was it an LGBTQ counselling centre?

BD: No, it was just somebody that I went to who does counselling. I don't think she's even a psychologist. Uhm, but she was one of my safe spaces to talk so it was just a narrative space, and this person definitely didn't make me feel judged, she gave me room to talk and seemed to ask me the appropriate questions that I kept moving forward in my self-understanding and self-love on that particular journey. I did go to one or two people who I knew were affirmative and asked them theological struggles and that was very helpful too.

KJ: Do you mind naming the places that you went?

BD: They were not places; they were all people. Individual people.

KJ: So, besides counselling was there anything that you did, or people leaned on for support? Especially with that disconnect from your family and the Church, who did you turn to?

BD: I would have to say that I made the mistake of trying to do it on my own, especially after I left the Methodist church. My ex-wife and I moved in, and we got married, but throughout those first couple of years, I couldn't do work. I couldn't do ministry work which was... I couldn't imagine not doing church work and yet, now, I was not acceptable to churches. SO, I was depressed. I really struggled through that time and my ex-wife carried us financially and I slowly explored small forms of income. But only within, I would say about two or three years of that I went to counselling specifically to deal with my depression. Again, not a specific LGBT person but just someone to help me through the depression. Uhm, and then I started working as a waitress for the first time in my life at the age of forty, and that got me back into the working realm and through that I started running retreats at that space, which was lovely and those were friends that I had known over time from my Joburg days. So, I knew I was safe with them, and I could just be myself and figure it out and it was then, during that time that I found Good Hope MCC, which then evolved me on a whole 'nother level.

00:29:55: Good Hope MCC

KJ: Do you want to speak more about it?

BD: Well, Good Hope MCC is an inclusive church, openly in Cape Town. And I went there just to attend a couple of times, and I took my ex-wife with me, and we could have communion upfront in the church, holding hands, where I knew there was no way we could have ever had done that in the Methodist church. We could go there and hold hands, and be prayed for, and be together in a church and that was the most healing, healing experience. I cried because it was so healing for me to know that my orientation was not an issue in this spiritual space which I value so much. Uhm, and then, at some point I was asked to preach there which I did a series for them and then I think the next year they were looking for a pastor and because I had preached there, people had remembered me, and I think that helped me to become the pastor of that church. And I have been the pastor there now for...since 2012,

KJ: Wow!

BD: Ja.

KJ: Where is Good Hope located?

BD: Good Hope MCC is currently just renting space with Central Methodist, which is at Green Market Square, that beautiful big church there. We rent the space on a Sunday evening.

KJ: And how has COVID affected that?

BD: Yes. Good question [laughs]. So basically, we immediately transitioned to Facebook live. SO, the very first Sunday that we couldn't meet in person, we did a Facebook live and have done that ever since. And then, what we've also done is occasionally do in-person gatherings, but outside. Just for social connection and being together. And we just started,

now last month, had our first in-person gathering at the church building and we're probably going to do that once every month or so, just through this winter period, third wave, just see how it goes and slowly get ourselves back. It's going to be a journey but really using social media as a way of keeping people connected, pretty much.

KJ: Yeah, that makes sense, everyone's turned to social media.

BD: WhatsApp groups are a lot more alive [laughs]. I do a lot of counselling virtually. I still kept meeting with people at restaurants because I feel okay with that so.

00:32:55 Childhood

KJ: Right okay. So, going back to young you, was there any point where you felt different from people in terms of your sexuality or in terms of being a woman? I know that you said that you were very introverted because of all of your moves. So yeah, was there any kind of disconnect otherwise?

BD: I would have to say that it was clear from my cultural upbringing that women were needed to be submissive to men. My dad was clearly the boss in the home and there were roles that women had to play. So, just because I was the only girl, I had to play domestic roles. As a little child already, I did not want to dress as a little girl, I hated it. And my mom soon started learning that I would rather wear pants. She would lay out clothes on the bed for me to choose and I would always go for tomboy stuff. She would have loved her only daughter to be in frillies and all sorts, but I was not that kind of daughter. In fact, I hated my confirmation dress, which all the girls had to wear a white dress and it was one of the things I hated about my confirmation in the church. So, I preferred to dress comfortably for activities and playing in the garden and all those things and I never quite felt like I fitted in.

Still don't fit in really. I've learnt that I'm a perimeter person, a between person. I'm not only attracted to women, but also to men, which puts me in the middle of the bisexuality spectrum. I am very understanding of the secular world, but I work in a perimeter church. Uh so in terms of churches, my church doesn't fit in, and I can go on and on and on. So, I've learnt it's okay [laughs] to not fit in. I didn't fit in at school, which is probably why I didn't make many friends because I also was in a bilingual home. So, my mother married an English guy and they had two kids, spoke English to them and the kids went to English schools. I went to an Afrikaans school; my older brother went to a special school. So even our family didn't fit in and language wise, I could speak English and Afrikaans and my Afrikaans school hated it when I used English in my natural conversation, which I did at home a lot. So, again, didn't fit in.

KJ: So, was there any time at school that they discriminated against you because you didn't fit in?

BD: Ja, I can remember a specific occasion where we went on a thing called veldskool, so they would take the kids away for a weekend, or for a week I think it was, and we would have to do some basics of life stuff you know. And when it came to dormitories, I was kicked out of the dormitories by the girls because they said that I must choose if I'm English or Afrikaans, I can't be both and so, they discriminated against me because of my dual upbringing at home.

KJ: Wow, that's not something that gets spoken about often, you know?

BD: You're right.

KJ: Do you need to take a break?

BD: I'm good if you are.

KJ: I'm fine. Exactly...Do you know the year when you came out? When you decided that you needed to speak about this with people.

BD: Right. I think it was 'round about 2005 that I started the coming out process. 2004/2005.

KJ: And that was to other people?

BD: That's when I started disclosing to my colleagues, and disclosing to family members one by one, disclosing to friends... It took me about, probably three or four years of disclosing, uhm, before it felt like I told everyone that I needed to tell.

KJ: And for yourself? When did you come out to yourself?

BD: Probably...about 2003-ish. It took me quite a while to say wow, this is probably who I am. In fact, it's probably now worth making life decisions around this. Ja, so I would say I lived under...I edited myself in church, as a pastor, for about three/four years before I actually started the coming out process.

00:38:47 Romantic Relationships and Their Impact on the Family

KJ: So, you said that you had two relationships with women, did you have any relationships with men prior to that?

BD: Yes. Quite a few. So, considering my upbringing, it's quite surprising that I choose to first- but it was my... you know, this is what you do, you go out with boys. And I actually almost married a guy, but our context didn't work for us in the sense that he was going to be a farmer and I wanted to live in the city and blah blah blah. But I went out with long term relationships, long term in the sense that they were 2 years, 3 years, 1 year... They were

never just an overnight relationship and I probably had about 9 of those [chuckles]. So, I was very comfortable with dating guys, I didn't think it was an issue. Which is why my bisex- it made more sense to me that I'm bisexual. That I just happened to be ultimately attracted for my life partner to a woman. So, I had no issue with dating men.

KJ: So, when did you feel comfortable dating women?

BD: I would have to say that it was through my interaction with my ex-wife, but it was through our interactions were we both... I was her first physical interaction with a woman, and she was my first one where I felt right about it. Uhm, it was because of that that I started going 'wow this could be me!'. You know I was never like...as a lesbian I think one would go 'ah, I don't like guys at all' or 'what's wrong with me?' and work through that process, but I enjoyed guys as well. It was never an issue. I just realised that this particular person was the person I would like to spend the rest of my life with. That's where I ended up leaning.

KJ: So initially your family's not very happy about it, so was it like... I know in a lot of cases; people get disowned when they come out. Was there any threats of that?

BD: I never, ever felt disowned though in a sense my dad has subtly disowned me, my biological dad, because he's making no effort towards a relationship with me... I just felt like my mom, being my only parent really, my mom didn't know how to cope with telling her people, her friends, her whatever. So, for a long time, she hid it so there would be no pictures of my ex-wife and I in the home. I went to visit my mom early in the stage just before I got married, I think, or maybe it was just after I got married and she had a little piece of paper in the guest room where I was sleeping that had a prayer list and people were praying against homosexuality and she was part of that list. So that was me realising that as

much as she's being nice towards me, she has a very deep underlying belief that it's absolutely wrong. SO, I would say on that level there was a distance between us. I wasn't prepared to explain why it's okay and I wasn't prepared to go into that debate with my family. So, they had to figure out how they were gonna deal with it. Now, she's become a little bit more open with people. My one brother, who didn't come to the wedding, him and his wife and my ex-wife and I used to meet up a lot and have meals together. Even though he never came to the wedding, he ultimately built a relationship and our relationship actually got stronger. So, you know there are these gentle positives. I've learnt to be patient; I've learnt not to be forceful. It's not who I am which is why I don't see myself as an activist, I just gently live my truth and I gently encourage others to live their truth and I don't force those who don't understand to understand.

KJ: I have to disagree with you a little bit there, I think that it is a form of activism because activism is not just waving placards and stuff like that, there's different types of activism and even just existing in South Africa as an openly queer person, a queer woman is a sign of activism in itself.

BD: Thank you for that. Because I've really struggled with that because there's an impression of what an activist is in the LGBT community and because I am a leader in an affirming church there are expectations for me to be that kind of activist. And it's been a real struggle because also my community, the church that has sort of developed around me as the pastor, are all gentle people who just want to exist in who they are, but we all feel pressured to be some kind of activist. So, it's very affirming and encouraging to hear that, thank you.

KJ: Activism to me comes from very different places and it also depends on how you're shaped you know? The people around you, the area you grew up in all affects you. So, say, for example if you lived in a township, your activism might be a bit more vocal.

BD: Right.

KJ: Yeah, I think it depends on your situation and like how life shaped you.

BD: Absolutely, I mean I know that there's a personality group thing, it's called the enneagram.

KJ: Oh yes!

BD: I'm a perfectionist. Which then also- That's number one. And its wing is number nine, peacemaker, wanting things to work out gently and softly. And number two, you know, on the other side is the helper. So that makes me the pastor that wants to nurture people and care for them and do it in a gentle way, you know, not forceful. Uhm, and I guess I also resist forcefulness because my dad was so forceful so that also shaped me a bit in the sense that I also didn't want to be like that.

KJ: I think within the community there is a need for that as well, because, of you think about a lot of the LGBTGQ community is exposed to violence and stuff like that so there's definitely a need for nurturing and caring for others.

00:46:39 Pride

BD: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think that's been a struggle for our church as well is where do we put ourselves politically in regard to the Prides, which I know is one of your questions. Pride in Cape Town is very political, there's a lot of political things going on, and it's very much on a race divide. My personal view, and therefore has infiltrated my church's view, is

that we need to be part of both Prides, and there's currently two major Prides in Cape Town, that we need to be part of both. Because we want to be available for that nurturing reason, that people on whichever spectrum can find that there's this church that exists. But it has made people understand from the different sides of the political thing that we are either for or against and they, you know, they're just putting us in that position and we're just still struggling to go cause I know that the Pride in town is seen as a very much white, gay men thing and it's more celebratory and it's a lot more fun than it is focused on change, making change happen. And then, Khumbulani Pride, which we've attended ever since it's been in existence, is more activist, is more trying to... to challenge the system etc. And I've learnt, as a white person, when I'm at Khumbulani, I must just shut up and I must just be present, which previously I had tried to be a voice and I just realised that it's not my place as a white person to even have a voice there, that I must just show support and that was an interesting learning for me. Uhm and then at the other Pride, we somehow message ourselves as... Our Prides are very different, there's very few people on the side lines going rah rah. You go elsewhere in the world and there are crowds of people on the sides, especially in the US, going rah rah for kilometres and kilometres, supporting those marching in the Pride. Whereas in South Africa there just happen to be onlookers who just happened to be there on the day. So, we want to explore positioning ourselves in both places, within the march and on the side, we're a small congregation so we don't know how to, but that's more where we'd like to be.

KJ: Yeah, that makes sense.

BD: The one year, I just bought roses and roses and roses, and I ran from point to point, as a pastor with my clergy shirt on, handing out roses. And there are people still people who tell

me that they remember and that it meant so much to them that they were given something beautiful instead of what might have been given on the side, you know. And I always wear a clergy shirt when I go to Pride, simply because it needs to be said that there's a church that's affirming. I would love to go to Pride as just Beulah, but I end up doing it more to say you know you get homophobia from all kinds of religious spheres, just know that there are small pockets that are not like that.

KJ: When you're at Pride, in your clergy stuff, were you ever met with, like, hesitance?

BD: [laughs] Let me tell you when I generally wear a clergy shirt and I move around town, in the malls and stuff, people look at me up and down. [laughs] So I've learnt that's one of the ways that I don't fit in, you know. So, I, uhm, learnt that people walk an extra distance around me if they see me or they look down, or someone else will actually smile when they see me because they can relate to their experience of Church, and it feels right for them. So, already I know that I get that. When I'm at Pride, I get a definite resistance and I'm such a nice person that it's like heart-breaking for me, you know because I'm friendly, I'm kind, I'm loving and to be seen as suspicious has taken many years for people to...to see me there again and again and again and they're starting to go "oh, she's always at Pride" so therefore, you know, she's one of the good guys. Uhm, and it depends on what banner I wear but I must say the immediate response I get from people mostly in Pride is "can I trust you?".

KJ: Right, right.

BD: And then I get others who just...we can chat for hours, and I've now learnt to go to the festival afterwards, not because I support the festival but because it gives me hanging out time for people to meet me and that's where people spend hours telling me their stories

and ask for hugs and etcetera etcetera. So, I've learnt that I've got to put myself in that place where I can just where I can just chat to people, and they can feel that this is a safe Pastor.

KJ: Safe space.

BD: Ja.

KJ: No, that's great. Uhm, have you ever been met with someone being outright rude to you at Pride? Maybe like telling you that you shouldn't be there or anything like that?

BD: Well, we had seen people on the side lines with posters etc and megaphones shouting, but that was in the early Prides for me anyway. And uhm I never personally felt like anybody was attacking me in terms of being a pastor marching in Pride. I must say, I'm too tender a spirit that I'm actually grateful that that hasn't happened because I think it would have really broken me and little things break me very easily. I was more hurt by Khumbulani pride's leaders, uhm, and their approach to Pride that clearly rejects me, and actually side lines me and actually judges me. Which is hard because I'm trying to be supportive. I've been more hurt by that than I have been by any strangers on megaphones or whatever.

KJ: In what ways do they try and sideline you? Because of your sexuality? Because of your race?

BD: Definitely my race.

KJ: Okay.

BD: It's almost like I don't belong in that environment. Uhm, also in terms of language being used, they don't use English much, so I don't understand a thing that's going on. I'm there trying to be supportive. They have occasionally asked me to open up with a prayer because I'm a pastor etc. But my community, who are mostly Coloured folk as well as me and some

white folk, all felt so unwelcome that they never returned. I'm the only one who goes as an individual now on behalf of my church, but they felt so unwelcome. And uh, we would get, for example, emails saying all the stuff we did wrong when we were there. And when you're a group of people who just sincerely want to support and participate and participate freely and openly, and you get pushed down and said you know "we prefer you just to be there", I think that in itself is hurtful. So, I've just learnt that I'm going to go anyway, even if you don't want me there or you don't want me to participate freely as who I am, I'm going to show you that we care about what's going on. We know that there's all these corrective rapes and murders, and they're happening in the Khumbulani Pride's culture, not at...not at Cape Town Pride, so we need to be there, and I will continue to go there because of my compassion not because of their acceptance or rejection.

KJ: Hm okay, that makes sense. That must be quite difficult, because you already get so ostracised for being queer and being different in that sense, and then to be further ostracised by your own community.

BD: I would have to say it was one of the saddest things, that shocked me, literally shocked me when I first started because you must remember when I became the minister of the inclusive church, that was the first time that I started meeting gay people, learning about orientation, learning about the politics of the LGBT community and I had to learn the hard way that you can't do this, you can't say that you can't. You know, I had to really learn the painful way. It was like swimming in an ocean of new things and figuring out where is my role in it all. So, I was shocked at the amount of politics that there is within this minority group that's already so rejected by the world on the outside, that I find it amazing that there was so much division on the inside. And I couldn't understand it and I still don't. I

understand it, but I just wish that it wasn't like that. And ironically even being bisexual within the LGBT community, I don't fit because that is not a prominent label that's being dealt with, you know, it's either lesbian, gay or transgender, genderfluid, you know, a lot more focus is going there, but the bisexual part? In fact, people also judge me for being bisexual within the LGBT community, which is so ironic, you know. It's like basically saying well if you're not fully lesbian, then you're actually not on our side, you're trying to keep your feet in both camps of the heteronormative or you know, whatever.

KJ: So that's happening with the LGBTQ community, is that also happening with your family? Are they also saying are you-?

BD: [laughs] Ja! I would have to say, I would have to say they were like why don't you just choose a guy, you know. They didn't say that to me, but now, because I'm divorced now, they say- You know I say I don't know when my next...who my next person will be, it could be a guy or a girl or a who knows, you know and you could tell there was this like... "let's hope she chooses a guy, that would make life so much easier for all of us" [laughs].

KJ: So yeah, there's a lot of biphobia in South Africa.

BD: Absolutely.

KJ: Would you say it comes from a place of ignorance, in a sense?

BD: Absolutely.

KJ: Yeah.

BD: And that's again why I'm quite understanding and patient. I'm not going to try and say, 'yeah well you have to understand that that's what this is about!' If people want to have an earthy conversation, I happily chat about it, I'm very open about it but I'm not prepared to

defend. Which was also a learning curve for me that I don't have to defend where I'm coming from. If you're interested, I'll tell you my story and you could receive it or reject it. But with our wedding we chose to have people that we knew would celebrate with us, not just be there intrigued or whatever, but they'd be happy for us, you know. And it's also ironic now to show people that even gay people get divorced. That in itself is a teaching, to show people and I was very open about it, about my own journey, about the pain of it, of being vulnerable and duh duh duh duh and then I got divorced. I put it all out there, so that people can understand that just like heteronormative journeys, we also go through these journeys.

00:59:24 Gay Marriage and Divorce

KJ: So, you... you are divorced now?

BD: Yes. That was its own interesting journey because...I'm not sure how much detail I would like to go into but basically, I came back from an overseas trip and my wife told me that she would like to get divorced and in six months we were officially divorced and then lockdown happened. So, February we officially got divorced and in March we went into lockdown. So I had to deal with that brokenness and that very big devastation in a very isolated way, which was really tough, and I ended up going to clinic, which I was also very open about, because I think that mental health is also stigmatised and I wanted people to see that it's okay, it's okay and within a year I came through the journey. And obviously, there would be snippets of pain and struggle, but in one year, considering, having known my ex-wife for twenty years that we were together and to have gone through this painful divorce and then within a year be fine, literally be fine, be myself again, continue to live life positively etc is actually almost unheard of. Because you know...ja...a lot of people hold that pain, hurt and resentment for many years and I would have to say that being part of the LGBT community gives you some

renewed strength in areas that others might not have resilience. You have the desire to be authentic because you realise that others don't understand, so you have to understand it for yourself and find what is authentic for you. You have the ability to...if you come through it properly, to deal with judgement and you develop many different strengths that are actually unique to the LGBT community, and I think that is the positive side of the spectrum.

KJ: So, obviously you have experience, you know, living with a woman would you like to speak more about that and what it was like?

BD: The happiest thing in my life. [laughs] My ex-wife and I were best friends before we went into a relationship, so we fully cared about each other and then... we got a house together, which was fun to do, we got married, we got cats, we tried to fall pregnant and that was its own painful story because I was ready to have kids and she wasn't and then she was ready to have kids and then I wasn't. I tried to fall pregnant with in vitro and everything and that didn't happen and then we started to look at adoption and then I wasn't keen anymore so that was a painful journey within our relationship of trying to have children. But I would have to say that I would happily walk around saying this is my wife, introducing her, talking about her on the pulpit, people just knew. We could sit in church together and be affectionate, to be a role model, in fact we were a role model to a lot of people, in South Africa to be in an eleven-year marriage, you know, we were almost like the old guys, and you know, people looked to us and said "wow, if that is marriage then I also want that". So my ex-wife and I became a space where people could ask questions and to explore their stuff within our home. and we did our domestic roles, you know, she was the main breadwinner, there was no who's the guy, who's the girl? [laughs]. I made an effort with the neighbourhood to invite people when we moved in and even though we knew that people

were a little- or clear on where they stood on the matter, they absolutely loved me and my ex-wife. And we may have been their first experience of an openly gay couple who have nothing to hide, who go to work, who are lovely and caring etc etc. So that in itself was I guess a bit of activism in a subtle way, and we were very accepted so. Again, middle class, white, it's a lot easier. I can imagine if I was in a different culture, I wouldn't be able to so comfortably say this is my wife. So we had a very beautiful, ordinary, life.

KJ: No that's great, it sounds very nice.

BD: [chuckles]

KJ: So I think I'll skip over the question about children and ask, is there any other instances where you felt persecuted based on your sexuality or your womanhood?

BD: Can we have a break here?

KJ: Yes, sure.

[END OF RECORDING ONE]

[RECORDING TWO]

00:00:00 Homophobia in the Church

BD: Okay.

KJ: So, uh yeah, so the last question I asked was if there any other instances that you would like to discuss where you felt persecuted based on your sexuality, that you haven't already discussed.

BD: Ja, so besides within my work environment, which was a church environment, which clearly was discriminatory, just because the church at the time didn't know how to handle it

so the easiest way was to sweep it under the carpet, I think. Uhm, and because of my personality being one that's not loud and shouting and everything, it could be swept under the carpet. But that was a clear discrimination for me. I would have to say that I don't feel...because you also asked if it was about being a woman etc. And I was sitting here thinking, I don't know if it's who I am, but I got to a point where I'm going to be me whether you can handle it or not, because what became crucial for myself, for my own wellbeing, was to be able to have integrity. That was like the thing that I truly...it's like one of my values that I'm not prepared to give up for others and I think that's what brought me into the foreground, so even though I was shy, even though I wasn't always confident, I kept moving forward in being a person in society that can make a difference. And...I ended up in leadership positions, which I never did as a child, I was never seen as a leader as a child, but in my adult years I...I was prepared to step in if no one else would, and that got me to become stronger in certain ways. So, if people judged me for being a woman, I never really felt it, I just carried on regardless. I don't think I had as much judgement on gender issues, but when it comes to orientation, I feel an enormous judgement, but not directed to me personally, rather directed by the overall country, the overall continent. And I know that it would be risky in certain places of the world where I travel to be out there. And so, I kind of...I guess I don't push the envelope. If I need to be just a little bit under the radar, I will. I can read people quite well; I have an intuition on where people are at and so...I...the number nine wing will avoid conflict and I will find a way to not have to deal with whoever. I won't go into direct debates, and I was, unfortunately because of the work that I do, invited to be part of a panel where I was the only church or religious representative and soon discovered that I was going to be the target for that whole discussion. And people directly said to me, "How can I possibly be prepared to be part of an institution that is homophobic? How do I justify

that?”. And...and it was definitely a fear and an anger towards the Church, that I, as an individual, had to deal with. Now that was a direct aggression towards me and I just remember thinking ‘well, my choice is to do it within the structure gently.’ I know that the structure is guilty, guilty, guilty. The religious structure is so guilty of causing all this heartache for so many people and some of the corners of the structure are unashamedly doing it. Other corners of the structure are trying to learn and understand, but the majority aren’t even trying. And so for me in this little corner of the world, I can be one of those religious institutions that say, ‘this is not even a conversation you need to have when you come into our community’. You don’t have to justify, you don’t have to explain, you can truly just be yourself in this space. Makes a little change. I would say our church is a small community, on average on Sundays we’re in the thirties...not a large number, but I can promise you this, that within the nine years that I’ve been the pastor, I have seen people come through, like a healing station of a hospital, and then go out and feel more well and whole about who they are. They may not stop and stay at our community, but they certainly came through there and got what they needed for their journey. So, it’s hard to tell what a difference we’re making but I know we are.

KJ: Even the fact that you have a congregation shows that you’re making a difference.

BD: The fact that it exists. I totally agree with you. The sad thing with our denomination, the MCC denomination, was started so that it could educate other churches on Biblical context etc etc and then people could go back to their churches and feel safe. Instead, we are a growing denomination from the ‘70s [chuckles]. It’s growing. What it means is that other churches aren’t getting it, but more of our safe space is needed. So basically MCC is expanding because aren’t able to welcome LGBTQI+ people into their communities.

KJ: Which must be really hard. I saw a- do you know TikTok?

BD: Yes.

KJ: I saw a TikTok of a female pastor talking about homosexuality in the Bible and how it's never mentioned by Jesus.

BD: [chuckles] Hallelujah!

KJ: And she actually had a lot of historical knowledge about the, uhm, progression of the Bible and I think she said only in like the...ah I can't remember the year now, but it was when the stigma around homosexuality began, that was when homosexuality as a sin was introduced into the Bible.

BD: Absolutely. I would love you to share that TikTok with me, but also uhm, it was only when the word homosexuality was created then they put it in those places which they thought had to do with homosexuality. So ja, you know...

KJ: It's kind of hard because there's already this set idea and then even within African cultures, there's this idea that homosexuality is unAfrican, but if you actually look back, uhm, there are instances of homosexuality before colonisation and it's kind of hard because there's all this evidence that says otherwise and people still choose to be homophobic.

BD: Do you know, I think it's the way- and places like Inclusive and Affirming Ministries are doing great work with educating church folk about how you read the Bible, because unfortunately it's the way that theologians are taught and then teach hundreds of people below them and a lot of the ministers are seen as a position of power, like authority you know, and like people sadly go to church and are told what to believe and don't even bother to try and figure it out for themselves and so there's this huge influence. As you say, Jesus

said nothing and the thing that I fear the most as a pastor in the church is that I am in the very position that Jesus actually condemned the most. Ministers and leaders within the spiritual realm; within the church. They were the ones that Jesus got so pissed off at quite often, because they were blocking the way for people, and they were standing in the way, and they were using their authoritative positions in a negative way. Jesus, if there's one thing, he did fight about a lot is "don't stand in the way between people and God".

Unfortunately, 2000 years later, we are having the exact same thing happening and if Jesus was roaming around the earth today, he would be pointing at all the church leaders saying, 'come on guys, you're still getting it wrong!'. Uhm, and I don't want to be that person, even though I'm in that position. Uhm, Jesus never once, he could've- Why did Paul speak about it? Because Jesus didn't feel the need to, right? The way I reconciled it for myself...ironically, the one was that this is between me and God, and if I have peace between me and God then there's nothing else. And I don't see a reason why God would be upset that I love another person and treat them with respect and that I am in a loving relationship. The other thing was, I don't believe that if we believe in the afterlife and in heaven and all that, I don't think there would be sex in heaven. So God really doesn't care about the sex act, except if it's abusive and harmful, right? So it's not about sex, which I think a lot of people unfortunately, make it about sex when actually that's not the majority of my relationship with my ex-wife. In fact, it was one of the smaller aspects of our relationship. Uhm, so people just turn into some little corner, and they get stuck there. And I believe it's through relationships, meeting someone and being prepared to have a relationship with them and learning about their story of being gay or lesbian or bi, that will eventually turn the tide. That there's some sort of normal and I'm grateful for media that has been very out there, and people have been very out there, teaching on the normality of being gay. And I think some people are being

swayed that way, but the biggest change that is going to have to happen is in religion, because that's where a lot of the phobias come out of. It's that religion needs to review why it has that negative focus.

KJ: You said that you would mainly start socialising with other LGBTQ people through the church?

BD: Yes.

KJ: So what kind of social gatherings would you go to, to meet other LGBTQ people?

BD: I have to say I never was a club person and etc. I was always 'let's have coffee dates, let's have braais' in a more personal way, that was my community approach. So originally within the church I never got to meet openly- I might have met folk, but I didn't recognise, and they weren't open about it along the way, in terms of my church community. Once I joined this particular church, I was exposed left, right and centre from all kinds of parts of the spectrum. Uhm, our church has a leather community, uhm, our church has special communities for people who have pets as their kids. Uhm, I was exposed to genderfluid folk and people tattooed to the heels but wearing a collar [chuckles]. And I just suddenly realised, if you truly celebrate diversity, you will be so gifted with so much because if people are authentic in who they are, then you'll be exposed to so much. So I would say that I started developing friendships and colleagues all across the spectrum and it made my life that much richer. So, I did have to crash learn when I started at the church but now, I would have to say that the exposure and that has made me have more friendships on all kinds of levels for which I'm really grateful. I've had to learn a lot about trans journeys because we happen to have a lot of folks in our community who are transitioning. In fact when I started at the church, I met this person as a woman and by the time I was in the middle of my

journey, that person had fully transitioned into a man, and that was a beautiful thing to witness and to learn about.

KJ: I remember one thing you mentioned was that you had a fear of authority.

BD: Yes.

KJ: how does it feel now being an authority figure in the church?

BD: [chuckles] Well I don't see myself as an authority figure. I think that's the natural thing. I don't want to be that kind of person; my approach is very integrative. I'm in a position of authority and some people put me on a pedestal. Some people just cannot refer to me as Beulah, I have to be Pastor this, Pastor that, Rev. this, Rev. that and I've had to learn that that's what they need. I don't need it, but they need it for their backgrounds or what feels right for them as to my role. Uhm, but I'm very much an earthy person. I preach in board shorts, and barefoot sometimes. If you see me on a Christmas day service, I will always be wearing board shorts and a clergy shirt, uhm, and I try to- you'll also see that I'm not stereotypically lesbian in terms of the way I dress. I change from a masculine look to a feminine look, so I'm very fluid in that and I think that people start realising that as much as I'm the pastor, I'm also the on the ground person who you can share anything with. And that's more important to me than being an authoritative figure, is that if you can find me to be a safe person with who you can share and evolve and figure out your own story, then that's me in a happy place.

KJ: Well I wanted to know- Actually, sorry to go back to this topic but what led you to Good Hope?

BD: I had heard about this church while I was still a Methodist minister and I knew there was this church somewhere in Cape Town, but I can't tell you exactly- eventually I think I just looked them up. Oh I think what happened was I knew that they existed, and I looked them up and I wanted to go speak to the leaders of that community to say that 'I would love to preach, and I currently don't have anywhere to preach, would you guys be...'. And that's one of the other things that this church offers, especially ministers who aren't accepted in their own community if they're out, then they can preach in our community. So actually it's a healing space for religious leaders as well who have been rejected. Uh, and I think pretty much that's how it started for me.

KJ: Okay. And then where would you place the church in terms of the leadership- maybe leadership is the wrong word, but in the LGBTQ community? Would you say that it's quite active? I know you said it's a small congregation, but would you say that it's still quite active within the LGBTQ community?

BD: I would have to say that I'm more the active element of the community, the majority of people who attend church actually just want to be there for their own spiritual enrichment. There were people who have come through the history of Good Hope MCC in Cape Town who were part of changing the marriage laws etc etc and there are tremendous folk who have been fundamental in terms of the changes in South Africa and there are other MCC church leaders that are out there, and I would have to say that we are, besides Pride events, book launches, uhm interviews etc. that it's more persons that are active than the whole community.

00:19:23 South African legislation with regards to the LGBTQ community and women

KJ: You mentioned some of the law changes, did you ever...You only came out in 2003, but during the 90's did you see anything about the LGBTQ community, the first Pride or anything like that?

BD: I would have to say that I was very disconnected. I didn't know there were Pride events, I didn't really know...I just knew Cape Town had a bit of an image of being a gay capital. It's probably why I migrated down here very happily [laughs]. Cause something in me knew, subconsciously even, that I need to explore this aspect of myself. Uhm, but I didn't know anybody. I wasn't exposed in any way to any LGBT things while I was in Joburg. I only came down to Cape Town in 1999, and even then, for the first couple years if somebody asked me about any organisations, I wouldn't have been able to tell you anything.

KJ: Uhm, and do you think the 1996 laws and the rest that followed, played a part in your coming out?

BD: I just want to say thank you, thank you, thank you to the forerunners so that when I came out, I could just choose to get married when I wanted to get married and so, all those folks who worked so hard to make it possible. I'm now a marriage officer and I can see the beauty of what uh, these weddings do for the family actually. Every time they witness that this is just an ordinary wedding between two people, and I help people realise that there's nothing weird or strange about this, but that this is just a beautiful moment. I can see healing happening and everything. So, I'm grateful to those who made it possible for example that same-sex marriage could happen because when my ex-wife and I were ready to get married we could just go and [clap] do our things. So I...you know, I'm deeply grateful for all of those, and I know a couple of the folk personally, who really put themselves on the line for that to happen and I know that there's still a lot more work to be done. To deal with-

that there's not discrimination when people are transitioning, uhm, that corrective rape is dealt with, the court cases are dealt with properly, that people are treated well through the process of sharing their pain, you know, to hand in memorandums with Khumbulani Pride to the police station etc. as to how they deal with these cases. So there's a lot to deal with. You know constitutionally we have the most beautiful constitution on paper, but practice is a whole nother story [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] definitely. Uhm...do you think that there are any issues within the LGBTQ movement that aren't really being tackled? Particularly with regards to women.

BD: ...Uh?

KJ: I mean within the community, not outside of the community.

BD: Oh. Interesting question. I must say when I read that I didn't quite understand what you were asking but now I get it. So how women are treated within the LGBT community? [long pause] I can't say that I see any difference if I think of...gay men and their issues and lesbians and their issues, I mean the only think obviously is the corrective rape. It's a huge issue that's not part of...uh... But I don't see within the LGBT community that there's any inequality.

KJ: What about sexism? Have you witnessed anything like that?

BD: The reason why...Okay, so this is going to sound weird okay...Within a church, most churches are filled with women and a few men...because churches are those spaces where nurturing things happen, and you interact with your own life story etc. It's more experiential and relational, so it's like a gathering. Since I was part of the LGBT community...it's almost like the gay men have replaced that role, because they're part of the nurturing and the

gathering etc. and your strong lesbian women are out there doing the activist work and raising their voices etc. and that's an interesting dynamic for me. So, the stereotypical gentle nature of gay men vs the stereotypical strength and butchness of lesbian women is an interesting dynamic on its own, I think.

KJ: Did you participate in the women's movement?

BD: Say again?

KJ: Did you participate in the women's movement?

BD: [shakes head]

KJ: Okay, that's fine. Uhm, do you feel like the South African legislation fails women?

BD: Well certainly, South Africa is still figuring out gender equality which is a general- I'm proud that we've put women in leadership roles, in politics and in workspaces, but in terms of on the ground spaces, I don't think that equality exists all that much. It's pushed by a lot of, again from my context, religious spaces that men are the leaders in the home and women are meant to be submissive and so obviously gender based violence is a key issue in our country as a result of that. So obviously, the country does need to face up to that and look at legislation and how you're going to empower people not only visually in political spheres, but on the ground and change the behaviour of men in terms of how they treat women. I can see that inequality, for example, in a lot of Methodist Black churches where the men are worshipping even separately to the women, the women have to wear certain uniforms and they have to be at a certain side in the church. So even there I always say you cannot deal with LGBT issues if you have not dealt with the issues of gender equality. It's like asking

people to fly to the moon when it comes to LGBT issues, which is why I have so much patience. I think legislatively we have a lot of work to do in order to safeguard women.

KJ: Uhm, do you feel like the legislation has failed you specifically?

BD: I feel like I've gotten work positions that were easy to do, there was no judging me as a woman. My salary has always been small, but that's because I've chosen work that doesn't pay well [chuckles]. When I look at the divorce situation, I feel like I felt the inequality there. I felt what it feels like to not be the main breadwinner, and how unsafe it feels after you get divorced and you now had someone in a sense provide the major structure for you and now that is no longer there. I felt that very painfully and am still living through what that means in terms of not having the same finances as my partner who gets like 90% more of an income than I do. So although I got something out of the divorce settlement that was equal, in terms of going forward, my ex-wife will regain her footing very quickly and I am now in a position of vulnerability, and I think that legislation should look at that. So even as a gay...lesbian relationship, I felt the same way that one would feel in heteronormative society where women feel extremely vulnerable if they go through divorce and don't have that same strength as their husbands.

00:29:45 Racism in the LGBTQ Community

KJ: Okay and then in terms of racism, have you witnessed any instances of racism within the LGBTQ community?

BD: Well certainly through the divide at Pride, it's clear that there's a race divide. So, there's clearly racism going on where the one side is not prepared to move for the other side and there's judgement of the opposite side, and even the fact that there is an opposite binary is

actually ironic. Uh, within the sphere that I work, there's a lot of compassion and gentleness going around. So I know within my community that- maybe I have a skewed view, obviously as a white person, but I would hate to know that there's any racism happening within our community and I want everyone to feel welcome, no matter who they are. Uhm, we don't attract enough Black folk, which is interesting, and that could be because we don't do enough cultural things that would make people feel comfortable within our spaces, but it's certainly not out of being racist. I mean, also, context in Cape Town would speak for itself, you know [chuckles] so ja.

KJ: So uhm, your congregation is mainly made up of Coloured and White people?

BD: Yes.

KJ: What about Indian people?

BD: Yeah, we've got, and we've had a few refugees from other countries. In terms of folk coming from other countries that are not safe to be out and they stay for a while, but culturally it might be a bit difficult. I'm not sure if language is a barrier, that kind of thing, does play a role, but folk have been helped in terms of their papers. We have a lot of homeless folks, who are also part of our community, and literally live on the street. And uh, they are in leadership positions within our community and very much an equal part, but that in itself, there's a lot of stuff that people have to work through. Like, in our community, people had to work through sitting next to someone who's homeless and learn that we are equal.

KJ: So a bit of classism?

BD: I would say that that was something we definitely had to work through cause some folk didn't feel- we used to end all of our services by holding hands and some people really didn't feel comfortable doing that. So we had to deal with what is the focus of our community, in order for the gay folk to come to our church, did we have to start saying to the homeless folk don't come. Because somewhere there has to be a ministry for the LGBT community and we don't want this to stand in the way, but I think we've developed a society that says if you cannot deal with that aspect, then you do not understand what inclusivity really means. So there is the inequality of folk living on the street and not getting the same health care etc. and what is our place as a church? We can't provide finances, we can't- but what can we do? And I think what we've learnt that we can offer dignity and I've come to realise that that is a big enough game changer in itself.

KJ: I saw this on Twitter, and I was wondering if you have any knowledge on it, but it was about the City of Cape Town evicting homeless LGBTQ kids from a shelter in Observatory.

BD: So If there was that happening, I don't know about it. Uhm, there's a lot of- my sphere is transgender women and how they are discriminated against. And also seeing, the Pride Shelter, who ends up there and even there they get discriminated against. And the people aren't given tools... they get rejected, they have no support system and then they're not given tools to build up their lives. Which I thought, something like a shelter would try and help with. Transgender folk are not given tools at all. So they don't have family support, they don't have society's support, they don't have uh county support, they don't have South African system support and that for me is just so painful to see and...ja. And for example, during Covid, some of our transgender women passed away and it was because they weren't given the health support that they needed etc so that is heart-breaking. Very heart-breaking.

Folk that I knew by name, folk that I spent time with, and they passed away on the street.

And obviously a lot of them had underlying conditions, a lot of folks struggled with HIV/AIDS and other issues, TB, etc so they were even more vulnerable as a result. And we also have sex workers who come into our community and the vulnerability that they have of being abused etc, etc is also heart-breaking.

KJ: Ja, that's really...

BD: It really opens your eyes, it really opens your eyes to see jeez, I was really living in a sheltered life. I thought I was living a sheltered life because of apartheid, and I thought that was the only thing- not the only thing, but the main thing that I needed to understand was that people were treated unequally and hurtfully. I respected folk like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu were my heroes in the story and I wanted to make a difference in that way. Then I come to the queer community, and I realise 'oh my gosh, there's apartheid here too' and it's devastating. People's lives are just devastated by it and how do you make a difference there?

KJ: It's very hard yeah. And not getting support from the government must make it even harder.

BD: And to try and get into the system and say, 'what are you guys going to do about this situation?' and they are starting to face up to things and getting a bit of pressure, which I think is good, but also the government can only do so much. It's actually the people on the ground, us, who need to change and make a difference. Just like it happened with apartheid, it has to happen within the LGBT realm. So we need forerunners, we need brave people, we need loud voices. If you think of apartheid and the 1994 elections, it eventually was everybody's voice, but there had to be forerunners and loud voices who stood up and risked

their lives to get to the everybody votes situation where everyone on the ground could start making a difference and then in the new South Africa, to start living that change and learn what that means, you know. This is my country; I belong here too. I now feel discriminated against as a white person, which makes sense because there is the correcting of the inequality; it has to happen. And it's difficult to now be the one who has to start experiencing racism on another level, but that's how...the pendulum has to swing, and it has to swing, it must, in order to find true healthy middle ground again. So I respect that, but the pendulum has to swing with the LGBT journey as well now. So I think yes, I agree with you, soft voices, people living their truths are making a difference without you realising it. For sure. For sure, I can see it with my own community, we all just making a difference by being authentic in who we are and be honest with ourselves. If that's the only thing you do, is be honest with yourself and be at peace with where you're at, you've already made a difference. Not everyone will come out. I chose to come out, but not everyone will do that and that doesn't make it that their journey is less than, it just means that their way of impacting is different.

KJ: Yes, definitely...I think this might be the last question, uhm, well we actually spoke about Pride already and we've kind of already touched on this, but work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

BD: Personally, I think that in order for the LGBTQI+ community to move forward, it needs to work together. So if I had to decide what needs to be a priority, I would decide start figuring out how we can work together so that more impact can be made in a more positive way by using shared resources, rather than each organisation desperately trying to do their thing which unfortunately is what I see in Cape Town. So, I think if we could - and what we're trying

to do now, just a few religious leaders of inclusive communities, is that we're actually trying to work together to see if even we can just do that. It's easy to judge others for not working together but if my little sphere of the LGBT community can't work together then how do we expect others to. So, we're learning to do stuff together and learning what that means and what that looks like and how rewarding that is and I think that it's in those shifts that impact can be made. And then, a lot of work needs to be done from the LGBT community to the religious community, not in a judgemental way but in a helpful way. Forcing, pushing, nudging the religious communities to start changing their rhetoric. Because if you can change that, imagine, imagine there's this rhetoric in Africa that says we misunderstood the Bible, we misunderstood the Quran, there's nothing wrong with being gay. Well, that would heal so much on every level because a lot of it is birthed out of the religious thing so for me, I would say tackle that aspect and then on the political sphere, tackle the ways in which government deals with certain aspects of LGBT struggles, especially violence against the LGBT community. How you deal with, how you deal with your court processes and ja, I think a lot of work needs to be done in that process which I'm not part of, but I see some of my peers are very much part of and I hear their struggles during court cases, and their heartache and they just get tired and fatigued with the way things are not being dealt with. Uhm, so for me that's just something I witness and see.

KJ: Right, that is something that happens very often with activists; they get burnt out really quickly and especially within the LGBTQ community, there's not many of them to begin with so it's almost like doubled.

BD: yes. Absolutely. So we, for example, this new little group of people working together we plan to do a healing workshop and that would be a mixture of those who have been

wounded in general, but fundamentalism and rejection of society and healing for those who are tired in the work that they are doing. Because like you say, fatigue is prominent when there are a few people doing a lot, a lot of work. I am the only paid member of my community and so I rely on volunteers to do a lot of work around me. I end up doing more than I should, if I had a better support system, a secretary or a whatever, that would free me up to do more work more efficiently, but at the moment you know, you've got to just manage it all. And I know a lot of LGBT organisations are one-man shows, three-man shows, you know, it's small teams trying to do a lot and I just applaud them for going on and plodding on and fighting the fight with as little resources that they have.

KJ: Uhm, so that's all of the questions I prepared. Is there anything else you feel like I should know or anything else you would like to get across?

BD: I have to say I can't think of anything offhand. It's been a privilege just to even be able to share with you and hear myself say certain things and realise what- it's almost like me telling myself what's going on and that in itself is really helpful and I guess I would just encourage folk to just find your own authentic truth and live it regardless, even when there are risks involved because the payoff for me is so worth it. To just be at peace with myself is just- I don't want to go back into the closet for all the money in the world. I will not go back because when you find your own truth there's something beautiful about that and I think that's probably the work that I do.

KJ: Thank you, it's been great.

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hours 52 minutes 10 seconds (Tape 1: 1 hour 5 minutes 46 seconds, Tape 2: 46 minutes 24 seconds)

Recording Equipment: Zoom H1N Portable Digital Audio Recorder

Copy and Access Status: signed release form; interviewee has restricted access to the raw audio to everyone but the interviewer.

Interview 2: Deborah Bell

Name of the Interviewee: BELL, Deborah [DB]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, Kirsten [KJ]

Date of Interview: 27 October 2021

Place of Interview: Durban, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Number of tapes/recordings: 1

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, Kirsten

Date Transcribed: 17 March 2022 – 27 April 2022

00:01:21 Introductions

KJ: Hi!

DB: Hello!

KJ: Hi.

DB: Hello. Oh, hold on, let's get this let's get this video on.

KJ: I just thought maybe you wanted to see the face. Put a face to the name.

DB: No, no, no, it's good. Let me just take off this background. Hold on a second. There we go, that's better. Alrighty now my hair doesn't look so funny. [laughs]

KJ: [laughs] It's okay, how are you doing?

DB: Okay, good, good. Good to meet you. Let me just put this up a little bit.

KJ: Sure

DB: These fancy lights always get me. Ah. Oh, there we go. It's a bit blinding, but...can you see me, okay?

KJ: I can. I can.

DB: Can you see and hear me? Good, good. Good to meet you.

KJ: Can you see and hear me?

DB: Alright. Yeah, good to meet you.

KJ: Nice to meet you. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed, I know that you are quite busy. So, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this interview with me.

DB: No problem, no problem. 100 percent. Just tell me what is the- I know you have mentioned it but what is the purpose of this survey? What is the purpose of the study? Is it for your it's for mainly for your personal studies? Or is it?...

KJ: Yeah, it's... it's for my master's thesis. Um, but also, I do feel like it's very important for just LGBTQ history in South Africa. Because there's not a lot of history about queer women in South Africa. You know, it's mainly focused on male activists, and I'm not sure if you- if you were aware, but recently with the UCT fire... a lot of queer women's history was actually affected by that fire.

DB: Oh, my gosh, no, I wasn't aware of it at all.

KJ: Yeah, it's- it's actually quite devastating. Yeah, it was just... So this, you know, I feel like... I mean, yes, it is for my personal studies. But I feel like it would be you know, it's necessary in order for more information to be made available about women's history.

DB: Absolutely. Absolutely. Sorry. I'm just getting the slide.

00:03:49 Issues in the LGBTQ community

DB: Yeah, I'm so sorry to hear that because already, we just don't have enough, uh... for women. And unfortunately, in our LGBTQ community, we, we- there's still huge male bias. And the sad thing is that most of our gay men don't actually realize or even recognize- there's no awareness. I'd say a small percentage, yes, but there's still no awareness among the male community in the gay, the gay male community, of just how much uh... even misogyny is there. And uh, you know, it's... it's... I don't know if this if things have changed, but when I used to socialize in the gay uh... certainly in what we call the gay clubs in those days [laughs], in the 80s, and 90s. Uh, before I was kind of a minister or anything, I remember there was always this kind of segregation in those days. It wasn't so much a colour segregation, because in those days, the clubs were white. You know, they were just white. It was ridiculous. I mean, it was. You didn't even think about it as a white person. You were kind of... but one thing that I did notice in my youth, because I used to go into the clubs at a young age, you know, 14/15/16, was that the men would always be very, very uhm segregated from the woman. And, in fact, the gay men didn't enjoy mixing with lesbians. And uhm, it was kind of almost like, "oh, no, you know, you can't mix with those dykes." And, you know, it was kind of a real... not a nice vibe. And I always used to try and break the barriers because I could never understand that. I always got on well with men. And I've always worked in, you know, male environments. So I was quite- I must say, for me, I noticed that, and I don't know if that's still prevalent. In our church environment, obviously, that's not the case at all. But when new folk come in... I've seen even among male, male, you

know, gay ministers. I've seen the bias. But anyway, I'm sure we'll get to them in the questions, so I don't want to keep you.

00:06:30 Ethics

DB: I have no problem with the study being used, even publicly, provided it is always pro women and pro LGBTQ, and that it's not going into third-, fourth-, fifth hands, where it can be skewed or misjudged. So I'm absolutely happy with that.

KJ: Oh, no, that's great. Um, I do plan on donating it to Gala, which is the queer archive in Joburg afterwards, just so that other researchers have more access, like, easier access to LGBTQ history. It's just something that I feel like, you know, is maybe a bit necessary, because it's useless doing all of this research, and then it kind of just sits in my computer, you know?

DB: Absolutely. No problem with it. Yeah. Good. Good idea.

KJ: So just quickly, in terms of the ethics of this project, just to run through this, if you feel uncomfortable at any point, if you want to redact any information, or if you want this interview to remain completely confidential, that's okay. I sent you an interview release form. If you could just fill that out; you could scan it back to me, or you could take like a really clear picture of it and just send it through to me on WhatsApp, that would be great. It's just so that I can use any information that you give me.

DB: Okay uhm, I'm to be honest, my desk is in a bit of a... They're, they're busy working on some things on my desk, some cracks that opened up, so my stuff is everywhere, and I've got like a printer. It's not connected. And so I think just with-, with-, with the workflow and the time constraints to get something printed and sent back... Would you be okay, for the

moment to... I'm happy to... uh, on that email where the form is to acknowledge my consent, I might be able to put in an electronic signature there on the email for you, but that's fine, as long as you've got it from my email. I think it'll be fine.

KJ: Yeah, no, that's great. I just need you to fill out the details to acknowledge who you are, and that you give consent to do this interview. And also, at any time, if you want to stop recording, or if you feel like, you know, you need to take a break/you want to anonymize someone's name/you want things to remain confidential, that's okay. Just let me know. Even after this interview, if you're like two weeks later, you're thinking, "oh, you know, I shouldn't have said that" or "I don't want that out," you can just contact me, and I'll make sure it won't go onto the record.

DB: No problem. Thank you.

KJ: No problem. No problem. Okay, so um just for the record. Could you please state your name, age, and your pronouns?

DB: [sighs] Oh, well. Uh... her...they for pronouns. My name is Deborah Bell. And, uh, how old am I? 50...7. Am I 57? Yes, I am. Gosh, I nearly said 47. That would be a joy. [laughs]

KJ: [laughs] Oh to go back in time. Okay, um, so we'll proceed with the questions if that's okay. Unless you have anything else you want to discuss?

DB: No, that's, that's all good.

KJ: Okay, good. Um, so, basically, what I'm looking at is what your environment was like as you were growing up, how your identity was formed as a queer woman... And a lot of that has to do of course, with who you're socializing with; your family background, your friends, your community. So I'm going to be looking at those things as well as, uh, more towards like,

you know, I do know that you... I think- you, from what I remember on the website, you founded the church.

DB: Yeah, that's right. Yes

KJ: So we'll go into that as well... and just a little bit more like technical things as we go.

DB: Sure, no problem. Okay, I've had a look through your questions so it's all good.

00:10:11 Family Background

KJ: Okay, great. So can we start with where did you grow up?

DB: Uhm, a privileged white girl [laughs]. I grew up in Durban North, in Durban, South Africa.

Uhm, yeah, I kind of... my mom was divorced when I was three. So kind of there was separation then. And of course, just for the record, that has nothing to do with my sexual orientation [laughs], which I'm sure we all know. But you're just for the record. And ja, my mom, you know, unfortunately, again, women were pretty much second-class citizens even in the, you know, early 70s as I was growing up. And the only reason I lived in Durban North was... a lot of the time we actually lived with my grandparents. They had a house in Durban North, and that was really stable factor for me, because I was the only child. And with my mother, being a divorcee, and not really getting any income or support from-, from my dad, in those days, it wasn't really enforced. You know, she was just, she was a secretary. And, you know, women, as I said, were earning very little in those days. No matter what they did, they always earned less. Still do. And so uh, you know, when I, when I stayed with my mom, we literally would be in you know, in a small flat. Sometimes we would get a flight in Morningside, Durban. Other times, we would stay with my grandparents, but my school life was always in Durban North. So it's actually a stone throw away from where I live now. But it

was a stability factor, because I was very, very close to my grandmother. And she, you know, she literally, she was always the stabilizing factor in my life, which was great. And just because my mom had to battle all her life, you know, just being a single mom. And so I was fortunate to have my grandparents. But my- uh, they didn't come from money, I will say, my grandparents were very poor. They came from Troyeville in Johannesburg, which many people will know, in those days was an incredibly... Still is, I guess, one of the more poor areas. And there were times we, we, even my mom and them didn't have much. And my grandfather literally tried to start a business several times and failed. And eventually, the next time my grandmother was the neck that turned the head and she got him to keep going, and he successfully started a shoe factory, providing shoes to mainly the Black community, through places, outlets that today we would know are predominantly stores that would be accessible, at least to most of our black community. So he didn't do it as a charity, it was a business, but there was a market for it. So I was blessed enough to be able to be in that kind of a stable environment where, by the time I was 5 or 6, you know, we had sufficient, uhm, food on the table and all of that. So I say we, we were, I was born into privilege white family, but not my mother, initially, because they were poor until he was successful. So yes, I don't know if that means anything, but I think context is always important. So I grew up in Durban North, when to, you know, from infant school to middle school to high school was all in the same area. So I had... I was fortunate enough to have that stability. If my grandparents weren't around. I would have still been stable with my mother. She was a loving mother, but we had to move around because we had to find small flats that could accommodate what she could afford. So it was awesome to have my grandparents there as a backstop.

KJ: Okay, thank you. Um, so, you mentioned that your, your grandfather had the shoe factory. What work did your-, your mother and your grandmother do?

DB: Well, my mom, as I said, was a secretary. My grandmother, my grandmother, she was just... she was literally forced into that same kind of, uh, stereotypical female role of being a mother. And oh, I did miss a step, before my grandfather went into his business of... and it's important because I guess it's part of our... it forms part of our context and obviously our worldview. He was, uh, he actually owned a [laughs] series of nightclubs in his youth, and he used to do... in those days before TV, he used to bring in all these stars from, you know, internationally. And so in a way, it was such a contradiction, because in a way, he was colourblind because of his... his experience and mixing with all sorts of artists, black and white, in his... in his nightclub. But at the same time, you go home, and then there was racism, maybe with the maid or whatever.

DB: So those were just realities, we grew up with that. And we didn't know it wasn't normal in those days. That was a protected environment that we all grew up in, I think. I know, we're not talking specifically race, but it's important because I think so many people in my era, were brought up in an, in an era where we didn't even understand that who and what we were doing wasn't normal. Until we, ourselves, grew up and recognized, you know, with... with things like the release of Mandela, and all of those things that "hey, listen, something was wrong here." You know, there was propaganda being spooned at us. The TV was controlled by the government, it was a bit like Russia [laughs], but that was the reality that nobody wanted to kind of face. And even I had to sort of recognize and, fortunately, being a lesbian, I think, and having to come to terms with those biases and discrimination on that level, it forced me to, in those days, also then look at the colour ratio and the struggle of

racism. You know, because we used to call- we used to say racism is the homophobia within, you know... Uhm, sorry, I beg your pardon, "homophobia is the racism within." That wasn't my saying it actually came from an LGBT organization from Nonhlanhla [Mkhize] here in Durban. So, I've always used that because it's a way we can understand.

DB: So yes, he had a series of nightclubs. And then obviously, he needed to get out of there. But my grandmother had to look after the kids. They had, I think she's got four kids, I can't remember I have to go back and count. But anyway, a lot of kids and... and then of course, she-, she was-, she was a strong woman, a great... she would have done amazingly. But she, she gave lots of business advice to my grandfather, but it was never acknowledged, of course. He was the head of the house. He was a patriarch of note. He didn't know how to do or be anything else. I wanted to work in his shoe factory, I wanted to be his production manager. But there was not even an inkling of a chance of that happening because I was a woman.

KJ: Right.

DB: And so... so his son wasn't interested in, in, in taking over the factory. So unfortunately, that all came to a demise when, uh, when we had a lot of rioting, and things started happening in our country where people, you know.... There was a need for wage increases and all of this and eventually he-, they just couldn't keep up. And they made a decision, and they closed the factory. But yeah, that was that. That's more their side than mine, I guess.

KJ: Okay, thank you. And then if it's okay to ask, what did your father do?

DB: Oh, yes, of course, you can ask me anything you like, if I can't answer it, I'll let you know.

Uh... So my dad, uhm, all his life he was also... he was a very poor man came from a very

poor family in Johannesburg. And he, he was a minister. He was actually a pastor, but it was in a nondenominational community. So it wasn't like he had this kind of set salary or anything. And eventually, he did quite an amazing thing. He for most of his life, he settled in Cape Town. I don't know... where are you based in Cape Town, right?

KJ: Durban, actually.

DB: Oh are you based in Durban? Oh okay, so our part of the world! [laughs]

KJ: [laughs]

DB: Well, he, he was based in Cape Town and what he actually ended up doing is he started a mission... Where he would go on to the farms, near Malmesbury, and he would preach among the poor community. And he, he had a lot of flak from the farmers because in those days, the way they would pay part of the-, a lot of them still do actually, they would have their dop system where they would pay their farmhands in, in alcohol... part of their salary was in alcohol and of course, all that did was make them alcoholics and break down the family. Uh, and so when he started to move and minister in those environments to the farmhands, they would, they would find Christ, they would find the Lord, they would, they would find their faith. And they would want to change. They didn't want to get paid in alcohol anymore. And so [laughs] he caused a stir with the farmers because of course... but then eventually they came around because they recognized that actually, their farm workers were more productive when they weren't drinking part of the time. And so he, he gained quite a long-standing reputation in the area of Malmesbury and working among the farmers, and the farm, farm workers. They're always among the poorest communities. And he had a... his wife, I think, had a bit of money... He remarried and his wife, he remarried much later and had one other child. And his, his wife, I think, had inherited a little bit of money. And

they bought a small plot in Malmesbury. And he had a little... an old stable at the bottom of the place. It wasn't anything great just a small old house in Malmesbury, with a bit of a nice... it did have some space in the in the yard. And then he converted the stable into like a little church so that the farmhands could come and worship on a Sunday, and they had a place and ja. He... So that's what he did all his life. And in prior to that, he would do these 10 Crusades, and he would go into areas like Gugulethu and all the areas that were considered dangerous. And this was in the apartheid era, I'm talking in the seventies, he bought this huge tent, it fitted hundreds of people in it. And he would literally go around to these really bad areas, these gang lands, and I say bad areas, because if you were a white person going in there, you were not safe in those days of apartheid for obvious reasons. And so that was where... his ministry, that's why I say his ministry was always among, you know, our Coloured community, among our Black community. And he did an amazing work among the gangs. Gang leaders found their faith through his meetings. And you know, they changed their lives. And there were healings and all sorts of things. So I saw that as a child, I would go and visit him twice a year. And it was him that instilled a deep faith in my heart because he, it was so different to the environment I was in in Durban [laughs] because my, my family were party animals, you know, they came out of that whole... My mother was... she could sing, my grandmother had an operatic voice. And they would always have people. It was a very social environment. They were always people in our, in our environment, but they were entertainers. So that was kind of their buzz, and then I'd go to Cape Town [laughs] and I'd be in a completely different setting. So ja and it was good. It was good for me, because I think my dad praying for me, and I had a lot of prophetic words, if you ever believe in that. I had prophetic words given and written over my life when I was a young child, fortunately, because I was with him. And I don't think he quite realized what it would mean, that it

wouldn't just mean me being in ministry, but that it would be a very different kind of ministry to what he expected, because he's very, he was very conservative. So as you can imagine, that is that is a separate story for another time.

KJ: Right. Would you say that for the rest of your family as well? That they were quite conservative?

DB: No, no, just the contrary. The only one, I would say is conservative is my grandfather, but only because- in his patriarchy. But other, other than that, my family were very accepting of LGBT of, you know, there was no issue with that. They didn't uh... Yeah, there was no issue with that. I was very, very blessed, and fortunate that they came out of entertainment world. [coughs] Excuse me. And because of that, they, they had, they were broad minded when it came to that, because of the context of, of being in the nightclub industry and entertainment industry.

KJ: Right. All right. Um, okay. So generally, you would say that the conditions that you grew up in were somewhat stable. From my understanding, would you say that you moved around a lot with your mom or...

DB: No, not? Not really, actually. Again, uh, I had a very, very deep relationship with my grandmother, I almost call her my second mother and the reason for that was because I was premature. And my mother didn't quite... she was too... she didn't have the confidence to, to even kind of look after me. She did, she was there. But she herself, now this is an interesting fact that I want to make clear for the record, my mother was gay. My mother is a lesbian. Well was. She, she passed away two years ago, but uhm, but in those days, you just didn't even come out and she's a very, very feminine woman. So she certainly didn't let me know that until the age of about eleven, I didn't even... I had no idea. I just thought she was

staying with her friend, you know, her long standing relationship with a woman, I had no clue as a child. We weren't exposed in those days to what we have today on the internet. Obviously, we didn't have it. So you kind of only knew what you knew from school or social environments, or the newspapers or maybe a bit of television, which wasn't very open at the best of time. So yeah, it wasn't something so - my, my grandparents had to first deal with my mom coming out as it were. But it was all very much a secretive thing. If you were gay or lesbian, or you were LGBTQ or queer. In those days, you were, you know, you just - for the most part... a part - unless you were a major activist, you kind of... for the most part, people kept it in the closet, there was such an area of shame. That came with the ignorance of that. And, you know, that's something that we try and that we've tried to dispel, you know, in my 30 years of ministry, and, you know, because in in our environment, you can't have, you can't have activism - you can't have ministry without activism. Because if you're impacting your community as a church, which is what we should all be doing, you can't ignore those realities, because they impact the church, just as they impact the life of, of people's faith. So, you know, but that's, we can talk about that later. But yes, I would say at a stable environment, my mother didn't move around much as in, it was always very much in close proximity to where my grandparents lived and it just, it just worked like that, I would just like, as I got older, I actually wanted to live with my grandparents, because I really loved I loved my mother, but I loved my gran and the environment of the house. And my mom didn't have any issue with that. She was always close by. And other than that, after school, we would always go to my gran's place and our mothers - because my cousins were like brothers and sisters to me. And my, my mom's sister, her husband died at a very young age when the kids were still two and three. And so they were both single parents, and we all went to the same schools. So after school, we would all go to my gran's house. And we all

went to those same schools in Durban North. So that's why I say stable, and then our parents, our moms after work would come and fetch us from my gran's house. And sometimes they'd stay over for dinner, and then we'd go home. So as I said, it's always been that was always the stable kind of factor. So it was like living there all the time. But yes, no, my mom didn't move around a lot. They were probably about, as I was growing up, maybe there were three places that we moved to, which is pretty normal. So...

KJ: Uhm, and then what were some of the challenges that you and your family faced growing up? If there's any that you can think of?

DB: Challenges? Okay, so I think we were privileged. I think we were... we would be considered a white privileged family. I mean, it doesn't matter that my mother struggled, she still, you know, and I mean... I don't have white guilt about that, it's not that kind of thing I'm trying to get across. I mean, I feel terrible for, for what we all, you know... but, but, but I don't... I don't say what I say because of that. That's what I'm trying to say. Uhm no, I think we were privileged. I think if we if we honest with ourselves, who is still privileged, we were able to get education, we were able to get pretty much free education in those days, when, in those days, Black people had to pay more for their schooling than we did as... as white kids. So and my mom being a single parent, she really... what... school fees were waived, even though they were only like five rand a term or something [laughs]. I mean, in those days, it was absolutely ridiculous, you know. And, yeah, and uhm... so I would say we were... the challenges that... I'd say the challenges I mostly had was, was maybe related to... [sighs]. Initially... okay, I can, I can say this in no uncertain terms, the challenges... I had challenges on two levels. I totally... I built up a lot of resentment towards my grandfather because he was so patriarchal. And even from a young age, I was a very strong girl, I was a

very strong girl into a young woman. And the one thing I could not deal with, even before I was exposed to activism, and knew who I was, as a queer woman, before any of that, I had something inside me that knew that, you know, treating woman, uhm... treating woman, sorry, I just heard something, treating woman and equally was not, was not acceptable. And even sometimes I used to, which I had no right to do, I would even chip in if I heard, uhm, if I heard him, maybe sort of, say something to my grandmother or order her around, or, you know, she used to just do stuff because it was thought to do and, and I would always be cheeky, I would, I would say something back to him. You know, like, if I saw he was being unfair towards us girls, my, my cousin, my male counterpart cousin, was being you know, given... he was given more pocket money than we were because he was a boy. So those kind of things... that was on the one hand, on the other hand, so growing up only once, I probably just as I started going into my teens, I probably got more cheeky, and those kinds of things always were obvious to me, even before I understood why I was doing them in terms of equality for men and woman in the home. And the other thing was, so I was totally against that. I mean, I just I couldn't stand that it just it literally freaked me out.

KJ: Understandable.

DB: And I would... Yeah! And then I would say, as a young girl growing up when I, when I stayed with my mom, obviously there came a time after her being with, with a woman for eight or nine years. It was a long relationship. And these things happen, I guess, just like 50% of our marriage, straight marriages. You know, these things unfortunately happen. She met a woman who I really didn't like, but I didn't know she was gay. Obviously, I didn't know I just say that the word gay. But I know my mom was queer. And I used to have to go to bed by eight o'clock. You know, in those days, it was like eight o'clock. And one night, I came out to

get my pen because I was so busy doing my homework. And I saw her kissing another woman. And I was like, "Oh no! What's going on here?" Even though I didn't even know that I was a queer. I, from the age of, let me put it this way, from the age of five and didn't want dolls. My gran used to buy my cousin and I dolls, a blonde one, a black haired one for her. And I was like, just don't buy me a doll. Give me guns, give me a cowboy suit, you know. And that's what I loved. And the more I would want that the more my grandmother would buy me dolls, and she was like, "Sure." She grew my hair. And she just really, she had no problem with my mom. But she, I think she could see in me I was this real kind of... I was a little tom girl of note, you know, as they would call them in those days. And I didn't know it was because I was queer. But I was different. And even the friends at school were nice to have friends around from class. It was mainly guys it was little boys. You know, we used to, I used to play with the little boys. We used to, you know, that was... and, and so that was my thing. So, uhm, my mom, when I saw her kiss this other woman, I mean, I just saw them in the lounge they obviously just said a quick kiss. I saw them in a kiss. And it blew my mind. I think I was about 11 years old. And I said to my mother, I said, "Mum, you've got to promise me that you never ever do that again. You never do that again." I made her promise me when she dropped me at school the next day. I said, "Because I was so upset". And she said no, she promises she will not do that again. You can imagine the guilt and the shame and all of that she had because she already felt shameful just being who she was. And that I now knew.

00:34:20 First Queer Experience

And in that transition period between 11 and 13 was interesting because I'd had little crushes, you know, you get crushes on your teachers, and you just ignore it. You think it's normal as a young kid, and then I started hitting my teens and I did everything not to like...

because my mother was never ever... as a said she was super feminine. So I didn't see anything wrong with you know, I didn't I didn't even think about it again. I was like she was never overtly queer or affectionate or displayed anything that would have made me, made me gay, made me queer, made me lesbian. You know, I was brought up in a very straight environment if truth be told with my grandparents and, you know, even with my mom without knowing. So, come, come my age of 13/14 I'm starting to realize my, you know, you start experimenting. Now you're starting to experience feelings and your little endorphins are going as a teenager. And you're like, whether you're straight or queer that you're looking at the world differently, and you're looking at, you know, girlfriends and boyfriends and, and I had some of the most handsome boyfriends, I was determined, you know, I'm definitely not going to be like my mother, I am not going to be like my mom. So I had some incredible boyfriends. And of course, they're not real boyfriends. They just kind of, you know, they're eye candy, really, you know, it just, but I just the girls would go crazy. They'd say, oh, my gosh, you're dating so and so. And I would go. [shrugs]. You know, I was it was ridiculous. Anyway, you can't get me telling a story because I'll tell it. But the bottom, the bottom line is that how we got onto that is, is that I didn't feel the same way about boys as I did about girls. And how that happened was, that was the... when I started experimenting, one day girl in two standards above me, who was at one of my friend's houses, it was a female, a girlfriend at school, who was also queer, who I didn't know was queer. Came and kissed me. And I was like, Oh my gosh, that was like, better than any boyfriend kiss that I'd had at 14, whatever you want to call that at 14. And I was that was... That's when I started just saying there's no way this can't be so, you know. And anyway, I kept that from my mom. and when I got to age 16 and that's why this all leads up to why I'm talking about the second reason of the challenges that I would have said ahead at school, they weren't financial. They weren't,

you know, they weren't because I was sexually abused. I was never ever sexually abused or physically abused, per se.

00:37:22 Coming Out as Queer and Socialising with Other Queer People

But my mom, when I was 16, this transition from 14 to 16, I came out as queer. Not totally, but I started coming out because at 14, I was already playing music with bands. And I was in bands playing drums. And at a, uhm, at that young age, you're exposed to a lot, you know, in the music industry, going out to clubs, when you're 14, my mom trusted that the band members would look after me and all of that. And sometimes the band members because in those days, all the clubs closed at 12, not like today. They would go to the gay clubs. Afterwards, they would go to these gay clubs because they were open. And I love that because I was at home without realizing it. But anyways, so when I finally realized I was I was queer, uhm, there was a there was a particular woman or girl at 16 that I kind of had a bit of a crush on. And I thought, Okay, I need to tell my mother and I was so nervous to tell her because I knew that she would blame herself when it had nothing to do with her apart from her genes, maybe. Because we do believe there's a huge amount of genetics involved. And in my research, I believe that wholeheartedly. Genetics play a huge role in our sexual orientation. And we know we can see the signs of that even more and more as well as environmental factors. So, uhm, so yes, that was the two biggest challenges is dealing with patriarchy, and my family and my mother, discovering that I was gay, and that I was queer. And she, she flipped out, she did exactly what I thought she'd do, she flipped out. She said, "You can't be. You not". So one would think would have been easier in a household where your mother's lesbian, but it was actually more difficult. And there were a couple of instances where she would come home and I would have a girl in my room, but just... we

were just talking because that was the only space I had, that was my own. We weren't like, you know... and she would throw this girl out thinking that there's like lesbian activity going on [laughs]. And I was like... so that blew my mind. And I guess that lasted maybe just a, you know, not long, but it was, it was it did make an impact on me because it affected me and I had to say to her, you know, this is not this isn't about you; this is who I am. You know, she looked back she could really see I was always I was always just a little queer; you know? And so I think I didn't want to make the mistake she did of carrying shame and all of that and that's why I started... I think I was quite rebellious as a teenager because I believed that women were so oppressed, I didn't understand it as that at the time. So even at school, you know, I was a bit of a rebel. Maybe there was, I don't know, in those days, maybe there was a bit of attention seeking, who knows, you know how it is when you're kids, but I think I was out about being gay, but at that stage, I left God out of my life because of it. Because I had to.

00:40:28 Internal Struggles with Religion and Homosexuality

DB: There was a struggle within me, because when I was a 10-year-old, I had committed my life to Christ in a Christian faith. And that was what you did. And it's what I wanted to do. It was something that came from my heart. And when I... when my life changed, I like the way my life changed, but I would come back to Durban, and then I would be in a different environment and as a child, there's not a lot you, you kind of can do. And then in the teenage years, although I always loved God, I began to really just put my faith aside because I recognized who I was becoming, and who I was. And I didn't believe for one second, the two could go together. Because the other thing that sticks with me in my childhood, more

than probably anything, is that my dad used to have these you know, in those days, they had little... what they're called tracts. I don't know if you... Are you familiar with them?

KJ: No, I don't think so.

DB: Ah okay. So tracts are... they were little booklets made by a terrible publication called Chicks Publication. And I say terrible, because they used to put the fear of God into everybody about everything. And, you know, Jesus, Jesus was coming soon. And if you don't get ready, you're gonna go to hell. So there was always the emphasis of the on the negative. And one of these little booklets. And of course, my dad had a whole lot of these tracts used to order them by the hundreds in those days, you didn't have desktop publishing here, that you know, that you could just print and, and he used to use those as part of his evangelism. And one of the booklets I picked up one day, and it was this booklet that had pink on it, and it had the silhouette of, of a guy with kind of the sort of pansy positioning, you know, the sort of the sort of feminine positioning, and it was called The Gay Blade. And I'll never forget it, because when you read through it, it was all about how one day the, you know, the LGBT community are going to flaunt who they are, they're going to march in the streets, and they're going to take over the world, and corrupt your children. And, and you know, that the facial expressions of these publications on these comic strips as they would, on these animations that they would draw with terrible, they were horrible. And that stayed with me, because I was like, okay. So I realized, and by reading that I would, okay, you definitely can't be gay and a Christian because even from the pulpits, I'd heard that, right. And from the newspapers, I had been shown and taught, you know, to carry shame, if you if you, if you're a lesbian, or you're a queer, you carry you carry shame. So those were impacts in my childhood, but I didn't have to deal with monetary issues. And there were times I mean, you

know, as I said, my mom was poor. My grandfather would give us pocket money, but it wasn't like we were flush, even though they had money. It wasn't like we were flush. So I didn't have those real kind of problems. I had food on the table. I had a roof over my head. Emotionally, there was general stability, like in a family, any family, I guess. So those are really the only major, if I think back, those were only the major challenges that are probably had, I mean, apart from you know, just normal childhood things. So ja, I would say.

00:44:01

KJ: Okay, and so it seems like you're really close to your family. Do you... Were you close with like your neighbours or anyone else in the community around you?

DB: Well, just to... ja so I'm not close, my family are all dead [laughs].

KJ: I'm so sorry.

DB: So no, no, no, no, don't worry. So, uh, look, I'm 57. So my mom passed away two years ago of cancer. My dad died; I think in 2009. And then, of course, my grandparents died. You know, I think my grandmother died in '96. So she was already 78 then. So, you know, I guess because I'm 57. Just, you know, these are the things that you end up dealing with families. And because I'm the only child so I don't have any immediate family left. But I have my cousins that I grew up with it. I'm pretty close to. Yeah, and some of my aunts. So, so yes, I do have I do have indirect family. And your question was, was I close to any neighbours? Or was that your question?

KJ: Yeah, yeah.

DB: Yes. At my gran's house, which as I said is where we were, most of the time, there was a neighbour that we had, a male neighbour, and I used to play with him as a friend. You know,

we used to play as friends. And then there was a girl up the road that I used to play cowboys with. Her mother bought her a cowboy suit, and I had a cowboy suit. And we used to play cowboys. You know, we used to move around the garden. And but yeah, I would say mainly a couple of friends from school, apart from them, you know. But yeah, I, I didn't... In those days as a child, you know, ja, we didn't, we didn't really socialize much except with those neighbours. And, and then with some school friends, you know, and then of course, my family's adult friends.

KJ: Right, right. So, I mean...

DB: Those types of neighbours, generally...

KJ: So there were people outside of your family that you were socializing with.

DB: Ja.

00:46:29 Family's Reaction to Coming Out

KJ: Okay, no that's great. Um, so, you said that when you came out, your mom didn't take it very well. How did the rest of your family take it?

DB: Fine. Absolutely. The only the only one that I knew I had to deal with- deal with is my dad. And the reason is because, like any child, you know, you look up to your parents. And I really looked up to my father. In fact, I was quite scared of him. Not because he was... it was my own perception as a child. But I think because when I say that I'm talking about as I moved into my teenage years, I was scared of him. And the reason was because of my perception of him not accepting me. And because whenever I was with him, I felt guilty being who I was. And, and there were even times when he would come to Durban and I would do everything, not to spend a lot of time with him because I was so scared, he would

ask me questions. So even into my... So let me, let me share this even into my... So I came out when I was 16. But obviously, the coming out process is a process and a journey. And so even though I came out quite young, especially for that time, it was a process of probably another, you know, another kind of six years or six to eight years, where I would start coming out in different aspects of my life. And the one area that I was petrified of was, was the area of, of my dad finding out because not only was I a queer woman, but I was also... I'd also then moved away from my faith. Because I just didn't believe God could accept me. So whenever I saw him, it was a reminder of both those things. The shame and that, you know, that I had backslidden from my faith. Yeah, and I knew that, you know, he would be able to tell, not about me being queer, but about my faith. And I didn't, I didn't want to answer the questions. So I did try and avoid him when I became an adult. And in my early, sort of, in my late teens, early 20s. So yeah, I would say, I would say that would be the only thing if I answered your question. Yeah.

KJ: So would you say that at that point, you felt a bit like disconnected from your dad?

DB: Yes, I felt disconnected from him because I chose to disconnect.

KJ: Okay.

DB: But later on in life about, you know, much later on, probably into, I wouldn't know exactly when it was but into my 30s. Because for a period of time, when he remarried, he also kind of kept a bit of a distance, not deliberately, we would be in contact, but it was just the nature of I guess, us all going in different directions. And maybe with me, also avoiding him, he kind of felt like I didn't really want to speak to him or be with him. Wasn't the case. But what happened is when I came back to my faith, which was in my late 20s, which is another story, which is probably an important one. But I obviously wanted to get close to

him again. And, and I wanted to tell him my story once I'd come to terms with it. So that's exactly what I did in my 30s and I actually went to Cape Town and met with him and had arranged prior to that, that I'd meet with him on my own. And I wanted to talk to him and tell him my story. And I wanted to say to him because from a minister to a minister, one to another, to say to him, Dad, you may not agree with me. But I would not... my, my, my wish is that you accept me as your daughter. Because you may not agree with me scripturally because you may not understand it the way I do, but that you accept me as your daughter, and he did. And I actually think personally, if you want me to be absolutely honest, I actually think my dad was gay. I really believe my father was gay. I will tell you what happened years later with him in his house. We were looking for photo albums because he was a photographer years ago. And a profess- He did amazing. He used to take hundreds of pictures of me when I was there. And we were looking for these because my mother wanted to have some of them. She said "Ah, your dad's got all the pictures". So I went. He said, "No go into to my study and look here and look there". And then I came out with this big album, one of those old black albums where they used to actually still put there those corner things, they would put the pictures in I don't know if you know what I'm talking about. And this album, yes. And, and this album was an album bear in mind. This is the 60s hey, the 60s. This was an album with his name and another man called Bill. Just my dad and Bill. And who in the... who would have taken selfies in those days like that of just two men and these, they were, they were postured back-to-back with these selfies and pictures of my dad, he was quite a butch man, quite a muscular man, you know, pushing very abstract pictures, and I'm talking the 60s, abstract pictures of him pushing on this big rock, you know, with his muscles glistening, and, you know, on the beach, and I'm like, Oh, my gosh, and then these poems in this in this, you know, friendship and that man, Bill, never ever got married [chuckles]. That

man Bill never got married. And he was searching for my dad years later, to catch up with him. And my dad was always kind of avoiding him. And by the way, I don't think anything ever happened or anything like that. I don't think my dad would have even comprehended that for his mind. Because he always sort of loved, loved the Lord and meaning that he wouldn't want to. But and he probably would never even have entertained the thought. But I think they got very close. And I think if it was another era, another day, that might have been the case. Most definitely. Because my dad... Oh, oh! My dad was he was even worse than my grandfather with his patriarchy. And that that was another area that was... I must say I didn't live with him. So it wasn't as bad. It impacted me in the sense that I knew it was something I had to change. With the people and the environment that I was in if I had any influence, because, because of his faith. He believed that I mean, women were supposed to be the subservient and submissive to their husbands. And he would take Scripture, as many churches do, even in the 21st century where women are still oppressed. We are the most people oppressed group, apart from children in the world. And so yes, that was a huge issue for me. And it took me many years to literally... I would keep quiet for years until I didn't. And because I didn't live with him, and he wasn't in my world. But he was an amazing man of God. He was just a patriarch, just unfortunately he was he was, and I think that chauvinism in him it was literally chauvinism. And, you know, woman's role was this and a woman did this and yet he would always uplift me and allow me to do things that were pretty boyish and masculine, buying me cowboy suits. My mother couldn't stand that he bought me cowboy suits and guns, and he would let me help him. He was also a carpenter with his woodwork in those days. So having said all of that, I think that made me more determined to say let's see what the Scriptures really say about women, and you know, let's study what it says about women and homosexuality and, and so I did that for myself because

of that reason. So yes, I have two patriarchs in my life, but fortunately, they weren't that prominent. You know, they, they had an impact on me and what I do now but yes, so I understand suppression in that sense. I don't even know what the question was [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] That's okay, no, that's fine. And it is almost an hour. Do you want to take a break? Are you fine to continue?

DB: No, know we can carry on.

KJ: Okay.

DB: No problem.

00:54:53 Dating Other Women

KJ: Um, so when did you like, start feeling comfortable dating other women?

DB: Okay, um, so I would say, I would say I was still pretty much in the closet at 14. And then I started experimenting and realizing that I was gay, but... that I was a queer woman, but I didn't want to accept that. So, I first again attempted to date more men to prove to myself that this wasn't... so I went through the process of confusion and what most women go through, a lot of people say they are bisexual, when actually they're not bisexual, they often are just at a different exploratory phase of their sexual orientation, not that I have any issue with it at all, but I'm just saying a lot of people miss... they mis-, they misunderstand where they're at. And it's a process and a journey. And so, I think if I talk about real dating, and I was I was probably 16, because that's when I met my first love. And, and we, who was actually my best friend at the time, and was straight. And we both fell in love. And we were together for seven years. [laughs] And it was the most tumultuous relationship I've ever been in, in my life. And I actually thought, Yes, that's what God means. This is of the devil.

This is why because, you know, you're not meant to be queer. And these are the same kind of things that play out in, in many, women's lives in many LGBTQ people's lives, you know, that this is happening, because I'm not supposed to be queer. So ja, I started dating around 16. And I was in a, you know, a monogamous relationship, which is all I believe in, for... for those seven years, but they were tumultuous, because the person that I was with could never accept that she was queer. Because her parents, her mom was not 100%, you know, all there. And she would be, she was emotionally distressed much of the time, and she would literally wait up for a daughter to come home. And then she would say, You are worse than, you know, a whore and a prostitute. And every single day, she would tell her daughter that. And eventually, when her daughter moved out, of course, I was blamed because we moved in together, and I wasn't a believer, or in Christ or anything in those days. I had forsaken my faith, and I was, you know, just an ordinary person living a queer life. And so, ja, so that, that's when I... but if you talk about dating, yeah, I kind of had a few kinds of dates, I'd say from about 16. But I was pretty, believe it or not, I'm an, I'm an extrovert, but I'm actually very shy. So I didn't. I guess I didn't date a lot of girls. You know, I was a musician in a band. And yeah, you know, I was told in those days, that's quite a lot of girls like me... But yeah, so I think in the days of leather pants and youth, I think y'all maybe it was possible. But anyway, yeah.

00:58:27 Family's Reaction to Dating Women

KJ: Yeah. And how did your relationships with other woman affect your relationship with your family?

DB: Well, at that stage, I think because they already had to deal with my mom. And it was so interesting, because in my mom's relationships, it wasn't like, she came out and said, I'm gay.

You know, she that in those days using the word gay, she would, she would be with a woman and people, my family just accepted that was her partner. They knew that was your partner, they didn't come out and talk about it. So what was the question? Sorry?

KJ: How relationships with other women affect your relationship with your family?

DB: Oh, yes. So they didn't worry about, about that. Once, once my mother got over the fact that she wasn't responsible for my sexual orientation. She was very supportive. And my grandmother was very supportive. The only thing they were not supportive of was my first relationship because they could see how detrimental it was to me and how bad it was for me. That it wasn't a healthy relationship, like any, like any parent would do, right? So they were absolutely accepting. There was no issue with any of my family, with my mom's sisters, with my grandfather. My grandfather was a very warm, welcoming man. So in spite of his patriarchy, he was always welcoming and always accepting of everyone. He... His home was a really an open house to anybody, he enjoyed that. So, I would say that I was very blessed in that regard. But they were still supportive, even though they knew I wasn't in a relationship that was good for me. But it's your first love. Yeah.

KJ: And how did your dad respond?

DB: He didn't know about that relationship. And that's, that's, that was that period of time that I was sharing, you know, sort of, into my late teens going into my early 20s. And, you know, because theoretically, I mean, apart from you know, casual dating that you would just consider nothing in your life. I've really just, I would say, I've only been in three major relationships, and all of them were long term. So that was the first one and then the second relationship that I was in, which was probably a year later after I had broken up with, with, with my with... my first relationship, she... shame she, she always she just couldn't get over

her confusion. So funny how things come around, I never socialized with, with, with her after that. But why I say this is because years later, somebody that knew her, came to our church and had actually had an affair with her [laughs]. And she was then married to a man. So she got married to a man and all of that, but she was always, she was always queer. And I think this happens with a lot of women and men. But ja, my next relationship, which was at the time that I broke up with my first relationship, which was... uh, into my mid-20s, I guess. I... Because we didn't really start effectively dating at 16. You know, we sort of we went through the, the motions. But I say that because that's when I came back to Christ was after the breakup of my first love. And I had there was no noise in my head so I could actually realize Listen, this is what I've been missing. And I just kind of I just gave it all to God. I was like, Okay, if you want to put me in a frock and make me straight, do it. But I don't want to leave you out of my life anymore. That was where I was because I didn't know. I was ignorant. I didn't know you could be queer, and that God could love you, you know, we didn't have internet you know in those days here in South Africa the way that was... So anyway, so then I found the Lord again and that's an amazing story. And in doing so, I meet a woman who I also led to Christ, and she became my...

[01:02:56 DB disconnects from Zoom]

[01:03:45 DB reconnects to Zoom]

KJ: Hi, can you hear me? Oh, you're on mute.

DB: What happened there? Was there a 40-minute limit or?

KJ: No, the screen just froze on your side. Maybe it was like an... the internet dipped or something like that.

DB: Oh, yeah how weird.

KJ: Sorry about that.

DB: No, no problem, no problem at all. Gosh, that's weird. We've got such a high-speed internet over here for all our live streams. Okay, well, good as long as we back. So at that time, I came out to my dad by introducing him to my partner. And I was quite comfortable using words and terminology that depicted that without throwing it in his face or disrespecting him. You know, I would say darling, if, if that's the terminology we used of endearment or whatever. So I sort of slowly gave him some shock treatment and introduced him, but it took a while. At work, I only started coming out of the closet in my early 20s. And beforehand, it was a horrible feeling because you never know people are discussing their weekends and you feel like you can't talk about your life. The closet is such a toxic place. But it is where so many people find themselves based on, you know, the pressure from families and church and so on. So ja.

KJ: Okay. Um, so you did mention that with your first relationship, y'all moved in together? How did that affect your relationship with your family, friends, neighbours?

DB: Everything was good, except if you're talking about people, I don't know, like neighbours or the general public, when we first moved in together, that was still, uhm, that was still the 80s. So, so, so I was still pretty much carrying shame around. So it's not like, we were open and comfortable with who we were. And there was this constant discomfort with who she was, so I couldn't have come out anyway, because she wasn't ready to. So if there were surrounding neighbours in the building we lived, it's not like we would sort of be a normal couple or act like a normal couple. We, we, we wouldn't say we not a couple. But you know, and same in our work environments, and in those days, we would take different guys, queer

guys, each of us to our work functions, you know, which is so sad, but that's, that's where we were. So it wasn't any pressure from the family, or anything like that. It was more just general social pressure of perceptions that we all have of what it means to be queer in the real world, you know, in the 80s. In those days, in those days, I was not involved in activism, because it remember, activism was still... we were still sort of 40 years behind the States, certainly in the church, but not that I was in the church. But no, we didn't really have, to my knowledge, any radical organizations. There was, there was an organization called GASA, I think, in those days, Gay Association of South Africa, if I remember correctly, and I did get involved with them, superficially, wherever I could, whether it was handing out flowers or helping them put postages together, or... But, you know, again, I wasn't kind of in the church in that in those days, so I didn't get as involved I had enough on my plate with my relationship [chuckles]. So, so, so yeah, I think I was just keep keeping my head above water. And so I was, as I said, I was out in certain places, like if we went to gay clubs, or at GASA, or whatever, but I wasn't out everywhere. So yeah, but my family was no issue.

1:07:51 GASA

KJ: Okay. Um, just to kind of jump a bit to, to GASA. What was your experience like? Because from what I've read, at least, it's very male... It was very male dominated.

DB: Totally. Yeah. I think I think even today, we see, you know, most organizations are still male dominated. Just give me one second. Sorry, I just need to... [answers call]. So yes, so I wasn't as actively involved in GASA. But I can tell you, it was very male dominated. And even today, when I look at our organizations, our queer organizations around the country, even today, the covers are mostly male dominated. You hardly ever see pictures of lesbians on there. If you do, it's like we're doing you a favour. The articles are male dominated,

predominantly. So I am still miffed at that. I still... I am still very... I just have enough on my plate as a church that I can't be... It's almost like as a minister, you've got to wear two hats. So I'd like to talk a lot about that. But that, that, that side is important to me. But yes, I think even today, we still in that position, but GASA was, you know, it was pretty low key. It wasn't... and things were still in the closet. We in those days in the 80s we still had the police raiding our clubs and bars. So you know, it was still... you were still considered illegal to be gay. They would raid the bars, they would raid the clubs, they would often beat up the feminine queer guys and you know those realities we dealt with and certainly in Durban, I remember various clubs that had to open and close and move location because they would be raided. And, and, and you know if you were caught in there when they were raided admittedly, I think they kind of did more with the with the guys in the way of sort of manhandling them than they did the woman, but ja. So I can't remember a lot about GASA because I wasn't actively involved. I just always I tried to get involved with community but mainly that happened when I started the church group before that in the 90s, early 90s.

KJ: Do you want to continue talking about that?

1:10:42 Return to Spirituality

DB: Yeah, I can. So when I, when I recommitted my life to God, with... and again, I was I was with this partner in a relationship for eight years, this is the second relationship. So first seven and a half, then eight. Seems to kind of feel... and unfortunately, things just didn't work out with, with, with that person, it was nothing I could do as much as I would want, have wanted to just didn't. People are people, and they have to make their own decisions. So, so with regard to, with regard to my journey... In 1990, I, I had a... I'll very quickly say this,

I had an experience with a, a woman that was in a Methodist Church, so she wasn't kind of I don't know what you understand about faith, I don't know what faith you are.

KJ: I'm Anglican.

DB: Okay, I just, just wanted to understand so that if I use terminology... I don't mind what, what your faith is at all I just wanted to understand. So, okay, so I'm a charismatic kind of spiritual Christian, if you want to call it that, meaning that we emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit being active in our lives, we believe God really does change us. We don't believe in cessationism, in other words, we don't believe the gifts of God died with the apostles in the book of Acts, we believe that why would Christ go to all that suffering and not bring... not, not have an impact on us now, I can't imagine that would be any... of any value. So I had an epiphany moment in 1990, where I had a visit from a Methodist woman who was just an acquaintance of my ex, by the way, and my first love. And we had dinner one night, she was a straight woman, and she was a Christian. And she said, "Listen, I shouldn't even be here tonight. But I've come here because I want to tell you something. She didn't know much about my life, my faith or anything. She just said, I've got a message from God for you. And I have to be here to tell you". And she wasn't even this great, like charismatic Christian. As I said she was a Methodist, God use this Methodist woman and that's how I knew it was God. She said, "I want to tell you not to put God in a box". She said, "like your father has done". She said, "God has been put in a box by your father has been painted, as this authority figure that's pointing down at you, and condemning you and the Lord wants me to tell you that that's not how God sees you". And, and she said, "God wants you to take God out of the box". And I remember crying because I'm thinking she doesn't even know about my father; she doesn't even know about that relationship. So anyway, that was a turning point for me,

where... I was quite a social animal. So in other words, we have quite a few friends in our circle, you know, we would socialize a lot, have people over for weekends and so on. And, and, you know, I guess from my upbringing, I also had a very sort of open home. I enjoyed having people over I was quite social, a social being. And, and at that time, I was still partying, I mean, I partied, and I was in my late 20s. And where was I? Somewhere around there and, and what happened is, that was a turning point for me. And that's when I said God, okay, okay. This woman disappeared. Weeks go by and I fell on my face. I had broken up with my first partner. This was before I'd met my second one. And I just, I just, I just said God, do whatever you want with me, have your way with me kind of thing. And I thought God may want to change me. You know, I really didn't know I thought ok now I'm gonna have to be straight. I can't do this, you know. But anyway, God, you can do all things. And then when I met my other partner. And as I said I had this experience with this woman. God had introduced me at these different parties, it was just so weird. I always found people that will want to have conversations with me about being gay and being a Christian. And can you be queer and be a Christian? And look, the Bible says this and what... And I was like, I don't want to even talk about it, people. I don't want to even go there. You know, it was that kind of thing. And I was just so irritated. So I think because I didn't have the answers. And so then eventually, it was almost like a little small still voice said to me start taking the numbers, the phone numbers of those people that are asking questions. Some of them were people I'd known for quite some time they were queer women, and others were, were just people I'd met along the way that I knew were interested in their faith and their sexual orientation and what that means. So I started to take numbers. And it took me another year before I acted on what God had said, because this woman had said to me, this Methodist woman had said, God wants to use you profoundly, but you have run away from God and it was all true, you

know [laughs]. And so I just wept, because I realized, you know, God speaks to so many different ways. And it showed me how God loved me and how God had never left me, I'd left God and blah, blah, blah. So in 1990, I started a group, I got hold of those phone numbers, and I phoned, the 12 people, or however many they were, that I remember in that past year of having conversations with and I said, Look, I'm just going to have a little get together at my house, just for us to come together and pray as a group, maybe twice a month, and ask God to reveal to us, you know, why did the Scriptures say this? And what are the answers because none of us knew. And then it was an incredible thing. Because in my journey, we did that these people came together, and we began to pray. And by the way, I was still a rebel. So I wouldn't like I was, like, you know, wasn't like a big religious experience. We were just coming together as friends trying to do what we knew how to do. And then, after praying a couple of months, my mother, it was so weird, my mom said, Hey, listen, I know you started this little kind of religious group. You know, there's a friend of mine from, from the USA, and I believe that they're coming to South Africa, and one of them is a pastor, would you like to meet her? So she's, she's a queer pastor. So I said, yes, absolutely that would be awesome. And I did. Turns out this woman came to one of our group meetings and helped us answer so many of those questions. A woman who had walked for 40 years, a South African woman, who then moved to the States and shared her journey and testimony. And it set so many of us free because we were standing there with our Bibles. Why does the Bible say this? Why? Why does a man shall not lie with a man as a woman and why did it say... [laughs]. You know, their natural desires, that word is actually intrinsic. It's got nothing to do with the physical anatomy of a person it's talking about the Greek word is who you are intrinsically created to be, and I am a fusikos lesbian, that's the Greek word fusikos, I am intrinsically created to be a lesbian that God created me to be. Because, okay, so then my journey

started. And this, this minister, this woman helped open doors for us. And we began to explore our faith a lot more, because we were more comfortable with our sexual orientation, but it's a journey and a process. Now I've got a course, a 10-hour course, on YouTube on our channel. I think I've opened it up now where people can, can watch it, not just as a course. So what, so what I was saying about that is why it was so important because, is because unlike... I was like many other queer women struggling to reconcile my faith and my sexual orientation, and one of the reasons why we struggle in our LGBT affirming churches today, to get in as many people as we should be able to get in, even though we are a minority group as you know, the queer community is because there is another barrier to evangelism and evangelizing and that is one of this being able to reconcile our faith and our sexual orientation, that even though they know there is a queer affirming church around, people still struggle to believe that it's acceptable. That God really does accept them, that the scriptures do accept us, and that God does love us. And so many have been put the fear of God has been put into them that they, uh, they're even scared to explore what the Scriptures really say. And yet, actually, the Bible is a book of liberation. It's a book of freedom. And it's really a book about Jesus's love, not about sexual orientation at all. Yes, does it talk about lust? Absolutely. So anyway, I have a course on it. And uhm, and ultimately, what happened is I... before we started the church, we had seven years of just running this group. And we were offered different groups like MCC church in America wanted us to become part of them. And I said, no. God wants us to have a South African identity and I'm not sure what that looks like, but we're not ready and it was also a training ground for me. I did have a mentor from the Methodist Church, funnily enough that this woman was from, and I didn't meet him through her. He had an interest in me and offered to mentor us as a group and he is, he... he is very publicly known to be accepting of and

affirming of, of our queer community. And his name is Bishop George Ervin from the Methodist Church. And he's retired now, I think, in East London. But anyway, he supported us... Sorry?

KJ: No, no. Just taking note of his name.

DB: Yes, yes. It's Bishop George Ervin is on my Facebook profile somewhere. Very wise man. a man of incredible integrity. And he took many risks in exploring this where we did open nights at his church in the 90s, in the early 90s, which opened a can of worms for him, but he took the risks. So he and by the way, he's always been an activist, you know, in the days of apartheid, he was one of those that came to the fore. So he's, he's pretty much an incredible man known throughout South Africa and the church community, but a conservative Christian but amazing. So, so we kind of had a place to go to we sort of went to his church as well as a group and we kind of began to re-establish our faith again. Why that was important was we still had to deal with this real issue. You know, what is the scripture say? How do we get people in and let them know that they're accepted and loved? And, and, and so I got I did get involved a lot with, with Nonhlanhla, I don't know if you know, Nonhlanhla? You must do? From the Gay and Lesbian Centre in Durban.

KJ: I've heard of her; I haven't had a chance to meet her yet. But yeah.

DB: Okay. She needs to change the name of that centre now. I think we need to make it more inclusive. But anyway, again, even, even alongside her, there used to be quite a predominant man that she leant on. That helped with a lot of stuff that... He died, and, you know, but we've always been very much a part of... but what I'm trying to say is that we don't have... that's all we have here in Durban. We don't really have other organizations, activist organizations, per se, if you know what I'm saying that are considered to be... So that

is the longest standing one. And we've been very involved with them throughout our time as a group, as a church.

01:23:44 Deo Gloria Family Church

DB: In 1997, we started the church, I started the church. We actually met with a church in, in Pretoria called Deo Gloria Family Church, we loved what they did. They no longer exist. And we said, look, we're looking to start a church in Durban, but we only want to take on your name, we don't want to be tied in any other way. We want to be independent and that was agreed upon, but their church actually closed down... But anyway, so I founded the church here and of course, that made us integrate with the Gay and Lesbian Centre. We did... we went on a lot of their you know... we became... we supported them and they supported us and, and so we were quite integrated every year, you know, we've been very involved in, in all the Pride marches and I've opened for them on a lot of the marches and a lot of the core stuff that they've been involved in and we've always tried to be a part of it as much as we can. We've invited them when we've had courses like you know, we call it HATBC which is just an older name. It used to be called Homosexuality and the Bible, so it was just short for that, HATBC where we explored the Bible on faith and our sexual orientation, and, and courses on rejection, because there's a double whammy with the queer community, on rejection in our communities, and so on. So I've got a course on rejection, I've got a course on healing, where we talk about spiritual and emotional healing that we all need so much of and even more, again, as queer people very often because of what the different dynamics that many have been through. But still, to this day, even after 30 years of being in ministry, we've just celebrated our 24th... ja, 24th year as being a church. And I look at it and I go, my gosh, if I had known, we still wouldn't be much bigger than this now, I would have been like

what. But the stumbling blocks are that even today in the 21st century, we still have this very real, unspoken reality that I've ministered to more people outside of the church than I have inside the church. And I say that because we've got a file, we've got, like we could fill three, or four, or five or six lever arch files, if you want to talk paper, with visitors that have come to our church over the years, but people are fearful, they, they, they're scared that they're going to go to hell, they still believe so much of what they've heard. And so often, even... and I'll tell you where else that comes from, is that queer women, especially because we deal a lot with queer women, probably because I'm a female minister, like, you know, it's, it's so weird, but you find that, again, there's still bias in the male community. But a lot of, a lot of people just if they've been involved in charismatic churches, because unfortunately, charismatic churches are the worst, in terms of being outspoken and their ignorance about homophobia, and in terms of condemning our queer community. So, so they are the, they are the worst in that sense, because they really show their ignorance [chuckles] by being actually quite arrogant about it, and going you know, God condemns that, and you can't be gay. And, you know, you need to repent, and you need to just come to the Lord and you're welcome here, but you must repent, you know, of your sexual orientation. They don't call it that, they say your sin. And of course, we know that, you know, it's not a sin or sickness. If it were a sickness, God could heal it, you know, and, ja, so. So we find, that's the biggest problem because they leave those churches, realizing that they're gay and then even if they know, there's another church that is affirming, and also quite spiritual, there's... it's the most difficult group to get hold of, and there are so many, we've got such gifted people in our community, that I see sitting on the side-lines, that I know could be a part of this and impact our community, make our community better... you know, lift that ethical standards in the... the misconceptions, and, you know, just to make our community break the stigmas, you

know, of promiscuity always being attached to homosexuality, and all that rubbish, you know, that comes with ignorance. And, you know, I find when people come back to the Lord, and God begins to change them within, and they're in an environment, like a church, that can be a safe space for them, they transform, and they blossom, and, you know, come into the church and be there a year and you realize, my gosh, and it affects everything, you have their parents telling them they're in a cult, and you've got to deal with all of those things. And we've been called a cult by so many. It's the most isolating thing, having a church that is LGBTQ affirming because... because you are ostracized by the rest of the church community, and you don't have the support of the rest of the church community. We have a network of churches, and that may sound all great, but all it is, is a network of affirming churches around the country scattered around the country, and one or two people internationally... We have an affiliation form, we act like a bit of a body as a, as a, as, as, as a network if I can say that sort of holds it all together. But it's not some kind of an official network. You know, it's just that we've got a spiritual network where we... They fall under my network, and it's just like a body where we have some stabilization in our queer community. You know, ministers that, that, that want to be promiscuous, they don't like our network, because I don't care whether you're queer or straight, we... if we call ourselves ministers of the word of God, we've got to uphold the standard of the word of God. And I'm not talking about judging people in any shape or form, my arms are open to any anybody, any ministers that make a mistake, like I make mistakes too [chuckles]. I don't care what you've done, you know, if Jesus opens His arms, I open my arms. And so it's not about that, but it's about acknowledging our wrongs, dealing with them, and then getting back on track, you know, whether we ministers or congregants and why I say that to you is because we have to build the Church the way Christ wanted us to. How do people look up to us, in our community, if

they, if they see that I'm promiscuous and running around and having affairs or whatever. So, of course, there's a higher standard for us as ministers. And because we're queer, that doesn't give us any excuse. And I want to tell you straight off the bat, I've been unpopular with some ministers even around the world, where I've been asked to step in or, you know, uhm, you know, and, and I will, because, you know, it creates a bad name for all of us. And, and, you know, what, are we building then? Because then if they see they're hurt by other ministers in another church, they're not going to want to come to ours. They're going to just see the Church as a bad place, like most people still, do. We already deal with that issue as queer people that the church is not a... Yes, there's some churches, some Anglican churches and Methodist churches that say they welcome queer people, but they're not fully accepting, they're tolerant. And there's a big difference. Will they marry you? Will they cancel you and your partner as a couple? Openly? Will they... you know, that's not affirming. That's just tolerant. So anyway, but you know, I can go on about that so, I don't know. But yeah, so we are. We were activism hats, and..., but yes, there is still such a severe oppression of woman, even in, especially in the Bible Belt in the States. There are gay men, who still don't believe women should be allowed to preach in the church. I mean, I'm serious, you want to live in the ark? We are dealing with the reality of patriarchy, and misogyny in our communities, and maybe more patriarchy, sexism. And the problem is, and even among some ministers overseas, I know that they've... I know that I've impacted their lives concerning woman because there wasn't awareness before. And you know what I'm saying? It's not like they're deliberate. These are wonderful men of God, I love them. But they're just dismissive. So in other words, they'll promote a man to a higher position in the church before they will a woman, they don't see the women. So these are things that we've emphasized, and we emphasize them in our teaching. We're inclusive. When we read the

Word of God, we inclusify it in terms of pronouns, you know, more translations are coming out now, like the NIV 2011, with more inclusive translations. They used to say, brothers in Christ. Now, they say brothers and sisters in Christ. They haven't quite got to the point where they use the word God as opposed to He, you know, and, and I like to use the word God as my pronoun for God, I don't use He. I might slip up once or twice because we are all learning changing our language, and yet our language represents where we are as a society. So I believe to try inclusify, we need to make sure that we do that in every aspect, you know, bringing woman... By the way, I have more male ministers and leaders that I've ever had women. And it's not because I want to, it's just been the nature of who has come to the fore. I think it's because women also don't see and know and believe in themselves the way that they should. And so I would love, I would love to have more female ministers, but it just is circumstantially, the way that has happened, that men have come into the ministry, and those have been the ones that have been committed. Not men in general, but the leadership that I've brought in. And, you know, we've had obviously, we've had kind of equal parts, but talking about my actual ministers, so yeah, I've had two pastors and both of them were men [chuckles]. Not intentionally or because it's what I wanted, but yeah.

KJ: I know that you are, like, worried about the time are you still okay to carry on?

DB: Uhm, yes, we can carry on.

KJ: Okay. Okay. That's great. Um, so, you know... You speak a lot about like, you know, the persecution from the church especially, right? How did you deal with that persecution, like those feelings and yeah...

01:34:57 Feelings of persecution and unacceptance by the Church

DB: I think what's, I think what's pretty sad is that there's still this silence. It's like a Cold War that happens within a person. I think what makes me so sad is that I understand it because I've been through it, and I can empathize a lot with... with our community, because I always try and encourage people that come into our church, to say, please know that the people around you understand what you're going through, because most of us have been there in different circumstances, but we, we understand. And what I find about the persecution, the most difficult is, is the fact that there are so many queer women and men out there that know and love God, but they will not step their foot back in a church. And even if you pursue them, you know, in a healthy way, if you pursue them, say, hey, why don't you come to church this week, and we, you know, we'd love to see you, and it was great that you visited us and just a general... There's something inside them that has been wounded and hurt by the global Church, the church with a capital C, that just causes them not to come near the church. And I know because I had that there for... It took me years; it took me several years. So for example, I was hurt by the church, my dad came out of a Pentecostal background. So as I've said to you, unfortunately, these are the churches, the same kind of faith that I belong to, where they're the most vocal about these things, even from the pulpit, they're not as subtle as the Methodist or the Anglican, for example, when it comes to these issues, you know. And so, for example, what... you'll go to a church a straight church and you risk somebody saying something from the pulpit that can hurt you. But what most queer people do is they sit under that, and they take it, believing they can take it, believing they can tolerate it. And what they don't realize is the damage that it's doing to them. So that eventually when they can't take it anymore, or they're thrown out of their churches, or they finally meet someone, and they can no longer be closed about who they are, they leave the church and all those wounds and hurts from what they believe the Church says about who

they are, makes them believe they can't reconcile. That's the biggest stumbling block as that there are people who don't believe they can reconcile their faith with their sexual orientation. Even if they find a church, that similar to what they've been in, they'll come into our church, and something will be a trigger, you know, even if it's not, you know, and so there is trauma, I believe, that has been caused that's unspoken, and it's misunderstood by the people themselves. They themselves are not even aware as to why they're not coming to church. Some of them go as far as even going back to another straight church. And that just burns me because I'm like, dude [throws hands up]. Because they've usually been thrown out of their churches or had to leave before they've even really been ready to come out. So even with when it comes to our parents, many people in my experience of counsel, maybe I can... this is my, my experience... is that what happens with queer folk just to digress a bit, is when it comes to, to persecution and stuff, even coming out to their parents is, is an issue. And why it pertains a lot to the church is because many parents are religious. And no matter what the faith is, if they are religious, and their daughter or son comes to them and says, you know, I'm queer, they... there is a huge struggle, and often that can be done prematurely. So for example, they have a need to say it, but yet, they are not yet emotionally ready to actually deal with the rejection that comes with having come out and so they're not ready to deal with the rejection and very often they get hurt again, or they'll come into the church, they'll be so excited, they finally come to an acceptance of themselves, they love it. And then friends that they will have in the social circles from other churches that are straight, and heterosexual people will come to them and say, Do you know that you condemned, you can't be gay and be a Christian, that church is a cult. And automatically those things set them back, they're set back again, and they like, oh my gosh, and now they're having to deal with something that actually weren't ready for. And so we always try and teach people that

coming out of the closet is a process and a journey. And unfortunately, if you are a woman, I believe you are open to even more bullying. You know, because women are always... in the church environment have always been expected to be more passive and even if you are a strong woman, your reaction to a male pastor, in which case it mostly is, telling you how wrong you are, is, he is more likely to be harder on you as a woman and firmer on you, in his language with you, than he would be with a man even though he may say similar things. So there's still this oppression, still this - okay, so we've got multilayers to deal with, we've got the oppression of women, we've got the, the problem with our sexual orientation, and reconciling our faith as, as, as women and men of God. And we've also got the problem that in the Church itself, there is discrimination on a very big scale, in the queer Church. Uh, of, literally men not having awareness that are leading those churches, in many cases. Some have come a lot further. And sometimes it goes from one extreme to the other end without realizing you can even be putting- What do you call it? Somebody that... You don't... you're just putting them there for show? What is the word? Postmenopausal [chuckles]. Uhm...

KJ: Like a puppet or something?

DB: Like a mascot, yes, like the mascot, you know, it's not really... it's not somebody that is, you know, that... they may not believe that person really has the credentials, but they'll just put them there because they're a woman. And that's not right. I mean, we have so many gifted women that need to be lifted up, but they are... they're invisible to men. And the problem is, we've got to bring awareness to the fact that men don't realize that they, women, are very often invisible to them. And even when it comes to changing language, when they hear me reading out of the Word of God, and anybody that takes my pulpit, I begin to teach them about the language because the pulpit's a very important place. And,

and they, they, some men are very resistant to that, why do we have to call God, God? Why isn't God a He? I say, Well, you can call God a She if you want to. But we... because actually, you know, that's making the point. But we understand from scripture that God has no gender. We have over the years throughout depictions, and our characterizations, we've painted God as this male figure with a white beard, but that's not... In my gender studies at university, certainly, I was so grateful for that, because it taught me so much, you know. And, and I was glad to see that, you know, the Scripture depicts God in very many female connotations, especially if you read the book of Isaiah, you know, it's like a hen with her chickens. And, you know, there are many depictions of God's... female character. And so God has both female and male. And that's why we are birthed and born like God. And even as women and men, it's so stupid that we have these stereotypes because I have both masculine and feminine, and I love both parts of me. I might be a little bit more masculine by nature. Just maybe I've got hormones that are... that's just who I am. But I love my femininity, and I love my masculinity, whatever that is. And I try and encourage men to develop both, and to allow both, and not to live by these stupid stereotypes that human beings have built up, they come out of patriarchy, woman having to wear stilettos, woman having to wear makeup, and I have nothing against a woman that wants to do that. But so much of this even the way we dress has come from men. It has been borne by men, the standards have been set by men, and those that's all about objectifying women. And the moment... In the 90s, if a woman didn't wear makeup, and she wore a suit to work, she was considered a full-on lesbian, even if she wasn't. Why? Because of the stereotypes of what our gender should look like, you know, you've got to be a lesbian if you've got short hair, no makeup and your wear sort of androgynous clothes. You must be, you must be queer. You know, so you were only an acceptable woman if you wore high heels, skirts, dresses that

looked all sexy. And you know, and men were allowed to pass comments at you and still are today. And that's why I'm very, very clear in our church language and in our training about that, and I correct it wherever I can. Some men have got miffed and left and that's tough, that's okay. But most people, once they've resisted a little bit, they get into it and women obviously are fine. They realize they're set free. The other thing I try and do is introduce as many stories as I can a lot more about women in the Bible, unfortunately, we don't know a lot about, a lot of the women, because women were second class citizens in those days. And the Bible, they're inspired by Holy Spirit was written by, by, uh, by men. And so we try and emphasize that that's a patriarchal setting. And that's why we try and change it, you know, wherever we can to, to, to bring about different influences of women, for example, the acts of Paul and Thecla, it's not in the Bible, but it was one of the things that was part of the writings of Paul. He actually had another female apostles that worked with him and alongside him, you know, and they don't mention these because they would have been left out of Scripture deliberately by, by men, you know. Esther was nearly left out of the Bible. Anyway. Yeah, I do. I do go- I digress [chuckles].

KJ: It's fine. It's fine. It's very interesting. Um, okay, so, let's see that we've covered a lot of that.

01:46:01 Children

KJ: So, um, oh. Are you a parent?

DB: No, no, only of four legged animals?

01:46:06 Socialising with Other Queer People

KJ: No, that's fine. And, um, okay, so you did mention gay clubs, that you went to gay clubs a lot. Were there any other places where you came to socialize with other LGBTQ women, or people in general?

DB: Okay, so again, I think probably in my, in my era of socializing in my 20s, and 30s, obviously, the rest of my socializing and environment took place in the church and church activities and church social, so I can't speak after that. But in my, in my 20 years prior to that, I would say that there wasn't a lot to offer in Durban. And even in Johannesburg, there wasn't a lot to offer, even in Cape Town is the largest, you know, queer community we have in the country to my knowledge still. But there wasn't a lot to offer. South Africa has always been a little bit behind with that. But they were a couple of coffee bars that they tried to open that may not have been obvious queer bars, but maybe a queer person, opened them and so it attracted... the word got around, and it became very much a queer place. So those are the kinds of things, but they didn't, there wasn't like five to choose from. There were not a lot of social environments, that you could meet people apart from the once-a-year pride. But I think once we, you know, when we are queer, we do recognize each other. And there's that, you know, gaydar we talked about, and I think, you know, there are certain places that may be heterosexual, but they, they attract, they attract queer people. And once you get a couple of queer people going, you know, it attracts more and so yeah, that's about it. Like there was that place in, in Point Road, what was it called? Was it three sixty or something? Three...⁵⁶³ And it was a, a, uh a nightclub. Yes, some years back. And it was open to all hours, I think it was kind of also a bit of a drug haven and stuff. So but that was that was a very androgynous type of club where it was well known that, you know, queers would go. It was a

⁵⁶³ The club was called 300 on Point. While it was known to be a club frequented by White people, it was very diverse.

queer club as well. So, but yeah. Okay, you know, the first gay club that we had in Durban that I can remember and I'm talking now in the 80s, when I was still like, fourteen and I shouldn't have even been allowed there. My mother would, would have turned and not even... she would have been very upset. But I was exploring, and we were bands. As I said, I was allowed to go out with a band. Was a place called Camp Freak? Did you ever hear of it?

KJ: No, I don't think so.

DB: Was it called Le Freak or Camp Le Freak. I think it was called Camp Le Freak.

KJ: Okay.

DB: And it was in, uh, it was in the centre of town, I think. The road began with a C... Jeez, I can't even remember. But it was literally one of those little alleyways you know, it was kind of hidden, that eventually became a club called Rumours, which I actually played it with my band. But again, it was an androgynous club, you know, there were a lot of gay DJs and, you know, so, but that was the first club that I ever remember. And the club before that, that started in Durban was called Zodiac. There were two zodiacs. The first one was, was Zodiac and it was in Morrison Street, right on the corner as you if you come off Brickfield Road, was going to Morrison and was right on the corner. That was the first club that I know of in Durban. And that was before my time, called the Zodiac. Then there was Camp Le Freak and then there was the Zodiac again, in the same place, they reopened it as Zodiac. So, you know, it was a disco when it was first Zodiac and then the second time it was a nightclub. So yeah, that's, that's about all there really was apart from one or two coffee bars, there was a coffee bar that opened in Windermere, I can't even remember the name. It was it was Gary's, he tried to make it a late-night sort of light snacks and coffee, but... and it would have been such an incredible place. But the service was terrible. I mean, it was terrible. And it

had, it was such a good concept. And again, this is what I find in our communities. So many people have great ideas, but they just don't follow through with, you know, so yeah, that didn't, didn't, didn't last for long. But yeah, he had like, on a Sunday night, he would have opera singers with a piano there. And you know, it was just a great vibe. But yeah, and I think that's the problem. We don't have enough decent places that we can go to because we are minority community, you need your people to support that and let's be honest, Durban is known to be terribly fickle when it comes to supporting any kind of social thing. I mean, they don't even... some artists don't even come here anymore. Yeah, because it's just so bad, the turnout is bad, even in our straight restaurants. You look at the one opens and then the other one gets empty. They should both still be full. But you know, it's, it's very, very fickle. So yeah, it is a bit of a different place Durban.

KJ: Yeah. I'm, I'm actually really happy that you're telling me all this. Because, you know, despite the fact that Cape Town and Joburg are kind of, like hubs for, for queer people. Durban is also a place where queer people exist. And there's not a lot of history behind it. So this is actually quite nice to get all of this, this history.

DB: Yes.

01:52:17 Sports

KJ: Then, were you a part of any social or sporting clubs? Where women who loved women socialized?

DB: No, no, I was never into any of the kind of soccer or indoor cricket or anything like that.

KJ: And with...

DB [incoherent]

KJ: Oh, sorry?

DB: No, carry on.

KJ: Well, with GASA, was there any, like social clubs that they had? That woman would frequent?

DB: [shakes head] No, I don't think so. I don't think... To be honest, I don't really... look, I may have been, it might be my own perception, because as I said, I wasn't as involved. But I don't think in those days there was much of a social environment drawn around them. And even then, I can remember them saying the lack of support and people helping and, you know, you know. What we would do as a church is we would have, like, we will have like movie nights.

KJ: Okay.

DB: And our church wasn't, wasn't a traditional church building. So it was like a commercial property. So, you know, we literally had all the nice lights and LEDs, and we'd have like, build-a-burger nights, and you know, you'd pay X amount, whatever it was, it was cheap was like 50 bucks, and you build a burger, and you can watch a movie. And the idea wasn't really to raise funds, it was just to help cover the cost of food and stuff. But it was more for us to draw people into a safe environment. And they didn't know it was okay, and just a way of meeting people and bringing our community together. And we'd have stuff like that, you know, or we, we would run an Alpha course where, where people would meet in different groups and have, have dinners together. And, you know, if you know that Alpha course, I'm sure the Anglican Church run that so, you know, but, but that's, that's all there wasn't really, to be honest, I don't think there was a lot of socialization. Maybe I just didn't socialize. But

what I do know is that most of this... because I noticed with my mother, most of the socialization would take place in private homes. So a lot of house parties. And, and I think the biggest fear they had in those days was just other gay people gate-crashing. Because people were desperate for... there was nothing for... Yeah, there was nothing for our people. And that's a problem because when people don't accept themselves, they do a lot of stuff in the dark, you know, and now today we obviously have the other detriment, which is people meeting online, which is very good and very bad. You know, it has its ups, and it has its downs and it's become normalized which is fine but... and uh, so we have a lot of different environments today with social media where people can meet and you know and, and that's good. Just give me a second, sorry.

KJ: No problem.

DB: Sorry there's just... I've just... somebody's dropping something off at the door, would you mind?

KJ: That's fine. We can take a break, that's fine.

[DB leaves at 01:55:31]

[DB returns at 01:58:14]

DB: Sorry about that?

KJ: No, that's fine. That's fine.

DB: This is my home office and so, so when they do deliveries, I'm the receiver of all the deliveries. Unfortunately, there's no, there's no assistant to do it.

KJ: Yeah, that's okay. There's just a couple more questions more about like the movements and stuff like that, and then we should be done.

DB: Okay.

KJ: All right?

DB: No problem.

01:58:25 Liberation movement

KJ: Okay. Were you involved in the 1990s in a liberation movement in South Africa?

DB: It depends what you mean, I wasn't directly involved in any activism movement, like officially, apart from the local, gay and lesbian centre here. So I, I guess you could say we were involved from the aspect as being, you know, starting a church and, and actively... I did a lot of... I did speak at quite a few engagements for the Gay and Lesbian Centre. And, and there were, there were faith talks... faith, and I'm trying to think, like interfaith meetings. So it was still concerned with the church. But if you, if you call it being involved in the liberation movement, I would guess we would be a part of that, because we influenced and changed communities from a religious aspect. But I was not a participator or an organizer and official organizer in in whatever, if there was such an organization at the time. It was just the ones I've mentioned that we've been involved in.

01:59:45 Issues surrounding the LGBTQ movement in South Africa

KJ: Where there any particular issues within the LGBTQ community up, sorry, the LGBTQ movements, that were not tackled at the time, particularly issues surrounding women.

DB: Uh... explain?

KJ: So you know like in the 1990s, there was like, with the release of Mandela and stuff like that there was this big push to make people aware of, you know, that gay people existed. And they also, there was a lot of... Sorry, like bills against being homosexual, right? So there was this push to, like get those removed and stuff like that. And a lot of those surrounded like the sodomy laws and things like that. So, you know, is there anything that you feel like, you know, they could've brought up that they maybe didn't?

DB: Well, what I can tell you is that probably later on, probably closer to the late 1990s. So going into the early 2000s, I probably would say I got more active, especially where we, we... again, it would have been because of the, the context of the church. So we, we saw what, what was happening in Uganda, and we saw ministers coming into South Africa, overtly saying that they were going to condemn homosexuality. I did get actively involved with the Home Affairs saga with uhm, Gigaba, who was here at the time. And uhm, and I was also actively involved in, in challenging Home Affairs, about the Marriage Act. When groups like... I'm just trying to think what they were called; I think it begins with a J, my mind's a little bit like a sieve this week. You might know it? It's an LGBT activist organization.

KJ: That begins with a J?

DB: I don't know if it begins with a J. They were in Cape Town...

KJ: NCGLE? Or OLGA?

DB: No. Have you got some more?

KJ: GLOW?

DB: Okay, I can't... No, it's not GLOW. I can't remember. But anyway, they were, I think they were an offshoot... Who were some of the groups in Cape Town? It was, it was from Cape

Town side, I think initially. But anyway, they were actively involved in changing the laws of the Marriage Act and so we did get involved somewhat with that, not to take any credit for anything, because certainly we could never have. But we, as a church began to push and, and we worked with them to use the standard letter that they had provided for us to begin to push and put pressure on Home Affairs. Because when the law came out, which is all the work that this jock had done, that were part of one of the LGBTQ organizations, and that they had all done this behind the scenes with, with government to change the laws of marriage and get us equal rights in the way of marriage, once that had been instituted, what the problem was, once the law had been passed, it wasn't actually instituted. Because as you can imagine, Home Affairs is already totally homophobic. Coming from a culture of, of Zuma, for example, who is, was, just... he was homophobic of note and a patriarch of note. So no matter what he wants to say, that is the truth [laughs]. And besides the rumours of him, obviously raping, you know, a gay woman and so on, anyway. And the problem is that we then started to put pressure on them. So we would put out the standard letter and we went to the press. I did quite a few press releases at the time. Oh, my gosh, I see the moved load shedding to stage four. Did you know that?

KJ: No, I was not aware. Are you okay? Will you be affected?

DB: I'm just gonna have a look now.

KJ: Okay.

DB: Oh, my gosh. Okay. That's six to eight.

KJ: Okay. Yeah, there's just a couple more questions like, like a handful. So it shouldn't take too long.

DB: No, that's, that's good. That's good. But as I said, there was more activism, I would say, from the early 2000s. On my part, you know, late 1990s. Yeah.

KJ: Do you want to speak about it a bit more? Like what roles you-

DB: Just yeah, just, you know, we put out some stuff with it. Some papers made, especially at the time, you can imagine it was news, you know, the Marriage Act and the Civil Union Act coming out and everybody was kind of on it at the time. So I did quite a few interviews with that. I did some radio interviews. I did some press interviews. I think there was one kind of big title in the Tribune you know, Gay Pastor Longs for Wedding Bells or something [chuckles] It's ridiculous, these subtitles they put in. But anyway, so there was those kinds of things and, and we did, we did have to push with this letter. I actually fortunately had, I think her name is... was it Vikazi or Vilakazi? I can't remember... She helped me tremendously in... she was a huge... Okay we worked with activist groups, so we weren't an activist group in ourselves, we worked with activist groups, if that makes more sense, maybe that's an easier way of putting it. So as a church, we were one of the, the clusters that would need to affect and influence community, but from a religious perspective. So we had most of our ministers that were ordained, even in the context of our network, we help them get ordained through doing this. So it took a long time, there was big resistance from Home Affairs. We struggled with, with getting this done, I spent hours on the phone with Home Affairs, often daily, it took a lot of time away from the Church for me. And that's why I say we wear two hats as ministers, because we sometimes have to decide, am I an activist or, am I a minister? And if I'm both, I need to juggle those carefully. That's the difficult thing as a minister. Sometimes the activist organizations expect you to be more of an activist when you [chuckles] when you have to still first be the pastor, you know. So, so that's the, that's the juggle. But we did a lot

of work in that sense, in pushing back on them and phoning them. And, you know, they took their time about it, they tried to stop the registrations for us getting our ministers licensed and eventually we would get some of the other activist organizations involved with us to say, the legal side, to say you can't do this. You have to let Deo Gloria, you know, the ordained ministers... because there are none in Durban that are willing to do it. And Home Affairs gave us... I would go there time and time again and I would have such struggles with them. There was one minister, uh one marriage officer and he was sitting there having lunch. He refused. He made me sit there and he refused. He refused to actually deal with me and speak to me until half an hour had gone past, I had to sit there and watch him eat his lunch. He did that deliberately. And then he said, No, I'm not willing to marry gay people. And I said, but that is your job. You are called... because he had sent people, he had sent a gay couple away. So we dealt with a lot of that, you know, where Home Affairs tried to pull fast ones on gay couples that wanted to go and get married at Home Affairs, maybe they weren't of a Christian faith, and so they didn't want to come to me as a minister and I would refer them. And they would come back say no, they told me we can't legally marry here. They don't marry us. And oh my gosh, so there's been, there still is some of that, but it's not just that, it's also because Home Affairs is such a mess. You know that, you know, it's such a mess, that it's just everything I think is a mess. So there's not proper communication. But ja. They lost, they lost documents, they lost documents of people we've married. Now those are everybody knows in... as marriage officers, the documents that people sign, the registers are actually a legal document. And that's why you have to take it there and actually sign and put it in a box. And they would actually lose these documents. And they were legal documents. I mean, you can't lose them, you don't lose them. And they lost at least three couples' documents that I dealt with. And if I did not keep the books, because normally once you've finished your

registration, if you finish one book, when you get another one from home affairs as a minister, you have to hand them in. I never used to hand mine in deliberately because I kept the copies of those marriage registers so that I could then have to send them back. Home Affairs just caused a lot of trouble. They really did. And it still is incredibly homophobic.

02:09:21 Women's Movement Involvement

KJ: Yeah, definitely. Um, did you participate in the women's movement?

DB: No, which women's movement?

KJ: The general women's movement in South Africa, the national women's movements?

DB: Mm-hm, I didn't know there was one [laughs].

KJ: Oh, no, that's fine. Um, okay. So I kind of spoke about this, but maybe you have other thoughts on it? In what ways-

DB: Oh I'm sorry.

KJ: Yes.

DB: Sorry. Sorry to interrupt you before I forget. Are you aware and I don't know if they're still together? But there was a group of academic lesbians that used to meet in Pietermaritzburg. Are you aware of them?

KJ: No.

DB: And I know they were very, very big on women's issues. Will you remind me after this to see if I can find the name of Priscille, to find her details, and then you can let her know that I have given you her number, and she may be able to help you trace if you're interested in talking to them.

KJ: Thank you so much. That's great. Thank you.

DB: Yeah, sorry, please carry on.

02:10:34 South African Legislation's Response to Women's Issues

KJ: I was just one wondering, in what ways do you feel that the South African legislation fails women, particularly lesbian woman?

DB: I think because the fails women. Then it will spill over into lesbians and whoever you are, however you identify, if you're a woman, you are still, no matter what the government says, you are still where you are. And you are not equal. And our salary structures... There's only... I mean, it's, it's, I think it's, I could be stand to be corrected, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's under 5% of women are in major decision-making senior positions in businesses like CEOs, or... I'm not talking about sales managers, but like a CEO position or a managing director, or, you know, we have such a small percentage of women in decision making positions, and that includes the Church. Even on that, you know, they'll say, Oh, yes, but this woman, we've promoted her here, but is she in a senior decision-making position? Because that's why things don't change in the Church. Because most of the boards are male, most of the ministers are male. And so until you change the decision-making structure to include women on an equal footing, things will not change for women. And my biggest peeve is with women's sports. That's the other thing is that only recently, we started to see a little bit more women's sports showcased on TV, in prime positions where normally men's sport would be, be shown. And if you were lucky, some female sport may be shown on TV, but it will be in the late wee hours of the morning, somewhere where no one can see and that's why the sponsorships are not there. Because women's sport is not being taken seriously. And I think one of the reasons is because women in sport generally don't look like

they wear high heels and long earrings and carry the kind of feminists look, feminism look, feminism [tuts] sorry, feminine look, as in the stereotypes that men perceive. They are feminists or... I am a feminist too. But they are feminists, or they are women that are strong woman and they don't, they don't, most cases don't feel the need to wear makeup or carry themselves or... What are they supposed to wear high heels on the field? You know? Are they supposed to look sexy on the field? So there's all of these connotations as to why women are not sponsored, because they're not taken seriously enough. And that can only come from the decision makers who unfortunately at this stage, I mean... So I think huge pressure should be put on, on women's sport for that. And the other thing is look at the difference in woman's earning in sport compared to men, they can barely survive if they're professional sports women. So I have I've huge issues with it. I just can't do anything more about that, because my hands are tied, and my hands are full. And I can't do any more than I'm doing, you know, in the church, so. But it's a big issue. So in a roundabout way, I don't know if that answers your question?

02:13:40 Racism within LGBTQ organisations

KJ: No, that's fine. Um, so can you recall any incidents of racist attitudes within LGBTQ organizations or the movement?

DB: Oh, I think there definitely is. I think that because we're still inherently South African, we are still moving past that. And, and I think and hear me, hear me carefully when I say this, because I've got to be careful. I'm not throwing everyone into one basket. Because my wife of 23 years, this month, last month we celebrated 23 years together.

KJ: Congratulations.

DB: We've been... Yes, yes, amen thank you. She's, she's Afrikaans. But she'll say the same thing as me. She's educated woman as well. She's not, you know, but she'll say, you know, we all come out of that era, the families of people that were racist. That we had to grow up and actually become aware of how we've all been affected, and we had to change. I know that happened to me in my 20s I to look around and say, Hey, listen, I'm still using this word. I'm still saying this. I'm still you know, those are all... My language reflects what I believe. So I think particularly in some of our more traditional cultures like some of our Afrikaans white community. And I know a lot of our gay men are in Afrikaans white communities. But interestingly enough, I actually think the bias is much more on the male side than on the female side. I think that, you know, a lot of white Afrikaans gay men still have that. And yes, a huge percentage of woman and, you know, even in if we take, I mean, I can even... look and, and I say this carefully so I think this is something we need to just be treading on careful ground here. For example, even in our, in our Indian community, in our, in our gay Indian community, there can be racism, you know, against black people, for example. So we have some of that, but it's not overt. I haven't experienced that personally in my church. Just the opposite in my church. But in the general greater community in my social, social circles or whatever, if we've, you know, one can pick up by, by the way people speak. But again, what I'm saying is not necessarily across the board. Just in my experience,

KJ: Yes, yes. Yes.

02:16:33 Thoughts on Pride

KJ: And then what are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for women to speak on LGBTQ issues?

DB: Why would it move away? When you say move away from political platforms? What are you referring to?

KJ: So in uh, in 1990, the first Pride was, and the subsequent Prides after that were all politically driven, where they had a message to get across. So a lot about like, you know, the first one was about rights. There was a lot about HIV and AIDS, there was a lot about, you know, the discrimination against women and there would be like, speakers...like the activists would prepare speeches and stuff like that to enlighten you know, those who are participating about it. But lately it's moved away from that political space to become more of what people associate as a party thing you know.

DB: Yeah. Yeah, I think I think I think What does saddened me, certainly in Durban and what I've seen in my experience, is that there's definitely less of the political now. I see they still have... sometimes some people from political parties coming up and you know, maybe saying a few words or they have a stall or whatever the case may be. I'm not sure if you've been involved or seen any of the prides in Durban.

KJ: No, I haven't.

DB: Okay, so. So I've probably been involved in everyone since they came back into the inception because they, they stopped the pride for some years in Durban. I just think, I don't know. Maybe it, maybe wasn't organized well, I don't know. But anyway, and then they started it again.

KJ: Do you know what years? Do you know when?

DB: No, but you can speak to Nonhlanhla about that at the Gay and Lesbian centre because she was totally, she was, she set all of that up. But having said that, having said that, so, so

often, I would be asked to open in prayer, and I would share a few words obviously, if I could just encourage people, God loves all people, etc. And what I found really sad is that so many people, where it used to be a thing where we would go out and march, because we wanted to make our voices known and you know and celebrate who we are. I would find that more recently the millennials and the Gen Zs and you know, maybe the Gen Q and so, so we go, but not the baby boomers, maybe not even some of the millennials, but would, would only come to Pride, once the march and everything was finished, to party. And, and I'm like, so it's just another party. It's not... and it doesn't mean... I mean, of course there were many people that would march and there were lots of stalls we, we would always have a stall, apart from now with COVID. But we would, you know, we would have a stall and most definitely, we would, you know, we would have all goodies there. And then a little love booth, you know, a picture booth. And so yeah, I think, I think that's very sad, because I think that people have lost the plot and the point and that could not be there it could it... maybe it isn't their responsibility alone. It could also just be that maybe the organization needs to look at what they need to do to make it exciting again, and, and to make it more meaningful, you know, so what are we actually doing here? What does pride mean? And to have those kinds of conversations from the podium, not, not just ANC, or DA, or political parties or, you know, any of us just, you know, talk about what is... what are, what are we doing here? What is the... you know, let's go deeper? And, and again, you know, I don't know. That's all I've got to say.

02:21:11 Work That Still Needs to be Done in the LGBTQ Community

KJ: And that's okay. And the last question, in your opinion, what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

DB: We've got a lot of work to do, especially among women, I think the LGBT organizations need to definitely admit that they must, that they do not have an awareness that they need to have of how oppressed women are even in our people group. And even this aversion to, to women, if they are men, you know, there's still that little bit of a stigma going on. I think it's changed a lot. But I mean, you would think, you know. Because usually, what you find is very feminine men may be drawn to not just heterosexual women, as friends, but you know, they're often drawn to the more feminine, or very butch kind of lesbian as friends. But I don't know, I don't know why it almost felt like sometimes women were a threat to the male community, in the gay community, I don't think it's as bad now. But I think it's more about just culture changing from our parents side, where we are inclusive, in every way where we don't say, Johnny, you go and play soccer while your sister goes and washes the dishes. It's Johnny, you wash the dishes this time, because you didn't do it last time. And you give men responsibility, and you show them that men and women are equal in your marriage, in your... in the tasks, in everything, so that they brought up in a culture where they don't end up marrying somebody like their mother, to pick up their dirty socks and, you know. And that goes back to everything that we teach our children and especially our boys, of what it means to, to treat women with respect and equality. And if we can do that, I think whether you grow up as a gay person or a straight person, or a queer person, or a lesbian, those things are ingrained in your culture. So they will shift in whatever you do. But I think the fact that patriarchy has been so ingrained in our culture, it doesn't matter your sexual orientation, it's still ingrained in the culture. And that's why whether we have gay men, who you would think would be more broad minded and astute because and have more awareness because of their own oppression in in society, we still have that as a big issue. The second thing is, we have a tremendous amount of work to do. Because we've kind of gone two steps forward

and one step back. Even though we have the broadest constitution in the world, or one of the broadest, we still have not implemented things because we've had such chaos in our government structures, that we've barely been able to get everything else right and in place with corruption and everything looming. That we haven't been able to... people have not worried about that. But among our community, certainly in the- when you're talking about faith, and because let's admit this doesn't matter what faith you are. Faith is a huge part of every single person. And whether we know it or not, it's an integral part of who we are. And, and, and it's part of our makeup in some shape or form. And so we have to come to a place where we, we... For me, the churches have to get a grow up and, you know, I have had such, such discrimination from churches that we've tried to approach, charismatic churches, spiritual churches. We've tried to approach to have conversations, just to have open conversations to say, We know you've got a lot of gay people in your church but... You know, we'd like to tell you about our church. They don't even want to open the door, there's such fear around this issue still. It's homophobia, but they will never admit it is. And so, so we have a lot of work to do because our churches and our faith impacts our communities, and I will say one other thing. We have, we are a very, very religious country. Even if we may have been predominantly Christian based before, any faith you're in, we're a religious country. And the problem is that whether you're Muslim, whether you are a Christian, all the faiths believe that you cannot be homosexual and be... have your faith. Most of them, do not accept that you can be. And so in every household, no, in many households not every household, in many households, faith is still a vital part of, of LGBT people being able to be who they can be, because that is often the biggest suppressing factor is we find people wanting to commit suicide because their parents are Christian, that they want to kick them out of the house because they're gay. Their minister has told them listen, he needs to

repent, and he needs to get those demons of, you know, lesbianism, or those gay demons out of him, or else, you know, you just need to tell your son go, because he's a sinner or she's a, you know, sinner. And so this is still a reality in many homes, we can't take our faith out of the equation of how we develop our LGBT community, because it's integrated in our family life, in some shape, or form. Even if someone's not overtly religious, they will still believe, Oh, listen, in my faith, I've been taught you can't be gay and be a Christian. You can't be gay and have your faith, you know. So that's my, that's my take. But we've got a lot of work to still do. We're not, we... I see it in the churches that we approach even to, to have a building. It took us ages to find our first building because we were an affirming church. And even now, you approach a church, and they're like hesitant, you know, if you're an affirming church, well, we you know, and they'd rather taken a secular group or secular school, than take in an LGBT affirming church, and they're a church, you know, so it's very sad. Very sad.

02:27:46 Finishing Thoughts

KJ: Ja. So that's all the questions that I have prepared. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or discuss?

DB: No, I just, I think the only thing is really what I've said and that is that I'm just saddened by... I've experienced it first-hand where even in the, the affirming church movement I have had ministers in my house, who I can see they would rather be in men's company with young, beautiful gay men, even if they're not sleeping around or anything than they would just having a good adult conversation with another woman. And that is that is sad for me. That is really, really sad for me.

KJ: Yes, definitely. Well...

DB: Oh, so I think that this Yeah, no, no, that's it. So I think I think we have a lot of work to do you know?

KJ: Yes, definitely. Definitely.

[DB gets up]

DB: Sorry.

KJ: No, it's okay.

[DB sits back down]

DB: Sorry, it's my dogs jumping on the fence.

KJ: It's okay, it's okay.

DB: So thank you so much.

KJ: No, thank you.

DB: So what is your main? What are you doing your, what are you, what are you studying?

KJ: Um, I'm doing my master's, research Master's, in history and I'm specializing in LGBTQ and women's history.

DB: What made you decide that by the way? I was just interested.

KJ: Um, I've always been, like, really interested in, in history. So that was one of my majors from the get-go. And then, you know, like, like you mentioned, I'm also very vocal about the mistreatment of women or just like mistreatment of people in general. And, yeah, so it was something that I noticed something that you know, even from high school, I noticed that you don't really... You know that the government's created all of these, these laws to affirm

LGBTQ people, but you don't know the history of how it got there, you know. And that was something that I really wanted to look into. And in my Honours, you know, when I approached my supervisor about it, she was like, Well, why don't you take the approach of women specifically because there's a lot about men already, so yeah. So I'm just continuing...

DB: Yeah. Well, that's good. I hope that it adds to our history. And you know, when, when you look at, I mean, even our churches are about 20. I think I said, forty years, but we're, I think we're about 20 years behind the USA, in our LGBT activism in the church. So yeah, I think with one of the broadest constitutions, we really have to push but I think our organizations got cash strapped as well, a lot in the last... Who have you approached in Cape Town in terms of your organizations?

KJ: I approached a couple of people I haven't heard back from them. I've been trying to get in contact with Midi Achmat but at the moment, she seems quite busy, so I'm just waiting for her to free up a time. You're actually my second interview? I haven't done many interviews, yet. Yeah. Because I think also, like you said, a lot of people, a lot of the activists, I think are also just burnt out, you know, they're doing so much with so little funds. And like, like you've said, like, there's a lot of work to be done. So, yeah.

DB: Have you contacted IAM? IAM in Cape Town.

KJ: I think I did very early in the year, but I don't think they ever got back. I'll try again.

DB: Okay, that would be de Lange I think has her name. I don't, I don't know if you really want to contact anyone else. But you know, who would have all of it if you... Oh, what happened? I've lost you somehow.

KJ: I can still hear you and see you.

DB: Oh there you are. But I know that Buelah will have a lot of that information because she's obviously there so if there's anyone there that you want to get hold of other than who you've got hold of, she's very, she's connected there. She's a lovely woman. Really, she is very nice.

KJ: She is, she is.

DB: She's really an amazing woman. And, yeah, you know, so and I think also I think there's a lot of ignorance about just how patriarchal our society is, you know, South Africa's is really bad. You know, we even though we've got this sort of progressive outlook in our political parties, it's not necessarily something that's transferred into our society. So it's, as I said, one of my professors, one of my ethics professors years ago, the one thing that I'll never ever forget her saying is that our language, uhm, our society is always dictated by the language we use. So we can see how far along we are so often, by the terminology we use, the language we use, you know, and there's a lot of his used as opposed to they, when it concerns the assumption that a dog may be male, or that God is male, or so there's a lot of there [chuckles]. So, yeah, yeah.

KJ: Thank you very much. I really appreciate you taking the time to do this to this interview.

DB: Okay. Okay, thank you so much.

KJ: Thank you so much.

DB: All the best.

KJ: Thank you so much. Have a good day.

DB: God... you too. God bless. Bye.

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 2 hours 34 minutes 40 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form; interviewee has restricted access to the raw audio to everyone but the interviewer.

Interview 3: Ecclesia de Lange

Name of the Interviewee: DE LANGE, Ecclesia [EDL]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 6 June 2022

Place of the Interview: Cape Town, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 3

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 20 June 2022 – 15 July 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:30 Introduction

KJ: Hi!

EDL: Hi there. [slight audio distortion]

KJ: Can you hear me?

EDL: Yes, I can hear you. Can you hear me?

KJ: Yes! Great [chuckles]. Hi Ecclesia, how are you doing?

EDL: I'm doing well and you?

KJ: I'm doing great thank you.

EDL: [points to name on Zoom]

KJ: It's KJ.

EDL: Do they, do they call you, uh, Kirsten, or do you go by your, uhm, initials?

KJ: I go by my initials.

EDL: Okay, okay, wonderful.

KJ: I don't know why it's showing that [points to name on Zoom].

EDL: My daughter's name is also Kirsten, so that is why it's interesting.

KJ: Oh, okay. [chuckles] Okay, that's cool. How old is she?

EDL: She is, uh, 20...uh, she's turning 29 in December.

KJ: Ah okay, three years older than me then.

EDL: Ja. She also studied at UCT. At [inaudible] campus.

KJ: At?

EDL: At Michaelis? The art school at UCT.

KJ: Oh, okay, okay. [chuckles] I'm not very familiar with UCT because my first two years were in Durban.

EDL: Oh, okay.

KJ: Because of Covid. So I wasn't actually based in Cape Town until this year.

EDL: Okay, okay.

KJ: Yeah [laughs].

EDL: Are you still doing it remotely?

KJ: Uhm, no. Now, I'm in Cape Town. Yes.

EDL: Oh, okay. Right, cool.

KJ: Yeah.

EDL: Oh yeah, you're in... Hout Bay! That's it!

KJ: No, I'm in Rosebank.

EDL: Oh God!

KJ: [laughs]

EDL: I'm confused with somebody that I was meant to counsel that was in Hout Bay. Sorry.

KJ: It's okay.

EDL: That's... that's fine, it's been a long day.

KJ: No, I understand, thank you, thank you for doing this for me, I, uh, really appreciate it.

EDL: No, you're welcome. Just remind me again, uh, KJ, the, uhm, do they say KJ, KG or what do they say?

KJ: KJ is fine.

EDL: KJ is fine?

KJ: Yeah.

EDL: Okay. Uhm, uh, just remind me about your study again, I read some of the questions now briefly.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: But give me a, just a background again.

KJ: A very brief summary is basically I'm looking at, uh, queer women's resistance and their social worlds from 1980 – 2010, because there's a lot written about like political resistance and like on the streets, legal activism, and there's not much written about like, actual queer women's history. Uhm, so that's kind of what I'm looking at, to kind of establish that even, uh, like even socialising is a form of activism, you know, owning your identity, being yourself, meeting with other queer people, that's a form of activism.

EDL: Okay.

KJ: I'm basically looking at like, uhm, kind of how the two intermingle or how your social world can influence your activism and how your activism also influences your social world, vice versa, that kind of thing.

EDL: Okay.

KJ: Uhm, yeah.

EDL: [inaudible].

KJ: Uh, before we get into it, I just need to like, discuss the ethics of it.

EDL: Yes.

KJ: Uhm, of the project. I sent you the interview release form.

EDL: I've got it, I've got it in front of me. While you talk, I'm going to complete it quickly.

KJ: Okay, I think it's just the first page that you need to fill in your details and sign. It's basically just to say that you consent to the interview, uhm and that if there's anything that you don't want me to use in my research, you'll let me know. So at any time if you are

uncomfortable, if you want to stop, if you decide you want this to be anonymous, you just let me know and I will do that for you and that's what the interview release form is, just like an assurance.

EDL: Okay.

KJ: Yeah.

EDL: That's fine, while we talk, I'm just putting it in a pdf.

KJ: No problem.

EDL: So that I can sign it, but then ja, we can start.

KJ: Okay, cool. If you could just state your full name, age, preferred pronouns, and sexual orientation for me please.

EDL: Okay so, uhm, Ecclesia de Lange. I am uh...yoh, I am turning 53 in October and I go by the pronouns she and her and also, they. Uhm, it really doesn't faze me if they call you a he or whatever, I don't have hang-ups about that so... Anything else?

KJ: Uh, sexual orientation.

EDL: Oh my sexual orientation? I'm a lesbian.

KJ: Okay, thank you so much.

00:05:39 Family Background

KJ: So let's just kind of start like, where did you grow up?

EDL: Okay, I, uh, well obviously I grew up, uh, I would say most of my teen years where in Johannesburg, in Gauteng. So in the southern suburbs, Mondeor, I don't know if you know

that? But it's southern suburbs, close to Soweto. Uh yeah that would be, I would say the majority of my teenage years would be in Gauteng.

KJ: Okay. And prior to that? Where were you staying?

EDL: It would be in Richard's Bay, for like, 5 years I would say. I was born in Germiston [slight audio distortion]. So ja, that's also Gauteng.

KJ: Okay, okay. And what was the community in your area like? Were you close with people in your community?

[00:06:41 heavy audio distortion begins, Ecclesia's video freezes]

KJ: Oh, I think I've lost you.

[00:07:06 audio clears]

EDL: So in school, if I was to talk about my school years, uhm okay. Can you, can you-

KJ: Hello?

EDL: Can you hear me?

KJ: I can hear you now. Should we switch our videos off?

EDL: Ja, I just switched mine off, do you want to switch... Uh, just a second.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Maybe I should just ask you again, what are you talking about when you say social, uh, social setting? You want my teen years, my twenties or... where are we looking at? Because that differs, I suppose.

KJ: Everything.

EDL: Oh, okay. Well you know, I was in a Model C school, white school, uh, so that has its own complexities. Very, uh, hetero, uh heteronormative. Uhm, you know there was, uh I can't remember... uh, there were talk about, like, queer boys, uhm, but it was very hush-hush and the school was also in those days- well when you talk about my school, religion was still uh, you opened assemblies with prayer, every day was open with prayer and either a song or a scripture reading. So it was very religious and uhm, the religious influence was uh it, I mean, it was a dominant narrative and uhm, according, uh at that stage any form of homosexuality was seen as a sin and so, one would not talk about it, you would not even try and think about it, uhm ja. It was only in my latter years that I would say that I, uh, came to terms in really venturing out and embracing my, my queerness. Even though I had known for a very long time, even as a little girl that I was, uh, I was different. You know, what the normal girls wanted to do and attracted to boys and so on. Uhm, but it was, you know, from a social standpoint, it was very hetero-, heteropatriarchal. You know, the system was very male female and the dominant roles of you know, that is how life is. You're gonna get married, and you're gonna have children, uhm, there was no, uh, your, your options were limited to some extent. You had to push the boundaries and then the cost of that you needed to evaluate, because you would not be popular, you might be excluded, uhm, because of the system, the social, the social system.

KJ: And did you notice that, like, within your neighbours as well? Or was it more predominately-

EDL: Yes. Ah, yes most definitely. There was a dominant narrative, uhm, yeah there was nothing, uh, strange that you would see, you know, even though there were, in Joburg where we stayed in the southern suburbs, it was very mixed in the sense of, obviously there

were no Black people in, uh, in those areas, uhm but Portuguese, Chinese, Greeks, uhm, Chinese and then uh, white Afrikaans and white English people. It was a kind of mixture, uhm, but there was nothing like, uh, I, uh, I can't remember living next to a queer couple for example. Uhm, I, uh, uh, and I also knew that for some, uh, I remember one conversation in the family where my mom said, uh, I think it was a, uh, a crossdresser and they made fun of this person saying, you know, should we call this person an it, because what is it? What is this person? So, uhm, like from a very young age that, obviously this, uh, the way that the people were perceived was not okay, it was, uhm, discriminatory, uhm, yeah there was no positive view.

KJ: Mmm.

EDL: I remember also there was once when we went on a, a holiday, and my father, we used to play squash, and my father, there was this, this uh artist, uh ja she was an artist, I don't know if she's still alive but she was in a lesbian relationship and her partner played squash with my father. This woman wiped my father off, off the court and that was the, actually, the first kind of positive, uhm, experience I would think of, of a gay couple that I saw. I must've been about, yoh, about 14...13, 14 that I could see that uh, yeah you know it was this couple in real life that I got to know in a blink of a moment, uhm and then of course there was always, I think from a social perspective, there was a lot of influence from, uhm, from singers in the world, like Madonna and uh, that gave you other perspectives of, of- for me and the conservative kind of box that I grew up in, in the bubble of apartheid. Uhm, there were these other, uh, kind of icons outside of your world that even- because I loved sport, like Martina Navratilova, was someone extraordinary for me, you know, uhm and uh, yeah... My, my social setting was very limited towards otherness, uhm, because it was not acceptable.

KJ: And uhm [clears throat], what's your family's background? Like what did your parents do for work? Who was living in your household at the time?

EDL: Well, I've got, uh, two siblings. Uh, I'm the eldest. So my father was a business, uh, entrepreneur. He, uh, my father passed away in 1986 and my mom was in the banking industry, uhm, and that was their kind of setting. My sister is also lesbian. Uhm, I don't know what happened to my brother because he's heterosexual.

KJ: [laughs]

EDL: But uhm, ja. He's you know... ja no, we're about 2 years apart and then it's my sister, Michelle, and my brother is about 5 years younger than me. Ja.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: That was our family life. We were also, our family was very close. We don't have a huge family, only a handful of people.

KJ: Okay. What were the conditions that you grew up in like? Like what class would you say that you fall under with your family?

EDL: I would say, uh, middle class. Uhm, there were also moments where I can remember we moved around quite a bit because of my father's job and uh, yeah, there were moments where we had lots of money where I would say that we were even beyond middle class, uhm, and there were moments where there were no money and that was just the nature of being an entrepreneur, uhm, you either had money or not and of course if parents didn't know how to, uh, how to, how to work well with finances that also caused a problem. Uhm, so I would say most probably middle class, uh, but I also know what it's like to not have, ja, when we didn't have a lot and we had to just, uh, I don't know, eat bread, and jam and go for it,

you know, and then you would have again. Ja, so, swinging, like a swinging pendulum I would say.

KJ: Mmm and besides financially, were there any other challenges that you and your family faced growing up?

EDL: Ja, I think, uh, you know, looking back, you always think that your family is, kind of perfect, they're perfect because that is your normal, isn't it? You grow up and you get to know your mom and your dad and it seems normal, until you grow up and you realise that it was not so normal, there was a lot of dysfunctionality in that [voices in the background] uhm, just a second, what is playing here... Sorry that is our board meeting that is playing in the background.

KJ: Oh, it's okay [chuckles].

EDL: I just wanted to know, what is Lauren doing on this call [laughs].

KJ: [laughs]

EDL: Yeah, and so, from a, from a... I think, you know, my parents who also grew up in the bubble of apartheid, also were somehow...their criticism, they were not able to critically engage with what was happening and unfolding. Uh ja, as sad as, as sad as it might sound but that is the reality of it and so they did not critically engage with, uh, the political state, I mean, they, they engaged but from a, an apartheid kind of perspective as if the government was right and they're right and so on. Uhm, and uh ja, I think they were just very young, uhm, you know in general, but that was also- people got married when, in that, in the 19- when was it? 1950s, 1960s? They got married in 1960... '69, '68. Uh, people got married when they were 21 and what do you know at 21, you know? It's, uh, they were very young

when they got married and then you have 3 children, that's a hellavu lot, you know, to take care of. I think they were a bit overwhelmed and probably many times on like a survival mode, you know. Uhm yeah.

KJ: Yeah, and, uh, your family's relation to the community at large? Were they pretty involved in the community or...?

EDL: Pretty involved in the church community.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Well my grandparents were part of- were very, uh, involved. Uhm, and then of course, I also thinks there's an element of, where my mom and dad were flooded, or had an overdose of church when they were younger. There was some resistance when they were older, in their young adulthood, with their three children. But there was some resistance there in wanting to be involved with the church. Uhm, ja, if I think back on it, it, it definitely had a significant impact on how they navigated their lives because coming from a Pentecostal background, it's very fundamental, you know, what is right, what is wrong and staying in those boundaries are very difficult and I think they wanted- they tried to keep in it but, uh, ja it was difficult for them and maybe they didn't want to stay in those boundaries, I don't know.

KJ: You think there was anything in particular that they were opposed to?

EDL: Well I think, you know, just in general life seemed to be so limited from that perspective that if you, uh, if you, for example, smoked, you know, you would be considered a sinner, if you had a drink, you were a sinner, if you even go dancing you know, it was all a taboo. And they liked all of the above they liked to have a good time, they wanted to enjoy themselves

but somehow the religious side of their upbringing said to them, that's not, that's not, you shouldn't be living your life like this. Not that I'm saying they went out partying every night.

KJ: No, no, no.

EDL: They had some kind of a balance, uhm, I think their upbringing had an enormous, uhm, uh, influence on how they tried to navigate...and tried to stay on the straight and narrow, uh, but it was false, you know, they couldn't, couldn't keep at it. But other than that we, uh...we were involved in school. But outside of that, when I left school after my father died, uhm, I wasn't very active socially, in the social...side of things. I lived my life, I went backpacking overseas, you know, I... and it was on my travels that I started actually realising, I started unpacking or confronting my own beliefs and my own upbringing. It wasn't inside of South Africa, it was only once I left, uh, I started to think about these things in more detail and slowly but surely started to adjust and kind of deconstructing and then rebuilding, uhm, and then finding myself and my own sexual orientation and the vastness of what is possible and what is not possible, uhm, so this is before 1996 when we had the new legislation. So, yeah that was, my idea at that stage was, with my girlfriend, we're going to go to Europe and we're going to get married somewhere, you know. Uhm, but that never happened [chuckles], but that was the kind of idea we never knew that things were going to change in South Africa the way that it did.

KJ: Yeah, and when you said that you were involved in school, did you mean like school politics? Like boycotts and stuff?

EDL: No, not really boycotting. I was not, uhm, I must admit I don't think there was one boycott at our school [chuckles]

KJ: [chuckles]

EDL: If I think back now, we were so dis-, uh, disengaged. We would have like debates, you know.

KJ: And it was an all-white school, right?

EDL: Mm, all white school.

KJ: Okay, okay.

00:23:18 Realisation of Sexual Orientation

KJ: Uhm, and then at what point did you realise you weren't heterosexual?

EDL: Well, I, I realised that, well in those days you didn't even know that you're heterosexual, if I can state it like- you were just a boy and a girl and you were meant to fall in love and get married and have children, but I've known that I was different from the age of about, what, 5,6 years old. Uhm, I didn't know what it was and why. I felt attracted to girls, obviously not all the girls, only certain ones, and it was only in my, uhm, at about the age of 21 that I really embraced myself. Uhm, not even embraced myself, I actually then went on experimenting saying what the hell, no I'm going. I fell in love with someone, at that stage I still had a boyfriend and then, kind of said that's over and then, pursued this relationship and again, uhm, even in that, exploration it wasn't from an activist perspective at all, it was just my personal life. I wanted to experience love and explore love in a particular way, uhm, so again it wasn't from an activist perspective, it was just me, my life, trying to find-, making meaning out of this for myself. Uhm, and I would say I only, my activism only came into play when I started studying or, or started giving myself for the ministry as becoming an ordained minister in the Methodist church, uhm, and I was then about, what was I? 29? Uhm so then,

it's actually taking me a very long time if you can look at the time, uhm, line, uhm, to actually, uhm, ja find my feet in this society and actually see what it is like and obviously it's still evolving for me, uhm, but that is the time that I said, I need to do something about this? I didn't know where to start and how to start. It came to me as I grew in my knowledge, ja.

KJ: And uhm, prior to, uhm like, sort of coming out to yourself, had you had any experimentations with girls?

EDL: Yes.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Uhm, yes definitely.

KJ: And this was prior to you turning 21?

EDL: Yes!

KJ: Okay.

EDL: When I was younger, I would kiss girls and, uhm, you know. Ja, you play games and, you know, yes, no, definitely I... even my first kiss was with, my cousin and I- it's so funny, my cousin and I, I said to her I want to know what it feels like to kiss a girl, but French kiss, and we experimented, we kissed one another so yes, before even actually saying I'm going to embrace myself now, I did experiment with girls.

KJ: And had you had any relationships?

EDL: No, no. I had-

KJ: So it was only relationships with men? Or with boys?

EDL: Uhm, I had very close relationships with girls but I would not want to say that they were lesbian relationships, they were very significant. Uhm, very significant, I think my girl friends were far more intimate relationships than my relationships, and I'm talking about on an emotional level, than with boys. With, with, uh, I mean, the guy I was seeing just before I said that's over, we had a sexual relationship.

00:27:41 Coming Out To Family

KJ: Okay. Uhm, at what point did you come out to your family?

EDL: Uhm, it wasn't long after I kind of said screw this, uhm, it must've been about at the age of 22, uh, where I think I also entered a stage of rebellion [coughs] just because of the responsibility as the eldest child, uhm, that was on my shoulders at that stage, I had to look after my brother and my sister and I... it was about the age of 22. I mean they knew and I said- and they were not very happy and I just didn't give a shit. I said well this is it, it's my life and so our relationships were... it was quite troublesome and most definitely I had broken relationships. I refused to go to church, uh, I didn't respond to any invitations from my family, I, I actually then left. Basically left the family and it was only, yoh, at the age of about 28, I would say, I slowly but surely- actually before that, it must have been 25 but I'm just thinking of the trajectory, speaking to family members, going back and mending the relationships, uhm, as I came to understand my calling as a minister, working with that and ja, just working with the brokenness in myself and the relationships that I, that I left behind and then starting to mend it, if I wanted to mend it or not. Like going back and saying this is who I am and if there's a way that we can find, a way to move forward together and continue, otherwise don't have a relationship.

KJ: Mm. And prior to that, what was your relationship with your family like?

EDL: I think, uhm, you must remember, my family, my mom, and my dad, because of who they were and my understanding of their kind of rebellion against church that played out significantly in their relationships with their family members. We, at times, as I said we're close, we're five, uh, I mean, our family unit was 5, so it was very close, uh, even though we would have our engagements with our family. I suspect that they were not as truthful as they wanted to be, uhm, and so that also led us, to be close to some family members and slightly removed from other family members. We also stayed in the same area, but other family members were further away, they stayed in Pretoria, uhm, so it was uh, I say now we were close but in fact, we weren't that close, maybe that's also an assumption that we made that we were close and we were not actually. I would see my friends as far closer compared to my family, even those days, my school friends were everything to me. Uhm, ja, they meant the world to me, uhm, I don't know if I'm answering your question.

KJ: No, it's okay [chuckles]. Just, just say however you feel, don't worry about it. Uhm, uh, so did you tell your friends before you told your family that you were queer?

EDL: Uhm, no. I... at that stage, when I came out, I was not- it's also strange because I'm not, friends with any of my school friends anymore. We've just grown apart, uhm, I left overseas, came back. I don't have any school friends in my life anymore and it's not because we're angry or anything. They- for instance, my school friends only found out via the grapevine, I never went to them and said hey I'm lesbian, or anything like that. It just so happened when I left school, I went to work and I studied part-time, uh, so that, uh, trajectory took me away from my normal friends, so I, I made new friends. Uh, and then when I left for overseas, it was a whole new world so it was, uh, into the unknown, finding strangers, making friends, uhm, ja. So it wasn't difficult for me to tell them because I didn't have a relationship with

them to maintain and in those days we didn't have, uh, Wi-Fi and sending a text message, making everything known on Facebook, we didn't have that so.

KJ: Yeah.

EDL: We were not living in the same area so we didn't speak and I had moved on. I lived in other place and then in another country, uhm so. It's actually weird thinking back that you don't have any means to, to say hi I'm, I'm out now. I suppose, as I got to meet them again, I would tell them but it wasn't, like, the first thing on my mind to say hi I'm Ecclesia and I'm a lesbian I'm not heterosexual anymore. Uhm, ja.

KJ: Mm. Sorry I just see that the meeting time is almost up which is so weird to me.

EDL: Okay.

KJ: But what I'm going to do is, we can let this one like finish off and I'll send another Zoom link to you via email.

EDL: Okay, I think it will go on a bit longer.

KJ: Do you think so?

EDL: Ja, it sometimes does. I don't know have you had the opposite experience?

KJ: Uhm, I've, I've had it go on longer but I've never seen the remaining meeting time when it's gone on longer, if that makes sense?

EDL: Oh. Well shall we go on until it kicks us off?

KJ: Ja, sure and then I'll send you another one.

EDL: Okay.

KJ: So when you came out it was still apartheid right?

EDL: Yes.

KJ: What was that experience like?

00:35:00 Coming Out During Apartheid

EDL: Well... I left the country because of, uh, I wanted to be with my girlfriend and I know that it was difficult to be, uh, to be in a relationship in South Africa being lesbian. So that is part of the reason why we left, uhm, we went to work on the Kibbutz and then we went to Europe and then after a very long story I came back to, to Joburg, ja, to Joburg, I think that was 1992. And things were slowly, slowly but surely, changing. I, uh, still had a group of friends here who were a queer group of friends. And it seemed like people were a little bit kind of- uh I surrounded myself with queer people so... and of course I lived in an area where there was security, uh, so we could choose where we wanted to go and if we didn't want to go somewhere, we could go to someone's house and have a braai or meet or have dinner, whatever the case might be. Uhm.... It's not hard to describe but you were very aware if you went into a restaurant, you were very aware that uhm, you're a woman and that you're with another woman. So you were not, uhm, you were not holding hands or anything like that. You tried to be, uhm, as normal as if it was two woman going out, friends, going out for dinner. You were very cautious in how you behaved in public. Not that we-

KJ: Was-

EDL & KJ at the same time: Yeah?

KJ: Was that just like... had you heard anything of something happening to same-sex couples out in public or was it just like uh, kind of like a gut instinct to not...

EDL: No, we had, we had heard and in fact it happened to us the one night, uh, we were at a... in Gold Reef City, uhm, where we used to go and have a few beers, and there would be karaoke and you know, we would have a good time. And there was... we were uh, a couple girls going out and then one of the guys made a remark to my, uh, a nasty remark to one of my friends and I said to him, you don't speak to her like that. But he, uhm, obviously saw that we were lesbian, or I don't know, he must have saw one of the girls were holding- or too close to their girlfriend, I don't know. And he, he wanted to hit me. I ducked. He missed and then a whole fight broke out in that, in that place. Uhm and we had to, that evening, run for our lives because these guys were coming after us with baseball bats. So we, uh, fortunately got to our cars and we drove to, uh, Booysens' police station, uhm, ja, so that was the closest I've gotten to some kind of a hate crime. So we were aware that you, you know, you should... and if I say behave, I'm not talking about you know queer people, it's not that they're hanging on one another, but you shouldn't, uh, make yourself vulnerable.

KJ: You had to take caution.

EDL: Yes! You had to be very cautious.

KJ: Mm. And would you say that that's still the climate now?

EDL: Uhm, well I suppose it depends on where you live.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Uh, because I mean, I'm much older now so it's not that, my wife and I, we don't, uhm... we are-. As you would- I mean, what is, how do you, you behave in public?

Respectfully to one another and to the people around you. So we're both respectful and if I want to hold her hand or she wants to hold my hand, I would hold her hand. I don't see

anything wrong with that and we're not afraid to. And, in fact, we will do it just to disrupt the norm, but, uh, within, uh...uh, within limits. I mean if we obviously realise that this is not a-, we feel the energy and it's not kosher then we will, uh, our lives are far more important than that. Uhm, but I would say it's, it definitely has changed in the areas where we move in, uh, in suburbs. Uhm, but you will have to ask, uh, you know our queer sisters and brothers in Khayelitsha if things have changed for them because it doesn't seem like it has. I'm not always sure what is their trigger that causes the hate crime, you know is it people who have had too muc- [EDL cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:40:22]

Tape 1 ends

Tape 2:

[00:02:16 EDL joins Zoom meeting]

EDL: Okay, so I don't know where were we?

KJ: Uhm, you were talking about the climate in terms of like, uh, homophobic hate crimes in Khayelitsha and stuff.

EDL: Yeah, it, uh uhm, it would be interesting to see what the context was of each of the hate crimes that have recently taken place. Uhm, you know, what were the circumstances, uh, what was present, uh... because that would be, I think that would be important indicators for us, you know, was it in a pub? Was there alcohol involved? Was there drugs involved? Was there nothing like that involved? I would like to- it would be interesting for me just to unpack to see what are the elements that, uhm, actually contributes to these hate crimes.

KJ: Mmm, yeah. Uh, sorry, when did you say- like what year did that incident occur for you?

EDL: Ooh, that was about 19... yoh, 1993?

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Ja. I would think about 1993. About there. Early '90s.

KJ: Hmm. Uhm, okay and then going back to, uhm, when you first started dating. Uh, when did you first start feeling comfortable dating other women? Was it during the relationship that you had, uh, with the guy at the time or only afterwards?

EDL: No, it was... I needed to find out what was this desire within me. It was an exploring time, well an enjoyable time. Uhm and yeah, and then of course in that process having to then find my own spirituality and reconciling that. That was a huge, uh, turning point for me because in order to reconcile my spirituality and sexuality I-, if I was serious, it might mean that I need to leave my partner because it's not acceptable to the Church. And this is where, uh, I don't know if you've read my story, it's on our website where it explains the story of, of coming to terms with my faith and grappling with it vigorously and again exploring and experimenting to see if God will still love me and if I'm still acceptable if I'm in love with another woman. And getting to that place to say yes, in fact the biggest sin is not that I am lesbian or that you know, it is that I didn't accept myself for who I was, you know, and who God created me to be. And that is really when I actually became okay and comfortable in my own skin and uhm... But, but looking back now, I think you know, there was always caution for me, even in those years I talk about that, that night in the pub, but even before that and after that there was this, uhm, this sense of you cannot be open about your relationship. You could only talk about your relationship amongst queer friends. Uhm, it was very difficult

to be open in public because you didn't want to be ridiculed, uhm, and you also didn't want to embarrass other people, you know? It was like a secret, living a double life.

KJ: And, and what about, uh, what about your family? Like how did your relationships with, with other women affect your relationship with your family? How did they take it? Because... so from my understanding you had broken up with your boyfriend at the-, by the time you told your parents, right?

EDL: Ja.

KJ: So were you already in another relationship with your girlfriend at the time? Or was there a break?

EDL: No, no, I was in this new kind of relationship which I didn't know what it was. It's not that we were, uh, going steady or in a formal relationship, I just knew that I wanted to pursue this and I wanted not to be in a relationship with my boyfriend so I had to stop the one in order to pursue the other one. Uh-

KJ: And how did your family take that?

00:07:45 Family's Reaction To Dating Women

EDL: No, I mean they were devastated because everyone thought that we would get married one day, you know, and he's a nice guy, there was nothing wrong with him. A very nice guy, I mean, sure I- if I wanted to get married to a guy it would most probably be him. But I-, from there I, you know, I merged myself in this subculture of, of going out, going clubbing, going to illegal clubs, you know, gay clubs were illegal at that stage. Uhm and so it was a mindset of just breaking away from the restrictions of what life has put you on. It's like you, you found a new way of, uh, being liberated and yet you're liberated but you must also confine to the

restrictions that were given to you which was it was illegal, you only had limited places where you could go to and then of course, if you didn't go to a club, you went to someone's house. Uh, you didn't go out into a public space like a restaurant just for the sake of having fun, that was very limited. Uhm, ja, so my family was devastated. Uhm, ja, I suppose my normal friends, ugh normal friends, friends from school who found out must have also been shocked, you know. Uh, because they, they knew the guy that I was seeing and we had been, been together for quite a while and ja, I can imagine that they were devastated.

00:09:25 Marriage

KJ: Mmm, uh, so you, you said that you have a wife, uh, right?

EDL: Yes.

KJ: Uhm, when did y'all meet?

EDL: Well, uhm, that's a long story, because I've uhm, I've been married before to another wife, to another person [chuckles].

KJ: [chuckles]

EDL: And that was when I came out within the church, I announced that I was going to get married. I got married to, uh, Amanda but that... marriage didn't last long, it was just too complicated within the church. Uhm, my, the, the court hearing went to the Constitutional Court, I don't know if you've read about that. Uhm, but yes, it was kind of a, uhm, big court case, a landmark case. It first went to the High Court here in Cape Town, then to the, uh, to the court in, the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein and then to the Constitutional Court in Joburg. And, uh, that, uh, whole scenario just put a hellavu lot of pressure on our relationship and we ended it, not because we didn't love one another anymore, but because

it was just, we were going to kill one another in the process; it was very difficult. Uhm, I thought that I would never fall in love again because it was just too much for me, but uh ja, love, you know, if you open yourself up to love it comes your way and I, in the process, I fell in love with one of my best friends. Uhm, and we've been together since 2012, well 2013 we got married, uhm, and we've been together and it's been ja- also how did we meet! That's another story, uh, because...

KJ: You're welcome to tell it!

EDL: No, it's related to the church. Uhm ja, and that is how, that is how we met. Uhm ja, it's... incredible.

KJ: Mmm, and did you live with your previous wife? Were you living with-, in the relationships that you've had over the years, did you live, uh, move in with them?

00:11:53 Living Situation

EDL: Well we, uhm, with my first wife, my ex-wife, uh, she moved in with me [clears throat] at the manse, at the church manse, and we lived together for a couple of years and then we moved when I had changed parishes, from the southern suburbs to the northern suburbs. We, ja, we stayed in a house that she bought, because she had rented it out so yes, she stayed with me for a couple of years, then I stayed with her, then we got a divorce. Uhm, and then today, Melanie and I, we bought a house together, uhm, so we stay in our own home.

KJ: Mmm and what was, like, your family, friends, neighbours reactions to y'all living together?

EDL: Uhm... well I don't think it's a bad thing, if I talk about my daughter and my son, it's actually Melanie's son and daughter which I see as my own son and daughter, that was

something that, uhm, she had to break news to them that we were moving in together and uhm, ja. I mean, they- we try and set an example to our kids and to our friends and to our neighbours, uhm, and I think we are doing a fairly good job as, as holding up another narrative of, of what queer people are like. Uhm, so we, uhm, it's not that we try, we just who we are in the neighbourhood and we partake in the neighbourhood watch and we partake in, if there's neighbourhood braais or then we'll go. We make a point of it, of putting ourselves out there to give a different, uh, view of queer people.

KJ: Mm, so there was no like, uhm, kind of like, uh sorry what's the word that I'm looking for, uhm, a negative reaction you know?

EDL: Look, I think the one place where Melanie and I moved in, uhm, before we bought the house, you know, some neighbours look at you a bit strange.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: But then we just stand our ground and with time, you win them over, so yes, there might be negative looks and funny looks and whatever, uhm, but we somehow just, I don't know, we got the courage to show a different side and to win them over.

KJ: Mm, and with your family were they also quite, uhm, hesitant at first and then eventually won over?

EDL: Well from my father's side of the family there are very few people left that are still alive, in the sense, you know, the uncles and aunt, aunts, uhm, and they're quite supportive, you know. Uhm, on my mom's side, they're also quite supportive, but it's actually now the cousins that are- they're slightly older than me, but they, they are supportive, so there's no, no animosity or negative feelings. In fact, we- like I said with- when it comes to family, I stay

too far away from my family, uhm, to have any input or even to allow them to have any say in my life so, I actually don't care what they think. Uhm, it is the people that I surround myself with now that I allow in my space that is important, uhm, and that is how we keep our sanity, how we protect ourselves, and if we decide to resist or to disrupt something we will do it in a, in a way that is planned and strategically positioned.

KJ: Okay, Uhm and then, you, uh, you mentioned that you are a parent?

EDL: Yes.

KJ: Biological as well?

EDL: No, no, no, no. I'm just [inaudible].

00:16:26 Children

KJ: Okay. And uhm, how would you characterize your children's relationships with your family of origin and your friends?

EDL: Well I think, uhm, with our family, uh Melanie's family, she comes, uh, Melanie is a Coloured woman, uhm, her family is Christian and Muslim and it's quite difficult for them to accept first of all that's she's going to, uh, divorce her husband and then to find out that she's in a lesbian relationship. Uhm, that was very hard for them to come to terms with and they couldn't understand that. Uhm, to the point that that relationship also broke down, but I must say over the last, I don't know how many years now, 10 years? 9 years? Those relationships have mended, uhm, they've managed to build bridges and we are okay. We can sit in one another's homes and be kind to one another genuinely. Uhm, they live in the Strand, some in Kuils River and then we live here. My family lives in Joburg, cool great. So it's far away and doesn't really have an impact. But with the kids, with Kirsten and Erin, uhm,

they are extremely supportive, uhm, you know they got friends, uhm, they're of a different generation. They appreciate the example that Melanie and I set for them and how to be in a relationship, how to talk to one another, uhm, the respect that we show for one another, uh, is something that we want to continue to, you know, leave something for them to look- or, or ja, to hold up and to say you can have this, you know. Ja, choose the right partner and uhm, you know, the way you communicate with one another and how you treat one another. So, that is something important that we, we will continue to do and they appreciate.

KJ: And uh, sorry, just to ask, what are their ages?

EDL: So K is 29 and E is turning 20... 23. 23 or 24. I think Erin's turning 24, uh, next month.

KJ: Ok and then how did they react when you came into their lives?

EDL: Uhm, look, I was a friend of their parents because of church so it's not that I was a stranger and also my former wife, Amanda, was also known to them. Uhm, I think it was a shock when they, well even it was a shock to Melanie and myself when we found out that we-, we discovered that we had actually fallen in love with one another. It wasn't on purpose, it's something that happened organically. Uhm, I think they were more shocked... the shock was the fact that Melanie was- well, she was not getting a divorce because of me, her marriage with her husband, uh ex-husband, didn't work for years to come and that was the biggest hurdle. It wasn't her sexual orientation. They had to come to terms with their mom and their dad getting a divorce. Uhm, there was not a-... It wasn't a big thing for them to allow me into their lives. I also made it clear to them that I was not going to be their father now or their mother, I'm going to be- I'm their mom's lover and I'll be their friend. If you want to call me your second mother, that's fine, uhm, but I'm not here to be your parent per se. Although I see them as my kids. I love them dearly and they know they can phone me

any time of the day, I will assist if I can. Uhm, so I don't think it was- if there was any anger, it might've been and could've been... because you know in their minds they might think that, you know, their mom could've gone back to their father if their father changed his ways, uhm, but Melanie is and her orientation is lesbian so even if he changed his ways there will never be an opportunity to go back because she's now actually where she wanted to be. She always wanted to have children, she knew that it was not going to be able to happen any other way than getting married to a man, she married her best friend and they had children and, you know, within the first year of their marriage he was unfaithful. That was a big cost for her because honesty is a huge... honesty and trust is huge for her. So I don't think the kids... ja, I don't think they have a problem with me, I think it's just the fact their mom divorced their father and then of course I came onto the scene.

KJ: And have they ever mentioned any instances where like they've been affected, uhm, by your sexuality?

EDL: Well I think, uhm, what they clearly... what they're clear about is that this, uhm, situation that they've found themselves in made them far more wiser and stronger than having a negative effect. They're seeing it from that perspective.

00:22:13 Persecuted Based on Sexual Orientation

KJ: Okay and besides the instance that we already discussed, were there any other instances where you felt persecuted based on your sexual-, uh, sexual orientation?

EDL: Well most definitely in the Church, uhm, you know the whole story with the Church where one day you're still the beloved minister and the next day when they hear you're, uh,

you're a lesbian now, which now as it defines everything about you, uhm, they just write you off. Uhm, so that is definitely a negative experience.

KJ: And, and how did you cope with those experiences?

EDL: With great difficulty [laughs]. No, it's uh, I don't know how I cope with those experiences. You know, it's about talking to someone that you trust, going for walks, keeping certain disciplines that keeps you sane. Well in my case, it's running, it's meditation, it's like I say, it's talking to someone that you trust, writing, do some free writing, uhm, and surround yourself with positive people and people that can help you in the situation, reading about the topic, uhm, and equipping yourself, gaining knowledge is most definitely, you know, if you can strengthen yourself and your beliefs, uhm, and know how to defend yourself. Not in the sense of physically defend yourself but if someone comes up with an argument that's based on religion or some kind of foreign ideal, you can engage with them in a constructive dialogue.

KJ: So did you ever, uh, use LGBTQ focused counselling or was it more like talking it out with friends?

EDL: No, there wasn't LGBTI counselling that I know of at that time only conversion therapy. It was... oh! There must probably was in 2009. Yes, I had spoken to a very good friend of mine that's a doctor in pastoral counselling whose daughter is also far younger than me, uhm, but she's lesbian and this particular friend of mine, Dr Nicki Spies, she was, uhm, she was also in the same church and we, y in fact met on some convening and I came out to her. So that was a good thing when I came out to her and then this whole ordeal with the church happened so she was one of my confidants that I could go to. Uhm, and of course I also

worked at that stage for Inclusive and Affirming Ministries. I was like a few years with them and the support that I received from them was immense.

KJ: So this was uh, you were working but not as like a pastor or minister?

EDL: Ja I am an ordained minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, when I came out ... when I made the announcement, it was 2009 December the 6th and I was discontinued or fired as a minister in 2010, uh, but then this whole court case started so we went for arbitration, it didn't work out. Then we went to the High Court, the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court. That was 2018 that ended. So it was a long process but in the process of not having work, I started at IAM part-time and so that unfolded, uhm, as that unfolded, they were supporting me in the sense... emotionally. I had a safe space, that was my saving, saving grace was that I had pockets of safe spaces.

KJ: Oh, so you were at another church and that's where that incident occurred? Is that what you're saying?

EDL: Uh, which other church are you talking about now?

KJ: I'm not sure [laughs].

EDL: [laughs]

KJ: You were at a different church and you experienced discrimination within that church community before you transitioned to IAM?

EDL: Uh okay, so IAM is not a church. Inclusive-

KJ: Oh! Sorry!

EDL: Inclusive Ministries is not a church. It's okay. It's an NGO, it's an NGO that works with religious communities.

KJ: Okay, okay.

EDL: To help them to become more inclusive.

KJ: Okay, gotchu!

EDL: If I just go back, I grew up as a, as a, uhm, more charismatic, fundamental Christian. That charismatic, Pentecostal as my foundation as a Christian but when I candidated for the ministry offering myself for ministry, I was a Methodist. So I transitioned to Methodism. As in the Methodist- well you can say in the Pentecostal church I've also experienced, uh, discrimination because that was a no go, you don't talk about homosexuals, you know. So in the Methodist church, there was far more acceptance although, uhm, they since 1976 had been discussing homosexuality, but because of apartheid that was put on the shelf because apartheid was such a huge thing to deal with. It's only in the late 1990s, '99, that they started this conversation again and, uh, I was then caught up in this conversation going forward.

KJ: Uhm, sorry if this is a bit of a dumb question, what do you mean when you say a charismatic background?

EDL: Okay, so you got different denominations within the uhm Christian Church, so you... and the denominations are different because of the way that they believe, they call it the doctrine. So if I say charismatic Pentecostal, uhm, you will, uhm to give an example they will uhm, from a singing perspective, they will clap their hands [claps], they will sing and dance.

KJ: Oh, okay, okay.

EDL: Charismatic and Pentecostal churches have a binary doctrine like heaven or hell, you in or out, very sure of what is right and wrong and clear about who God is and God is a He., Presbyterian, uh, Dutch Reform, Methodist, Anglican, they are far closer to one another though they're different, uhm, because their emphasis is not on, on, uh, the Spirit and are relatively open to God as a mystery. There's far more equilibrium between the Trinity and you can, you can draw more parallels between them than compared to charismatic churches which are far more fundamental.

KJ: Okay, okay.

EDL: They judge, uh, they judge... uh there's quite a big judgement, uhm, ja.

KJ: Okay, thank you.

EDL: There's other differences as well, but ja.

KJ: No [chuckles]. The thing is I actually am Anglican so you would think I would know this, but you've mentioned this... and I've just been a bit confused about what charismatic is because I only know Anglican and Catholic.

EDL: [laughs] Oh, also, one big difference, for instance, is the, uh, baptism. The charismatics will baptise you when you're older like they'll say, you can make, uh, a confession of faith when you're 18 or 19 or 20 and they submerge you completely. The Anglicans, Methodists and those, uhm, you get baptised as a baby with a drop of water so it's a huge difference.

KJ: Okay, okay. Thank you for clearing that up for me. Uhm, so you currently aren't working as a minister?

EDL: Uhm, yes and no because I still do preach at times in churches, uhm, and I, do baptisms for same-sex couples. I marry same-sex couples, though I suppose you don't have to be a

minister to be, be a marriage officer. Uhm, but there are moments were I still do the work of an ordained minister but it's not attached to a specific church.

KJ: Okay, okay, I gotchu. Also, I'm so sorry, I gain I can see the running out of time thingy, so I'll send another one once we, once we're kicked out. I don't know why it's happening, its's literally never happened before.

EDL: It's fine.

00:32:10 LGBTQ Socialisation

KJ: Uhm, okay, so we've kind of discussed this a little bit, but how did you come to socialise with other LGBTQ people? You said that it was quite limited and it was mainly clubs or house parties.

EDL: Ja, well I suppose it's, uhm, you know... my first girlfriend, uhm, through my sister who went camping with a group of girls and then somehow- I mean she didn't even know that they're lesbian. We were again in a social gathering and I just connected with this girl and our eyes connected and I knew that something was going to happen. She was with her boyfriend; I was with my boyfriend at that stage and something did happen. And from there, I suppose when you go out to a club, in those days, it was very close. People were close and it wasn't big communities so you would make friends, you know... When you're in Joburg, you don't have to know people very long before you invite them for a braai and you invite them, and if you like them, you will invite them again. Uhm, and at those social gatherings you'd got to be introduced to people that knew people and then your friendship just grew like that.

KJ: And then which gatherings were important to you as a lesbian woman? Like would you prefer the braais over, like, the clubs or...

EDL: Well, when I was younger, I'd prefer the clubs, but now, these days I would rather prefer, having a nice dinner at home. But also remember that was the only kind of social space we had in our younger days, uhm, the only kind of safe space which was also a dangerous space because it was also illegal. But now it's more about, ja, going out for a nice dinner and having dinner at home, or at a friend's place, or going away for a weekend, uhm ja.

KJ: Okay. Do you remember any the names of the clubs that you frequented?

EDL: Yes, uh, there was a Champions in Joburg, uhm, then there was Jacqueline's in Pretoria. Oh my goodness! I... what was it called? Dungeon? I think that was the oldest club in Joburg. I can't remember the names in, in Durban there was one or two clubs there. I also can't remember the clubs, the older clubs in Cape Town. There were other clubs before there was Beulah's and that's also closed now, I think. Uhm, and then of course you have Manhattans and all of that, but in my younger days it was Champions, Jacqueline's, Dungeon and that was in the '80s, '90s... '90s? Ja.

KJ: And what was the demographic like? Was it mainly, uhm, queer men or was it mixed?

EDL: Ja, I would say mixed sexual orientation and gender identities and also mixed race.

KJ: Okay. Would you say that was quite common in gay clubs? Where it was mixed race compared to other clubs?

EDL: Ja, I would... ja definitely. Definitely so.

KJ: Uhm okay, and were you a part of any social or sporting clubs where women who love women socialised?

EDL: Uhm, only action cricket. Uhm ja, I played provincial action cricket and there was also so many gay girls, uhm, and running clubs, I belonged to running club.

KJ: Uhm, were there any like any initiations or anything that you had to go through?

EDL: Only drinking games [laughs]. You know if you belong to a sport there's certain things you need to do in order to be a member of the team. Uhm, not, not serious initiations or things that I can recall now. No.

KJ: And were people quite open about their sexual orientation in these clubs?

EDL: Yes.

KJ: And uhm... sorry let me just think about how to phrase this... Uhm, was it quite stereotypical or like... if you can get what I mean.

EDL: Yes! Like a butch girl and a femme girl that sort of thing. Uh yes, I would think so or maybe like half-half?

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Yeah, you could clearly see who's the male in this relationship but there was also like the more general, genderfluid.

KJ: Oh okay and like what was it like, you know? [chuckles] Was there any exclusion towards anyone or was it just like a very supportive space?

EDL: You know, I... if I think about Champions which if you call my friends who've been and know Champions, it was most probably the best kind of social club. They had a big garden-

grass garden outside as well so if you didn't want to be in the, in the music you could be on the grass, having a drink and then they had downstairs they had pool tables where you could play pool. Uhm, I would say from my experience it was very safe, it was very accepting and affirming space, uhm, the owners was a female and her partner, they were the bartenders, uhm, and there was always a good vibe. You know, when I was there, there was never fights, people were dancing and having a good time. Ja, it was queer people it wasn't just males, dominated by males or dominated by females. Most probably there were slightly more males but not like you would have at Manhattans where it was just males or something like that. It was a good kind of mix.

00:39:33 Gay Liberation Movement and Women's Movement

KJ: Okay cool. Uhm, were you involved in the 1990s gay liberation movement in South Africa?

EDL: No.

KJ: Okay, so then uh... Oh! Did you participate in the women's movement?

EDL: No.

00:39:51 Religion and Spirituality

KJ: I want to ask this but I don't want you to be like cut off to be into the juicy bit about religion and spirituality [laughs]. So obviously reli- religion plays an important role in your life, would you say from birth?

EDL: Yes, I think that's one of those things that, uhm, was instilled in me from a young child, you know, to read the Bible, that big Bible with the pictures, and pray and, you know, be in

right-standing, in good-standing with God and confess your sins and, uh, ja no it's been part of my life for ja, since I can remember.

KJ: Okay, and then you did say at one point you went through your rebellious stage?

EDL: Yes.

KJ: And did that include kind of like giving up on religion?

EDL: Well I didn't... I most probably gave up on religion, but I didn't give up on God.

KJ: Okay,

EDL: Because in the moments when I was alone or afraid or a little bit confused, I would always pray. Uhm, I always had a small little, uh a small little, a pocket Bible thingy with me. Uhm, so even in my travels, when I travelled, I had this small Bible with me. Uhm, so my spirituality in a sense was very constant, uhm, and I think I got- [EDL cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:41:28]

Tape 2 ends

Tape 3:

[00:02:00 EDL joins Zoom meeting]

EDL: Okay.

KJ: [chuckles] Sorry about that.

EDL: It's fine. Okay where were we?

KJ: Uhm, you were saying something about kind of your break from religion but not break from spirituality.

EDL: If- You could also read, uh, you must also read my, uh, it's not a long page it's just 2 pages of my, uh, story. It will give you more insight there. Uhm.... I suppose I, uhm, I interpreted religion as, as if it was spirituality but it's not the same thing. Uhm, because in that process of breaking away from the Church, uh, I thought I had left God. I knew then that I didn't leave God. It was when I decided to embrace myself completely and I wanted to return to the Church because I felt called to the Church. I was confronted with this kind of doctrine from the charismatic, Pentecostal perspective that it's a sin, uhm, so I went back and I thought well maybe let me try celibacy, maybe it's something that I'm going through and I went through, you know, conversion therapy, uh, support groups. Even went as far as belonging to Exodus International which have also consequently recently a couple of years ago, uh, apologised to the queer community. Uhm, and it's in that, uh, trying to be celibate and not giving into your feelings that I then offered myself to this particular church to say I want to become ordained in the Church and then this pastor said to me, sorry, you know It's wonderful that God is calling you but you first have to have a husband because he's your head and that was then the decision that I then realised that this is not the place for me. I was also then quite a bit upset with God because if God has called me how the hell- why can't I continue with this? And so I left that church, and on my leaving that church I stumbled onto the Methodist church where I heard and learnt that women had been ordained since 1976. Uhm, and that was when I started pursuing my call as, as a priest and in that, in my studies and theological understanding I- this whole thing about my sexuality also came into play again, uhm, and I then started exploring and experimenting to see if, if this was something that God would be okay with, if I was to embrace my sexual orientation. At that stage I had done so more reading about sexual ethics, different perspectives, theological interpretations. My priest at that stage also gave me a different outlook on the

way that I was interpreting the Bible and all these things helped me to say okay let me experiment, let's see and I did and I felt, it felt like God was saying I'm okay, you're okay, uhm, and that is when I embraced the Church fully with my sexual orientation which ended, well, at the end of the story they fired me but, uhm, ja it came at a cost but I think I am better off in having to make that sacrifice. In that process the Church has moved forward and, uh, other people have found hope. Ja.

00:05:50 Conversion Therapy

KJ: Mmm, so to go back a bit you say that you were involved with conversion therapy?

EDL: Ja. Conversion therapy was in different forms. So conversion therapy if I, uh, describe it I mean I would never have said I was part of conversion therapy, but this was conversion therapy. Being part of a support group that kind of, uh, wants to teach you with the aim to change your sexual orientation. Whether that is praying for you, giving you other kind of texts to read or, uhm, readings to do, uh, convincing you that, you, you, you will find a husband, you will have children as if that is the medal you will have to put on around your neck to say you've made it. Uh, and I was part of this-

KJ: Voluntarily?

EDL: Well not voluntarily. I thought that was what I needed so I submitted myself to this kind of [makes air quotes] therapeutic counselling, whatever, uhm and then also became part of that because if you believe that that is- I mean, if you have a genuine belief that you're off the track and now this is you finding your way, you emerge yourself in that until one day you walk into a wall and you find or you hear something else and it starts evoking different thoughts and ideas in your mind and you find a new way. Thank God that, uh, I found it, you

know. Uhm but ja, that's more or less what the conversion therapy that, that I was involved in.

KJ: In South Africa, right?

EDL: Yes, in South Africa. Well there was so many groups like that around, uh, yeah. That will convince queer people that there's something wrong with them, that God's going to punish them, they need to change their ways, let me pray for you, let me pray the gay out of you, uhm, you know all of that.

KJ: And what, what year was this if you don't mind me asking?

EDL: This was about 199... from about 1994. '94, '95. 1995, ja.

KJ: And how did you find out about them? How did you find the support group?

EDL: Well it was Rhema Church and how did I find out about them? Oh it's a friend of mine, uhm, that- she was always, you know, the odd one out at these queer parties of ours. She was very religious and had a crush on the pastor's daughter and had to- wanted to be in church every Sunday, uhm, and she was caught between this kind of am I going to hell, am I going to heaven kind of thought and belief and when I made the decision to go back to the Church somehow, I phoned her and she introduced me to this Rhema place.

KJ: To? Rhema?

EDL: Rhema? Do you know Rhema Church?

KJ: No, I don't think so. How do you spell that?

EDL: R-h-e-m-a.

KJ: R-h-e-m-a. Okay.

EDL: And they're in Randburg, Joburg.

KJ: And you've said that since then they've apologised?

EDL: No. I had a support group and in that support group you could become part of Exodus, Exodus like how you spell Exodus, International. If you were to Google that you will find Exodus International apology, you will find that then somewhere there.

KJ: Oh okay. So this was, uh, I'm sorry I'm trying to like figure this out. So you had come to terms with your sexuality when you were like 21 and then left to Europe with your girlfriend, right?

EDL: Yes. Then came back.

KJ: You came back and you still hadn't really, uh, like... So during that time while you were overseas, uhm, even though you were in a relationship, you didn't really have a relationship with the Church or anything like that?

EDL: No, but I had a relationship with God to put it that way, ja.

KJ: And... and then... sorry if this is like, I'm just trying to figure out like was it like you working through your spirituality, uhm, that made you think that because the way that it comes across to me, and I don't mean to be offensive or anything like that, but it's kind of like you were kind of like accepting of yourself and of your orientation and then trying to have a relationship with the Church, it seems that that kind of took away that acceptance of yourself. Is that?

EDL: Let me explain it this way. So I left my family and the Church because of the Church's standing and I embraced myself for what I knew at that stage I was and with the person that I was having and being. But in that going, I still had a connection with God somehow and

maybe that is something that speaks about, uh, the dualism of not connecting your spirituality and your sexuality. Somehow, I could still connect with God even though I was in this relationship. I lived with it. And so I came back. I still had relationships with other girls because we broke up on the other side of the Mediterranean and, uhm, in that process of being back and trying to find my feet, I... what I perceived was God calling me to say go back to the Church and I wanted to become a priest. So, uh, God didn't say, uh, don't be a lesbian anymore, I just heard you need to go back to the Church so as I went back, this person said to me I must first get a husband and whatnot and whatnot. Then I had to say I'm fed up. That is also where I actually became really aware about feminism and the plight of women. So there was a series of events unfolding and becoming clearer to me, uhm ja. And in that going and wanting to try and be okay and acceptable to the Church, I then got to Rhema Church as a support group who introduced me to people. This is the thing about, uh, indoctrination and uhm, what is the word? When they call it, uhm, like a sect! You know I would say it's like a sect where you buy into certain beliefs, thinking that this is going to help you and then to walk and to bump your head and also remember at that stage now, I'm running away- not running away, this church said I must have a husband, I don't want a husband so I leave but I also want to be true to what I perceive God has said to me, to go to the Church and become a priest. I stumbled onto the Methodist Church that ordain women. There's this priest who has a different view to homosexuality that I have. SO I've got this thing that says you must be celibate and I'm hearing him say but you're reading the Bible- there's a different way of reading the Bible and so when you engage with both of those and you find a new... it's like deconstructing and building and then reconstructing your faith again. Uhm, so it was a whole confronting, deconstructing, constructing and continuously working in that kind of cycle, uhm, to the place where I then said, and it was in seminary,

where I said I'm going to explore and experiment. Uhm, I felt that I was in a safe space, I felt that I am in the place where God said I wanted - I must go. I am at the Church, I'm busy becoming a priest so if, if all of this is working out, they must either stop me, the people must either say you're not going to be ordained or you're not, uh, whatever. You don't fit the characteristics, uhm, but I came through. Not that I was hiding anything! Uhm, ja I got ordained and so there was bits of myself in the reconciliation of my sexual orientation and my spirituality that just got deeper and clearer and ja.

KJ: Okay.

EDL: Does it make sense now?

00:16:39 Methodist church and Homosexuality

KJ: Yes [laughs]. And so you got ordained with the Methodist Church and this Methodist church in particular and it had taught you about a different way to read the Bible in terms of homosexuality and stuff like that. But then is it the same church that then fired you?

EDL: Correct.

KJ: Oh. Interesting. So was it like the congregation that weren't accepting or...?

EDL: Uh, no. Uhm it is... because it was still a discussion in the Church with the dominant narrative as, uhm, being unacceptable the Methodist Church brought out a statement to say that all people are welcome and this was in 2002, I think. I must check the dates. Uhm, but the debate was going on and on and on and on. There were already a variety of ways of reading the text and different perspectives and interpretations. It wasn't just sorry it's a sin and that's finished and klaar. Uhm... they were saying that they are... that they have opposing views in their statement, uhm, and that they're still busy discussing this. Uhm, but

there was a huge kind of a vacuum because there wasn't clear regulations within their statement where I perceived as being opportunity for me to be who I am because none of the gay clergy could be out and I was, uhm, I was killing myself slowly by keeping silent and uhm, that was part of me, part of me announcing that I was going to get married was also part of giving myself an opportunity to life. Which then, of course, was interpreted by the hierarchy- the guy that was the Superintendent of our particular circuit, uh, of where I was the minister of- he was a homophobe, a queen or the king homophobe in the church and so one could imagine that if it was a different circuit or a different supervisor, we could've had a different result. But unfortunately for me, I was in this circuit with this man who was so homophobic and that then escalated to the presiding Bishop and then that then had its own thing unfolding, even the disciplinary committees, you know, the kind of people that they had on the disciplinary hearing. I could also have, you know, unpack each of their lives and say you know, if they were different people, we could've come to a different conclusion so uhm... but I suppose it does respect the dominant narrative in the Methodist Church at that stage.

00:19:50 IAM

KJ: Mmm, and so then during that time after they fired you, you said that you found IAM?

EDL: It was actually before that.

KJ: oh okay.

EDL: That someone introduced me to Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) and I think it was 2008 and they've actually made a documentary that's called uhm... It's also on the webpage, There Comes A Time, of my story coming out to the Church. So they- in this

prelude to coming, to announcing to the Church that I was going to get married, they made- they started making a documentary, uhm, because we didn't know what was going to happen. I anticipated that- I didn't anticipate that they would fire me. I knew that there was going to be some hard rocky roads, but not that. That was where I met IAM and then slowly but surely got involved with them.

KJ: Okay and how would you define your role with them?

EDL: With IAM? Well currently I'm the director of the organization.

KJ: From the beginning?

EDL: From the beginning, it was a limited time that I- like I said they were huge support to me in, in, uh, with the Church and even with my divorce. When my first marriage came to an end, they were superb. That was my safe space. Uhm, and I suppose my, my, you know, that is where I've learnt about activism in the LGBTI community. Uhm, they've given me an immense amount of opportunities to learn and to grow and to see the extraordinary and not to be surprised by people. Uhm, you can always be surprised by what people do and what they look like and how they present themselves. Uhm, so it's been a very good, productive, uhm, relationship over the last 10 years. Very, very good. You know I became- then I was appointed full-time as a co-ordinator and then I became part of senior management, uhm, and then when the director's post opened up, they asked me whether I wanted to apply and I did and I got the job.

KJ: Congratulations [laughs]

EDL: Agh ja. Uhm ja but no ja, it's a good relationship. It's challenging but good.

KJ: Uhm and what would you say like IAM what role do y'all play in the community at large?

EDL: Well I think people view me as a leader in the LGBTI community, specific from a religious perspective, uhm, and so they, ja, they look towards me and if I say me, I mean IAM because we don't build on one person, we're a team. Uhm, as people that can find a way in difficult times strategic, you know, as a strategic partner. Uhm, you know, I suppose as someone that, uh, gives hope and courage to people that think that there's no way out. Uhm, and we try to be intersectional in the places where we work, you know. Uh, really reaching out to sex workers, people that use drugs, uhm, try to make that intersection because religion or faith is one of the obstacles in both those; people who use drugs and with sex workers, uhm, and there's a very strong link that we can make our case, uhm... But other- women's issues as well, we do a lot of work, you know, talking about uh gender-based violence. Yeah, I suppose, I don't know what more can I say about it. Oh, I suppose you will have to ask that to the community what they see when they see IAM or when they see me, uhm ja.

KJ: And do y'all, like what services, if that's the word I can use, what services do y'all provide to the community?

EDL: Well we provide like uhm human sexuality workshops and then we take it a bit further, human sexuality workshops with the Bible from a religious perspective. So we work in schools as well to help them with the comprehensive sexuality education. Specifically when teachers are constrained because of their faith, uhm, and they don't want to teach a particular chapter in the curriculum, we will come and assist. Uhm, we offer our services in universities, first years, gender-based violence through sensitisation. With police officers we do sensitisation workshops. We do anti-bias workshops, there's a lot of race work as well. Uhm, and then we do a lot of resource development and, in terms of translating those

resources to vernacular and Portuguese and French. Uhm and we do presentations, making people aware, creating an awareness, opening people's minds, opening their hearts and creating safe spaces for difficult conversations. Having an embodied- help people to find an embodied, uhm, participation in workshops and expressions and reconciling their faith and their sexuality.

KJ: What are some of the challenges that arise in the organisation?

EDL: Well I suppose one of the big challenges is always funding. Uhm, for NGOs that's always a big thing. Uhm and then of course the backlash from churches. Uhm and uhm ja I think those are the two biggest things. It is quite a stressful environment to work in. Because people make all kinds of comments.

KJ: And is it mainly churches you work with or other faith groups as well?

EDL: Uh, we do interfaith work as well, but at this stage we work with mainline dominations like Anglicans, Methodists, not the Pentecostals and so on. Uhm and then we work with universities, uhm, Stellenbosch, KwaZulu Natal, UCT, UWC, CPUT, uhm, like I say we work with schools, uhm, and we work with individual companies like Booking.com or, uh what is it? PayU will approach us to say can you come do a sensitization workshop with our staff. That is whom we work with. And with partner with other civil organisations, intersectionally and of course with Triangle, Gender Dynamix, the bigger names out there. And we work, we work regionally, Southern, East and West Africa as well.

KJ: And within working, particularly with other LGBTQ+ NGOs and civil society organisations, have you experienced any like challenges with that?

EDL: Working with other civil society organisations?

KJ: Mm.

EDL: Well I suppose there's always challenges. We don't always see things from the same perspective.

KJ: In terms of like, uhm, so someone else that I interviewed mentioned that there's often like a difference, a generational difference, sometimes that comes into play in the queer community and in queer civil society organisations.

EDL: Well I think there's could be generational, could be class, uhm you know, which is sometimes problematic if you work out in the rural areas. An organisation like us, which is in the suburbs, there might be, not conflict, might be difficult sometimes to relate. Uhm, could be conflict as well.

KJ: Would you say that generally it's a harmonious, like, relationship?

EDL: No.

KJ: No, okay [chuckles].

EDL: No, I don't think so. There is a, there's a lot of politics in the civil society and the LGBTI, I mean I'm talking very frank. It is complicated and uh, it's like you say LGBTI **communities**. We are not a community because in the communities there's conflict. It's not an easy sector to work in because people have very strong opinions, uhm, and there's different generations, you know, and I suppose toxicity in it which makes it very, uhm, uncomfortable to work in at times.

KJ: Do you mind speaking a bit more about what some of those things might be? It's okay if you don't want to.

EDL: Uhm, I think there's just a different work ethic, you know, our work ethics are not all the same. Uhm, our educational organisational skills are not the same. Uhm where we- our positionality we're not all in the same, uh, sector in a sense. We're in the same sector but our context is not the same. So our focus is not the same as, for example, Gender Dynamix's. Uhm so we don't understand, for example, all the dynamics with regards to trans people where they don't understand everything with pertaining to the religious sector. So you would have conflict, but there's also mutual respect in knowing that, uh, civil society organisations have their own expertise. And it's about managing those uncomfortabilities and we've got personalities in the sector, you know, you can't get away from it. It's like not everyone perhaps likes me, but I don't like everyone so not everyone can like everyone and sometimes it makes it difficult to work with someone if you have clashing personalities.

00:31:48 LGBTQ Movement Issues

KJ: Mmm, okay. So, uhm, are there any particular issues within the LGBTQ movement that were not tackled at the time, particularly surrounding, uh, issues surrounding women?

EDL: Well I think, uhm, currently there's still this whole thing about lesbian women and bisexual women, and trans women I think we have to include in that, that there's not sufficient funding, you know. Funding is still male-orientated and uhm, even in the HIV world, it's always the emphasis on men having sex with men, but women also have HIV and the whole women thing is just neglected. It's still being dominated by men; the funding sector, if I can put it that way. Particularly with regards to funding available to women. It's limited.

KJ: Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

EDL: No I think I've said enough.

KJ: [laughs] Well those were all my questions so yeah, if there's anything else that you would like to speak about or you felt that maybe we haven't covered, you're welcome to go ahead.

EDL: No, I think I, uh, if I can make a suggestion if you want to, if you have time, you can read that, uh, my story and if you have time, it's not a long thing, uhm, what is it called?

KJ: The documentary?

EDL: Yes, the documentary. There Comes A Time. It's also on the website. I think it's like 40 minutes or so. That might also give you some insight.

KJ: Okay, thank you.

EDL: It sounds like- if I tell my story, I think to myself to myself I'm just [inaudible]. I am at this stage where I am at the moment, uhm, because it was quite a, a turbulent time in my life. Navigating through those obstacles.

KJ: Yeah, it does sound like it. Uhm, okay. Thank you so much for participating! If you have anyone else that you can think of or you could suggest or if you could just pass the message along that I'm looking for participants, that would be great. Uhm but thank you. This was really insightful and it will be a great help in my research. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day. And sorry about all the Zoom hang-ups [laughs].

EDL: It's fine, it's fine KJ. Good luck with your story, uhm, with your thesis and if I have anyone, I will send them to you.

KJ: Thank you so much! Enjoy the rest of your day and good luck with everything!

EDL: You too! Okay bye-bye.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:34:40]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hours 56 minutes 40 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form; interviewee has restricted access to the raw audio to everyone but the interviewer.

Interview 4: Fikile Vilakazi

Name of the Interviewee: VILAKAZI, Fikile [FV]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 18 August 2022

Place of the Interview: Durban and Cape Town, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 3

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 5 November 2022 – 11 November 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:00:30 FV joins Zoom meeting]

KJ: Hi.

FV: Hi, KJ.

KJ: How are you?

FV: Can you hear me?

KJ: I can hear you fine. Can you hear me?

FV: Yes, I can. I'm sorry, I'm just, I'm really in the middle of a situation, so don't mind my appearance [laughs].

KJ: No, no, no. If you want to reschedule, we can?

FV: No, it's fine, you know, because I- it was hard to find this time, so let's rather do it, then you know that it's done.

KJ: Okay. Okay. Thank you so much. I really appreciate you taking the time out to do this for me.

FV: Sure.

KJ: Thanks. So, before we get into the questions, I just want to, to do some admin stuff. But basically, just to say that I do have ethical clearance from UCT. And so that's the form that I sent you on WhatsApp which if you can just fill out and send it back to me, that's just to say that you agreed for me to use this interview, in my research, obviously bar any like, redactions that you would like to make. So, you can make those during the interview, afterwards and then when I send you the transcription, the full transcription of the interview, if there's anything that you see in there that you'd like to remove, you're more than welcome to. Also, just Zoom has been kind of clamping down on the meeting times, so if it starts- if that timer appears, I'll just normally give you a heads up, but just re, re-click the link, and we should be back. Everything should work fine from there.

FV: Alright, that's fine.

KJ: Okay, cool. Are there any questions that you have for me before we get into it?

FV: No, no, no, no, I'm fine. I can see the form; I will send it to you.

KJ: Okay, thank you so much.

00:02:44 Background Information

KJ: So, to begin, please state your full name, age, preferred pronouns and sexual orientation.

(00:02:52) FV: I'm Fikile Vilakazi, I'm 43... uh- how, how old am I? [laughs] I'm 48 years old.

Listen to me, I'm saying I'm 43. The last time I remember I was 43 years old. Time has just gone past me [laughs]. Oh my gosh, I'm 48 years old. And really, I just go as myself. I don't- I'm just gender non-conforming. Doesn't really matter what, what the person sees, sees me as long, as long as they don't gender me in a way that makes me uncomfortable. So I really don't, yeah.

KJ: And sexual orientation?

(00:03:30) FV: I identify as a lesbian woman; as a black- hello? as a queer woman.

KJ: Okay, so let's just get into your background. Where did you grow up?

(00:03:44) FV: Do you, do you know Soweto very well? I grew up in Soweto in Johannesburg.

KJ: Okay [Zoom audio inaudible] ... Durban.

(00:03:54) FV: Yeah, no, I grew up in Soweto.

KJ: [Zoom audio inaudible]

FV: [Zoom audio inaudible] ... [laughs].

KJ: So, in Soweto who was like in your living space at the time?

(00:04:07) FV: When I grew up, I was with an extended family. My grandmother was there, my grandfather was not so much at home. And my father and all his brothers and sisters and my cousins also.

KJ: Okay, and what was your family background like?

FV: In terms of?

KJ: Um, you know, what type of work was your family involved in, that kind of stuff.

(00:04:37) FV: Ah. No, it was a quite a situation. I mean, some of them were working, you know, in the, in the industries that were there during apartheid, they were working in town, and some of them were not employed.

KJ: Okay. So generally, more like working class, that kind of...

FV: Working class, definitely working class.

KJ: Okay, um, what was Soweto like? Were you close with your neighbours?

(00:05:06) FV: Vibrant. Completely politically vibrant society, you know, it was quite a beautiful space to grow up in. Township vibe, township culture, you know, very political because we grew up during apartheid. So many of us were growing into activism, you know, without even noticing that you are in this path, because that was just the way of life. So it was that kind of space.

KJ: Okay, um, so you kind of like in each other's business, a lot more than like, maybe in the suburbs, that kind of thing.

(00:05:46) FV: Totally. It was so communal. I mean, we were just into, you know, you knew your neighbour, your neighbour knew you. It was such a communal way of living, sharing. I could easily go to the neighbour and ask for salt and, and potato, you know, if I don't have and I could get it. That kind of thing. Even a teabag, you know, you could easily go and borrow a teabag [chuckles].

KJ: [laughs] Okay, cool. And what was the conditions you grew up in like?

(00:06:17) FV: It was quite a strange environment. I mean, you know, just in terms of conditions, like I say, it was a highly politicized environment. So I remember how, for example, you know, our parents were never really home because either they were working, and my father in particular, because I grew up from the father's side of the family, or either they were running away from the police. So very much in an environment where we were just on our own as children growing up and figuring things out. It felt as if sometimes, it felt like a zombie space because you're just young and you're there and it's just all of you running around the house. Whether if you're hungry, you just have to figure that out yourself. So we had to try and make sense of that environment, you know, from time to time, ja. And then when there were adults, and you just sometimes then you can feel this temperature of anger that one couldn't really make sense of now- at that time, but now I understand because of the political you know, atmosphere at the time. When our parents were present, they were really tired and angry and all of that so it felt like it also some kind of an environment in a violent space to be growing up because you're, you're sort of, sort of come to know this anger that you can't explain yourself as a child. Why are people so angry all the time? But now you know, now that you look back it all makes sense.

KJ: Mmm. And at the time, like what were the ideas of homosexuality or surrounding homosexuality? If there were any.

(00:08:04) FV: Mmm. In my-, in Soweto generally as a, as a township you know, we grew up with what you would call your baby mama cultures type of a thing and baby mama not necessarily be a being a concept of, you know, older and younger people, but it was just a concept of women who come together, they become, you know, either the other one becomes the mother of the other but ja, it really sexualized relationships. And men also,

were doing something similar like that. It's not something that was frowned upon in Soweto when I grew up, it was just, you know, some-, it's a subculture of some kind. In my family in particular, there was just no language and no conversation about sexuality at all, you know, people just- I remember I had my first, my first lover was, was a woman, you know, in that arrangement. No one said anything about it. I've never- even now I don't remember a moment where I can say that my family was against my sexuality. I only really started to get those ideas outside of home as I was growing up, and you know, get becoming a teenager and, and starting to interact with other people outside of the Soweto community. Then I started to encounter resistance and backlash but really at home it was okay. I mean, one of my uncle's was trans, uhm, intersex in fact. Yeah, so sexuality was just for us always that kind of a thing that I think we've just always known consciously that we are just what they are. There was never really something that is truly heterosexual in my family, if you know what I mean. You know, my, my dad, my own dad used to be very much in the opposite sex parties. It is they used to do that with their friends. There was a culture called the hippo culture, I mean, the hippie, it was called the hippies at that time, I don't know if you're familiar with that term. But literally, you know, just men having fun with each other, going out and doing parties and that is where you see these opposite sex parties. And I used to watch this as a kid. And I used to admire my dad for it, you know, and of course, I think that is, for me, now that I interpreted it, I think it was quite a fluid, sexual environment, although he was heterosexual dating women, but you could still do that openly, oh, by the way, without, without hiding it. So I grew up in that environment that was embracing in that way. Yeah, not really condemning. So, so I feel like I think I was free and growing up with a dad, you know, buys me what people would consider male clothes, raised me like a boy. So I've always been

this tomboyish child in the family, not alone, also with my other cousins who were also doing their own thing similar, you know? So that's the kind of environment that I grew up in.

KJ: And would you say that those ideas were, like limited to your family, or just like a broader like, idea that was held in Soweto at the time?

(00:11:25) FV: I think it was broader than my family, you know. I mean, I can also just share similar sentiments for example, in the family house of this woman that became my first lover, or that I think of as my first woman lover, that the environment was pretty much the same, I could just walk into her house, sleep over at her place, there was just no questioning and no problem whatsoever. It was not just the two of us, there are many of us, of our friends as well, you know, because this was some kind of a subculture, we were living in also different suburbs, you know, different areas of Soweto that were doing the same thing. We were never attacked, we were never really, you know, uh challenged until far later in life when homophobia became rife generally in, in society. But when we were growing up, these things were really there. I didn't, I didn't, I don't remember a moment where one was violated because of that kind of a thing that was happening with the time.

KJ: And so these relationships that you're speaking about, like how did you enter into them? Like, how did you even like you, you said they called the baby mama relationships. Right?

FV: Right.

KJ: How did you like, come up with that term? Or like, like, did you know about it previously, from watching other people and then implement it into your like, own life or was the person-

FV: No-

KJ: Yeah sorry?

FV: Yeah no, you can finish your question?

KJ: Oh, no, I was just gonna say, were you approached by another person who, who, wanted to, wanted you to be in this relationship with them?

(00:13:07) FV: You know, what used to happen is I actually, I think I grew up into it. You know, when I grew up, and becoming kind of the street vibe, it was just something that was there. And I think that maybe even people before as perhaps our mothers or you know, and so on, perhaps practiced that subculture, because it was there. It was part of society. And what used to happen is, if you saw a woman that you really were attracted to, and you wanted them to be your baby, or to be your mama, you would just - I remember how a group of us would sit in the street, waiting for, you know, women that are passing by and we would all tease each other and the others would say, oh my gosh, I liked that one and you've been seeing her for, been seeing her for quite a number of days, perhaps or months and you want to approach them, then we would just encourage one another, you know, just go for it, go and ask her you know. And that's how it would happen and you just jump and you stop them, can I please talk to you, I really like you blah blah blah, you know, it was fun. And really, that's how these relationships happened. It was really just like that, you know, and, and, and in the end, you realize that these people have managed to, to get into this mama baby relationship. And it was not always monogamous, you know, some, some of them that will be there and not all of it, not all of it also was sexual. Some of them would eventually get sexually involved and others would just be platonic relationships. Yeah.

KJ: Okay. Okay. Cool.

00:14:44 Relationship with Family

KJ: And how would you describe your relationship with your family growing up?

(00:14:53) FV: It was okay. It was an okay relationship. You know, like any other family, you know, we had our own ups and downs. Growing under apartheid, that was just that the biggest challenge of our lives and I think it continues to haunt us to this day and the only really challenges that we experienced was centred around that. Because the absence, the absenteeism that I spoke about, the fragmentation that I spoke about were as a result of the system. Not really, because of anything else about us as a family. And I remember how, how, you know, my grandmother, for example, was a domestic worker, so she was never home, you know, because she had to stay there and work there. So you just have those absences of parenthood, those absences of bonding, that were created by the system, I don't think there's anything that you could have done about it. So that's just what it was. But other than that, we had beautiful moments going out together, you know, some days, we'd celebrate holidays together and just go to the park and you know, the culture of going to - you know we had a beautiful park here in Soweto called Ntokozo; Ntokozo means happiness. So all of us, as families, you know, we'd just have these days, when you just book a bus and invite the neighbours and we plan this thing, you know, over three months or six months' time, we all come together. We go with our children and our parents and we both play Ntokozeni which is a place of joy, a place of happiness, and it was such a thing that happens almost every year or twice a year. So we did all of those things. And I just also sometimes remember beautiful sounds of music, either being played by parents, you know, lovely sounds, I still play them today even here, some of the songs I still have. That vibe of joy and just happiness and just chilling, you know, it sort of, sort of still vibrates in my mind. So that's, that's what it was.

KJ: So you would say that you were like, pretty close with them, given the circumstances and stuff?

FV: With my family?

KJ: Yes.

(00:17:02) FV: I was close to them; I was close to them in that way. But of course, you know, in terms of just the violence component that I, that I, that I mentioned, I didn't really stay long at home, I had to leave at a very young age. In a sense that I spent most of the time in the streets, even if I would come back, I'd just come and pop in and then I'm out and I'm doing my own thing out there. So I think, you know, maybe from the age of 10? 9, 10 years old, I was streetwise already. And I just navigated my way into the streets. And I'm not sure whether that was just me being aware that I'm different and maybe just protecting myself. I don't know what that was. Because I was never attacked for my sexuality at home at all. Instead, I was always, you know, targeted for not wanting to stay at home and my parents were always worried that I'm just so streetwise, I'm so out there. When I wake up in the morning, I'm out in the streets and I come back late in the evenings or come back after two weeks spending time either with friends or with baby mamas or, or wherever, [chuckles] you know where my head took me to. I was just such a naughty girl. Ja [laughs]. I don't know whether that is close. But I mean, you know what I mean like I- there was that kind of relationship of, uh, an arm's length type of distance. I still felt them there. The person that I never really had connection with was my mum because our parents divorced when I was young. So I grew up with my dad, so she's always been absent, like, literally she was just not, ja.

KJ: Do you have other siblings?

(00:18:53) FV: Yeah, I've got my brother and many others outside of our parents' marriage that were born.

KJ: Are you quite close with them? Did you grow up together?

(00:19:06) FV: I'm close with, I am close with my one brother but others are not so close. We know each other, but we didn't grow up together, they grew up with their mothers also.

KJ: Oh okay, so you grew up with your brother?

FV: Ja. I did.

KJ: What was your relationship like with him?

(00:19:27) FV: Very good. Very good relationship. Very healthy, happy relationship, we still are, we still are. Yeah.

00:19:38 Disconnection with Family

KJ: So would you say around 10, you started feeling a disconnect with your family or was it later?

FV: Yeah.

KJ: Okay.

(00:19:48) FV: It was, yeah, yeah. Somewhere around there, around 10, it was clear for me. Simply it was just becoming, yeah, it was just becoming clearer, you know what I mean.

KJ: Mmm. And I know you said that you can't think of anything but like, I mean, did they say anything? Was there...- Or was it like a self-imposed like, disconnect?

(00:20:13) FV: No, it was the violence. Uh, you know, I had this, uh, one particular uncle- In fact, my uncles were so highly violent, you know. And, and the kind of violent that is, that is, like, I want to believe happens in every family. It was like when you just get beaten for things that you actually can't even explain. It's like you're constantly this child that is either beaten or, you know, mishandled and so on that every time you home just something happens that makes you uncomfortable. There was a lot of alcohol, I just remember there was just so much alcohol around, people being drunk and there was a lot of drugs as well, you know. They're taking a lot of cannabis mixed with alcohol and when that happens, then, you know, madness is going to prevail, you know, whatever kind of madness. And, and I was, I was just, you know, a unique child because I always confronted that, and I always refused to be treated in a way that felt uncomfortable, in a way that felt violent for me at that time and I think it was because of that, that I got beaten so much. So I was just running away from the beating and I was just running away from what I experienced as violence, and some form of lack of freedom in that sense, you know, and when I was in the streets, either playing or being with friends, I felt more at home and more free. I felt like the streets were receiving me in a more loving way, in a more embracing way than then when I was in the walls that I call home. Yeah. And that's, that was the disconnect.

KJ: Okay.

00:21:55 Homosexual Awakening

KJ: So when did you realize that you were not heterosexual?

(00:22:03) FV: [laughs] I like that question. I've always known that I'm not. I have always known. It's just always been a part of me. Even when I dated a man at some point, I just knew that I was not heterosexual.

KJ: Okay. Okay.

FV: I was just a sexual being.

KJ: But was there ever like a point in time, where you were just- Because you mentioned that you've dated men, right? Like, was there a point in time where you're just like, I just don't want to do this anymore, I only want to engage with other women.

(00:22:40) FV: Yeah, yeah, no, definitely. That moment arrived for me in my 20s. And that was just after, you know, I was in church and I was just here in this, in this asexual relationship with the man in church because he couldn't have sex before marriage. And we got married and I- something just clicked inside of me, you know, clicked immediately, that no, this is not how I want to spend the rest of my life. This is just not it. And then I divorced. And at that time, I knew that I needed to take a different path. And I started earlier on actually, when I was 18, I had this very, very close friend of mine, and I really was so in love with her and I [chuckles] actually asked her to marry me, and she was heterosexual. So we had this very interesting relationship. And she told me Fikile, you know, I love you so much. I'm crazy about you, but I'm not, I'm not the way you are. And, you know, something, then some level of awareness that happened through that conversation, because in that moment, I realized I was actually different from her, you know, in ways that I otherwise did not before that conversation, because I was clear in my head and heart that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. But she also was very clear that as much as she would love to, she would love to do it as a friendship, not, not, not in the ways that I was asking her to do. And from that time on then, the conversation with her landed in a place where I said to her, you know, people know that we've been friends and we've been having this very close bond and I am going to come out, I think, I know who am I now. You know, just around 18. And when I do

come out, I think people are going to perhaps also associate you with my, with my sexuality, because they, you know, oh, it's always such a public thing. And it was that moment. It was that moment and I started really coming out. Even as I was still dating this man, there was the clarity in my head and in my heart. And then I started to do the transitioning process of being deliberate about the kinds of decisions that I make about my sexuality. And the kind of people that I interact with, you know. And I remember vividly how I then took a step, because there was this other person, a lesbian woman who was out but she also just didn't identify as a lesbian, I think she was just going through the same things that I was going through. And I was so in love with her, you know, and I just went for her because my friend couldn't, couldn't spend the rest of her life with me. And we had resolved that, and it's just part of like that. So even when I got married, I knew that this is not me, but you know, when you're younger, there are just some things that you do without thinking, and I realized, my goodness, I just made a mistake. I can't, I can't, I can't do this, this man is a friend to me, but I can't take it beyond friendship. And that distinction was clear. Luckily, as painful as it was, we were able to resolve it. And I've never really looked back since then. I've never looked back, I've always, I've always been in relationships with queer identifying and lesbian identifying women, or humans, let me put it that way. Because some of them don't really identify as women, they identify as they or as trans and so on or as, or as queekings or queers, you know, so I've always been in those kinds of relationships up to this day, that I finally settled with, with someone that I think is the love of my life [chuckles], identifies as a, as a queeking, so I'm happy, I'm really happy.

KJ: As a?

(00:26:37) FV: As a queeking.

KJ: Oh, okay, okay, okay.

(00:26:41) FV: Queeking is sort of a combination of the word queer, I don't know where is the king, the, the king of it coming from the, the queeking, I can't remember but she has got some theory around it. Really interesting theory about with the word queeking, but it's something queer.

KJ: Okay. And so, how did your ex-husband react to your divorce or rather you asking for a divorce?

(00:27:14) FV: He was absolutely broken. You know, he was my childhood lover, if you know what I mean, like, we've been in this childhood relationship for many, many years. And just when you think we've got it, and we're getting married, and there's this thing, so he was broken, utterly, utterly broken. But, you know, that's just how it is. It's, I had to, I had to say to him, you know, I don't think it's fair to trap you, in this relationship that's not going to necessarily give you the kind of emotional and sexual benefits that a relationship offers, you know. I can always be there as a friend. But that's just really how far it can go. I just wasn't attracted erotically in that way to the kind of masculinity that, that he was. I mean, I am attracted to masculinities of a different kind, but not that one. You know, so it's, so it was that kind of a thing. And in the end, we were able to resolve but he was, he was hurt.

00:28:20 Coming Out

KJ: And what was your family's reaction to you coming out?

(00:28:27) FV: No, no, my family, I never really had to come out to my family, they've always known. Every time I like I said, you know, it was never even a conversation. When I had partners, I would just go home and introduce them, you know, this is so and so, this is my

lover, and that's it. I've never had to come out to them at all [laughs]. Yeah, I've always had to come out though, to other people, other than my family either, you know, at work. I had an adopted family as well outside of my biological family, I had to come out to them because they were Muslim, you know, because of the Islamic belief system. And of course, they did know that I was this kind of a person. And I needed to then come out to them in that way. So I've always come out in other spaces but not at home.

KJ: And how did your adopted family take that?

(00:29:20) FV: It was hard. It was hard. The, the challenges of Islam. They took it as an embarrassment that it's going to you know, embarrass the family. This is a, this is a well to do family in the area where I was. We were living and they were well known as Muslims and well respected and now this thing you know that they're living with a lesbian in the house and you know, I couldn't bring my lovers at home. I couldn't have the enjoyment of, you know, having a space that is called home where I can bring my lover to meet my parents and we can sit at home and have coffee or, you know, just chill. I didn't have that. Whereas my brothers could do that, you know. So that was painful for me. And it ended up badly because I had to leave home. Uhm, I was expelled from home actually, in my adopted family as a result. So that's when I actually started to live my life. I started to build my life outside of home to be independent, it pushed me. I was kicked out [laughs], I always refer to it as such, you know? So, and I realized, from that time on that there will never be a place called home for me in that sense, you know, because I had decided to leave my own biological home for reasons that I've stated, and I'm not going to go to it. And this place that I had found is a sort of a place of safety, struggles with my sexuality, and I can't impose it on them either, because I love them that much. And I decided to go, so I did go. And up to this day, I mean, we're still

dealing with though with the, with ramifications, you know, ramifications of that situation. Our relationship has never been the same since then. I love them to bits and I know they love me, my mother particularly. And she is in deep pain for it. Because later on in life, she apologized very, very deeply about having treated me in that way and she's always inviting me back home. But there's just so- I don't know what, I don't know what it is, it's just sitting somewhere there inside of me, you know. And I, in fact, it's not even about me, because I know I'm loved, it's more about my lover, I never want to expose them to that kind of violence, ever, you know what I mean? I really don't. And if it means not going home, I won't go home, because I want them to know that wherever we are, we can be free to express ourselves without having to be violated in those ways by the people that we love.

KJ: Mmm. Mmm.

00:32:04 Persecuted Based on Sexual Orientation

KJ: Okay, so... [long pause] sorry, I'm just going through the questions.

FV: Sure.

KJ: Are there any other instances where you felt persecuted based on your sexual orientation?

(00:32:18) FV: When I think about it, yes. It was, just before I left home, with, with, with my partner then, it was at work. She had cancer as a chronic illness, so she, you know, she was constantly ill. And there was this one time that she was really, really sick, and I needed to take a family responsibility leave, and they wouldn't let me take family responsibility leave because we were a lesbian couple. And, you know, the policies at work could not accommodate that kind of- they did not see her as my family, you know, full stop. And, and I

had to resign, eventually, from that workplace, because I realized, they'll never be able to see me as human, or see us as human. And she needed me, so I took the leave. You know, as ungranted as it was, and of course, it was a dispute and eventually, I decided that I'm going to resign. So that was one incident. And the second incident, I don't know whether that incident was related to sexual orientation and other things, but there was just some elements of racism as well, because it was the mother of my partner, you know, it was an interracial relationship and still seeing me as a black person, as a k-word, you know, my partner was Indian. And that thing, just, you know, it just had this negative weight in our relationship to a point that I moved out, you know, we separated, and she couldn't handle it, and she committed suicide, you know. So, so that, those are the moments that I look back at and say, if there are moments where I feel violated in my life, because of my sexual orientation, it will be those two incidents. I mean, there are many other minor ones, you know, when you walk into a shop, or a restaurant, and, and so on, but those are fundamentally key because they are connected to the people that I love, in spaces that I call spaces of safety. Because when I'm talking about home, in the context of my mother, and I'm talking about my lover in our house, in our home that we created together, and then either my family or her family comes in, they come in in that way to violate our sexuality, but also our relationship, in those ways, it becomes difficult to live, live right because home is a sacred space where you come to and anything else can happen out there in the world. And I've always been deliberate about this, you know, living in a homophobic world that is patriarchal, you know, that has, that has inflicted all kinds of violence into our bodies. I'm very deliberate that when I enter a place that I called home, that it should be sacred for me, it should be peaceful, it should be all the things that I would like to see in the world. So, so I

felt violated in that incident. So those are the two I can think about in the meantime, ja.

There are many, many others, but I can just highlight those two.

KJ: Just letting you know that we have under five minutes.

FV: I can see four minutes, ja.

KJ: Yeah, so we can just- once it goes out, we'll just reclick the link. But then I wanted to ask you a follow up question of like, what's- around what time was this happening? That time period?

(00:36:03) FV: Were the two incidents? [KJ nods] Well, they- my mother's one happened in 2004. Mmm, so I was just in my 20s then, and this, and this one of my mother-in-law happened around 200...8, 2008 I think, yeah. 2008, 2009, four years later in our relationship. So, so that, yeah, and I think I must have been in about my early 30s then.

KJ: Okay. And the one with the work situation?

(00:36:43) FV: That one happened in 2002. 2002. So it's, yeah, they followed each other; 2002 and then, and then the home one was 2004 and the other one was 2008.

KJ: Okay, okay, thank you.

00:37:01 Coping with Feelings of Persecution

KJ: How did you cope with these feelings?

(00:37:07) FV: Oh, it was depressive. Completely, completely, disturbing, you know, disorganizing in terms of one's life, I mean, you know, you can imagine if you had to leave home, and you really did not plan to. I had to find myself living in places and spaces that are called, you know, temporary shelters, in spaces of safety, just to be free, you know, just to

breathe. And like I've indicated, sometimes you just find yourself in the pavements of society, just really, you know, idling, you know, for lack of a better word, because you just don't have a place of belonging. So it's been quite disturbing. Destabilizing as well, especially with my partner, because I thought that was going to be the rest of my life, you know, I thought that we had settled. So it was quite unsettling in a deeply fundamental way, because it meant going back now to re-organizing my life, you know. And in terms of work, I mean, you know, it's a source of income and having to resign because I'm not seen as the human that I am in this workspace, it's also destabilizing economically. So on so many levels, you know, economic destabilization, social unsettling of my life, fragmentation as well. Yeah, highly de-, depressing, highly depressing. I had to go through all of that.

KJ: Sorry?

FV: I'm saying I had to go through all of that depression. To the depths in order to rise again, yeah.

KJ: And who did you lean on when you were going through all of this?

(00:38:58) FV: LGBTI organizations, that is actually what led me to join LGBTI organizing. I remember how vividly when that thing happened in my family with my mother and at work, the next organization that I worked for was the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project. Because I just felt like I just wanted to be in a place that understands me. And I got lucky because there was a post that came out immediately at the time and I applied for it and I, and I got it.

KJ: So would you-

FV: I'm just going to-

KJ: Yes?

FV: No, I can see you're gonna cut in one minute.

KJ: Oh, okay. If you want to like take a break or anything just let me know, get some water.

FV: No, no, I'm fine, I just thought maybe we should pause and let this link go and then reconnect again.

KJ: Yeah, sure.

FV: Is that okay?

KJ: No, that's fine. That's fine.

FV: Because it's going to finish anyway now in a minutes time.

KJ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We can just like let it run out so that we don't re-join again, and then it only has like one minute left again.

FV: Yeah, okay. Yeah. So I'm gonna grab some water then whilst it does that?

KJ: Sure, sure. Go ahead.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:40:19]

Tape 1 ends

Tape 2:

[00:01:15 FV joins Zoom meeting]

FV: Okay, we are back.

KJ: Yeah. Okay. Cool [laughs] Yeah, sorry about that. So I didn't know it's... it never used to do that.

FV: No, it's fine. Yeah. They've got this 45-minute limit, I know.

KJ: Yeah but I used to have like, two-hour interviews on the 45 limit, but it would go on for like two hours. But ever since I think just being like, April, I noticed they started, like enforcing that 45 minute.

FV: Yeah.

KJ: Yeah. Uh, sorry, where were we? Oh, you were talking about joining other LGBTQI organizations at the time. Would you say that LGBTQ counselling helped play a role in providing you with mental and emotional support?

(00:02:17) FV: I actually didn't go through counselling, but I think LGBT activism, became my sanity, it became my healing. The more I got involved in dealing with homophobia in society, being a part of a collective that responds to, to these issues, helped me a lot to find myself and to make sense of everything else that I was going through, especially when I left home, and my mom kicked me out. You know, it was, it was really, really disturbing and destabilizing. But I immediately was helped by the LGBT movement in that sense. So the spaces and the sessions that we had about coming out, about maybe that's what we call counselling, maybe that, maybe that was my counselling. I was part of those rainbow sessions myself. When I spoke more about sexuality, I spoke more about violence, you know, homophobic violence, and so on. And I was part of the people that were not just talking about it, but also seeking solutions, you know, talking to government, and talking to role players and so on. And I benefited from all of that. And in that process, I really healed and I forgot about the pain [chuckles]. I forgot about the pain that I went through. And I also, maybe I also found solace in knowing that something is being done about it somewhere. And I then felt part of a community as well. I got a sense of family. And so, so it replaced all

the things that were broken in my life, if you know what I mean, like really coming into LGBTI activism, and into the struggle was became my home for a very, very long time.

00:04:04 LGBTQI Activism

KJ: Yes and this was around 2004, right?

(00:04:09) FV: Yeah, yeah, I got this job. 2004, I think, yeah.

KJ: At the, at the-

FV: The Lesbian And Gay Equality Project, yes.

KJ: And that was when they were working around the same-sex marriage.

(00:04:28) FV: That's right.

KJ: Okay. And what was that like?

(00:04:32) FV: It was so amazing, because I joined the Lesbian And Gay Equality Project at the time when the Fourie and Bonthuys case, the two- uh, lesbian couple, you know, were challenging, were challenging Home Affairs, about the recognition of their marriage and Fourie and Bonthuys' case was joined by others. And the job that I got was that of, of advocacy in training around same-sex marriage campaign, you know, so I was in communities really holding these workshops, I was speaking to the media, I was engaging partners, you know, bringing in everyone in society really to support the same-sex marriage campaign. So it was such an exciting piece of work, when I look back to it, I really enjoyed it. You know, working with lawyers, we had a beautiful team of lawyers, Crystal Combanis attorneys, who really led us to the, to the successful end of, of that campaign, you know. So engaging with them, also engaging with the Law Reform Commission processes around

same-sex marriages, just debates, you know, the submission processes and Parliament, thoughts and views and ideas from various stakeholders in South African society was intriguing. You know, it was exciting, it was... it brought some level of hope. Although in the end, we didn't get marriage equality, you know, that the Civil Union Act became that thing that, you know, one can look back today and say, you know, at least somebody did something some way. It's not full equality, I think something still needs to be pushed further to equalize the marriage system in the country, but it is something.

KJ: Yeah. I mean, what was some of the like, things that you were dealing with at the time? Like, was there a lot of like, pushback from other organizations who were against the campaign? Or was it-

(00:06:36) FV: There was.

KJ: Like quite a bit would you say?

(00:06:39) FV: There was a lot of pushback from the church. The religious fundamentalists. From Muslims, from Christians, I remember vividly the African Christian Democratic Party was one of the voices that was opposed, you know. The Muslim organizations and traditional leaders, you know, we had a lot of opposition from CONTRALESA, which is the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa. And we had a lot of contestation also from the National House of Traditional Leaders of South Africa. Of course, we continued to engage them, we had a number of meetings, even though they were opposing us because we realized that, in order to win this campaign, you don't speak to the people that are supporting you, but you also need to speak to other voices that are opposing you, and be able to, to actually stand that heat of opposition. And hopefully, through debate and through contestation, we would be able to convince them otherwise. And it happened in some, in some sectors, you know,

the South African Council of Churches, the Catholic Bishops Conference, for example, were some of the spaces that were able to make inroads in. Where, you know, both those structures, were able to get into the religious community, to the churches, where we had like really almost on a weekly basis conversations about sexuality, gender, sexual orientation, in such a way that some of them ended up developing policies, you know, that that are inclusive and of course, others became our spokespersons even in Parliament. Because I know the SACC has got a limited representation and the Catholic Bishops Conference, you know, so there was opposition, it was not a struggle that was won easily. And I think that voice was being used to want to even remove sexual orientation from the constitution to this thing. But it was so highly organized, luckily, at the time in South Africa, as the LGBT movement, that, that somehow, we managed to resist that. And I suppose the strategy of mobilizing communities throughout the campaign because we went into all the nine provinces, speaking to communities, really, and part of my job was that, you know, with others, to go to communities, I travelled all the nine provinces with a team, and engaging people on the ground, ordinary citizens. And by the time Parliament had to take public hearings to communities, we had done our job, you know, to sensitize them and conscientize communities, and it worked. It really worked. But it didn't, it didn't come easy. There was absolute strong opposition. People were saying South Africa has got a population that is 80% Christian, and they didn't think that this was going to happen and if it was going to be possible in South Africa, but it, but it was possible.

KJ: And you were a part of that!

(00:09:53) FV: Yes, yes! Yeah, I'm part of that [laughs]. I am grateful. I'm grateful for having been a part of that journey. I'm super grateful. I've learned a lot from it. I've benefited from

it as well, just in terms of my own psyche. It has healed me in, you know, some of the scars that I've shared with you. Really I felt like it was healing me in such ways. [To person off-screen] Thanks babes.

KJ: And besides that organization, were there any other organizations that you were involved with?

(00:10:32) FV: Yes. When the Lesbian And Gay Equality Project closed down, I moved to the Forum For The Empowerment Of Women, which is a black lesbian organization in South Africa, you probably know FEW [KJ nods]. I moved then to work for FEW and, and then I left FEW to join OUT: LGBTI Well-being. And the reason why I moved to OUT is because the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project was the lead organization for same-sex marriage campaign, so OUT, managed to secure all of that funding when LG-, when, when Equality Project closed down and I was still attracted to the campaign. So they then created a job offer for someone that will be the frontline of the campaign to take the-, basically make sure that this legislation is passed. And I was attracted to the post and I applied, and I got it. So I stayed with OUT, uhm, until the passing of the Civil Union Act, in 2006. And, and when the law was passed, eventually, I was starting to feel like I perhaps need to be somewhere else and at that time, we were forming an organization of, you know, lesbians on the African continent, after the Sex And Secrecy Conference that was held in Johannesburg, in 2003, you know, so [Zoom audio distorts] ... behind the scene. And it so happened that just after the Civil Union Act was passed, that network wanted to formalize itself. And it was looking for someone that can put it together, you know, the first director really to, to build that organization for the African continent. And I applied, you know, and I got the job to be the first, first ever Director Of Secretariat, putting together systems in place, employing people, raising money for the

organization and it's, it is still in existence up to this day. So, so I went there to the Coalition Of African Lesbians, co-founded it and directed it for until 2012. I resigned in 2012, because I felt like I had done my part, in terms of strategic direction of the organization. I then, you know, was feeling like so much of my woundedness had been healed by this journey of activism. But there are certain parts of me that were still feeling sort of like loose, which is my personal desires to finish my education, and perhaps do something else. So I decided to go back to finish my master's degree because I had an honours degree then. And I left, I left activism ranks 2012, officially, I still continued on a retainer, sort of contract with CAL, the Coalition Of African Lesbians, because I was the founder and the director, and you know, when you exit the organization, you sort of want to stay and exit well, but also handover well, so I stayed until about 2014, in that two years period, [Zoom audio distorts] just doing this work of handing over and support and so on. And then I went to back-, I went back to study, you know, those are the places that I've been and all of those have been LGBTI, queer trans organizations. And then since then, when, as I was doing my Masters, and I was doing my PhD, I have been in and out, you know, through consultancies or either just attend processes and meetings, or, you know, people- I get invited from time to time to come and speak here and there. So I'm still very much a part of the movement in that sense. But then, when I finished my, my PhD- in fact, when I finished my Masters when I was-, as I was doing PhD, I, I felt like I needed to contribute this part of me that is about sexuality and gender, in perhaps a manner that is transferring skills and sharing knowledge, you know, somehow and I got attracted to education. That's funny enough, and as I was thinking about that, I saw this post at the University of KwaZulu Natal, they were looking for a lecturer in political science and public policies and I applied you know, and because my intention was really to sort of integrate sexuality and gender in the curriculum, and that's what I've been doing since 2015.

I'm still there. My research is around that work, I have engaged with the Gender Studies departments, and so on. And I foresee that my future is probably going to stay in gender and sexuality, even within institutions of higher learning. Because it's so much a part of my healing, you know, I continue to feel like, it has healed me so much. It's our therapy really, as LGBTI and queer people, this engagement in the manner that we do with activism and struggle, it is our therapy. And I felt like because it has healed me in the way that it has and as I'm growing, also, by age, I realize the need for rejuvenation, for healing, for connectedness. And I find that activism does that. And I would like to share that skill and transfer that skill, even if it means doing it at the level of tertiary institutions, and hopefully, also with schools, and will continue to be a part of the movement as and when I can, yeah, so that's, that's my journey really in terms of where I've been elsewhere [laughs].

KJ: Okay. I have a couple of follow up questions from that but okay, so you were at OUT and FEW, what were some of like the differences between them?

(00:16:43) FV: Few was an organization that was committed to the eradication of hate crimes against black lesbian women in townships, that was the fundamental pillar of the existence of FEW, when Zanele Muholi and Donna Smith founded FEW. It was focused on les-, black lesbians in townships, really about rapes and killings and murder, you know, what, what we call corrective rape as well and generally hate crimes. And then OUT was different in the sense that, you know, it was an organization in Pretoria led by a white gay men, you know, Dawie Nel and very much then also attractive to that segment of our LGBTI population, not just working with issues of lesbian women, but also just broadly LGBTIQ+ people with a deep connection to research and knowledge development. OUT has always been passionate about issues of health as well, particularly HIV and AIDS. And really, to

make sure that we document all of the work that we're doing. So that-, those are the differences and then, of course, my partner and I, the one that committed suicide, she was a professional nurse when I was working at OUT. We then, you know, under her assistance, she, she developed the first clinic at OUT, I don't know if it's still there, but she was the one that conceptualized it, I remember how we were sitting at home, drawing it in paper, and so on. And she went in to really set it up, which is beautiful, you know, the first ever LGBT friendly clinic in-, at OUT. And she volunteered her time as, as a nurse to be able to assist and to deal with issues there. So those are the differences in that then OUT was focused on broadly LGBTQI people and doing research, whilst FEW was very, very clear that you know, its audience is black, lesbian women and targeting hate crimes and nothing else. Yeah, so I don't know if anything has changed since then but those have been the differences between the two organizations.

KJ: Okay. And I mean, in general, with LGBTQI organizations that you worked for at the time, what were some of like, the struggles that, that you faced?

(00:19:37) FV: Money, I think was one of the biggest challenges that we've always had, you know, FEW, for example, would struggle a lot in terms of accessing funding as a black lesbian woman organization compared to OUT, you know, and I'm not sure what that is. But you had, in the donor environment, there was a lot of money for, for HIV and AIDS, a lot of money for gay, gay work than there was a lot of money for lesbian women. And because for a very long time, you know, sex between women has never been considered a thing, you know, that actually happens and I'm not sure why. But as a result, homosexuality, everyone who spoke about homosexuality in society would always think of homosexuality as something that's happening between men. So a lot of money then was geared towards gay

men. So money, I remember vividly how money was always a challenge in how we needed to push back, right. And also the differences just within the LGBTI movement, struggles of patriarchy, you know, and that dichotomy, you know, and that fragmentation within the LGBTI movement where gay men would take more space, more voice, more money, more resources, everywhere the struggle went really. Uhm and the differences of race as well, where there were glaring differences between people of different races who were LGBTQI. If you think about Pride, at some point for a very long-term Pride used to be in Rosebank and not in townships. You know, township Pride was started by Phumla- I don't know if you know Phumla, she used to work for FEW. We used to-, we call her Uncle, you know, who used to advocate a lot within FEW to say why is it that we always have Pride at the Zoo Lake in Joburg when we can take Pride to Soweto and FEW then started a project called Soweto Pride that was, that was raised by her and it has grown since then and you can see how Pride has multiplied itself. We have so many Prides now you know, we have KwaThema, we have eKhurhuleni, we've got Cape Town Pride, and so many of them. It, it- we never used to- Pride was just a singular thing, people would come from different provinces to come. So Pride stands out as an example of the struggles that we have just around space and representation and visibility of certain bodies, who is the frontline of the LGBTI movement. And also just the donor community, what they get attracted to and not attracted to. We struggled as lesbian organizations. You know, when I started, CAL, the Coalition Of African Lesbians, that was one of the challenges, even when I was at FEW to just secure, decent funding for the payment of decent salaries, and wellbeing of staff, you know. Because, because of the politics of money and where money is sitting, things have changed now, there's a lot of feminist funders, who emerged because of the kind of, of work that we've done to lobby the donor community and sensitize them around these issues. So that's the

thing that I just remember vividly, really, those, those struggles around race, class, gender, and positionality in feminism and patriarchy, you know. And then, of course, there was the rise of the trans movement that, uh... started to sort of be stronger, the formation of Gender DynamiX, by, by uh... Liesl Theron. You know, and then trans politics also coming into the space in a very strong way and how the fragmentations of the movements started to happen, when transphobia just became rife within the LGBTI movement. Lesbians just didn't understand now, how is it that we are having trans men, you know, people that before we knew as identifying clearly as lesbians, now they are trans. And gay men, similarly, people who you knew before as gay men, and now they are trans women. So those dynamics changing the movement in such a fundamental way, because also, we've started to see different patterns of sex emerging, or perhaps they were there, but they are becoming more visible at that time where a trans man would now have sex with a gay man. Whereas a trans man was a lesbian woman before. So it started to be just so complex. And I think it took time for the movement to open up and embrace those politics in that way, of being the fluidities around, around sex, you know, people can do-, you can date anybody that you want to date, really, regardless of one's trans identities even and we realized that sexuality is fluid in that way, you know, I mean, there was this research that was done, I don't know if you've seen it. Right from the beginning of our activism that was clear that, you know, sexuality is a continuum, it lies really in a continuum that moves over time in between space and it is so fluid that someday I can speak to you KJ, and you clearly identify perhaps as trans or as queer, and tomorrow I could meet AJ-, KJ as something else, you know, and who am I to judge? And that was the hardest politic to deal with, uh, I know I'm speaking a lot [laughs], but those are some of the things that I, that I sort of looked back and I, and I think those are some of the challenges that we have been through.

KJ: Mmm. Mmm. No, I mean, like, don't apologize, I'm, I'm here to listen, I think that I mean, your opinion is obviously very, very interesting to hear. And, I mean, you lived through those changes of the movement. So one of the things that I'm also looking at is documenting those changes that occur within the movement and stuff like that. So don't apologize.

00:26:00 Pride

KJ: Um, what I wanted to ask you was, what are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform to speak on LGBTQ issues? You kind of did touch on it a bit, but is there anything else you'd like to add?

(00:26:17) FV: Mmm. You know, I mean, I haven't, I don't know when was the last time I attended Pride. But sjo, I mean, I just remember when we wrote the book called Pride and Prejudice at that time, it was led by, by Anthony, you know, at GALA, it was still called GALA then, the Gay And Lesbian Archives. Pride was a place of protest, you know, in a sense that it was a statement of protest. Regardless of all the other racial politics that were surrounding it and politics of location, it has always been a space of expression. And we did it in such a way that we deliberate to make sure that the media really covers Pride as much as possible and the, and the week leading towards Pride has always been this week of consciousness building. Sometimes it would be two weeks, you know, where all of us as organizations were rallying around making sure that people know that we exist, and we are here. So it has always been really that momentum in the country every year, that happens to say, we are going to speak and bring government and bring all the voices that we struggled to talk to during the course of the year. And they would come, you know, they would come. But also talk to each other before we go and parade and so on. So I think there's value in, you know, I mean, that was the value of Pride, in any sense, the space of belonging. It has evolved over

time, I think it became highly commercialized, you know, when it was like you could just literally come with your things, and you camp in there, and you sit, but I've learned over time, and I'm speaking really on correction here KJ because I haven't been at Pride for so many years, but when I started to move away from Pride, it's when it became, it started to be expensive, it started to really be difficult to enter the space and some of us couldn't afford to go there. And of course, it was decentralized, you know, it started to be in-, more, more, you know, closer proximity in the townships, which is a good thing. You know, just, just- So I think it is a place that can still have value. But it also started to just degenerate into, into, into a commercial space rather than a political space, you know what I mean, to be that political voice. And I feel like there's an opportunity there that we are losing around politicization of Pride, as a moment to remind the country, that homophobia is problematic, that we are here, that we matter and that we are part of being citizens. So there's something there that I think is nice, but I still think that Pride is something that we need to have and have it yes as a celebration, but I also think we shouldn't lose the components of Pride as a space of protest, we must just find balance between protest and celebration and bring it together in some way to make sure that we are not diminished in the, in the, in the psyche of the nation.

KJ: Mmm. Yeah.

00:29:24 Socialising With Other LGBTQ People

KJ: What I wanted to ask you was, you know, uhm, prior to becoming a lot more active in like, you know, LGBTQ activism and stuff like that, were you socializing with other LGBTQ people, and if so, how?

(00:29:45) FV: Yeah we had a lot of- oh my gosh, LGBT activism for me was social life also, we were partying all the time [laughs]. Well, I mean, you know, we socialized either as part of work, we had a lot of functions- I just remember how we had a lot of functions. When we had conferences, when we had workshops, we always had to put a social component. Either it is a gala dinner, or it is a closing party. So there's always been in that way, organized spaces for socializing, but also just friends, you know, as activists, we would visit each other and create spaces where we can, we can just meet and chill, chill in any way that we can. So a lot of poetry sessions, you know, particularly for feminist, feminist spaces, and lesbian women spaces, we used to join a lot of that. A lot of eating together, out and so on. So we did those kinds of things outside of the organized ones, like Pride, and, and all the ones that we did through work in activism.

00:31:06 Mediums Used to Express Experiences

KJ: You mentioned poetry, are there other mediums that you use to express your experience as a queer person?

(00:31:13) FV: Music, dance, choreography, uh, theatre. You know, we used a lot of that as well. Storytelling, and writing of our stories, you know, either be it in anthologies, or in, in some form, you know, whether it is articles, we've always found a way of using those mediums to, to tell a story and to celebrate herstory instead.

KJ: Yeah.

00:31:47 LGBTQ Issues That Were Not Tackled

KJ: Were there any particular issues within the LGBTQI move-, movement that were not tackled at the time, particularly issues surrounding women?

(00:32:02) FV: Ja. Ja. Issues of health, wellbeing and rest, you know, issues of just self-care, I've always felt that they, they are neglected, even in the budgets in the, in the manner that we're thinking activism is just always out, you know, we're just constantly running, constantly on the front line. And, and because of the nature of who we are- I mean, I remember how when I was at the African- Coalition of African Lesbians, every day, there was a call either from Nigeria or from Uganda, or Rwanda, not just one, you know, every day, there's someone running away from home or from the country, someone arrested, someone has just been raped, or someone has just been killed, you know, and it's all coming from all angles, and the nature of the act-, of the kind of space that you are in, does not enable even that rest to happen. So I always felt those things were neglected. You know by ourselves, but also by the people that are supporting us, spiritually, emotionally, and financially and otherwise, you know. Sometimes they would not even want to pay for salaries, because we can't even go to a spa, or to afford a massage or anything, because your salary is just not enough to be able to carry you. Many donors, in fact, gave us money for programs, they expected us to do work, but they did not want to pay for the bodies that are doing this work. And I've always felt like that was a **huge**, neglected component of our activism. You know, the recognition of the labour behind all this beautiful work, it has never really been honoured and recognized and respected. It has always been just taken for granted. I mean, I remember how always, we would just have to find some money somewhere within the money for programs to be able to pay someone's labour, so that they're able to live a decent life. And it's hard to do that work. Because you constantly then have to account how you've moved a budget line item here and put it there and so on and so on. So those are things that I really felt were neglected. People really also burning out because of lack of self-care. The anger that comes with that, you know, once you burn out, not feeling helped by the

movement, not feeling like people care a lot, they just think about you when there's work to be done. But when you're breaking down and can't hold together either because you're tired, you're just exhausted, you've just been broken by the system or by activism, that there was just not always a space that was available to hold you. So those are the things that I felt were neglected. That perhaps we can self-correct on as we move on with LGBTI activism.

KJ: Mmm. Uhm... uh... I'm sorry, let me try to like, formalize this question. But when it comes to like- so would you say that there wasn't a lot of like maybe like LGBTQI counselling for activists at the time? Or if there was, it was like inaccessible?

(00:35:27) FV: There was uh... - Well, at FEW part of my job was counselling actually. But what happened is that black lesbian women needed a different type of counselling, they always were very clear that they needed a social worker, or a psychologist that was black. So we had counselling for example, OUT has always offered counselling, but you find that it is either black- uh, a white, lesbian woman or a gay white gay man. So those differences were always glaring. People just didn't want to talk to anyone. And of course, then did not benefit from those kinds of services. OUT: LGBT Well-being has probably been the only organization that has carried the work of counselling for a very long time in my memory, you know. FEW did it as a by the way, but not, you know, it was not a structured programme like it was structured at OUT. Triangle Project in Cape Town also did it a lot under the leadership of Dawn, uhm, Dawn has since relocated, I think, to the Netherlands. But I remember vividly one of the Directors' name used to be Dawn, you know. There was a lot of beautiful counselling work there and I think it's still continuing, I'm not sure. And, and then we had in KwaZulu Natal, the, the-

KJ: Lesbian and Gay Centre?

(00:36:53) FV: Yes, the Lesbian and Gay Centre, which has been led by uNonhlanhla and Si for a very long time. Also, they, you know, they're very much focused on health. So there have always been these spaces, but accessibility, because of these dynamics that I'm telling you about, has always been a challenge. Mainly from people really who were saying, I'm just so angry and I know I come into this spaces troubled, and disturbed, but I also want to self-determine who I speak to, who gets to know my story, who I tell my story to, because I don't want to just constantly re-victimize myself, because you know, what happens when you tell your story over and over again [chuckles], to a person that I don't think has my interest as a human being, either because I'm black, or because I'm a woman, or because I'm gay, you know, there's always been those dynamics, or I'm trans. So people have been sceptical, but otherwise places have been there in that sense. Pretoria, OUT, KZN and Cape Town, have been at least the three centres that I know have always had access to counselling.

KJ: But have you utilized any of those centres?

(00:38:08) FV: No, I haven't. No, no.

KJ: Okay. I mean, obviously, maybe you can't really speak much to this since you haven't utilized them, but, I mean, would activists be able to utilize them themselves?

(00:38:24) FV: They did. I know a lot of people did. A lot of people did, yeah. People were calling in, we had a helpline, also, the lesbian and gay equality project also had a helpline. People were calling in all the time. LG-uh, Equality also had a legal advice line. People always utilized the services.

KJ: And what were some of the things that they would call in about if you don't mind me asking?

(00:38:49) FV: Coming out, expelled from home, rape, murder, you know, unfair treatment in the hands of the public officials. So those are some of the cases that people were reporting and of course, access to health care services in particular. When you go to the clinic, when you go to hospital, those kinds of things. You know, discrimination when you go to the police reporting a case. Those were a number of cases, kinds of cases that we were dealing with from time to time.

KJ: And what, what was the like the demographic? Was it mainly like men, women, gender non-conforming individuals, like who was mainly like utilizing the services at the time?

(00:39:38) FV: Gay men and trans people mostly.

KJ: Okay, okay and I mean, we just have a minute left but just to wrap up this question, like the segment, I wanted to ask you, what do you do for self-care?

(00:39:59) FV: I am a traditional healer in my other life, so I do alternative healing methods. I meditate, you know, I just listen, I do all kinds of things that are alternative to, to refresh myself and to rejuvenate myself in that way. I speak to the skies, I speak to nature, I sing, I go to poetry, I write poetry myself, I exhale in those words, in those ways, I sing, take a walk, you know, I go to the ocean. So there's so many things that I do to just switch off and, and be, you know, and I sleep a lot also when I'm not- [FV cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:40:45]

Tape 2 ends

Tape 3:

[00:00:55 KJ joins Zoom meeting]

KJ: Okay, sorry about that. So you mentioned- well, we've kind of been circling about around it, but you mentioned that you're a traditional healer. So what role does religion and/or spirituality play in your life?

FV: Well, I mean-, before I answer the question, I just want to check in how much time we've got left, because I actually am dealing with that emergency.

KJ: Okay,, okay.

FV: So I'm going to need to exit at some point, I'm just saying that, you know, just to give me a sense, then I can communicate to the people that I'm dealing with.

KJ: Okay, we can just briefly discuss this and then there's just a couple questions I wanted to ask you with regards to the anti-apartheid movements, because you mentioned that you were in it, I think, at one point.

FV: Okay. So, so, so... I'm a little bit distracted now because of this thing.

KJ: Oh no, if you want to end it, we can end it and reschedule if you want? Or you could just answer them via-, the rest of the questions via WhatsApp on voice notes or something.

FV: No, no, let me just answer this one, let me just answer this one, we can go on maybe until, until quarter to? Let's just see how far we can-, how much we can get.

KJ: Okay, sure.

FV: And if I'm not done by then, then I can answer the rest, maybe through voice notes or something.

00:02:37 Religion and Spirituality

(00:02:37) FV: Look, I mean I think the role of religion is key, right? Just for self- Let me just say the role of consciousness of some kind, you know, we all believe in something, we all turn to something when we need to be held in certain ways. So it's that kind of consciousness that says, there is something else out there that can hold me when I feel like I'm falling apart, whatever we call it. Some, some of us call it God, some of us call it a Goddess, some of us call it nature, and so on. But we somehow believe in something and of course, there are atheists who don't believe in anything. Bu, uh, so, so it's important in that sense, because that's where we draw our energy from, we draw our strength from, we draw our power from especially in times when things are just not pulling together, you know, things are just really pulling into different directions, and one, one wants to reconnect and recentre. So I find that, you know, being a traditional healer, when I burn imphepho, you know, just to breathe, when I light a candle, when I communicate with my ancestors and my ancestresses, you know, in the manner that we do, when I dance, because we dance a lot as traditional healers, these are ways that recentre my body and my spirit and my mind in ways that are fundamentally deeper. And I'm okay with that, as a modality. You know, and of course, it has taken me to different places, like I've mentioned, you know, that reconnection with Mother Earth, and reconnection with landscapes and horizons, that I also find that they can stretch me in ways that are healing but also bring me together as well at the same time. So believing in something is important, whether we call it religion or faith or... you know, for that reason, because those are the kinds of things that hold us when we feel like we need to be held. Yeah.

KJ: Okay.

00:04:46 Anti-Apartheid Movement

KJ: And then, you, you participated in the anti-apartheid movement, right?

(00:05:02) FV: When I was younger? Yes, yes.

KJ: And do you think that the anti-apartheid movement provided you support as a queer woman?

(00:05:18) FV: Sjo, that's a very, it's a very dicey question to answer a yes or no to. Because I mean, the person that comes to my mind is Simon Nkoli and Bev Ditsie, yeah, because I just remember how Simon as a gay man part of the anti-apartheid movement, and all of us have been really, in our different ways, always expressed the difficulties of being a member of the liberation movement and not be seen, you know. Whether one-, the fact that you're gay... So, so ideas of discrimination, and ideas of prejudice, were clearer when we spoke about race, but as soon as we needed to talk about anything else that is not race, somehow those ideas disappeared in the minds of, of liberation fighters. And it's the same questions in the same struggle we've had around patriarchy, you know, there's just the inability and this erasure, and this blindness to the intersections of systems of oppression, you know. So the anti-apartheid movement had that thing, it had that easy blindness to other kinds and other forms of violations, whereas they could see clearly through race, they just couldn't see clearly through sexual orientation, through gender identity and so on. And although the Constitution in the end included sexual orientation and gender identity, because of the push, that happened from people, like Simon Nkoli and Bev Ditsie and you will see, you know, history shows that it's everywhere on the public domain, how much we pushed. So being then part of the anti-apartheid movement myself, I know that it has not always been open and open minded about sexual orientation and gender identity. You know, so it didn't really hold us in the manner that we would have wished as a result. At least until 1998 in South

Africa, when, when sodomy was removed from our statutes, you know, but before then, in the 70s, in the 80s, and the 60s, really a hostile environment to be in.

KJ: Mmm.

00:07:39 Racism Within LGBTQ Organisations and the LGBTQ Movement

KJ: And then second to last question, did you experience any racism within LGBTQ organizations or the LGBTQ movement as a whole?

(00:07:53) FV: Not, not directly as a person. But I think as being part of the collective, I don't remember any incident within the LGBTI movement, except the story that I've shared with you of my mother-in-law, where I have been discriminated against, because I'm a black woman. But I've always felt as part of a community of black lesbian women in general that we are constantly violated for reasons that I've already stated to you, you know, in a sense that we've never always been seen as a priority. We were absent. I think if the Forum For The Empowerment Of Women did not rise to form FEW, I don't think that we would have been made visible in the manner that we are visible now. You know, FEW had to carry that woundedness and face that hatred on its face and say, we are here also, we are black women, and we exist. So as part of that community, then I think that there's always been that racism that has always been glaring in the manner that you know, we represent what is LGBTIQ, the representation of LGBTIQ has always been a white gay man, you know, and nothing else for a very, very long time. You know, if you see the kinds of writings, if you just follow Mamba Online, as an example, just follow Mamba Online that should tell you that Mamba Online, just look at the kinds of writing that Mamba Online, the kinds of coverage that Mamba Online would show you, you would see that the face of LGBTIQ+ in South Africa for a long time has been a white gay man. So that, that level of invisibility-, I even remember

on the African continent is even worse, homosexuality has always been a gay man's thing, and a white gay man's thing. Also, black gay men would never be considered to even exist. People, people even still deny to this day, government still denies that homosexuality exists in the African continent, they say it's a Western import, it's a white, it's a white man's thing. So when we st-, formed Coalition Of African Lesbians, the first campaign that we ran was a visibility campaign to say, just to let the world know that we are here. We spent five years just doing the work of visibility and recognition. The same thing that happened in South Africa, in the fight against homophobia to say, Recognize Our Relationships campaign, that was one of the first, very, very first campaigns that were run by the Coalition On Lesbian And Gay Rights in South Africa before it became the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project. So it has always been there, racism has always been glaring. The way Pride was organized also, you know, it's always been there, it always had that white face, you know. But I've never had an incident that, that personally comes close to me as Fikile to say, you know, I'm treated this way because I'm black, it has always been that part of the community that experiences it either by deprivation of some kind, that needed one to go to a certain place of consciousness to be able to find this racism and actually touch it and say, by the way, you know, actually, what we're going through now is an experience of racism, but it was always subtle, you know, we could-, it was not obvious, if you know what I mean?

KJ: Yeah.

00:11:30 Work That Needs To be Done Within The LGBTQ Movement

KJ: Okay, and then last question, what work do you think still needs to be done within the LGBTQI community?

(00:11:41) FV: Um, you know, it's... I don't know, hey, I don't know, what is it that we can do. But I just think that there's so much that has been done that the one thing that we should do now is not to lose it. To keep it, to cherish it, and perhaps, to ensure that it passes from one generation to the other. And for me, the things that we need to do more is to, is to get into social systems, you know, socio-political systems, if it means then that we need to transform the curriculum in education, we do that, that work we, we deepen it. I know, GALA started it, were part of the process of you know, just including sexual orientation as part of Life Orientation programs in schools, so we must deepen that work, you know. Transforming the understanding of, of faith, which means that, you know, in faith spaces, understand that humans also have a varied sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, even sex characteristics. That kind of work that says, we are human. So if we can all take our struggles to that place that says, We are human, you know, in our family systems, that families are not just that nuclear, heterosexual family, of a mother and a father with two daughters and a cat, you know, but it's actually multiple and layered and complex and open up society to that. So if we can take our LGBT activism to, to the transformation of social, political and economic spaces, I would even argue that KJ, we also need to also take political office. Let us not be shy to be governments, ourselves, because we know what we want, you know, we have been spending our lives fighting against governments who do not see us, but we actually are government ourselves. Let us move to a place where we can have presidents who are queer and we can have ministers who are queer, who won't even have to argue about whether queerness exists because they will be experiencing it themselves. And then of course, you'll then be able to channel taxpayers' money into the kind of programming and service delivery that is queer inclusive and gender sensitive and, and perhaps also non-conforming to these kinds of norms that have violated us over time. So for me, that's the

future. The future is here in that sense, because then we go into a place that says, there's no need to even question this. We are all human, we come with these diversities. Perhaps we go to a place where we don't even have to tick a gender box on the application forms, you know, maybe we don't even need to even indicate our sex on the forms that we develop, whether you go to Home Affairs, or go to a bank or go to anything, let us maybe have a code that just says human, I don't know. Or have nothing, or just have nothing there. Let it not be an issue [chuckles]. I mean, let it just disappear from our psyche. So that's the kind of activism that I think is for the remaining of the 21st century, that is perhaps going to take us to the 22nd century as a century of freedom from all kinds of oppressions, starting with what we call ourselves, and what we name ourselves, and how we have our sex. Yeah [chuckles].

KJ: Cool, thank you so much. Those are all my questions. So thank you so much for sharing your journey with me. I really appreciate it. I've learned a lot as well. Yeah, just like I said, it will probably take me a while to transcribe everything, but once that's done, I'll send it off to you for you to check through if there's anything you want to remove. But it like- a lot of people do get a bit like-, because there's often a lot of like, uhms and ahhs and stuff that I have to include. So don't worry about, like those kinds of things. But if it's just like, you know, a specific thing that you've spoken about that you want taken out just like let me know if you want to change, that kind of thing. And also, if you know anyone else who would be interested in doing this interview, please let me know. Or you can pass their number along to me as well. But yeah, thank you once again so much for your time and your patience. KJ: You're welcome. Thank you for inviting, I enjoyed visiting those parts of my life [laughs].

KJ: Thank you for sharing them!

FV: Yeah, and good luck with your, with your research it's for Masters, right?

KJ: Yes, it is. Yeah, yeah.

FV: Good luck really.

KJ: Thank you so much. Good luck with your emergency.

FV: Thank you.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:16:41]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hours 37 minutes 45 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form.

Interview 5: Jade Madingwane

Name of the Interviewee: MADINGWANE, Jade [JM]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 3 February 2022

Place of the Interview: Johannesburg, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 1

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 26 October 2022 – 28 October 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:10:13 JM joins Zoom meeting]

JM: Hello?

KJ: Hi! Hi, can you hear me?

JM: Hi, I'm so sorry, I lost track of time.

KJ: No, it's okay, don't worry about it. How are you doing?

JM: I'm good, how are you?

KJ: Good, thank you. So, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my master's research project. I, I really appreciate it. Um, would you-

JM: That's okay, it's a pleasure.

KJ: Would you prefer it if I put my video off? Or would you like me to keep it on?

JM: Um, I think it's fine when it's on, it's not a problem.

KJ: Okay cool. So just to kind of give you like, just a brief intro into like, what I'm doing. The title of my project is examining the interconnection between queer woman's resistance and their social worlds in South Africa, between uh 19- uh the 1980s to 2010. So really, what that means is that I'm going to be looking at queer women's journeys in South Africa, what their social worlds are like, and kind of how this plays into their activism.

JM: Okay.

KJ: Um, is... can I assume that you're also queer?

JM: Yes, I am.

KJ: Okay cool. And just out of curiosity, what pronouns do you use?

JM: My pronouns are she and her.

KJ: Okay, thank you. So, in terms of the ethics of the project, I am ethically cleared by the University of Cape Town. And that's what that form that I sent you, uh, last night is about. It's just to say that you agree for me to use the material that's discussed in this interview.

JM: Okay.

KJ: But if, if at any point, you feel uncomfortable, you want to redact information, you want to anonymize something, or you just want to stop the interview altogether, you just let me know and that's like, it's completely fine.

JM: Okay, cool. I'll sign it.

KJ: Thank you. Electronic signatures, perfectly acceptable as well. So, you don't even have to like print it out or anything.

JM: All right.

KJ: Okay. Um, before we begin, do you have any questions?

JM: Um, no, I'll ask you as we go along.

KJ: Okay, that's great. That's great. So yeah, I just like to treat this kind of more like a conversation than an interview just because, you know, to help, like, with the flow of it, you know.

00:13:33 Family Background

KJ: So, I'll begin by asking you, where did you grow up?

(00:13:40) JM: So, I grew up in a township, is it a township? Yeah, in a township. Wait, so I grew up in kind of like two places. One, in a township in Soweto called White City. I think the first couple of years of my life were there. And then I moved to another township in Eldorado Park. So yeah, that's where- I basically grew up in Soweto.

KJ: Okay, and what was the community in Soweto like?

(00:14:21) JM: So I was, I was a very- I think I was a very extroverted-, introverted person I mean, when I was growing up, and never necessarily paid much attention to my community. I think the, the first couple of years of my life, obviously I was a child. So, I would play outside in White City. It was a very- so we were kind of... not squashed up like- So we had a main house, my late great grandmother, she had a house and then my aunts and uncles like lived around- It was kind of like a village. But yeah, it was in the township. Yeah. Uh, the

community, I mean, in black cultures, particularly, the communities were there for each other, supporting each other. So yeah, I'm not too sure what context we're talking about the community. But yeah, the community is just a basic a village raises a child type of thing, you know. We would borrow sugar, or salt or whatever we needed in the house, we'd borrow that? Yeah.

KJ: So, you would say that you were quite close with your neighbours?

(00:15:47) JM: Yeah, we were. But I think in Eldorado Park, it became a different story, because we were, so we are Black and in Eldorado Park, it's predominantly like a Coloured neighbourhood. So, we were kind of like the outcasts for lack of a better word. I think, though, it was just two black people in the street so, we were kind of not... besties with the neighbours or like, friends of the neighbours, wherever. So, I think that's when I was very introverted, you know. The only friends I had were in school. Yeah. Like Eldorado Park was, was a different ballgame than White City. So, and the dynamics obviously changed. Because in my formative years, I did not know Afrikaans, obviously, I was that girl that was... That did not have much friends in Eldorado Park, as opposed to White City, you know, so yeah, so the two were very different when I was growing up.

KJ: Okay. Yeah, that makes sense. Um, and what were some of like, what were some of the conditions that you and your family grew up in? Like, what are some of the challenges that you faced?

(00:17:22) JM: Yeah, so in Eldorado Park, so I didn't grow- So, my mother did not raise me. But I think in a lot of cultures, or not a lot of cultures, but like, I think with a lot of working parents, we were always left with our maternal grandparents, you know, and so my great grandmother was working as a domestic worker. My other grandmother was working as a-

she was selling sweets at school. And then the others were just fairly young, my aunt and uncles they were fairly young and were still in school, I think. I don't remember much about my childhood. But that's- that I do remember, you know, so, as I was saying that we had that big house. And then we had like, smaller other houses for like my aunts and uncles. Yeah, so it was one main house and then separate other shack dwellings around it. And then in Eldorado Park, my grandmother bought a house. So, I've got two grandmothers, they're sisters, by then I went to live with my mother's mother, which is my grandmother. She had a house; I had a room of my own. That was exciting, you know. So, I lived a comfortable life with my grandmother. It wasn't the same as White City. So yeah. So that... yeah.

KJ: Um, okay, so just to clarify, how many people were living in the house with you?

(00:19:16) JM: So, in White City in the house, in the main house there would just be about my grandmother, myself, my brother. Yeah, that was it. Because other people have their own kind of, like rooms for lack of a better word. It's not a backroom, like it's a shack with like- okay, it's like literally one room shack and then you just have to divide the kitchen, the lounge and the- A weird thing, but yeah.

KJ: So like an outbuilding?

JM: So I think it was in the beginning- Yeah. In the beginning, there was like, two shacks. And then my great grandmother moved to her shack so she left the main house and she moved into the other shack. Yeah. So, we would be left in the house me and my grandmother. It would be me, my grandmother and my brother. Yeah.

KJ: And you said your mom wasn't with, uh, you in that house?

JM: Pardon? I didn't, I didn't get that. I think you froze for a bit.

KJ: Okay, sorry! So, your mom wasn't living with y'all in that house?

JM: No, no, no, she wasn't. She was living on her own somewhere in the world.

KJ: Okay and your father?

JM: I never knew him. Yeah, that's a part of. Yeah, I just don't know him.

KJ: No, that's fine. And then how did the housing situation change when y'all moved to Eldorado Park? Was it still the same small units and a main house?

(00:21:13) JM: I wouldn't call it small. It was fairly big because it was a three-bedroom house. So that meant I could have my own room. My brother could have his own room. My grandparents had their room, it had a bathroom. So, we had a toilet and then we had a bathroom.

KJ: Okay.

JM: Yeah. And then, and then the lounge, we had the kitchen so that was better.

KJ: Okay.

JM: Yeah, so, it was big.

KJ: And did the rest of your family also move with y'all to Eldorado Park?

(00:21:50) JM: No, no. So, No. So it's my sister's... So, this isn't my mother's mother. We then moved to. Yeah, so it was just us.

KJ: Okay.

JM: Because technically, we are the grandkids. So...

KJ: Okay, I get it.

JM: Yeah.

KJ: So, would you say that you were pretty close to your family growing up?

(00:22:17) JM: Not really, I really wasn't. I was just a child existing. And they had to take care of me. I was never... I think, I think I was closest with my great- my late great grandmother because I'd go with her to work at times. Hello? Can you still hear me?

KJ: Yes!

JM: Okay, I'd go with her to work at times. And yeah, I think we had some form of connection, you know. With the others, I don't know. I mean, I don't know. Like, we were not necessarily close. No, I think. Yeah, people are just trying to figure stuff out in life.

KJ: Uhm, has that relationship kind of stayed the same since? Like, over time.

(00:23:16) JM: No, so I've never necessarily been not uh, not to say not a family person, I am very much a family person. I just think with family, I think for me- So, when I moved to Eldorado Park, we, we, we, not, not- So, we- it's not conformed, man. What is this? When you migrate from one religion to another? We converted! We converted to Islam because my grandmother had a calling and she answered the calling and okay, yeah. So, we had to convert to Islam as well. I think we were Christian at some point in our lives. I think I only remember a church, going to church, once or twice in my life. That's what I remember. It could have been more with my late great grandmother because she was a pastor, also. And then when we moved- that's why I'm saying I think the first formative years of my life, I don't remember much about it. But I do remember that I'd go with my grandmother to work. She had this white lady that she used to work for that was very sweet, you know, and I would be the one that would go there. Funny enough. And then she would preach at church on a

Sunday so like I- Those are the things that I remember, because I was close with my great grandmother, and then when we moved to Eldorado Park who converted to Islam, and, and then so I'd go to school in the morning and go to school in the afternoon as well. So that, that's called madrasa. Yeah, so we converted to Islam. And then I think when I moved out when I was 19 I think part of part of my, my, sort of- and I put this in air quotes closeness with my grandmother was just the religion. There was nothing else that I can say, we connect with, you know, because I don't think we were connecting. So, when we were so when I was 19, I then decided not to continue with the religion. So, I figured, I figured out my own spirituality by myself, because I did not connect with the, with the, with the religion anymore. Apart from it being very patriarchal, and not accepting of queer people, I, for me, I was just like, I don't think I can do this. And this was- I had not even discovered my sexuality as yet as well. But I distanced myself from the religion because it was not serving me in any way, you know. And I think, more than anything, I was doing it for my grandmother. For her approval, and to be close, super, super close with her. But that just did not work out, you know. So, so my grandmother would have- I think she really yearned for a I don't know what kind of- what type of daughter or granddaughter in me, but I think, because my mother was kind of rebellious. She also figured I was rebellious. And for me, I just feel like no, I was never rebellious at all. No, I was never that girl that would ask her to go to parties and whatever. And the only time I came home drunk when I was 18, and I had passed, matric, and that was literally it, you know, in her presence, you know, everything I did by the book. I studied, got good grades, and whatever. Like, I literally did everything, you know, that I felt like would put me in good books with her, but I don't- I think it's very different from their lens, you know, what success looks like? And what being proud looks like, you know, so I won't say- she was just my grandmother, right? Like, she was my grandmother, there was nothing to it. We

connected through religion; I left the religion. And I came back with a tattoo this one time and she was like, Oh, my goodness, the devil himself is here. So, it Yeah, I think after that we never got close. And I just tried to repair the relationship. As much as it wasn't even like a big thing that we fought over. I think it was just because of my tattoos and me moving out unannounced. I mean in Black cultures, they had to pray for literally everything that you buy when you move out. And for me, I was just like, it's really unnecessary. You know. So, my grandmother was really upset that I bought myself blankets and a bed and she did not bless that. And I was just like, it's not that deep, but okay. And then I try to repair my relationship with her. And sadly, she passed in 2020 when I was going through the journey of like, like being with her, not, not, not necessarily being with her, but like, being there, you know, and her seeing the kind of person I am. Right. As opposed to the thug that she thinks I am because I've got tattoos, you know, so I kind of wanted to change her mindset and I'd visit every other weekend. Yeah, and I think she was- I mean, maybe when I was covered up, she was just slightly comfortable with my presence, you know, but yeah, I think we were getting to a good space and then unfortunately, she died and then yeah, that's that. So, in terms of like family, proper, proper knowing and wanting and yearning for family, I think I've always wanted that with my mother, but because she was not available I kind of sought validation from my grandmother, which she did not necessarily give much of. And then when I left home, it was far worse because now I'm coming with so many tattoos and she's just like, well, the devil himself is walking into my house. So yeah, so I've never necessarily been close with people in my family uhm ja.

KJ: And your brother?

(00:30:14) JM: I'm very close with him and that's, that's one guy that has got my back. So, we grew up together. So, like, yeah, we've just always been close.

00:30:30 Black Culture and Islam

KJ: Um, and then I wanted to ask you have mentioned, like Black culture quite a bit. And with Islam, how did you kind of like merge the two? How did your family merge the two?

(00:30:47) JM: I think we were. No, we're not. We're the only ones that identify as Muslim in Eldorado Park. So everyone else in Soweto in different parts of South African townships, like my other family members I think they were all Christian, still are. So, it was our household that was Muslim. And then it was my aunt, my, my, my mother's sister. They, they also identified as Islam. So, it's practically two homes. So, there will be different holidays, right. In White City, they'd celebrate Christmas, and I'd have to go there. But they would not necessarily come if we're celebrating Eid. It was, I think the celebrations were basically about the two households that identify as Muslim but other than that, like... For me, also, I think, got a lot of backlash within the Coloured community because how can you be Black and be Muslim? From the black kids at schools also I got a lot of backlash, like how can you be Indian when you're black? Like, do you not know your culture? Do you not know, you know, practice culture and all of those things, you know? So, there's a lot, there was a lot, right, like, and for me when I was doing that- So at some point the religion made sense to me like I was a staunch, staunch, like pious person at some point and I wanted to further my teachings in Islam after school, but I think I then realized that actually nope, I've been doing this for my grandmother. But a part of it I loved and parts of it I just was infuriated by so yeah. I think I got a lot of backlash at school for identifying as Muslim. And then uhm in the, in the, in the, in the community, I also got a lot of backlash, because it does not make sense

that you are Muslim, no, black people can't be Muslim, you know. So yeah, I think my mom was also kind of confused at some point, when she visited that is, but no! She was not actually surprised, actually, now that I think of it she was not surprised, because my mother tried to marry her off with a Somalian guy. And then my grandmother tried to do the same thing with me when I was of age. She tried to marry me off and I was just like, nope, no, ma'am, it's not going to happen. So, I think the regress from my, from my grandmother was because me and my mother were literally, it was that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree kind of effect. So, my mom came home drunk when she was supposed to get married to this man because it's instant marriage, right. So, if someone comes and pays dowry, it means they take the woman to be theirs. And that day when the dowry was coming, my mom got so drunk, and my grandmother was just like, I'm done with you. And then when it was my turn, I ran away. I was just like, nope, not my cup of tea. I'm not gonna do this. So yeah. Yeah, I got a lot of backlashing for identifying as Muslim, but I stood my ground. And I'd literally wear like full hijab to school. Even in high school, I was that lame kid that did not have much friends, but I kind of did have friends. But they were also just like, Dude, you are so lame. Like, you don't have a boyfriend. You don't have this. You don't have. Your uniform is super long. You're wearing hijab like you are super weird. So yeah.

KJ: And do members of your family still identify as Muslim?

(00:35:07) So, my grandmother died. And then her husband is still alive. So, he's still like, proper Muslim. My brother lives there with him now. I mean, because he's old, so he took up that responsibility to live with him. He does it sometimes. He prays sometimes. He, he still celebrates Eid. He still fasts now and then. I'm not too sure if he's half in or half out. I'm

not really sure. And the other household, which is my aunt's place, they are still Muslim, yeah.

KJ: Okay, oh, uhm sorry, before I continue, is your brother older or younger than you?

JM: He's older.

KJ: Okay. By how many years?

JM: I think two years. No, it is two years, ja.

00:36:05 Sexual Orientation and Coming Out

KJ: Um, so, how would you define your sexuality?

(00:36:13) JM: So, I define it as, so I'm, like, lesbian. Yeah. Including my gender identity? No, no, no. No, no, no, no. That's okay [laughs]

KJ: [laughs] It's okay. Have you come out to your family, about being a lesbian?

(00:36:41) JM: I've come out to my family, yes. Well, when I came out to my mom, she already knew apparently. And she was okay with it. Because she herself was bisexual, but she never necessarily came out. I just found out. And then my brother was cool with it as per usual. My grand- so my, my brother came out for me to my grandmother, when he saw me on TV, when we were organizing Soweto Pride. And he was just having a conversation around gay people. And then he was just like, Oh, do you know, Jade organizes this Pride and whatever and I think my grandmother, like, pushed it, pushed it off, you know, as uh-uh, I don't know what this is. So, I'm not too sure about her how she felt about it. But my aunt, I know, my, my, my, my mother's big sister. She was she's okay with it. The younger aunt I'm

not too sure about, about her, I think I think she's not comfortable. But I can still go to her house. But it's not something that she's comfortable with, you know. She doesn't approve of- I put it in air quotes my choice of-, my life choices. But I, so I do the things that I want to do, right? Within my family, for example, my aunt does not like it when I wear short dresses because we are Muslim and I've told her that I don't identify, I'm not part of the religion anymore. So, I can do what I want with my body because it belongs to me. It doesn't belong to anyone else, you know, and she throws a lot of shade. But I'm just like, I can't be- this cannot be on me, it's got everything to do with you. But you can't be projecting your insecurities onto me, you know. I know I'm a big girl and, like, I've come to also kind of explore my body because I was very reserved, you know, I'd just wear like long things that would hide my hips, long pants, long dresses, you know, just to hide, you know. And when I came- when I started working for FEW and I learned about body autonomy, I then just kind of expressed myself the way I wanted to express myself, you know, so I think she gets, she gets very uncomfortable with that. So yeah, even with my sexuality, we don't talk about it much. But I do go with my partner whenever to the houses, my aunt's house, I do go with my partner, and I've introduced her as my partner, you know, not as my friend. My other aunt. She's okay with it. She's cool with it. Yes, she's cool with it. She's okay with it because she also was bisexual at some point. Not sure what her sexuality looks like right now, but yeah. So yeah, my brother is also okay with it. My grandpa, I don't think my grandfather knows but I always go with my partner home. So, I'm not too sure. He calls her comrade; I don't know why. But, yeah, that's his way [laughs]. It's fine. I'm not, I'm not trying to say he must just, I don't know. I think it's okay. Yeah, it's for me with him, it's okay. Like, we don't need to go any further. I don't need to tell him anything else, it's just fine. Yeah.

KJ: And how old were you- because you said that you didn't realize that you were queer while you were Muslim, right? So how old were you when you started questioning your sexuality?

(00:40:55) JM: So, I had been questioning uhm, oh sorry, I had been questioning- Well, no, let me let me not say anything I had been questioning, I was so focused on the religion that I did not even have- I had an imaginary boyfriend so that I don't feel crazy, right? This was when I was around 13 to like, 16. So people around me, my friends, the friends from school and the morning school and the afternoon school. Like people had boyfriends, people were talking about boys a lot. You know, and I could not relate. As much as I was a part of the squad, I could not relate to a boyfriend, or a girlfriend, you know? So, I spent most of my time dedicating it to the religion. And that was it. So, I only explored my sexuality when I was 19. Yeah. So 19 was the year of big things for me [laughs]. That was the year that was just like okay, wash your hands off the religion. Okay, explore yourself. I think at that time, we still had to Mxit. So, whenever I see groups that were like lesbian, I'd literally just be... not, like- I'd wonder what is this lesbian? You know? I think in our curriculum, we did have life orientation but when they talked about gays and lesbians, it was just a very small portion. So, I could not necessarily relate to it. But I knew that lesbian meant you are physically emotionally and sexually attracted to other women. And I started having those kinds of images in my head of being with a woman. So, my, my imaginary boyfriend changed from Michael to Michaela. Wow, I'm such a weirdo. Oh my god. Anyways, so I on Mxit, I then started being in groups of some groups were les. So, I started joining those groups, and I found friendships on those groups, I found partners on those groups, you know, and yeah, that's how my, my journey kind of coming out myself as well. That's how it kind of went, you know. Uhm, I remember this one time, my aunt was trying to hook me up with her

girlfriend's son and I was just like, brah I really want to live the life that you're living right now. Well, not, not the life that you're living, where you're married to a man and now sneaking out or sneaking off with a woman but like, you know, I want **this**. This kind, this one. Not that other one. I want this one. And she tried to hook me up with this guy and, and he had muscles and all of those things. And I was just like, yeah, no, you're not my cup of tea. I don't like you. So, I ended up not going to the movies with him. I was just like, it's uncomfortable. Yeah.

KJ: Okay. Uhm, and did- So, do you still like at 19, at least, did you still keep in contact with friends from school?

(00:44:33) JM: No, as I said, so, I'm very, I'm very introverted. So, I think I got the hang of what anxiety looks like from a very young age as much as I did not have the language for it back then. I'm looking, I'm looking at my friendships, my school friendships, uhm, how they were that I really never kind of kept friendships after matric. We tried here and there but it just did not work out because I'd always come up with excuses, I'm busy, I'm this, I'm that to avoid people so I think- [Zoom audio cuts out]

KJ: Sorry?

[00:48:12 Zoom audio reconnects]

JM: Hi! So sorry I lost connection.

KJ: No, no, that's fine. That's fine.

JM: Okay, I think I'm the one with the problem, connection problem, but I'm hoping I've fixed it. I just fixed my Wi-Fi right now so I'm hoping we can still go, yeah, okay. I was explaining something, I've lost track about was I explaining.

KJ: You were talking about your relationships with your school friends.

(00:48:42) JM: Oh, um, so after high school I think we all went our separate ways. We tried to reconnect with my other friends and we did go out once but yeah, I... I've never been good with people. So, I just... I also just let it go you know, so I don't necessarily have primary school friends nor do I have high school friends in my life.

00:49:17 Relationship With Women

KJ: So how soon after you started like exploring your sexuality and joining those Mxit groups and stuff, uhm, like, did you feel comfortable being in a relationship with a woman?

(00:49:41) JM: Uhm, I think it was from the get-go. I was comfortable from the get-go. So that wasn't much of a problem. So yeah, I was comfortable from the get-go.

KJ: And how... So you said that obviously, your family has met your current partner and stuff? Was your partner the first person that you brought home? Or was there someone else before that?

(00:50:17) JM: There was someone else before that.

KJ: And what was their reaction to you bringing them home and stuff.

(00:50:29) JM: So, with my, with my grandmother. I just introduced the person by name and did not necessarily say that this is my partner. I mean, I think she then thought it was a friend, but I kept on coming with her often. With my, with my aunt, they were okay with it. I only ever... So my aunt, I don't think my aunt had told her husband, that I'm queer. And then, one, one day last year, around February, I went to visit my aunt and I just told her husband that... because I think we were, we were somewhat close because of our politics, right? I had always been interested in politics. So, he was my to go guy. So, I just came out to

him and I was like, I was like, this is my partner. Not my friend, my partner. And I left it at that. And my partner was shocked, because she was also just like, wow, I did not expect that, I did not expect that but I'm cool with it, you know? So, the first partner, no one had a problem with. The second partner, she's the second person I'm bringing home and no one has a problem with her. I think my families love her and they're okay with her.

KJ: And do you live with her?

(00:52:07) JM: Yes, I do.

KJ: And did your family have like anything to say about y'all moving in together?

(00:52:18) JM: So, the only person that knows that I've moved in with her is my brother, right? Because the women in my family are weird, man [sighs] They'd want to do things that we don't do as a people. And I don't know, they've got these weird rituals that they would want to do that are unnecessary for me. But I think my oldest aunt figured it out. And the young one, I think she's, she's figured it out already. But they don't say it. Like the woman my family don't speak. We don't have conversations, you know, whatever floats your boat, go with it and that's, that's, it's okay. But the one thing that I know that my one aunt would have a problem with is if I were to get married, because she's still, she's still Muslim, you know? I'm not sure what her feelings are about... No, I do know, because last year, the, uhm, the mosque was having a conversation on Muslims that identify as LGBTI. And she asked my opinion about it. And yeah, I'm just not sure how that went. Like she had just asked my opinion, and it was the first time she had asked me about it. So yeah. But my aunt, she's cool with it. My brother- so, my to go person right now is my brother. So, if, like, I just tell him stuff, but, his opinion does not necessarily matter. He's okay with my sexuality, and my living arrangement, but he's not like, he's not anal about anything that I do with my life. Whatever

I do, he just asks if I'm okay with it, if it makes me happy, then that's it. You know, I don't really care for other people's opinions, including my family because we don't have that kind of relationship, do you get what I mean? So my... my brother is the only person that is important enough that I can share my living arrangements with you know. He's my to go guy basically. The others, we're just a family by name, but we don't necessarily do things that families do because people are just weird. People are just trying to figure shit out and it's okay, you know.

KJ: And uhm, like the community like around you, where you're staying, are they aware that you're a lesbian and that you're living with your partner?

(00:55:04) JM: So, we live in a block of flats. And I think people know. Our one neighbour, our one very good neighbour she knows and she's okay with it. Yeah, I don't know, we're in the North. So, everything is just like... People have like high walls. So, we really don't know much of each other, you know, apart from the immediate people that are in this block of flats. Not that we also know them. But it's just you come in from work, you're in your house. On the weekend, you're outside. We just greet each other. And that's that. Yeah, so it's just our neighbour that knows. And we have another lesbian that is also in the, in the block. But we just greet each other and that's it.

KJ: Yeah. And any of your friends?

(00:56:03) JM: So, I mostly have queer friends.

KJ: Okay.

JM: So, they know, yeah.

KJ: Okay. So, no one's been negative about it or anything?

(00:56:14) JM: No, no one has been negative about it, no.

00:56:18 Children

KJ: Um, do you have children?

(00:56:22) JM: No, I don't. My partner does.

KJ: Okay. And how would you define your relationship with them?

(00:56:32) JM: It's a good relationship. We've got a relationship. I'm able to reprimand them, they're able to come and talk to me about anything. So, we're basically co-parenting? Yeah, yeah. So yeah, they're cool with our relationship. I think at first, they were slightly shocked that there's another girl that's coming into the house. But they know, they know about relationships. And they know that the previous relationship with their mom did not work out. Their relationship with their dad did not work out. So, they visit their Dad on weekends. But I guess obviously, because it's kids, they yearn for the mother and the father to be together. And, yeah, but they are okay with my sexuality. There's one. So, they're twins. There's one that is just always asking and talking about, like marriage and stuff. The other day he was, he was saying do I feel uncomfortable if he talks about his mother's ex-girlfriend. I'm like, no and he's like I think people do kind of get sad when you bring up exes. I'm like, You are nine years old how do you know these things? Yeah.

KJ: Have there been any incidents where they've kind of been like affected by you and your partner's sexuality?

(00:58:19) JM: I think it's not much of an incident. But at school, obviously, people talk about their mother and their father. So, they can relate to a conversation about my mother is... works here or my dad works here. But in terms of the family life, and the day to day, they

don't necessarily relate. They don't- they can't relate to that. Because she's been with women and her I am also. So, there's never been an uncomfortable situation where they did come home and say, Why do you have two mommies? They know that they still have a dad. Yeah, so there's never been that instance, where they feel kind of left out of conversations, or uncomfortable from what they told us. There's never been that.

00:59:29 Persecuted Based on Sexual Orientation

KJ: And then, like you personally have there, have there ever been instances where you felt persecuted based on your sexuality?

(00:59:41) JM: Agh, yes, the work that I do. So, I mon- I monitor hate crimes cases at FEW and I think there's been just a lot of incidences where, when we're monitoring a case, and we're questioned by either the prosecutor- So when we tried to have conversation with the prosecutor or when we're trying to have a conversation with the Defense attorney, just to get an intel on the case, you know, that would be very difficult because then it's a- this is not... this is, this is a sinful life that you're living this lifestyle that you've chosen, you know. I guess also... I'm trying to think of situations where I was, I was made to feel uncomfortable because of my sexual orientation. So, when we were doing this one time, I was doing a sensitization training in a police station in Vaal and the station commander was just questioning, like, are you not scared of going to hell and all of these things, you know? I mean, it's part of the job, you have to tell them no, it's not going to happen. But at some point, you just want to say fuck off, actually, because what nonsense are you saying? Does it even make sense what you're saying. So yeah, there's been a lot of instances, man, like, I can't really pinpoint, but there's been like, with the work, you know? Yeah.

1:01:35 Coping with Feelings of Persecution

KJ: And how do you cope with it? You know, like you said, like, there's a lot of frustration behind, you know, being told all of those things. How do you cope with those feelings?

(1:01:54) JM: Uhm, I just let it be.

KJ: Okay. So do you-

JM: Hello?

KJ: I'm here. Can you hear me?

JM: Hello?

KJ: Hi. Hi.

JM: Hello?

KJ: Hi. Can you hear me? I can hear you.

[00:03:09 Zoom audio reconnects]

KJ: Hi, can you hear me?

JM: The network is horrible today. I'm so sorry.

KJ: No, it's South Africa honestly [laughs]

JM: Honestly, gosh.

KJ: No, it's okay. I wanted to ask, does LGBTQ focused counselling play any part in your life in terms of like providing you with support?

(1:03:39) JM: So, I'd really have to go to a person that is properly queer friendly, that has been sensitized. But the psychologists I normally get [laughs] and this is so ironic because we, we had a counselling service at FEW many years ago. And we picked out like the best

counsellors for people. And we at the office are not using those people. So, because also we don't have much funding for, for counselling, for staff counselling, so I had to find like a cheaper alternative, because I also don't get that much. So, people- So I did, I did counselling with Lifeline last year. And the counsellor was based in Soweto, and she was just... I think she was more than anything she was interested in my sexuality more than the problem I had come there for, you know. It was okay, but it just been felt like a learning session, rather than a therapy session for myself. Um, she'd be shocked when I'd say LGBTI. She'd be like oh my God what is that? What does that mean? You know, it was so funny because, like, okay gal, I'm literally here for you now. So she'd always just really be shocked when I say hate crimes, when I say the work that I do is exhausting, she'd just always just be shocked, you know. Even the therapist I have now is just always, like, I understand you, I hear you, the work that you're doing is important, I had to explain what hate crimes is, I had to explain around my sexuality and all of that. And this one time, she just gave me a Bible verse. And I was just like, wow, oh, my God, not another one. Yoh and now I'm just like, I'm not so sure about you. I think it is very difficult to get queer friendly therapists that we can afford that is. You know, at times you'd have you have to opt for the cheaper, cheaper, cheaper people because you need to talk, you know, particularly around the job that I do, like, it's very frustrating. And I come home sometimes, and I'm just like, you know, what, I really want to quit, but for me, it's hard work, you know. So, to even get to this point, where I requested for therapy, was because there was this one case that was weighing heavy on me, you know, and it really affected my life. You know, we were supposed to go to sentencing with this case, but it was moved to March this year. And we were really so, so close, you know. And, do you know, when you're close to something, and you know, it's there and then it just gets taken away from you. I was so sad. So that case had been kind of taking over my life, you know. And I

was just like, I need a therapist. And then I speak to the therapist and I need to educate her on what hate crimes is, what sexual orientation, gender identity as well as characteristics is. So, I had to... Yeah, it felt like working than having a conversation with someone. But yeah, I guess when I'm able to afford a proper therapist, I'd go to the therapist that we would pay for people when we had counselling services, you know, because then it's much easier. They are understanding, they're queer friendly, because a lot of our people gave us good feedback on the one therapist that we took them to. So yeah.

KJ: So as a staff member, you wouldn't be allowed to have access to them? The therapists?

(1:08:11) JM: I would! But I'd have to pay out of pocket, yeah. And she's slightly expensive than the one I've got now. So, the one I've got now, I don't even pay for it, because it's Life Assist from my partner's workplace. Yeah. So, for me to have access to the ones that I actually want, I'd have to pay for it. And an activist salary does not cover therapy, unfortunately.

1:08:46 Religion Continued

KJ: Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Um, and then we've kind of spoken about this a bit, like, the role that religion played in your life, but would you say that you're still spiritual or have you completely distanced yourself from that altogether?

(1:09:06) JM: So, I've distanced myself from the Islam... from, from Islam. And I've tapped into spirituality. So, like the divine universe, aligning chakras. So that's where I'm at. I'm not necessarily Chris- I'm not Christian. I'm not Christian. So, for me, it's the higher power, which is the universe, you know. Yeah, that is where I'm at right now. I tried to... at some point, at

the age of 19, I tried to study like all of these religions, but I got to Hinduism, and I was already exhausted because I was just like, wow [laughs]] It's a lot that people believe in, so I think I found my centre and I stuck to it all of these years, yeah.

1:10:10 Socialising with LGBTQ People

KJ: Okay. Um, so other than Mxit how did you come to socialize with other LGBTQ people?

(1:10:26) JM: So I then met this one particular person on Mxit and we became friends and she kind of took me through like all of these spaces. But before that my mum would go to Joburg Pride a lot. Yeah. And I didn't know, I didn't, I didn't know much about, like Pride and whatever. So, this friend kind of took me through the ropes, you know, out queer parties that were happening in and around Soweto. And then I was introduced to FEW. So, we then tried to start a group in Soweto, right? For Black lesbians, you know, just to talk, just a social group, we would meet at a park and talk about our issues, what is affecting us in our lives, or, like... So at first it was about it was a social kind of space, where we talked about issues where we can all relate with, and kind of give unsolicited, unsolicited advice. I don't know why we thought we'd advise each other; when we have the same problem. And then, and then, and then at some point, FEW came to our group, and I was leading that group, so FEW came to the group. And then I started being an active member in the group where we then started doing proper advocacy work, you know, having community dialogues within our communities, talking about sexual orientation and gender identity for people to understand, you know, so FEW had an entire, so it was a project, you know, that we, that we were under. And so, we just did, we just did that work. And then I applied for a job at FEW and I got it. So the social spaces, someone had to take me through the ropes. So yeah.

KJ: And where most of those spaces like clubs, or like, like you said, there were parties, were they like house parties, or were they at clubs, bars?

[1:12:59 Zoom audio disconnects]

KJ: Hello?

JM: Hi, can you hear me?

KJ: I can hear you now, yes.

JM: Please repeat your question.

KJ: Okay.

JM: If there was a question.

KJ: So, I wanted to know, like, what type of like social spaces were they? Were they like clubs, bars, or like house parties?

(1:13:30) JM: It was a mixture of everything. There would be clubs, there would be house parties, there would be chilled sessions, you know, on a Sunday, we would all just sit together as queers and just hang out, yeah.

KJ: Which ones did you prefer?

(1:13:50) JM: I don't like parties, right? So, like, I'd go just to meet people and you know, meet queer people because I... then was just so fascinated, not fascinated, but it was becoming myself and I felt more comfortable being in lesbian spaces, you know? So, I've never necessarily been a party person. I've always just been a weird person that did not like partying and all of these things. But I just do it anyway, too. I think for me, I wanted to create

community for myself. Yeah. So, I think that the spaces that I enjoyed most were the house sessions where people would come to us and we just hang out.

KJ: Okay. So, are you part of any sporting clubs?

JM: No.

1:14:53 Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW)

KJ: Okay, no, that's fine. So, We've spoken a bit about like you meeting FEW and everything like that. Could you speak a bit more about like the role that you play in the organization?

[Zoom audio disconnects]

[1:15:29 Zoom audio reconnects]

KJ: Hi.

JM: Hello, sorry I'm actually just trying to find a place where I can get connection because it's not working out. Okay, what was the question?

KJ: Could you talk about the role that you play in FEW?

(1:15:49) JM: So, I'm currently the Program, I'm currently Programs at FEW. Can you hear me?

KJ: Yeah, I can.

JM: Oh, my God.

KJ: [laughs] I can hear you.

(1:16:00) JM: Okay. So, I'm Programs at FEW. So, the work that I do... I do a lot of advocacy work. So, I... what I do is I plan projects and execute the projects in and around FEW. I do

sensitization trainings as well. Yeah. So yeah, whatever that has to do with Programs I do at FEW. Yeah, I don't know. Do you want me to talk about what we have done?

KJ: Yeah. Anything you feel comfortable with.

(1:16:44) JM: So, the projects that we've had over the years- so FEW has been in existence since 2002. And there were, there were so many projects at that time. So, when I joined FEW, I was first the admin person. So, I did not necessarily get to be part of a lot of projects, because I had to do the admin work. And then I became the community liaison. So the community liaison, which basically to a lot of group work, on the ground work. Yeah, going into these communities, when communities have dialogues, I'd be part of these communities, and I'd assist where I could, but I'd mostly do sensitization trainings in these different communities, yeah. And doing Programs, it's- I've got obviously more responsibility now where I have to plan a project and execute that project. Yeah, so the past two years, we've been working on the Criminal Justice System Project that ended in October last year. It looked at the South African, South Africa's criminal justice system. We're part of the National Task Team, that there was also a need for, for, for a lot of black queer bodies to understand the criminal justice system. As a result, in these communities, people did not know how to monitor a hate crimes case. And yet, they are mostly affected by hate crimes, you know. So, I did a lot of training with these communities around the criminal justice system. From the basics of the police, to the NPA, you know, so, yeah, we also did a lot of online work since COVID started, so we'd have conversations about anything and everything under the sun. Yeah, we've also connected a lot with our constituency with the Soweto Pride. Soweto Pride is one of our biggest projects. And then, yeah, we also had a lot of conversations around

intimate partner violence. Yeah, so we've been...yeah, we've done a lot of work over the years.

KJ: Yeah. Have you been with FEW since its conception?

(1:19:25) JM: No, I started with FEW in 2015. Its conception was in 2002.

KJ: Okay. So, what are some of the, like challenges that you face on a daily basis at FEW?

(1:19:47) JM: I think currently, it would be funding. So it's become, it's become very difficult for FEW over the years, you know, because we're the only lesbian organization that exists in South Africa, and a lot of people are now moving towards, like, trans issues, and intersex issues, you know, so funding is not necessarily directed anymore at the black lesbian, because we've, we've kind of laid the foundation, you know, in these communities. So, it's not much of a big thing. But now trans is getting the attention, trans organizations are getting the attention, intersex organizations are getting attention, as well, they should, because, you know, when took LGBTI there's often just that neglect of the T and the I, you know. But yeah FEW is struggling with, with funding right now. As a result, there's only three of us in the office and two of us that are proper, proper, active members of the organization that have to wear a lot of hats. So currently, I currently wear like, a lot of hats, you know, from admin, to my job description, and my job role, you know, to literally everything. So, everything is just dependent on the two staff members that are there. So, we're struggling with funding, yeah, and because of that, we can't carry out a lot of the activities that we want to carry out, you know, like intimate partner violence has been a big kind of topic and conversation for us, you know, because we see it happen. People have come to us and say, it's bad in my relationship, my intimate relationship. So, yeah, so we're

struggling with fund-, with funding, we're struggling with resources, we're struggling with capacity as well. Yeah.

KJ: Uhm, on average, like, how many people like in a week how many people would visit or come to y'all for, for help?

(1:22:19) JM: So it hasn't been that much from 2018, when we ended, when the Rainbow Activist Alliance Project ended, we don't get, we don't have much walk ins. So, it's not that much, it's like one or two people that will come in, but it's not that avid, you know, as before, that is, yeah.

KJ: So then how do people reach out to you now?

(1:22:50) JM: So, people reach out to us online. So, we don't have a physical office anymore because of COVID. So, we are working from home. So, people reach out to us online by either inboxing us or calling us. So, we literally live on our phones, our phones are our work, everything is done on our phone. The people have our personal information.

KJ: What does that feel like? You know, to constantly be working?

(1:23:30) JM: [sighs] Agh, it's such a, it's such a nightmare. I mean, agh, yeah. It's a lot. There are days when I'm just like, maybe I should switch off my phone. But then I can't because... yeah. I think it's overwhelming for me. And for my colleague as well. We're always talking about it. Because now that we're working from home, there was no way that we could not give out our personal information, because how would we reach people and how would they reach us, you know? Yeah, and I mean, being an activist, there's no nine to five, you know, like, anytime is teatime, you know. We get calls from people that were raped, or, you know, so that's kind of how we are living right now. Where we have to monitor hate crimes

cases, people will call at 2am with a problem and you have to answer that call unfortunately, you know, so yeah, it's draining. It's tiring, but we do it.

KJ: Do you get a lot of volunteers?

(1:24:55) JM: Nope, nope, nope, nope, we don't. In 2016, when, when our Pride was coerced into postponement by, by the state. So, we don't get a lot of volunteers, either it's, either it's physical or monetary. So, we ask people to donate to the organization so that we amp up on security for our Pride and we only got R500 [Zoom audio distorts] And our Pride- for a Pride that hosts up to 10,000 people. We were shocked, you know, we were just like, Oh, okay. R500, it's not gonna, it's not gonna get us the security that we need to host this Pride. So, we ended up not hosting our Pride that year. And we got backlash for it also, on top of our request, you know, and I don't know, we just have to only do things by ourselves, like people never volunteer, even if you ask for volunteers, you know, it's always a, are we gonna get paid? And it's like just, but we don't have such resources to pay you and people are just, just like, ah, it's tough times, can't just be working for free, you know? So yeah.

KJ: Yeah, that's difficult. Yeah. Um, do you often work alongside other activists?

(1:26:34) JM: Yes, we do. We do a lot of collaborations. Because we believe that, that working in silos does not help and rather working together. But other organizations also, like, a lot of organizations also just want to be, like, lead on things and get the glory and stuff like that. And we found that to be very, very challenging and difficult, because we're all doing the same work, you know. And when people do that, we recognize it, and we see it, and we distance ourselves, you know. With the Criminal Justice System Project, we were, we had originally partnered with a, with a, with an organization and they just... We felt like, we were insulted to some degree, because at some point they were asking for, for us to have a

director, and at that time, we could not have a director, you know, until we got our Acting Director currently now, and they were just questioning everything that FEW was doing. I think what they were basically saying that was that we are incompetent to carry out such a big project. And we did, you know, we did carry out that project. So there's also a lot of narcissism within the spaces, you know, there's a lot of looking down on organizations, because of the people that are in it, you know. For example, I don't have a degree, you know, to my name, but someone at a different organization, that's a director, that's what maybe an Honours and a degree, they look down on people like us, and that has become, like a thing within the NPO spaces, you know. Which for me is difficult to, to kind of comprehend, because the work that you're doing, what does it mean for you? And what does it look like, you know. To constantly be belittling another person, because there is no director in that organization, or there is no finance person, you know, I think for me, that could have done- that could have been done in a more polite manner and a safe manner, you know, but because we know this organization to be doing that and we're always working with this organization, funnily enough, but we were just like, actually, no, we will not back down. This is our project, we came up with this project, we were just, we considered you to be a partner in this project and yet, this is how you're treating us. So, we cut ties with that organization. But, like last year, there was a lot of- there was a spike in hate crimes in South Africa. And I just felt like people were just wanting their organizations to shine. And it was such a difficult time for all of us activists, you know, because like we were going through the most. I remember a time where my partner was accompanying me to an Uber and she wanted to kiss me and I was just like, no, that's not going to happen. I don't know if I'm a target because it's so rough, currently, you know. So and people want to be in the forefront, they want their organizations to be in the forefront. And that was such a difficult time for me

because I could not comprehend like, we're going through the most as queer people and people want to take, like, a lot of, I don't know, clout, or whatever. So yeah. So, we work with organizations that really do want to work with us that are not going to question our abilities to do the work. And yeah, and we're always asked for, for, for collaborative work, you know, collaboration work. But I guess some people have a different kind of feeling about FEW because of the capacity in it, I'm never sure really, you know, but we're always, we always want to have collaborations, and then some people steal our work and like our ideas. We'd be discussing something with a different organization and they'd steal that from us and we're just like, haibo, like, what's going on? You know, so yeah, I guess that's NGO life.

KJ: Um, do you find that it comes from a lot of older or younger activists?

(1:31:29) JM: Older activists, oh, my god, older, older, older activists. Yoh, they have a problem.

[Zoom audio distorts]

KJ: Sorry can you hear me?

JM: Yes, I can hear you, sorry.

KJ: Sorry. What did you say? I didn't catch that.

(1:31:47) JM: I'm saying it's usually older activists that want to kind of continuously... I don't know, man, I don't know how to say it. But it's usually older activists that want to still be in the forefront, you know, still be relevant, and not hear the younger activists, you know. And so, yeah, we've mainly had problems with the older activists that are running these organizations, you know. Uhm, yeah.

KJ: Okay. Um, yeah, I've heard that a lot, actually. So, since FEW's conception in 2002, what are some, like, really important milestones that FEW has achieved?

(1:32:42) JM: So, FEW has achieved so much over the years. I think Soweto Pride being the biggest achievement that still continues even in 2021. You know, another thing that was quite an achievement, achievement was the Triple Seven Campaign. So, the Triple Seven Campaign, it was a- but it was also a collaborative, like it was a collab with different organizations like GALA, uh, OUT Wellbeing, you know. So, it's a campaign about the two lesbians that were killed in Soweto on the 7th in 2007, you know, as much as that case is kind of... it's a cold case, right now, it's unresolved, you know, but the work around it, you know, was, was, was very powerful. Hate Crimes cases are also one of the things that FEW has really excelled in, you know, in terms of monitoring hate crimes cases. There was- FEW also had a soccer team at some point, Chosen Few and that did very- that did really well, you know, advocacy through sports.

KJ: [Zoom audio distorts]

JM: Pardon?

KJ: Does it no longer exist? Chosen FEW?

(1:34:12) JM: No, it no longer exists now. I think, FEW moves with the time as well, you know, so advocacy through sports back then was an important thing to- for, for people to understand that they can advocate for themselves through sports, you know, not that soccer is a lesbian sport, no, but they could be free, you know, because a lot of black queer women did not know what to do in the townships back then. And they were really good in soccer, and that was a safe haven for them, you know, and they travelled, you know, through soccer,

you know, so that was the biggest thing as well. I think another thing was The Roses Has Thorns Campaign. So, The Roses Has Thorns Campaign was basically a storytelling project, which I think was- I was not there, but I've read articles on it, you know, I think it was important for people to share their stories and their journeys of life with other people. And that was really powerful for me. Because I think for me personally, myself, like when I go into, when we have like conferences, I want people to be as comfortable as possible, you know. So, we'd have like, a safe space where people can just do whatever it is that they want to do. And we have a facilitator that either does meditation because the work that we do is so draining, you know, and we never get time to just breathe, and just take it all in or take it all out, you know. So, we have these spaces, whenever we have conferences, whenever we have meetings, we have, like healing sessions, you know, when people where people can talk about their feelings, you know. Another, another big one that I was actually reminded of last-, late last year was traditional healers in the spaces, you know. So, when FEW started- So they started, it was initially going to be a group of just women, not necessarily black, lesbian women, but just women coming together, talking about their issues, and it culminated into black lesbian women talking about their issues, and then obviously, an organization formed from there. But spirituality has always been a big, a big part of FEW, you know, where traditional women whenever there would be like, a conference or a workshop, traditional women would burn incense, and they would chant before the workshop started, you know, to give light to the workshop, you know, and for me, that is the biggest thing that I hold on to the, on to the memory of FEW because, like, they did things that they wanted to do.

[Zoom audio distorts] They [Zoom audio inaudible] ... were freeing for them, this conference area and there's drums and they, you know, like some form of... not initiation but like a let's

have a great time here, let's learn, let's be with each other you know, so there was a lot of oneness with FEW back in the day, and I really appreciated that.

KJ: Is it not like that now?

(1:38:030 JM: Well, uh, not that it's not like that. I think people have different beliefs now.

So, we don't necessarily... so it's different now because we do have healing sessions. So, we don't start the conference with like a traditional healer now. We're not sure the comfortability of people with traditional healers, or whatever, you know, so we can't really assume, you know. So, what we do is,

whoever wants to do whatever they want to do in the space before the session, they can do it. If you want to pray, you can pray, if you want to... burp, like... a sangoma, you can do that. If you want to burn incense, and people are not affected by it, you can do that. But we leave it to people because we don't want to impose on people as well, you know, but we have the healing session because I think, besides how important it is for me, I just think that activists go through so much, and we don't talk about it, you know. And so the healing space for me, which I'm always just advocating for, is very important because then people can then connect with themselves and not the work and then connect with the work, you know. So when you connect with yourself, the work becomes slightly easier, not that it becomes easy, easy, but you've connected with yourself, you've been in touch with yourself, you know, you're not neglecting self for hard work, you know. So, yeah.

KJ: Okay. Um, and future goals that you would like FEW to achieve within the organization.

(1:40:04) JM: So, for me, I think future goals looks like... one for, for further stuff, right, but for us to get funding for the work that we want to do moving forward. So, the future goals

for FEW look like going provincial, right. So, we're currently just working in like three provinces. And that has been a big step also, because we were, we were working in Gauteng only. And now, we know that the work that we're doing is so important, right? Like Limpopo, for example, they needed us to come through for them. Kroonstad, Free State, you know. So the work that we're doing is important, and people see the work that we're doing. And now what we want to do is, be in all the nine provinces, you know, make sure that people understand the criminal justice system. Because it's so important, like, I'm just imagining a rural area, not even a township, a rural area in KwaZulu Natal where it's just predominantly patriarchs and, and misogynists. How does one express their sexuality? And how does one report a case of hate crime? You know, I mean, it's simply not a thing, right? Like, and people go through these things, you know, people are raped day in and day out, and they can't report these cases, you know? Yeah, I think I'm always saying that being a black woman in South Africa, it's an extreme sport, you know. Being black and queer, wow. I don't know what that is. That's like death row, you know. So, I'm just imagining in KwaZulu Natal, in a rural, **rural** area, where it's still where patriarchy reigns, if a black queer person is, is, is out there, like, do they know what sexual orientation and gender identity is? Do they know about their sexualities? You know, do they know about their characteristics, or gender identities? You know. So we really want to go into all the nine provinces and go into these rural areas where no one has set foot in, you know, to have conversations with people that could possibly identify as queer, you know, and give them tools, you know, to work with, you know. Last year we were doing- no, in 2018 we were doing interviews around COVID, and how COVID has affected black queer bodies. And we went to KwaZulu Natal, like we went to KwaZulu Natal, and people were, like, people don't know. So, there was one person that

identified not, not- So when we left the space, they identified as trans. But they didn't, they didn't know that you know... [Zoom audio inaudible].

KJ: Oh, I think you've muted yourself.

(1:43:33) JM: So they didn't know that they were, were trans until we explained it to them, you know, and that, for me was so sad, because, like, people need to know these things, you know, people go around with, I don't know, like different characteristics, or identifying differently because of mainstream media, you know, mainstream media just gives us the bare minimum, do you get what I mean? So people need to proper, **proper** know what the criminal justice system is. And people need to know about their sexualities, their identities and characteristics, you know, and people don't in these rural areas, and we were so shocked. People did not know what, what criminal justice system is, people did not know how to report a case, let alone a police station in their area, you know? Because they're scared of the community that they're in, you know, the people live a very harsh life out there. And we want to go into these spaces and make and teach people about their sexual orientation or gender identity or characteristics, and about the criminal justice system in South Africa and about patriarchy and about misogyny, you know, because we've done the work in Joburg and we really want to spread it out.

KJ: Yeah so go national basically.

JM: Yes, that's what we want to do.

KJ: Okay.

1:45:08 Gay Rights Movement in the 1990s

KJ: Um, when it comes to the gay rights movement in the 1990s, do you feel that there were any particular issues surrounding women that weren't tackled at the time?

(1:45:27) JM: I think, I think in the early 90s, I think the one person that made sure that lesbian is on everyone's lips was Beverly Ditsie, you know, and, but we- Well, I was born in 1991, I can't say we never heard of it, but like, it was never spoken about, right. Like, lesbians were not spoken about, you know, it was such a taboo within the communities, until the likes of Bev spoke out. But in black communities, it continued to be taboo, and it continued to be silenced because uh-uh, this thing does not exist. This is, this is unAfrican. As much as there were a lot of lesbians within the townships- I'm just remembering a story that my mother told me about lesbians in the townships, butch lesbians, that were wearing pants and T shirts and caps, you know. And those were the untouchables, you know, because they could fight for themselves and whatever. But I'm imagining now, how, how, what a difficult life they had to live, because the community was, was, was, was not for gay people back then. I mean, even now, I mean, a lot of, a lot of communities in the township, they're, they're not necessarily agreeing to us, existing the way we exist, you know, there's always like a backlash, you know. So, I think Bev kind of paved the way as much as they got a lot of backlash as well with the UN, you know. So there was never really a conversation, you know, back then and when Bev started the conversation, I think mainstream kind of took that and a lot of activists started, started organizing, you know, yeah, but I think before that, I think it was just all about the gays, gay this, gay that. Like lesbians were not necessarily a thing. Yeah.

KJ: Okay. Um, in what ways do you feel that the South African legislation fails women, particularly queer women of colour?

JM: Pardon?

KJ: In what ways do you feel that the South African legislation fails women, especially queer woman of colour?

(1:48:24) JM: I think in the government's eye, we don't exist, right. Because as much as we've got the entities and the provincial task teams, I think it's still very difficult for black women to, to, to exist in spaces of government, right. But just to also exist, just to exist, you know. I think a lot of people think we take up space as black, queer women, or black queer bodies, because we're always talking about queer rights, queer this, queer that, you know, and for me, I just feel like the government feels like we should be thankful, thankful for what we have in the Constitution that talks about LGBTI, which is barely nothing, to be honest. It's just that we don't have things like the penal code or the death sentence or things like that. We don't have that in South Africa. But I mean, they give us the bare minimum and they feel like we should be thankful for that, which is nonsense, because on the ground, black lesbian women are being killed, left, right and centre. Last year alone, a lot of queer bodies, you know, like, we bore the brunt last year, you know, and the government could only speak about it, when he addresses the nation which he then talks about the level, the levels and the COVID, whatever. And we were so shocked. And we wrote to, to the President, when, when, when these when these hate crimes started happening, you know, and we never got any response back from the President about the deaths that, that we are facing as a queer community, you know, so it wasn't really that important to him, it has never been important. And I just feel like the fluff of it all. Like, we are given fluff, like, bare minimum, and then we're given fluff to just to get rid of us, you know. And so, the government is, I don't know, it's, yeah, I think it's the worst perpetrator of, of the violence that we face in this country.

Whether we are black women, or black queer women, like the government is always taking the perpetrators side, all the time, our criminal justice system is so fucked up, particularly when it comes to, to black queer bodies, you know, black queer bodies are treated like shit in police stations. So yeah, like, we literally don't have a leg to stand on, because we're on our own. You know, we don't have backing from government. And yet, we should be grateful for what the government has given us, which is the bare minimum, which does not even talk about LGBTI. You know, the Constitution does not necessarily talk about LGBTI. The section just talks about us living freely of our sexual orientations. And it's milk and honey, when you read it, if you're in a different country, like Angola or something, you know, and a lot of, a lot of people from these different countries, when we're in conference together, when they see South Africans, they're just like, Oh, my God, I wish I can move to South Africa. It's milk and honey in South Africa. And I'm just like, it really isn't, you know, because we still face a lot of deaths of black queer bodies, you know. Imagine if you were to move here as a migrant, that would be 10 times worse, you know? So, it's, yeah, it's bad. So, the government does not give two shits about black queer bodies, unfortunately.

1:52:45 Racism in the LGBTQ Movement

KJ: Um, have you experienced any racism from LGBTQ organizations or within the movement?

(1:53:04) JM: Oh, um, I don't know, it could have been subtle. Yeah, the degrees thing that I talked about earlier on, I think that could also kind of, uhm, it kind of ties into it, you know? It also is very subtle. Yeah, I think we just, we just tried to do the work and that's it and not focus much on other things. But I think, yeah, we have.

KJ: Uhm, has FEW, like, received any backlash for focusing solely on black queer bodies?

(1:53:52) JM: Yes, we have received backlash. We received backlash from trans-led organizations, for not including trans women. And our stance has always been that, because we don't... we're not like... we're not learned much on trans issues, as much as we know of trans issues, but we're not necessarily experts on trans issues. You know, we are experts in black lesbian issues, because we've done a lot of work in townships with black lesbians, you know, but with trans people, we have not necessarily done that. We know of an organization that does a lot of trans work, you know, so we can't say for example, we wouldn't be able to assist a trans man for example, with hormones, you know. We wouldn't know which, which-, where they can get their hormone replacement therapy, you know. And so, we've, we've predominantly work on black lesbians. So, we don't know much about trans or intersex. So, we just kind of refer a person to the organizations that we know do a lot of work around trans and intersex bodies, you know, but we've received a lot of backlash, about not including, including trans folk and intersex folk in the work that we're doing. But as an organization, as we're saying, we're black lesbian, organization, LBQ, and there are just some things we can't take on. Like, we are a staff of three people. So, like, trans would probably need for us to do a lot of, a lot of proper research around it. And if you don't identify as trans as well, it becomes slightly difficult, you know, not that we can't do it, but like, I think it's best that there are people that are doing it. And yeah.

KJ: Mmm, like, to a certain degree, it's like your own experience that you're using.

JM: Yes. Yes.

KJ: Do you think that maybe in the future, FEW would take on trans individuals?

(1:56:31) JM: Yes, we spoken about it at length in our strat plan, in our strat plan, when we've got the capacity, you know, trans women that identify as lesbian, right, like, a part of

the work that we're doing, you know, and yeah, we have spoken about it. So yeah, we're having another strat plan in a couple of weeks. And yeah, we'll further talk about it.

1:57:09 Pride

KJ: And what are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from being a political platform, to address- for women to speak on LGBTQ issues?

(157:26) JM: So, Pride over the years, So, I know of one Pride, the main Pride that has always just been about partying and all of that, and when FEW kind of took up space and had a township pride, for me, it talks a lot to the way we want to position ourselves as, as, as black queer bodies, right? So, when, when FEW started the first Soweto Pride, it was to also- one, it addressed our existence as black queer bodies in the township, right and our lived realities, right. So it addressed that and it also addressed what is this... So the, the Main Pride would be like, in a fancy space and a fancy place, you know, with pink money, and, and all of those things, and black queer bodies could not necessarily afford drinks that were inside the Main Pride, you know, and they created their own space outside until one day we were kicked and beaten up at a Pride by white gay men, for, for, for wanting to have a moment of silence for black lesbian women that that were killed. And this was in 2012 if I'm not mistaken. Yeah, yeah, I think 2012 Yeah. We were beaten up by white gay men in Rosebank at a Joburg Pride for not participating, for- So, so they had a float, what did they call it? A parade. And for us a march has always been important for people to see that we exist as black queer bodies, and we wanted to have a moment of silence. We had duffel bags-, not duffel bags. What do you call it? Bean bags made out of human, human, human shape. And we just wanted to have a moment of silence at some intersection for black lesbians that had been killed previously and we were met with white gay men wanting to

flaunt their tutus and this for them was not important. So, we were doing this with One in Nine. So actually, FEW was not necessarily part of it. No, they were, but the action of it, I was part of it and I was not part of FEW back then. And I was slapped by a white gay man. My other colleagues were beaten up, but you must, you must check out One In Nine. That story is- could be on the One In Nine website, you know. So, we got backlash for that. And that's when Soweto Pride kind of not, not, not that it started then. But a lot of people then started kind of resonating with Soweto Pride much more, because it's a free pride, number one, people can come in with their own drinks, but also because there's a political program, you know, in the beginning of the day where we march, you know, and that for us, it's to celebrate our queer identities in the communities we exist in. So, we, we couldn't necessarily go to Rosebank and celebrate our queer identities, because that's in the north, it's high walls, no one can see what we're doing, you know. And it's, the challenges are way different in the north than in Soweto, for example, you know, if I'm a black lesbian in Soweto, and I go into a police station and report a hate crime, either I've been raped, or my friend has been killed, because she identified as queer, that's very different, you know. And Soweto they laugh at you for being gay, in a police station, they call literally everyone to come in here that yoh look, here is a *stabane* in our midst, and all of those things. In the North it's different, you know, you get different treatment, if you're white, and you are queer as well, you know, you get a very different treatment as opposed to a black person in the township, where there's a lot of personal beliefs that people take into their workspaces. You know, if they don't believe that queers exist, it's a big thing, it's a problem, they can't necessarily be talking to a gay person, and you know, what you're doing is wrong, you will go to hell, you know. People bring in a lot of their, their personal things to work, you know. So yeah, so it also was not a safe space for black, for black queer people, from my point of view,

because I, in that moment, I did not feel safe. Because we were also outside of the barricaded lines of the Pride, you know, we had to create our own kind of party on the outside. And the parade does not make sense for me as Jade. Because it march makes much more sense because I'm celebrating my queer identity. And, like, I remember when I attended my first Pride, one of our neighbours where I grew up, because we had it in White City, and I grew up in White City, one of our neighbours, you know, that I knew, came and was questioning and was asking, what is this rainbow flag? What is happening? What are you guys doing? what are you marching for? Are you marching for electricity? What are you doing? you know, and I got to explain what we're doing to her, you know, because, like, she knows me, but she also know, wants to know what's going on, should I be part of the march, and she joined in the march, you know, and that was beautiful, because it meant that she's accepting of LGBTI people within the community, you know. As much as a lot of people will not, but there is a percentage that will come and listen, you know, and be a part of the pride, you know. So, for us, well, personally, for me, I think the political element of pride has been lost throughout the years, right? And FEW has kept that, you know, because, for us, as I'm saying, celebrating our queer identities, from where we come from, is so much important, you know, for our families to see that black queer people can be gay and are gay. Not can be, that they are gay, you know, because a lot of our, our communities think that this thing is foreign, you know. It's a white thing, and we're just like, Guys, come on, calm down. You know, they think it's a Western culture, we are adopting Western cultures, you know. How, how are you going to procreate if you're with another woman does not make sense to them. And this has been such an important space, where we celebrate our queer identities in these communities, and we make sure that we are there to have fun as black queer bodies, because that's probably the only time we can go out and have fun without I don't know,

without discrimination, for lack of a better word, you know. Yeah. So, I think the political, the political element of pride has been lost somewhat, because people are focusing on having fun. And I understand that, like, we've gone through the most as, as a queer community over the years, you know, and a lot of people have been doing the work, and it gets to a point where can we just let our hair down and just party, you know. But unfortunately, we can't necessarily just have that, you know, we can't just have a Pride, where we are just having a party and a jol, you know, there has to be some form of politics that comes with it because when we are all gathered, and this rainbow, people also need to understand what this means and what it looks like, you know?

KJ: Yeah. And then last question, in your opinion, what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

(2:06:41) JM: I really think that we need to stop working in silos, right. So there are a lot of internal stuff that goes on within the queer community itself, you know, and I think if, if we do away with, with, with the negative thoughts of other people, I guess, or other organizations, I guess, and the belittling of other organizations, does not make sense for me, you know. We need to be working towards the same goal, right. And if we're always working in silos, it's gonna take us a long time, it's really going to take us forever, to get to where we want to be as a community, you know, as much as we are mentioned slightly in the Constitution, that is not enough, you know, the groundwork needs to happen as well, you know. It can't be that last year alone, more than 150 people were killed, and those were just hate crimes, you know, these people are killed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, you know, and it can't be that we are still working in silos, or we want to take the rap, or we want to be the famous organization. That is not... I don't know, that does not

make sense to me. So, working together is always like a pivotal point for me and a point where I just feel like for us to get to where we want to, because there's still a very long way. And I'm sure when Bev was, was, was making her speech in Beijing many years ago she was probably like, there's still a lot of work that needs to be done amidst the Constitution being in place, but she said, a lot of work needs to be done. Here we are, many years later, 2022 a lot of work still needs to be done. You know, last year, we had an entire I don't know, like, it was a pandemic on its own where queer bodies were just being killed left, right and centre and we're still kind of picking up from, from that, you know. In the new year, already, we've heard of two cases of queer people that have been killed, you know, is 2022 a repetition, you know, so the limelight wanting to have the limelight as a single organization does not make sense to me. Working together is always best because we bring in different ideas onto the table, you know, and we table them to the parliament. And who knows, I know that the Hate Crimes And Hate Speech Bill has **been** sitting in a desk in Parliament, somewhere- it probably burnt down when the parliament burnt down [chuckles]. So, I don't know. You know, we do a lot of work around that, you know. And there's a lot of work that needs to continuously happen. And together, not working in silos. You know, yeah.

KJ: Okay! That's all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

JM: No, no, I think I'm good. Thank you.

KJ: Thank you so much. I really, really appreciate it and also taking like two hours of your time to sit through this.

JM: Thank you so much.

KJ: Thank you! If you know of anyone else who would be interested in being interviewed, please let me know or even like pass on my number. I don't mind. Yeah.

JM: Okay. I'll do that.

KJ: Thank you so much.

JM: I'll do it.

KJ: Thank you.

JM: Thank you. Bye!

KJ: Bye!

[Zoom meeting ends at 02:10:47]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 2 hours 10 minutes 47 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form.

Interview 6: Nikita Ramkissoo

Name of the Interviewee: RAMKISSOON, Nikita [NR]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

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Number of Tapes/Recordings: 3

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

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Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:01:12 NR joins Zoom meeting]

[An audio issue on KJ's side during the meeting initially, but meeting recording audio works fine]

NR: Hello!

KJ: Hi Nikita!

NR: How are you?

KJ: I'm good, thanks. Can you hear me?

NR: Yes, I can.

KJ: I can't seem to be able to hear you unfortunately.

NR: We have load shedding so I'm on mobile. Let see if I can do this. Is that better? Still nothing?

KJ: No, I can't seem to hear you. Uhm...

NR: [sighs] Oh dear.

KJ: Oh, I can hear you now!

NR: Oh, okay. That's weird [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] Okay, yeah, no, I can definitely hear you now. Sorry about that. Hi, how are you doing?

NR: All right, how are you?

KJ: I'm good, thank you. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my master's project. I really appreciate it.

NR: No worries.

KJ: Thanks for reaching out. I can talk a bit more about it if that's okay with you?

NR: Mmhmm.

KJ: It's basically... I'm looking at the intersections between queer women's resistance and their social worlds between 1980 to 2010. Specifically, because when you look at queer history, which is almost like never looked at, but it always is focused on men, and that focus is always more to do with like, the legal stuff as well and less about, you know, what were women's issues at the time? You know, what were the things that women were dealing with? And how did they, how did they navigate their world as queer women? Right. So yeah,

that's just a bit about it. So, basically, we're gonna do this interview, I sent you the interview questions for you to browse through. I also sent the release form, which thank you for filling that out. That's just to say that I can use the interview- that you give consent for me to use the interview in my research, but also, just so you know, for peace of mind, if there's anything you want me to like, leave out, if you want to redact anything, if you want the interview to be anonymous, you just let me know, either now or later on, whenever you feel like it, and I can always change things around. But basically, after the, after this interview, I'll start transcribing it, uhm transcribing everything, which might take a while [laughs], but once that's done, I'll send it to you to look through and if there's anything you want me to edit out, or you know whatever, change around then that's fine, yeah.

NR: Cool. I generally work in Google Docs, so.

KJ: Oh, okay.

NR: Because I don't have- I'm not I'm not paying for Microsoft Word [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] No, that's understandable. Luckily, for me, it comes with being a university student.

NR: True, true. Yeah. No, I understand. I did my masters back in 2006.

KJ: Oh, okay, what did you do your masters?

NR: In Gender Studies.

KJ: In Gender Studies? Nice. What was your topic?

NR: It was, uhm, media representation of Indian woman in popular media.

KJ: Okay, that's very interesting. Where did you do it?

NR: At UKZN.

KJ: At UKZN? I'm originally a UKZN baby too.

NR: [laughs] Yeah. No, I miss academia. I'm actually trying to get back into it.

KJ: You should. I think it's better now than like, the past two years trying to be an academic.

It's been really, really difficult. This is like, probably the best time to try and get back into it.

NR: Yeah, I just need to try and get funding. That's the only thing.

KJ: Yeah. But I feel like if you do go the Gender Studies route finding is quite easy.

NR: Yeah. Especially NRF.

KJ: Yeah. They love, they love all of that kind of stuff.

NR: Yeah, they do.

KJ: Okay. Are you ready to start the interview?

NR: Yes.

KJ: Cool. So just for the record, please. Could you state your full name, your age, preferred pronouns and sexual orientation?

NR: My name is Nikita, Ramkissoon. I'm 38 years old. My pronouns are she/they and I am bisexual.

KJ: Okay, cool. Thank you.

00:06:53 Family Background

KJ: So, we're just going to start with a bit of family background, and then continuing as it goes. Uhm, where did you grow up?

(00:07:01) NR: I grew up in Durban, and in a little Indian township called Merebank. And then when I was quite young, we moved to a predominantly white area called Montclair. And, yeah, so I grew up between the two, I was still schooling in Merebank, and my family was mostly still there.

KJ: And what was the difference in the communities between those two areas?

(00:07:26) NR: I never realized it then, but I do realize that now that the differences between those two communities is that Merebank was very family oriented, and community oriented and we would always be there for each other, but it was also quite a toxic environment. So like, people protecting abusers, and people kind of- this weird expectation of Indianness in a very multicultural and a changing society. So we were expected to just be, uhm, completely insular. And so when I came home with friends of all colours, they would be like, Oh, what are you doing? But like the temples and the churches, and the institutions would protect people who are toxic. And then in the white area, it was very much I had to assimilate or be ignored or shunned. And a very similar sense of conservatism but practiced in a very different way. Yeah, so highly conservative, both areas.

KJ: Would you say that uhm, that was just like the community at large? Or would you also experience it with like your neighbours?

(00:08:55) NR: Um, it would be with neighbours until like, you kind of got to know everyone. I'll tell you a story about one of our neighbours that, uhm, their kid was, and this is quite triggering, the kid was cycling around the pool on the tricycle and fell in and they refused to put the child into my mother's car because she's brown, to take the child to the hospital, and the child died.

KJ: Oh, my word. Wow. That's awful. Jeez. And so was there any other kind of like, things that you picked up on in the community, that- differences or similarities?

(00:09:41) NR: Similarities was definitely in the conservative nature of South Africa at the time. I mean, we're still a very conservative country and very Christian, whereas the Indian township was more Hindu and still very much hinged on tradition. But the major differences was that I could be myself less around white people. Yeah, like, at least in the Indian area, I could tell my closest friends that, you know, this is how I feel about somebody or this is how I feel about something. I came out to my friends before I came out to my family.

00:10:27 Coming Out & More on Family Background

KJ: Okay, how did they take that?

(00:10:31) NR: Oh, my friends, my closest friends were chilled, they were like, oh, yeah, we kind of knew, but don't they always? Yeah. My parents are so, so fine with it. They're like, Oh, okay, whatever.

KJ: Really?

NR: [chuckles] Yeah.

KJ: Okay. That's nice. Um, what's, what was your relationship with your parents growing up like?

(00:10:58) NR: Well, my family's background is that my mom's a teacher, and my dad's an engineer. Both of them, uhm, formally educated and educated in the larger sense of the word. But they were also activists. They were anti-apartheid activists. So I grew up in a struggle household constantly with literature about struggle, and communism and, and, and. So I, I tell my friends, this story that was quite funny on my crown birthday, my mom gave

me a copy of the Communist Manifesto as my gift [chuckles]. So my family was very different to the rest of the community. And a lot of the time, we were shunned for it. Because, oh, we need to put our heads down and just work hard, and just get by and not create any waves and we'll be okay. That was the general Indian mindset of the time. But my parents were like, Nope, this won't do and they fought.

KJ: Nice, good for them.

NR: So I was raised in that kind of, yeah, environment.

KJ: So did it heavily affect your relationship with like, your neighbours and the general community? Or was it more just kind of like, Oh, they're like that, but we'll still, you know, like, associate with them.

(00:12:24) NR: A lot of the community that we grew up in, they were younger than my parents, but they were activists and a really strong activism, kind of vibe in the community. But when my parents were in their teens, it wasn't so, uh, pronounced. And so my parents were the eldest of the activists in their area. And it was when, it's when they took up the mantle, that younger activists started coming up and saying, Oh, these people are doing something amazing let me join them.

KJ: Mmm, cool. And so other than that, what were the conditions like in your household growing up?

(00:13:10) NR: From what I can remember, being very young, we were quite poor. But then, my dad, because he was working smart, we managed to kind of pull ourselves out of- it wasn't abject poverty. But it was more like, we couldn't afford the nice things. And then eventually, my parents got a car between them. And then my mom got her own car. And

then, you know, we managed to, to buy a house. And so it was kind of like, that gradual build-up of individual wealth. And it was more for our security than just frivolous spending. We did grow up financially kind of secure, even though it was poor. But one, one of the things that I remember is that the one of the biggest challenges was that the entire community was poor. And so when they saw a family come up, it was oh, these people think that they're better than us and they owe us things and, and, and, you know. And always try to drag you down. Like, I was one of the first people from my group of friends to be accepted at university. And they're like, Oh, you think you're better than us? kind of thing.

KJ: And uhm, that was in Merebank?

NR: Yeah.

KJ: And in Montclair?

(00:14:51) NR: In Montclair, I only really had one friend. And she now lives in Scotland.

KJ: Oh! Good for her.

NR: Yeah.

KJ: And so who else was in your household growing up with you?

(00:15:11) NR: It was my parents, my sister and our domestic worker, our full-time domestic worker. KJ: Okay.

NR: And her children every now and then.

KJ: Okay, okay. And your extended family? Were they living close by or?

NR: In Merebank, yes, they were literally around the corner.

KJ: Okay.

(00:15:32) NR: My mom has a huge family, we didn't really talk to my dad's family that much, they were misers and money obsessed and all of those things. Didn't really like my grandfather that much. But my mom's family are very, very close. We still are.

KJ: And so, would you say that you're quite close to your parents then and now?

NR: Mmhmm.

KJ: So there was never really like a disconnect?

NR: I'm in their house right now [laughs].

KJ: Oh, okay, um, so no disconnect at any points between them, cool. And then-

00:16:14 Mental Illness & Abuse

NR: I suffer from a mental illness, I, I suffer from DID & bipolar. So there was kind of a disconnect at some point. But it was more to do with the illness and the fact that they didn't know how to deal with it because I had severe childhood trauma. And that's why I say the churches defended abusers because they defended my abuser.

KJ: I'm so sorry to hear that. I'm really sorry to hear that. Do you want to talk about it, we can move on if you don't?

(00:16:47) NR: I don't mind. Well, my story is quite well known in terms of the gender-based violence kind of circles. There was a family friend, and between the ages of four and nine. Under the guise of- he was a comrade. He was one of my parents friends. So under the guise of babysitting and taking care of the kids, while my parents were busy with meetings and things like that, that's when... he saw opportunity, yeah.

KJ: So sorry to hear that.

NR: Thanks. I'm healing. It's a lifelong process.

KJ: Yeah. Completely understand. Unfortunately, it's not something that's paid a lot of attention to in South Africa.

NR: Mmm.

00:17:40 Healing Journey and Therapy

KJ: Um, how, how are you going about your healing process, if you don't mind me asking?

(00:17:46) NR: I'm going through a strict CBT, DBT and EMDR kind of program.

KJ: Okay, yeah.

(00:17:59) NR: And I write a lot and a yell a lot [laughs] about people on the internet.

KJ: Any other self-care things that you like to do?

(00:18:07) NR: Oh, I don't sleep. I just work. I always tell people, like my form of self-care is that I just bury myself in work. And they're like, No, that's not how it works.

KJ: [laughs]

00:18:20 Coming to Terms with Sexual Orientation

KJ: Um, okay. Um, so, when did you realize that you were not heterosexual?

(00:18:29) NR: I think I've always known. Uhm... so, I always say that I fully realized it when I was 13, when I really fell for this girl in school, named Caryn. Unfortunate name, I know. She and I are still friends. But she was very straight and I was very heartbroken. But I think I knew before then when I would look at the girls in school and be like, Oh, she's really, really

pretty, or uh listening to one of the girls talking and being like, Wow, I love her mind. And my first crush was a literary crush. And it was- and I know that this is going to be held against me at some point, if I ever make a career as a writer. I fell in love with Virginia Woolf's words and so, when I started reading Virginia Woolf, I was in, I was in primary school. I could read well before school began because I mean I had a teacher as a mum [chuckles]. So I fell in love with literature very, very young. But then I remember that first crush being Virginia Woolf as a writer. But uh, yeah, I always just knew that there's something different here. But then I also liked boys and I was like, Wait, this is kinda strange, a weird feeling, yeah.

KJ: Okay. And so when did you kind of like put a label on yourself so to speak.

(00:20:34) NR: On myself, when I was about 13 and I came out to my friends when I was 15.

KJ: 15?

NR: Mmhmm.

KJ: And then to your family?

(00:20:46) NR: When I first started dating a girl, in late high school. Her name was Mbali and we weren't really dating. It was more like we would just go to the, to the mall and hold hands and have ice cream [chuckles]. That was the extent of our relationship. We would just like sit and talk about books. But I remembered I really liked this girl. And when I wanted to go to the matric dance with her, that was when I came up to my parents properly.

KJ: And they were fine, you said?

(00:21:27) NR: They were perfectly fine. They said, spare yourself the pain and go with Greg, Greg, who's my best friend.

KJ: That's so sweet. And your larger family. Are you out to them?

(00:21:42) NR: Not really. Cousins know. My closest cousins know. I never felt the need to come out to them. Yeah, because I knew certain cousins and certain family members would be very adamantly against it. And I knew that some would be supportive. So when they find out, they find out that was my entire thing. And if they don't, then they don't know me well enough. Evidently [laughs].

KJ: Um, and so you were still commuting between Montclair and Merebank? Or had you started school somewhere else?

(00:22:33) NR: Yes I did. I went to the Christian School in our area in Montclair for two years and I was heavily bullied and then I got a scholarship to go to Crawford so that was near UKZN.

KJ: Nice. And anyone from your communities have they found out that you had come out?

(00:22:58) NR: A few people had and among my parents friends they were very supportive. Uhm, the older generation they kind of chose to ignore it. And when- it was harder for me to speak about the abuse that it was to speak about my sexuality. Yeah.

KJ: Why do you think that was?

(00:23:26) NR: And I'm just thinking why? Because I've actually never asked myself that question. I think it is because it was one of their friends. That it was somebody very respected in the community and quite close to the family. But also, I've always been that kind of person if you don't like me, you don't like me, you hurt my people and I will end you.

And so if anybody ever came after my parents about not protecting me from this man, I would be at their throats in a heartbeat. So it was a lot- There was, there was more at stake for me speaking about the abuse, yeah.

KJ: Uhm and... sorry. Do you think that like your parents reaction and like some of their like friends was reaction, kind of... Okay, sorry let me put it this way instead. What do you think like, in terms of like Merebank and Montclair, what do you think like the overall view on homosexuality is and if someone had found out, how do you think that they would have reacted?

(00:25:06) NR: Well, you see, I know that I'm the outlier because of my family. If the rest of the community did find out, when I was younger, I would have been completely ostracized. In both areas. Even telling somebody in school that I have a crush on, this girl was like, whoa. I never even told her [laughs]. I knew that it would have been received badly. Because it's so conservative. Incredibly religious. Yeah. And that was the time as well, because this was the 90s. Yes. I mean, apartheid was barely over.

KJ: Yeah. Sorry about my cat.

NR: No, don't, don't apologize for, for the thing that owns you [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] Continue. Sorry about that.

(00:26:14) NR: And so I think if the larger community did find out then, it would have been quite a different story. Right. But I was very lucky that my family protected me. From whatever repercussions there were going to be. And I still have people being like, oh, yeah, you were, you were very queer back then. And now you're married to a man. So you're straight now? No, no, doesn't mean I'm straight dammit!

KJ: Yeah... Sorry, what did I want to say? It just slipped my mind. Let me just move on another thing and hopefully it'll come back.

00:27:01 Dating Women

KJ: When did you stop feeling comfortable dating other woman? Was it Mbali, or before that?

(00:27:10) NR: I was comfortable with Mbali in front of my closest people. But I was 20 before I started publicly dating women.

KJ: Okay, okay. Why do you think that is?

(00:27:24) NR: Well, it was kind of a conscious decision on my part not to date when I was in undergrad. And I was like, Okay, I'm just gonna focus on my studies, and I want to have fun, and I'm gonna go to parties, and I'm gonna get drunk, and I'm gonna hook up with whoever I want. But I'm not going to actually get serious with anybody. And then I met Leila. And then all of that went to shit. Because I completely fell head over heels in love with this woman. And I was like, if people see me kissing you in public, I don't give a shit [chuckles]. So it was more about the confidence that she gave me and the confidence that I had at the time and circumstance. But it was also I knew that Durban being that small town mentality that somebody was going to see us holding hands in the shopping mall. Somebody is going to see us holding hands on the beach. And phone my parents and say, Oh my goodness, have you seen your daughter? It happened once or twice. And my mom was like, It's none of your business. My dad, his entire thing was to respond with the pun. With Oh, she can't be dating somebody, she's all 'bi' herself.

KJ: [laughs] Dad jokes.

NR: [groans]

KJ: Oh, no, that's too funny [crashing sound] Sorry, my dog. Sorry, sorry.

NR: Oh, animals. They're the most entertaining thing [laughs].

KJ: He's a puppy still [laughs].

NR: Oh, yeah. We have-, we had Labradors and up until they were 15 they were still puppies [laughs]. I'm going to change location because I need [Zoom audio inaudible]

KJ: No problem. So you said... sorry, I'm very bad at math, but like, around like, what year was it when you were in your like early teens?

(00:29:52) NR: I was... Okay, I was 13 in 1997.

KJ: Okay, okay. So like the, the legislation and stuff had just passed and stuff.

NR: Just. And just barely and the attitudes have not changed yet.

KJ: Right. So what was that like? When you-

(00:30:16) NR: When homosexuality was decriminalised in '96. I remember feeling like this is vindication. This is a step forward in terms of human rights. And my family knew people like the Kathradas and the Cachalias and Arthur Chaskalson; people who were writing the constitution, so. It was that huge validation of these are amazing people who are doing amazing things. And they are validating my existence. And it doesn't mean- it means that I no longer have to feel ashamed of who I am. And I think that's kind of what prompted me to be honest about my feelings for Caryn [chuckles].

00:31:08 Feelings of Shame

KJ: Did, did you feel ashamed?

(00:31:12) NR: A little bit. When I was a lot younger, I was like- apparently, these are not natural feelings. And people are saying that, you know, gay is not okay. The people in my class were saying- I had a very flamboyantly gay piano teacher. Not only was he gay, he was in a relationship with a person of another race. So he could have been executed not just for homosexuality, but under the Immorality Act. And so I think having him as a role model really helped. But when I would tell people about this beautifully, wonderfully flamboyantly gay piano teacher that I had, there would be like ew, that's gross. And that's an abomination, that's against God, you know. So yeah.

00:32:11 Family Reaction Continued & Experiences of Discrimination

KJ: And so, how did your parents react when you first started dating women?

(00:32:18) NR: My mom was concerned for my safety, more than anything. And my dad doesn't really speak about emotions much. I mean, typical Indian dad. But I think he was concerned as well. But my parents wanted nothing more than my happiness. And they would be like- Oh, my mom's entire thing was, whoever you marry, as long as you have a Hindu wedding, that is fine [chuckles]. Even though my family is so atheist, that is one of the things that they kind of hold on to, yeah.

KJ: And did you have any, like male relationships prior to your female relationships?

(00:33:07) NR: Yes, I did. I dated in high school. I dated two boys in high school. And then after that, I was like, No, I don't want relationships. They're complicated.

KJ: And do you think that there was a difference in the way that your family treated your male partners versus your female partners?

(00:33:32) NR: There was definitely more acceptance among my friends. When I had boyfriends as opposed to girlfriends, but it was subtle. The differences were very subtle. It was always like, oh, that's your *girlfriend*, you know?

KJ: So overall, still just very supportive?

(00:33:56) NR: But in the larger community, when I was out, there was a very big difference. Like, people would gawk, people would point and stare. And people wouldn't serve us at restaurants.

KJ: Really?

NR: Yeah.

KJ: And this is now like, [Zoom audio distorts] what? Early 2000s?

(00:34:24) NR: Yeah, I went in there holding her hand and they would be like, Oh, we don't sell to queers.

KJ: Really?

(00:34:33) NR: Straight up, we don't sell to queers.

KJ: And these like, like... what kind of restaurants were they? Just like... like, I don't know.

(00:34:48) NR: I don't know if you remember Musgrave Center?

KJ: Yes.

NR: Circus Circus. One of those places.

KJ: Really? Wow.

NR: Yeah.

KJ: Wow like Circus Circus kind of needs people coming [laughs]

NR: [laughs] They're dying a slow and painful death.

KJ: Yeah, wow, that's crazy [Zoom audio distorts] ... with like your female relationships.

(00:35:17) NR: I feel like in public, people were still very much attuned to this idea that queer relationships were... not, were not normal. And people would sometimes feel the need to- and I'm a very loud person, I make my opinions known wherever I go. And so I would unashamedly hold hands with my girlfriends. And, yeah, had some acquaintances say, Oh, you're just a summer lesbian, you know?

KJ: Wow.

(00:35:55) NR: Yeah and- oh, the electricity is out. Uhm, but by and large, well, my close knit community was supportive. The other people in my life, like, on the periphery, would very much treat me very differently. They would be like, you know, there's uh- you just need to find Jesus. Or you just need to go to temple or you're confused, you're, you're finding yourself, and you're just experimenting. Which was painful to hear. But I learned to take it on the chin. And be like, I know myself, I know, my identity, and I know who I am. And just kind of understand that they're coming from a place of ignorance. And that's when I kind of learned to meet their hostility with compassion.

KJ: Right.

(00:37:04) NR: And I think that that was a very important turning point in my relationship with my own bisexuality is that when you meet people's hostility with compassion, you are taking power back, firstly. And secondly, you're not giving credence to their hatred. And that's something that my mom always taught me. You turn the other cheek.

KJ: Mmm. Okay, just quickly, I see that our meeting time is running out. I will, we'll like, finish this one and then I'll send through another link.

NR: You can join by the same link.

KJ: Oh, can you?

NR: Yeah, you can.

KJ: Okay, because I'm not-

NR: I discovered this.

KJ: [laughs]

NR: [laughs]

KJ: This is the first time; this is the first time that it's happened where I've had a one on one and it says that like there's our remaining meeting time. Normally my remaining-

NR: They've been clamping down on it recently because of the servers being clogged.

KJ: Okay, okay. Okay, that's good to know, thank you. So then we can just [Zoom audio distorts]

NR: So I'll re-join in a second.

KJ: Yeah, we can wait for it to like finish and then we can just re-join.

NR: Yeah.

KJ: Cool. Um, so let's see, um, did you ever live with another woman?

(00:38:30) NR: Um, not that I was involved with no.

KJ: Okay, okay. And are you a parent?

(00:38:38) NR: I'm not.

KJ: Okay. Okay.

NR: I don't want kids.

KJ: With this current climate, I completely understand.

NR: Yeah.

00:38:49 Persecution Based on Sexual Orientation

KJ: Okay. Are there any instances that you would like to discuss where you felt persecuted based on your sexuality?

(00:39:02) NR: I hate it when they ask in job interviews, what's your sexuality because that's nobody's business. And I feel that if it's a place where in the interview process they ask your pronouns, that that's kind of an indicator that this is an LGBT friendly space. But if they don't, and then they ask you a sexuality, you know that you're going to have a hard time. It's kind of those unwritten rules here and there that you just pick up on those social cues over time. I definitely have been in public spaces, and among certain family members who I don't talk to anymore- It's part of the reason I don't talk to my dad's family. And they were completely unsupportive. And part of my dad's family, a cousin that I was quite close to, unfortunately, she passed a while ago, she was quite supportive but the rest of her family had converted to Christianity and completely been like okay no, this person we can't actually have them around our kids.

KJ: Wow.

NR: Yeah.

KJ: Any other like instances of like, like homophobic hate crimes or anything like that, which I know is a sensitive like topic to talk about.

NR: Mmm. I wouldn't say hate crime. I would say just bigotry directed at me.

00:40:42 Coping Mechanisms

KJ: And how did you cope with those feelings?

(00:40:46) NR: [sighs] Oh, it was hard. It was very, very hard.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:40:53]

Tape 1 ends

Tape 2:

[00:00:04 NR joins Zoom meeting]

NR: Hi.

KJ: Sorry about that. Okay, we're back. Yes, sorry, you were saying?

NR: I need to reply to this message because she's been waiting for my content.

KJ: No problem. Go ahead. We can take a break if you want.

NR: No, it's alright.

(00:00:28) NR: So in terms of experiencing hate crimes, as I said, it wasn't a hate-, it wasn't hate crimes. I was never beaten up, or I was never really, like shoved around or anything like that. And I've seen friends have hate crimes perpetuated against them. And it was nothing like that. It was just hostile. And so there was this one incident where Leila and I were sitting

on the beach, and they were a whole lot of other couples around us. And the security came straight to us, and said, You can't sit here. Like, no there were a whole lot of other people sitting around here. No, it's not allowed.

KJ: And what, and what year was this?

(00:01:18) NR: Oh, this was 2004. And we knew exactly why. And so we refused to move and they wanted to escort us out. Like nope this is a public place. I'm allowed to be here with whoever I want to be with. And I mean, I had to pull rank essentially, I was like, my family is friends with the mayor of the city. Do you want me to call him? Yeah.

KJ: Wow. That's crazy and like no one did anything?

(00:01:58) NR: Nobody around us stood up for us. Not at all.

KJ: Wow, that's insane. And 2004? That's what like, at least 10 years after the Constitution has changed, right?

NR: Mmhmm.

KJ: That's insane. So how did you, how did you cope with these feelings, like bigotry and everything?

(00:02:24) NR: It was really hard at first. Because I would come home and I would cry and be like, Why do they hate us so much. But then, the more I saw it happen to people I care about, the more I realized, it's more to do about them than it is to do about me. And at the same time, I was dealing with coming to terms with the abuse and what had actually happened. And the fact that I suppressed a lot of memory, and the fact that I had DID. And so it was all intertwined with just a whole lot of trauma happening at once. And so it was more a sense of coming to terms with a traumatic existence. And a politicized existence.

Yeah. And realizing that the nature of a politicized existence means that even if I don't want to fight a certain battle, I have to. Uhm, it was kind of a turning point in how I viewed it. Like, I can't let this get personal. Even though I truly believe every single interaction is personal, you know, this is a person that you're dealing with. If anything, we should start our relationships by being personal. That this is not to do with me as a human being. But it is everything to do with that person's upbringing, that person's inadequacy as a human being with less compassion or they have not been shown the acceptance that I've been shown by my family, etc, you know, and all I have to do is just carry on living my truths. But it was hard at first.

KJ: Yeah. And who did you lean on when you were feeling all of these things?

(00:04:43) NR: My sister. My sister is a little bit of a narcissist and she's very difficult to deal with. But by and large, she is the biggest support. And she was the one person who carried on telling me that people are only going to hate on you if they feel an intrinsic lack of something in their lives? Yeah.

00:05:16 Counselling

KJ: And then when did you start counselling?

(00:05:21) NR: I started counselling when I first told my parents about the abuse, I was about 13.

KJ: Okay. Was it just like a child psychologist? Or was it LGBTQ focused?

(00:05:40) NR: My first therapist was very homophobic. And that's part of the reason I stopped seeing her. Because when I told her, you know, I have, I think I may be put off relationships with men, because of what this man did to me. She started telling me things

like, Oh, it's just a phase, it'll pass and you'll be normal soon enough. And that sentence stuck in my head. You'll be normal soon enough. And so I stopped seeing her. But then the therapist I've had after that, in that first consult, I always ask them, Are you LGBT friendly? And if they said, anything to the contrary, I would be like, Nope, this is not going to work out. Thanks. Bye. And having that initial experience, I wouldn't say it was triggering or traumatic. It was just like, good God please [chuckles], you know. And I think as a result of the compounded trauma that I've been through a lot of what happens in spaces that I know I have control, it's like water off a duck's back. Because I've learned to not sweat the small stuff. And if you are going to be homophobic, that's on you. I don't have to be in this space, cheers. Until I found a therapist whose entire politics and all of that aligned with mine. And yeah, I'm still seeing her.

KJ: Cool. And uhm, I've got two questions. One, how long, how long have you been seeing her for? And then- Yeah go ahead.

NR: I don't even remember now [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] That's fine, that's fine.

NR: A while, a while.

KJ: Yeah. And then the second question, I wanted to know was out of all the therapists that you've seen, how many of them were LGBTQ friendly?

(00:07:56) NR: Three. Three out of, I think, nine. Unfortunately, one of the LGBT friendly ones was a Zionist [laughs] so that's why I stopped seeing her. I was like, if you don't believe in freedom for the Palestinian people, we can't be friends, sorry.

KJ: You go there for one thing, and then you have to leave because of another thing. It is. it's quite difficult. Honestly, I can imagine. Do you think... Like, what do you think of the psychology slash mental health space when it comes to like queer people and how it's handled?

(00:08:46) NR: We don't have queer friendly spaces. Except spaces that queer people create for themselves. We have to create our own spaces in order to feel safe. And even then, the straights are not okay. They want to infiltrate everywhere. Like even Pride. It's like straight people dressing up and being like, Hey, I'm an ally. And I'm like, No, the A and LGBTQIAP stands for asexual not ally. Let us have our day. Thanks, I appreciate your support. But you know, just don't make it about you. And so, I find that in creating those spaces, we almost have to be a little bit gatekeepy, which I don't like. And it's not about like quality control, so to speak, it's **just** about being safe. Because whenever I see an ally, I'm always dubious like, are you m- Firstly, are you making it about you? Secondly, are you, uhm, are you a conditional ally? Are you an ally, on the condition that we don't make you feel uncomfortable? Or that our truth aligns with yours, etc, etc. So is it performative? So in creating those spaces, we have to safeguard ourselves. And so back to the question in creating these spaces, psychology is one of those places that still needs a hell of a lot of work. Because of the stigma on mental health, firstly. I mean, we had the Life Esidimeni tragedy not even five years ago. And so when you have not just the government, but a people who thinks that firstly, mental health doesn't exist, or mental illness doesn't exist, and if you have depression, you must just go to the beach for an ice cream, how do you create a safe psychological space for LGBT people? When on top of the stigma attached to psychological or mental health care, you have a stigma attached to being gay. So on - with those issues compounded of course, we're going to have a lot of resistance in that sphere.

And people like- I've seen gay friends whose, whose parents wanted to send them to conversion camp.

KJ: Really?

NR: Yeah.

KJ: That's insane.

(00:11:30) NR: I mean, I've had about 36 people... 36, yeah, move through my house.

Because one of the reasons I wanted my husband and I to buy a big house is because I wanted extra rooms so that people can come to my home and feel safe. I think he's getting tired of it now, though [chuckles]. He'll never say anything.

00:11:59 Relationship with Husband

KJ: How long have you two been together?

(00:12:02) NR: We've been together 16 years.

KJ: Wow. Congratulations.

NR: Thanks.

KJ: So that was like, what? After undergrad [chuckles]?

(00:12:12) NR: Yes, I met- We met during my master's and we were friends for quite a while before we started dating. I was actually dating somebody else when I met him. And after this person and I broke up, we just got closer and closer. And we started dating. We married nine years ago.

KJ: Nice, congratulations.

(00:12:31) NR: Thanks. Um, oh, and people tell him that he has bi wife energy all the time.

KJ: [laughs] I mean he technically is.

NR: Yeah [laughs].

KJ: So it's not, it's not like, off. They're like correct.

NR: Yeah.

00:12:54 Expressing Experience as a Queer Person

KJ: Um, what I wanted to say, um, are there other mediums that you use to express your experience as a queer person?

(00:13:04) NR: Yes, I write poetry. And I'm currently writing a book of essays on feminine queer, black trauma.

KJ: Ohhh. So you mainly use writing as uhm...

NR: Yeah, yeah.

KJ: And have you like published any of your poems?

(00:13:27) NR: Um, a couple were published, but nothing overtly queer. I had Kobus Moolman from UKZN as a mentor at some stage. Unfortunately, we've lost touch. And he was very supportive of my, my queer style poetry, but he was also quite protective over me, saying, If you publish this poem, you're going to get a lot of hate and that's the last thing you need right now [chuckles]. So he would say rather publish this one, which is a little bit safer. And in retrospect, I would have fought it had I been stronger then.

KJ: I would love to read any of your poems if you're, if you're willing to send them to me.

(00:14:14) NR: I actually have... a... So my brand is called The Bipolar Feminist. And the podcast is called The Bipolar Feminist.

KJ: Oh you have a podcast as well?

(00:14:34) NR: Yes.

KJ: Is it just you?

(00:14:37) NR: Yeah, it's just me and I interview a whole lot of people. But I just sent you the, the, the poetry side of things, uh, in the chat. That's the Instagram handle.

KJ: Okay, I will definitely check it out, thank you. Um, when did you start podcasting?

(00:14:55) NR: I started in Jan this year, through TikTok because have a whole lot of friends on TikTok, were, like, you have the perfect voice for a podcast, and you have all of the knowledge, and all of those kinds of things. So please do yourself a favour and get a podcast going.

KJ: Yeah. And how's the reaction been to it?

(00:15:22) NR: It's slow, the uptake is very slow. But it's gonna take about two years before it actually takes off. I mean, that's the average.

KJ: [Zoom audio inaudible]

(00:15:31) NR: It has been six months. Yeah.

KJ: So, so, it's still a baby.

NR: It is still a baby. Yeah, yeah.

KJ: And have you been using that sort of as, like a self-care kind of thing to just express yourself through it? Or is it more-

(00:15:48) NR: It's more educational, it's- I haven't done much queer content, because I'm still getting there. But by and large, it's, it's very much, this is what I know, this is what I understand and I'm making you understand what I understand through these words. So proper research, and helping people understand quite complex concepts.

KJ: Cool, it sounds interesting. I'll definitely have a look. Any other mediums that you use?

(00:16:22) NR: I paint, I paint a lot of naked woman. And a series that I just did, that a friend bought from me, was on the back, I wrote the descriptions that past partners, specifically girlfriends, have said about me. And so if dating is kind of me understanding how they saw me at that point in my life.

KJ: Wow.

00:16:49 Religion and Spirituality

KJ: Um, okay, and then what's your kind of like situation when it comes to religion and spirituality?

(00:17:05) NR: I am ardently atheist. I used to be one of those militant atheists who just disliked religion entirely. But I've become a lot more tolerant now. There's no real sense of spirituality, everything is quite logical. Like, if there's evidence, I will evaluate that evidence and see whether it applies to my life or not. But I'm not going to look at spirituality or religion as, as entirely bad if it gives somebody solace. I'm not going to judge them for their beliefs. I will judge them for the belief if it's what makes them oppress other people though, obviously.

KJ: And has this been your take like throughout your life? Have you always been an atheist?

(00:17:52) NR: Mostly. Yeah, I was raised atheist. So, I was raised by two atheist communists. So [chuckles] quite.

KJ: And the rest of your family?

(00:18:04) The rest of my family, the extended family is very Hindu, except for that one arm of the family who are Christian who we don't speak about. Like just Voldemort them in the corner. But yeah, mostly Hindu and practicing Hindu at that.

KJ: Okay, okay. Um, was there any, like, tension between your immediate family with your extended family based on like, religion and spirituality?

(00:18:33) NR: Um, it never really occurred to my parents to have any form of religious talk with the rest of my family as like, you know, my, my daughter is queer so don't mentioned religion and all of that stuff. Because they said, if it comes up, we will deal with it, then. We don't want to pre-empt any arguments if there's not going to be one. But because my parents are so respected in our community. Nobody dare tell them anything [chuckles]. And there's only really the old aunts [coughs] who would phone my mom be like, your daughter's holding girls' hands and watching movies.

KJ: And then, did you end up having your Hindu wedding [chuckles]?

(00:19:28) NR: We did [laughs]. Yeah, but I married into a Muslim family as well. So we had the Hindu wedding and the Muslim wedding.

KJ: Is your partner also atheist? Or like...

(00:19:42) NR: Yes. Yes. Muslim side of the family does **not** know.

KJ: Okay. Okay. That's what I was gonna ask. Okay. How do you think that they would react if they did find out?

(00:20:01) NR: Very badly. And we are not close enough to them for me to warrant telling them. So let them live in Lalaland. They call me by my Muslim name, which I don't even respond to.

KJ: Okay, um, so otherwise not really like- no Catholic guilt about homosexuality or anything like that?

(00:20:28) NR: Oh, none. None whatsoever. The only guilt I feel is the fact that my last, that relationship with Leila went south because I mean, she was amazing [laughs]. That's it.

00:20:48 Socialising with Other LGBTQ People

KJ: How, how do you come to socialize with other LGBTQ people?

(00:20:55) Well, mainly online, especially these days. Uhm, but by and large... Now having been a journalist for so long, and this is something that I found throughout my life, is that people have sought me out to tell their stories. And people just tell me their stories randomly. And so I always get people's complete honesty, somehow. And so when people tell me, Oh, I'm queer, or this is what I'm struggling with in terms of bisexuality, or my gender identity, or whatever the case may be, uhm, I'm always just listening. And so one year, it was back in 2016, we had just bought our house. And I put out a flyer on Facebook saying, a very gay Christmas. If you can't go home for Christmas, if your family does not like you, and does not like who you love and does not like your sexuality, or your gender identity, come spend Christmas at home. And our house became known as the gay friendly house, to the point that one of my friends said that I take in strays all the time, like stray humans. And

he's like, Yeah, your house is like the SPCA. So a lot of the time, it's just through the fact that people see an understanding person. But also, queer artists space in Johannesburg. It is phenomenal. Like galleries and performance spaces and the music industry. Everything except the metal music industry, because metal is very white, Afrikaans, male dominated, and very homophobic. But yeah, I find that most of the artistic spaces in Johannesburg are very gay friendly. And then, in 2018, my husband got a scholarship to do his master's in Sweden. So we lived in Sweden, in the gay friendly city of Sweden called Borås [coughs]. And I volunteered at one of the youth centres there. So yeah, just made a lot of queer friends there. A lot of queer Swedish people.

KJ: And uh, growing up were any of your friends queer, like your school friends and stuff?

(00:23:56) NR: Not that I knew of back then. But now in retrospect, looking at it like huh, that makes sense.

KJ: Yeah, so you would say like growing up your space was pretty hetero?

(00:24:14) NR: Yeah. And lonely. Because I was the one willing to write about my experiences and write about my feelings and talk about it in front of class and willing to be ridiculed for it. Because I'm like, Why is this not normal? Why is this seen as such a shameful thing? When I first remember, I was seven years old when I first wrote a poem about a girl. And I was kind of lucky that the class didn't recognize the complexity of the poem. Otherwise, they would have understood like, Oh no, she likes a girl [laughs].

KJ: Was this Virginia Woolf?

(00:25:06) NR: Oh, no. There was this [laughs], there was this girl in the grade above me. I was like, she's so pretty. And I just wrote about how beautiful she was.

KJ: Um, and then, are there any like social gatherings or parties that are important to you to attend as a queer woman?

(00:25:29) NR: I haven't attended Pride in a long time. Purely because I've just never had the opportunity. But never really-

KJ: [Zoom audio inaudible] Sorry?

(00:25:49) NR: Uhm, I haven't attended Johannesburg Pride I think since like 2013.

KJ: And Durban Pride?

(00:25:57) NR: I've never been to Durban Pride. Because Durban Pride as much as I really wanted to go. Firstly, it was always very small. And secondly, it was always very white. So as a brown, queer woman, I never feel safe in public Pride spaces. Because it's very white dominated. Yeah.

KJ: Sorry, before I cut you off, what were you gonna say?

NR: I've forgotten now.

KJ: Oh, okay, sorry about that.

NR: No, nor worries.

00:26:41 Social and Sporting Clubs

KJ: Were you part of any social or sporting clubs where women who love women socialized?

(00:26:48) NR: No. Um, unfortunately, when I was younger, those didn't really exist. Or if they did, I didn't know about them. They were not very well publicized. But I was part of a society called Other Ways.

KJ: Other Ways?

(00:27:05) NR: Yeah. And we kind of formed an LGBT group in school, which died as soon as I left. As soon as I matriculated, nobody wanted to keep it up. And I don't know why. But yeah, it was quite sad that an entire movement was hinged on one person. And there were plenty of people who were out in school. But it was just, it was mostly the white kids. In fact, I don't think there was a single brown person who was out in school.

KJ: Oh, okay and what, what would y'all do?

(00:27:55) NR: We would just like, during Pride month, hang up pride flags all over. And we got a lot of hate, from especially the Orthodox Jewish community. Because the school was owned by Orthodox Jewish people.

KJ: Is this Crawford?

(00:28:15) NR: Mmm. And so yeah, it was Carmel College. So it was, uh, we were met with resistance. But more than just the performative stuff, every week, we would have one of us sit in the library and say, any queer person with any questions and who wants queer literature, or resources, you can come to us and you can speak to us. And I had a dedicated email address for that. Just in case, they didn't feel comfortable coming to us in person. Yeah, so I tried to provide that as best I could.

KJ: And then after you left, it kind of just...

NR: Fizzled out.

KJ: Like what literature were you providing? When you say queer literature?

(00:29:15) NR: I have- in fact, I'm still looking for that reading list that I had. It was a lot of queer literature from the '90s like. I was- I struggled to find black queer literature.

KJ: Was it more like overseas queer literature then?

(00:29:43) NR: Mmhmm. Yeah. But oh, finding literature, queer literature from the '90s it was pulling teeth.

KJ: Okay. Yeah. Because there was also that like ban on literature, right?

NR: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

KJ: Um, okay. So no other social or sporting events?

(00:30:12) NR: Not really until I got to university.

KJ: Okay, what, what events, clubs are things were you-

(00:30:19) NR: We would have Pride. We would have, uhm, [sighs] I was at UKZN up until Masters and then I went to Wits to do a second Honours. And when I did that Honours, I was very much a part, uh, involved in the queer stuff. Like we would have parties and socials and we would celebrate Pride. All of those kinds of things.

KJ: Wits is really like big on that. I suppose that's where the movement came from anyway, so.

NR: Yeah.

KJ: And then like GALA is situated there as well.

(00:30:57) NR: Yes, yes, uhm, I got involved with GALA because my housemates was one of the people who worked there, Hussein. Hussein Khan, Gabriel was then Khan. And now a friend of mine is now the President of GALA, Keval Harie.

KJ: Really? Ah, nice. Yeah, I was, shame, I was in GALA's face for like most of the end of last year and the beginning of this year. They were like, sick of me.

NR: [laughs] No, but Keval is a wonderful person.

KJ: They, yeah no, he is and just the staff is just so nice. It's almost as if like, it's like a different world within, within GALA. Like you step in there and it's such a safe space.

NR: Yeah it is. It's so nice. So, so nice. I was like, Oh, I feel at home now. Like, I found my people.

KJ: Yeah. Yeah. No, they're great. Yeah, I miss it [laughs]. I used to go there, like every single day to get like my research done. No, it's just it's so nice.

00:32:23 Fighting for LGBTQ Rights

KJ: Okay. What drove you to fight for LGBTQ rights?

(00:32:29) NR: I think even if I wasn't queer, I would still fight. Because nobody is free until everyone is free. Yeah. And so I can't say for sure that it would have been at the top of my list. But I am primarily a women's rights activists, especially a queer black women's rights activist. But LGBTQ has always been intrinsically tied into feminism for me. And I've kind of taken on this role of being the mother in a movement, that person saying, okay, so you're going to a protest, here's your little thing of milk, just in case you are attacked with tear gas. And here's a buff, and here's your water and here's your poster. So that is kind of where I am at the moment. But when I was, when I was in my 20s I was the person getting shot at. In fact, I still have rubber bullets wounds on the back here.

KJ: From, from what exactly?

(00:33:44) NR: Police dispersing University protests when a queer woman was sexually

assaulted on campus. Campus Security did nothing. Yeah so we protested and they're like, oh, we, we're going to do the only thing we know how. And that's call the police.

KJ: That's crazy. When, when was this, if you don't mind me asking?

(00:34:08) NR: 2003.

KJ: Okay. Wow. Yeah. Do you mind speaking about your role in the movement?

(00:34:20) NR: Well, now as kind of mother of the movement, I'm generally the one taking care of people. My house is like central meeting point. We have a lot of people coming over to make posters and placards and things like that. But it's become a leadership role. I'm not really involved in any specific organizations now. Especially because the panini.

KJ: Sorry?

(00:34:53) NR: Especially because the pandemic has just kind of [Zoom audio inaudible] everything and so there's a lack in social movement and it's all moved online. And so in terms of the online activism, I've taken the role of educator. So doing the research, putting all the homework together, collating all the information and saying okay, here is the comprehensive- a comprehensive response to XYZ, you know.

KJ: And prior to like your role now?

(00:35:39) NR: Oh, I was chief agitator [laughs]. I would be the one like writing all the articles to the newspapers and saying like, Okay, this is my opinion piece you can publish it if you want to or not. If you don't publish it, then I will. And so basically just getting people talking. But also, when the police came with their riot gear, I would be the one throwing the first stone. So the whole thing of be gay, do crimes? That's me.

KJ: [laughs] Uhm, what did I want to say? Uh were you involved with- Because you said like, obviously, you were quite involved with like GALA and at Wits. Were you involved in any organizations in Durban?

(00:36:40) NR: Well, it was Other Ways. That was the UKZN organization. I don't know if it still exists. And one of my best friends who was actually- he performed a dance at my wedding. He was the chairperson. Yeah.

00:37:01 Issues Within The LGBTQ Movement

KJ: Okay. Cool. Let's see were there any particular issues within the LGBTQ movement that were not tackled at the time, particularly issues surrounding woman.

(00:37:16) NR: Women were quite ignored. Lesbian, lesbianism is treated as the thing that is there for men's pleasure. Or it's out of sight, out of mind. And the violence, the intrinsic violence against women, is ignored by and large but against queer woman, definitely. The fact that black trans women are the most targeted demographic in the world is not spoken about enough, even today. And black then, black then, back then intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality and disability were **completely**, completely ignored. And I'm finding that it's very similar today, not much has changed. We're still having to remind people that black women, women of colour, disabled women, women in general, experienced the LGBT life a lot differently to cis gay men. Yeah.

00:38:33 Women's Movement

KJ: Did you participate in the women's movement?

(00:38:37) NR: Yes, absolutely. In many ways. First, it started with the realization that my story can't be for nothing. That as much as I don't owe anyone my story, I want my

experience to make a difference in other people's lives. So I started writing, and I did a post-trauma course. So people who have been through immediate- So like, I'm, first port of call for immediate trauma. And people get hold of me and say, this trauma just happened and I talked them through it. Basically reminding people, specifically woman, that I believe you, you are loved, it wasn't your fault. You know that reiteration of a crime that is committed against a woman is never the woman's fault. So doing that work is constant for me. And that's not something I publicize a lot.

KJ: Do you want me to mention that or do you want to-

NR: Uhm, you can, you can.

KJ: Okay.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:39:59]

Tape 2 ends

Tape 3:

[00:00:20 NR joins Zoom meeting]

NR: So my battery might die soon. Yeah, because loadshedding. Hopefully- well we're due to be switched on in the next, uh back on in the next 10 minutes. So if, if it does die, then I'll join via phone. KJ: Okay. Okay, sorry about that I should have, I should have stated that these interviews normally take quite a while.

NR: Yeah, no, I understand.

KJ: I'm sorry, before we got cut off, you were saying?

(00:00:51) NR: That kind of activism I feel... [sighs] I don't feel like I need to be recognized for activism in general. Because it's about human rights, it's about the work that you're doing, it's not about me being the one doing the work. So in terms of women's rights, it's about the quiet work, it's about getting this woman out of an abusive situation into safety, within at least an hour of her reporting it. And educating? Yes, but doing the tangible day to day stuff, it's not glamorous. And I was part of the Total Shutdown, organizing that march in 2018. And I still do volunteer every now and then for places like Rise Up Against Gender-Based Violence, you know, collecting blankets for, uh, women in women's shelters. But they are not very queer friendly spaces. Generally. Because with the total shutdown, and I do not mind this being mentioned. Um, there was one of the women involved in the total shutdown who was in a relationship with another woman who was abusive. And the total shutdown movement may not have protected the abuser, but the individuals definitely did. And so, where's the equality in that, you know? So I found it a very, not queer friendly space, in terms of recognizing queer relationship violence.

00:02:50 Homophobia within the Women's Movement

KJ: And like, was there any other like, instances of like, homophobia within the women's movement?

(00:03:01) NR: There's always the underhanded homophobia. Not so much these days, but definitely back in the '90s.

KJ: Do you mind elaborating on that?

(00:03:12) NR: And early 2000s as well. So like, you would have a very butch woman come in and saying, I would like to volunteer and they're like, and somebody would inevitably say,

somewhere along the line Oh, but aren't you the guy in your relationship? So it's those kinds of microaggressions that **really**, really get under the skin.

KJ: Yeah. I mean, do you find support within the women's movement as, as a queer woman?

(00:03:52) NR: Uhm, I don't seek it. Within the movement, I just put my head down and do the work. And yes, I'm loud. But at the end of the day, it's about the work and it's about having to do what's necessary, so I don't seek support as a queer woman in these spaces. I have my support network.

KJ: Okay.

00:04:19 South African Legislation

KJ: In what ways do you feel that the South African legislation fails women, particularly women of colour?

(00:04:30) NR: Oooh. Well, this is an interesting one, because we have the legislation. We don't have the knowledge, we don't have the understanding, we don't have the support. Our judicial system is highly skewed in favour of straight cis white men. As it is all over the world. And if you're not straight cis, white men, you just have to be a man. You just have to have a dingus dangling between your legs and you are fine. Unless you are trans. But just that little caveat, you have a trans woman's entire existence completely nullified. And so it's about the attitudes. The fact that a judge can look at Khwezi's kanga and say that was an invitation for rape, that's how the legislation- not the legislation fails us, but the legal system fails us. So our constitution is bulletproof. If you look at our constitution properly, and all the amendments to it's, it's, it's sterling. It was written by an incredibly progressive and educated people. And it was vetted by equally brilliant people. But then how it's applied.

There's a reason that black trans women are still the most targeted demographic in the world. Because the legislation no matter how protective it is, fails us when it gets to the people enforcing it. Police are still very much anti-women. A woman goes to a police station and gets turned away and says, your husband can't rape you, he's your husband, you owe him sex. You have a child going to a police station saying you don't know what happened, you're a child. You have a queer woman being beaten up on the side of the road and going to the police and the police beating her up too, you know. So the problem is not with the legislation. It's with how entrenched patriarchy is within our society.

KJ: Yeah, definitely.

00:06:52 Racism within the LGBTQ Movement

KJ: Then, did you experience any racism within LGBTQ organizations, or the LGBTQ movement as a whole?

(00:07:05) NR: Oh, yeah, there's a lot of racism. Back in [sighs]... I think it was 2013, 2014 I can't remember what year it was. When a line of black women laid down on the, on the road during the Pride marches, and said, black women are ignored in the LGBT community, white people trampled on them. Do you remember that?

KJ: I heard about it. Yeah.

(00:07:40) NR: Being there was, uh, was quite different. You felt the racism. And so yeah, that should say it all really. There's still a lot of racism. I, I used to often get told, like, isn't it against your religion to be gay? Like, isn't it against yours? Like, why is Hinduism- In fact, queerness in Hinduism is more accepted than it is in Christianity, so why are you applying

this double standard? And you're assuming that I'm Hindu firstly. And so there's just layers to it. There's so many layers to it that goes above and beyond just a person seeing the colour of your skin and making a snap judgment.

KJ: Yeah and did, like did you experience anything directed towards you?

(00:08:48) NR: Uhm, yeah. But just underhanded, you know, those kinds of comments.

KJ: Microaggressions again.

(00:08:54) NR: All of those micro aggressions. Yeah. And if I had to tally them all up, I mean, it'll come to a lot you know but [chuckles], yeah.

KJ: And was there any particular like demographic that was saying it?

(00:09:12) NR: Generally white men in public, but white women. Ugh [sighs], white women will always choose white supremacy over solidarity with women of colour, any day. No matter how marginalized white women are, they will choose white supremacy because it gives them that much more power.

KJ: And, like, was this in the women's movement? Or just like in general?

(00:09:47) NR: LGBT, women's, everywhere.

KJ: Everywhere. Okay. Okay, then, last two questions. Hopefully you still have battery for this.

00:10:01 Pride

KJ: What are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for women to speak on LGBTQ+ issues?

(00:10:10) NR: The Pride Parade is for fun. Everything else surrounding Pride should still be highly politicized because LGBT existence is still politicized. And the movement away from- the move away from politicizing Pride benefits only cis white people.

KJ: And companies.

(00:10:40) NR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, just put a rainbow on your logo and yay!

00:10:45 Work Needed in the LGBTQ Community

KJ: Um, okay, last question. In your opinion, what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community.

(00:10:51) NR: So much needs to be done. Anti-racism work, anti-sexism work. Because I find that gay men hate woman too. And not just because of sexuality. It's because of misogyny. So severe anti-racism work, anti-trans, anti-bi. There needs to be a hell of a lot more education, and a lot more solidarity. And so when you have somebody- like, I mean, the sheer- the existence of terfs within the movement, and the fact that they're still called radical feminists? No, they're not radical feminists, they're not feminists at all, you know? So, yeah, there's just so much that needs to be done. That requires unlearning. First before anything else, it requires people with privilege to unlearn what their privilege has taught them is normal.

KJ: Mmm. Yeah. That's all of my questions for now. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

NR: Just stay dangerous.

KJ: Thank you. Thank you so much, again, for taking time out of your day to do this interview with me and telling your story. Thank you again, so much. And if you know of anyone else

who might be interested, please let me know or like send them my poster. Because yeah, I am still looking for interviews.

NR: Okay.

KJ: Thank you so much Nikita and enjoy the rest of your day.

NR: Thank you and good luck.

KJ: Thank you. Hope to see you in academia soon.

NR: I hope so. Bye.

KJ: Bye

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:13:19]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hours 34 minutes 11 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form.

Interview 7: Nokuthula Dhladhla

Name of the Interviewee: DHLADHLA, Nokuthula [ND]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 06 July 2022

Place of the Interview: Johannesburg, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 4

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 03 September 2022 – 11 September 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:03:54 ND joins Zoom meeting]

ND: Hello.

KJ: Hi! How are you doing? Is everything okay? [laughs]

ND: Yeah, everything is fine. Just this loadshedding messes us up all the time.

KJ: I know! It's so bad. I'm so sorry. I wasn't even, like thinking about loadshedding, uhm, do you... Are you fine? You said you have electricity?

ND: Yes, I have electricity now.

KJ: Okay, cool, cool. Uhm, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my master's project, uh, I really appreciate it. If you want, I could speak a bit more about it.

ND: Okay, well, maybe just a summary of it.

KJ: Yeah, sure. So I'm basically looking at the intersections of queer women in South Africa's activism and their social worlds. So basically like, when you look at LGBTQ history in South Africa, a lot of it has to do with men, obviously. And most of it has to do with like, legislation - legislation changes. So I'm looking more at, you know, what people were experiencing during that time. What was there... Like obviously, now, there's a lot more opportunities for people to socialize freely. So, you know, like, what, what were people doing at that time? And how that influences their activism and vice versa? You know?

ND: Okay.

KJ: Do you have any questions before we begin?

ND: No, I'm just... getting up because I'm sitting outside so that you can see my face.

KJ: [chuckles] It's okay, I can put my video off if you want.

ND: No we can, so that I can see who I'm talking to.

KJ: Okay [laughs]

ND: And you can see who you're talking to.

KJ: And then also, I sent you an interview release form in the email with the integral questions.

ND: I see that.

KJ: Yeah. Just to discuss that... it's basically you know, for ethical clearance for the university to say that you consented to do the interview. But uhm, also if there's any changes that you like, you know, if you want to stop the interview at any time, if you want the interview to be

anonymous, if you want to like remove stuff out of it, that's all there to just as an agreement.

So whatever you say, uhm, I will use but if you say like don't put in this, this, and this, then I won't and that's basically what the interview release form is for.

ND: Okay.

KJ: Okay, cool. Are you, are you ready to start?

ND: Yes, I am... I forgot to put the charger for the [inaudible] sorry...

KJ: It's okay, take your time, take your time.

ND: I don't know if you can be able to see me.

KJ: [laughs] I can see like a silhouette, it's okay!

[ND moves around]

KJ: Yeah, I can see you now.

ND: Okay. This is much better.

KJ: Now we can see each other.

ND: Yeah.

KJ: Okay. So, um, please state your full name, age preferred pronouns and sexual orientation.

ND: Okay, my full name is Nokuthula Dhladhla. I'm a Reverend, I'm 48 of age and my pronouns are she and hers.

KJ: And your sexual orientation?

ND: Lesbian.

KJ: Cool. Thank you.

00:08:57 Family Background

KJ: So we're gonna start with a bit of like, family background and stuff first. Where did you grow up?

(00:09:08) ND: Mostly, I grew up here in Soweto, South Africa. In the township. First we stayed in Orlando, then we moved to, uh, Katlehong, uh, Westrand and then finally my family decided to move to KZN in a small town that is called Charlestown. That is where mostly my family is based. But because of work, I am still here in Soweto, in Diepkloof where I currently stay.

KJ: Okay, and what was your- the community in your area like in Soweto?

ND: Okay, um, I think because I was very young I just did not know what is going on. But I knew that there were issues around apartheid at that time. And, you know, we would hear these things in school that we are not treated equally. But issues of my sexuality was such a hidden matter. So I did not get to see or hear anything around that because I guess, you know, because I grew up in a family where Christianity was the thing. So one of the things that I would hear like, to hear being preached about was issues around, homosexuality is a sin, so you end up in hell. So I kept it as a secret for myself at the age of 14 because I did not know whether I needed to expose myself to that kind of uh... At that time, I did not know. But I used to believe that it was the wrong thing for me to do, or say or, you know, even want to know more about, uh, sexuality issues. So that is what was happening in my community. But mostly, at that age, we were... you know that people were talking around issues of here's apartheid, you know schools were.... we were boycotting. I remember, my first year in high

school, we were boycotting Afrikaans, because it was the thing that we don't want to, you know, our oppressors to continue oppressing us. So it was just a confusing period of my life that I can't put like things to say, this is what I was located around, you know what, what was happening, because I was having my own internalized struggles with my sexuality, but at the same time, you know, being part of the church, that did not want us to get involved in anything that was not Godly. Even the riots and all that was happening during that time, was not Godly, per se for, for me. So that is what was happening. I think I got to, got to be exposed when I was around 18, 18 years of age, when now I started to know that there were lesbians, like that name. There were people who identify themselves as lesbians or gay people. But it was mainly gay people that I would expose myself to get to know. But in a, in, in, in that manner of not knowing what is happening around the world around me.

(00:13:06) KJ: Okay and how did you, how did you come across the word lesbian.

ND: So homosexuality, the word I would hear in church, it was preached in church, the verses, the Sodom and Gomorrah story, that is what I would hear and get to see, to know, but I was involved in getting to know about gay people when one- there was an incident in my church where one person came in as a visitor, who then stood in front and said, she was struggling with herself, you know, with God, with her sexuality, she believes that she's a lesbian. So that was my first time to get to hear that there was such a word, apart from the word homosexuality. Then at that time, nobody wanted to be around that person so I then befriended that person, because I believe that we were on the same struggles together, because now, now she has said that she's a lesbian and that was a thing that was not accepted in the church. And she was not accepted by anyone. So we became friends and in us being friends, we started talking about how it can be, you know, we pray more or we fast

or do something about this that nobody wanted to hear about. So that is how I got to expose and get to hear about that word. But at the same time, as months [passed with] her being in the church, we were then called in by the elders of the church, because I guess they assumed that this friendship that we had, we have a relationship of some kind. So at some point, then we get to be excommunicated from the church because [chuckles] of that fact that it was labelled as if we are having a sexual relationship, you know, together so. And then she then tells me that oh, by the way, there were other people that I know who were gays and there were other people that I know who are lesbians, and you know, so that was my, my journey with the words. But it did not make sense. Because at that time, when you're struggling with your own sexuality integration, it becomes a challenge. When now, you have to accept yourself, it was so hard for me to accept myself. Hence, I offered myself to be prayed for in the church, because I needed to change because it felt like I was the odd one in the midst of other people who were normal. But I deemed to be this person who is not really accepted by anyone.

00:16:27 Church and Family's Reaction To Coming Out

KJ: And was this also your parents reaction as well?

(00:16:36) ND: Hey [chuckles]. It, it was. So in between- Maybe let me give you a background, then it makes sense. So in between us being called to the church and being excommunicated, being told that God did not love us, and that is when my mother and my grandmother called to find out, because- So normally, when someone is excommunicated from the church, their family, uh, get to be called but in our cases, my family was not called, the visitors were not asked to leave the church, or the children. So we were made to stand in front of the church and then the, the elders, the men told everyone in the church that

women must be scared of us, must really stay away from us, because what we have, and what we are, is, is, is a demon that is transferable type like that. So my mother got to know about that, in that moment. And it was hard for her because I was actually confused because I did not have a relationship. I did not even know what women do when they have relationships, it was just a friendship that was- the assumption was now because nobody wanted to be with this person and I am the one who's being friendly with this person and spending time with her because when we're trying to explain that it is because both of us are having the same struggles and now it will make sense for us to be together so that we are able to help each other. But at the same time that, that was a shocking moment for my family and it was very hard for my mother. I remember she was crying so much to say now, you know, you ended up being chased away from church, now, what's going to happen to you? Are you accepting this thing that they said you are? And at the same time, I just said, No, it was the thing that I just did not know. So from that day on, we did not have a conversation about it [chuckles]. And that was the strangest thing about it and it was a moment of silence. And I needed to figure out for myself what, what, where to now. Because if I am being asked not to come to church anymore, where do I go? Then me and my friend decided Agh! we're not boycotting the church, we are going to the church, whether they want us there or not. But we offered to say probably the only best way to do is for them to pray for us. And then that process for it took almost six months where we prayed for every Friday night. You know, they were trying to chase demons from us and at the same time, me and my family were not having a conversation about it. It was like that thing that I needed to change from and I also wanted to fit in and be accepted, but at the same time not accepted as a lesbian, I wanted to be accepted as a human being and I wanted to be accepted as someone who also formed part of, you know, being human, and I... At the later

stage, six months later, we then realized, me and my friend, this prayer thing was not working because we get to be beaten up, we get to being treated like animals and we don't have a say in the matter. So we had to lie and say, the demons are gone. So we are practically okay, we can be able to go back to church. It put, uh, so much strain in my family, because of the fact that I'd find myself alone, and not being able to talk. But I could see that my family was carrying some form of a shame because it was a shameful experience that you get to be exposed like that in front of everyone and no one was protecting you. But at the same time, I did not know whether God is true what the Bible is saying. And I needed some way out and that my way out was to lie to say, I'm actually healed from the prayers. So that is how, and my family got to... the process that we took with them.

KJ: And then the church, like let you back in?

(00:21:23) ND: So the church let me and my friend back in with the condition of obviously, we were just the odd ones. So we're not really fully accepted. So for me, it was an incident that happened. So after we were led back to the church, I got myself into a situation where I was gang raped. And that same day, when then the person who picked me up from the police station, then called everyone, all the members of the church and everyone, to come so they came to pray for me. So in that meeting, or in that prayer moment, where now everyone know, got to know what happened to me, then I was told that God was punishing me, God was telling me that it was wrong to be having relationships with women so I needed to be taught some lesson- I don't know, what was the that moment of the lesson that I needed to learn from that experience. And I was hurt. And I- from there, I then decided that maybe the best way is to kill myself so I needed to die. Or I choose another God that is loving and kind, who is not going to punish people like the way it was. No one asked

how I was, no one asked me how this thing, the rape that has happened. No, nobody was caring enough to ask me. And at home, it was not a conversation that was open because it was hurtful for my mother, and to watch me experience all these things. So in the midst of it, that day, I then took all my medication and pills, and I needed to die. But as I was admitted at the hospital, then I woke up and realized that ey, actually, I'm still here, I'm still alive, then that is when there was a reasoning in my head to say, probably there's a reason why I'm still alive and there's a reason why I needed to go through all these things. From there and then I decided to say, that God that they, these people have told me about is the one that I don't want, I'm not gonna worship that kind of a God, I actually want to worship some other God, who is loving, who will love me the way I am, because I have tried everything I knew at that time. I would fast and pray, I would allow people to hit me and beat me as they pray for me, because I thought that is what needed to happen. So now if it did not... meaning there are many other people who are more- who are like me, who are going through all this, you know, at that time, I did not even know that there was a word for it where, you know, conversion therapy, that type of thing. So then I then started to realize to say I need to find more gay people, more people that I can be able to share and one person who contacted me and said ey, actually, there's an LGBTI church, uh you know, that you can go to, you know, and be and meet the pastor, probably the pastor can be able to help you with whatever dilemma that you're having when you're reading things in the Bible, and they are not seeing the same things that you are thinking about, and you should not kill yourself anymore. So that is how I got to learn, you know, to work with this man who helped me through that process of acceptance and dealing with the issues of rape and dealing with the issues of rejection and all that the church has put me through. But at the same time, I needed to accept myself for myself. That was my first process to say, I cannot be wanting other people

to accept me, probably with the new relationship that I have with God, the God that I know that works for me, and the God that I read from the Bible for myself, that is one, uh, process that I needed to take. So in between, I will read scriptures like know your Jeremiah, Chapter One, where the Bible says, "I knew you before you were born," you know, uh, so those kinds of things. So it was an affirmation for me to say, the other God, who says homosexuality is a sin, or whatever, that people are reading from the Scripture without having to understand the background, they are not saying it correctly, they want me as a person to change my being and that is not possible. There is no way that anyone can change their being. And there is no- there is no way that you can change how when now you read for yourself to say, all human beings are created in the image of God. So that is the process that I needed to do for myself. So, [chuckles] I don't know if I'm answering the questions properly.

KJ: Don't worry about it, don't worry about it. Just speak how you feel. Uhm, how old were you when all of this was happening?

(00:27:10) ND: I was in my, my late... 20s. My late 20s.

KJ: Oh, okay.

ND: Like, yeah because in in between that- So, ey, there's a whole load of things that happens in during the time [chuckles]. So I had a child also, uh... in the-, in between when I was 18, 19. And yeah, so everything happens in my late 20s.

KJ: In terms of your sexual orientation?

ND: Mmm, with all the dramas in the church and everything. But realizing about it, I was around 12 when I started noticing that there was something different about me.

KJ: Okay. And if you don't mind me asking, what denomination was the church that you were originally with?

(00:28:09) ND: A charismatic church, church of Christ, uh, it was a kind of a Pentecostal/charismatic type of church.

00:28:18 More on Family Background

KJ: Okay, um, and then... Okay, going back to when you're growing up, what's your family's background? Who's staying in the household with you? You mentioned your mom, is there anyone else living with you?

ND: So it was my mother and my grandmother. So I had two brothers and two sisters. And then my- and then we had, I had two cousins and my aunt. So that is the background of my, my family, so...

KJ: And what type of work were they involved in?

(00:28:59) ND: So my mother and my grandmother and my aunt were domestic workers. And us, during the time when they were working as domestic workers, we were still in school.

KJ: Okay. And then are you the eldest?

ND: Mmhmm.

KJ: Okay, so it's you and then the four other siblings. Okay. And what were the conditions that you grew up in like?

(00:29:31) ND: The condition was very confusing, you know? Because now we have work. Your mother is working as a domestic worker. And there's riots that are happening in

between. And you are young and nobody- because the... my mother- they were busy with work. So there was no other conversation about anything else, except that we are hungry, we need food, we need books, we need, we need, you know all those kinds of things. But in school, when I was mainly now in high school, that's when I realized that there was something that is odd that is happening. Because now why would we have these riots? Why would we have these kinds of conversations where, you know, they're talking of killing the white people or whatever people were having conversations about. But there was, like, discrimination, hate that was happening. And at the same time, it's like, but **we** don't have these kinds of conversations at home, the only conversation that was in my house was about God, the church and nothing else. So that is where... what I grew up knowing, that these other things did not matter. Because even the message from the preachings was against us as Christians being part of these riots or whatever that people were complaining about. The only thing you were taught was you're going to heaven, and you're going to hell, so whatever that is happening, that you are unhappy about, you will get it when you get to heaven, because heaven is a better place than this world. So I was more of a conservative type of a person as I grew up as a child.

(00:31:38) KJ: Did you have friends though?

ND: [chuckles] Yes, I had friends. It was, it was a lovely time, you know, we had friends at school. But at the same time, we'll have friends in church, the same, you know, as young people will have- will be friends. But it was more of a same language. Yeah, that this is the friends from church were more of people that I would spend my time with, because we will talk about the Bible, talk about God, talk about... but the friends from other places, like in school, they were talking about the other life that I was not exposed to, like my, my, my, my

same age group people, young people were talking about going to have to drink alcohol, I did not- I was not exposed to that. Or they will be talking about girls, boys and you know, but I would not be able to talk to them because I had a secret of loving another girl. And that was something that was like not, not gonna happen, not gonna have the conversation. So I was, I guess I was more... [chuckles] uh, a very confused child and not exposed to many things at all, except the church and being part of being a Christian.

00:33:18 Anti-apartheid Movement

KJ: So you didn't partake in the anti-apartheid riots and stuff like that?

ND: Uh, when it was happening in school, something like that we are boycotting something then I'd be part of it.

KJ: Okay.

ND: Because then it was giving me an opportunity not to go to school. And yeah, just you know, toyi-toying all over the streets, people with placards, and I was like, okay, this is what they are doing so I must, might as well be part of it.

KJ: Okay, before we continue, I have been having this problem with Zoom, where it keeps putting a limit on my meetings. Basically, we'll wait until like the time runs out and then you just re-join with the same link, it will still work.

ND: Okay.

00:34:08 Family Challenges

KJ: Yeah. So, what are some of the challenges you and your family faced growing up?

ND: Whew, I think not having enough money, not enough resources. Because, you know, when you have a parent, one single parent who is working, who has four... five children, working as a domestic worker, then means that money was limited. So we had to learn to live with whatever we have. And we also learned the fact that you know, we go to school, but we knew very well that it might not end and, uh, lend us to go probably funding to go to university, for instance, or having a better education. So we're stuck with whatever we have. And like it was just being taught to be grateful for whether you have shoes, and you want more shoes or you want more clothes, you want you know so, so that, especially that I am the eldest at home, so I had to sacrifice so much, because the young ones needed to have. And, uh, also, when they go to work, I needed to take care of my, my siblings, in ways that I got to learn to be an adult in an early age. So to make sacrifices and compromises of making sure that the one thing that we were taught was, we will not go to bed with empty stomachs. So whatever that we have, we had to stretch it so that then we are not hungry, we're not you know... So we were sure that we poverty's around us, and there was nothing we can do about is just to accept things that things are the way they are.

KJ: And besides financially, were there any other challenges growing up?

ND: [shakes head]

KJ: No?

ND: No, not necessarily. I guess, because we- even though my, you know, my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, were working, but they were present in our lives. So the, the other, the other challenge was the fact that, you know, you became- I became a parent [chuckles]. So that was my only challenge to say, now I needed to be taking care of- So the other things that young people are doing, I might not be able to be part of those things, because I'm

needed a home. But it was loving, very kind and a very... a very, very good home that they built for us. So even though financially, things were not really okay. But at the same time knowing that your, your, your one parent is... my mother is my mother and my father, we did not have that lack of having, uh, not to have a father, my mother was playing both those roles. And my mother was very honest and my mother was open. It was only dealing with my issues with sexuality, but in all, she was honest of the things that she can afford, the things that she can do, the things that she cannot do, and the fact that she always taught us that, you know, we need to learn to love ourselves, and appreciate ourselves and know that we have skills and, and we will go far in life if we are not stuck with what other people look at you and say you, you smell poverty because that is what you hear from people when others have money or they have more, you know, but my mother made it a point to make us feel comfortable with whatever that we have. And knowing and believed in our gifts and talents and make sure that we, we, we study, we, we learn, we take the opportunity to go to school very serious because she would tell us stories like she was not able to finish her high school because of the fact that in her time, it was believed that a woman cannot go to school, the woman's role was to get married and have children. She wanted to get more education, she wanted to learn to play a guitar, but her father did not allow her to do that because she was a woman. So my mother... all those things, she was teaching us to realize that life is unfair but make it fair for yourself. And, and even though she then learned so many other things at, at a later stage in life, but she did not allow her situation to make her feel that she cannot go beyond. So she then instilled that to us to say even though I cannot, I know for a fact that I might not be able to take you to university or whatever, but create opportunities for yourself as a Black child, and make sure that you know that you are worth

more than what you- your, your circumstances and situations are. So we did not feel much more of the challenge of life.

KJ: Mmm, so you would say that you had a pretty close relationship with your family.

ND: Yes.

KJ: Would that also apply to like your extended family?

ND: Uhh, so, we did not have that much extended family members, because now- So it was from my mother's- my grandmother's side, my grandmother had two daughters. So that was all she had.

KJ: Okay.

ND: So we were regarded as a very small family because we did not have uncles. We did not have aunts. It was only one aunt, but we were just a small- we still are the small family with no other ex-, uh, extensions, ja.

00:41:11 Disconnected from Family

KJ: Okay. And prior to the points that we already discussed, was there any other particular time where you felt disconnected from your family?

ND: No.

KJ: No?

ND: Yeah, it was only, I guess, the shock- that shock was the fact that I was taught love, kindness, and all that. And now when it comes to me... because everyone was confused about my, you know, the issues around sexuality. So I was shocked. Like, how is it that the

family that taught me love, regardless, but now, it's like, everyone was confused, I took it as that kind of confusion. But there was no other time, except this time.

KJ: Okay.

ND: But yeah, but we went through all of it, even though it took a **long** time. You know that whole journey with my mother, it took me over 20 years, until to a point where then she realized that she's not winning this battle and she decided to tell me that I'm her child, there is no dustbin for me and all that she has been doing was not loving me. It was the problem of her not accepting it. But now she decided whatever. She will not, she will not understand God. And we know there is no way that we understand what God gives us and what, so we just have to really learn to live with ourselves live with each other. So then it became that thing after 20 years and that closeness again and the relationship that I have with my mother and my grandmother and everyone at home, it became one less problem.

KJ: And so you said your, your mother had like, quite a, uh, like shocked reaction. How did your siblings react?

ND: They never said anything negative to me, but I think the silence of it was what worried me more. But I think they were taking sides [chuckles], you know, with my mother. They did not want to disappoint my mother. So- but they never said anything. Whether we understand or not until when my mother was explicitly- [ND cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00: 43:49]

Tape 1 ends

Tape 2:

[00:00:00 second Zoom meeting starts]

KJ: Sorry about that, I was just closing my door, it's a bit cold.

ND: Okay.

KJ: Sorry, sorry. Yes, you were saying.

(00:00:17) ND: Yeah. So it was, agh, I guess they were just trying to not to, to disappoint my mother. But they never said it was not, uh, a bad treatment or anything that has changed with them. They still respected me as their eldest sister. Yeah. But I think for me, it was more of I wished we had a conversation about how do they feel about me but it was then at a later stage where it was more of, we did not care, whether you're whatever, you are our sister, so...

00:01:02 Being Queer During Apartheid

KJ: Okay. Um, and then what was it like to grow up as a queer person in apartheid?

ND: I think because my activism started somewhere in 1997. So in 1997, when I like, you know met that LGBTI pastor who was helping me with my own journey, I was then exposed to the Metropolitan Community churches, and, you know, we're part of the bigger movement around issues of religion, faith, and sexuality type of thing. It was a bit of an overwhelming, because, as I mentioned, before, that I was not exposed to many things, except God and church and that's it. So now finding myself within LGBTI spaces, that is the church, and then also having to get exposed to issues around, I remember, the conversation at the time was about, you know, the Civil Union, marriages, the issues around adoption, issues around, you know, the... from us from the religious space, we're talking about being created in the image of God, we all deserve equal rights. And so my first, first attending pride, was a, a big thing for me, because it was, I've never seen so many LGBTQI+ people in

my life, it was 1997... 1996,97. And it was very exciting but at the same time, it was a scary moment of realizing that we still have so much discrimination, so much hate, so much... like people who are not able to live their own truth. And I was not able to be myself. But at the same time, my focus was more of as a religious person. And I got ordained as a minister for the, for, for, full time, from 1998. My focus and my activism was more of what can we do about this theology that is excluding other people, and more focus on kill the gays part of it, what can we do as a church? And what kind of messages that can take it out there? That it is possible to integrate your sexuality and your spirituality. And that, that I guess that... that was for me individually, even though yes, there were things that were happening, that I were not really... I wasn't... I was still processing the fact that the life that I live before was now the life that I'm exposed to different kinds of activism, that I did not know what it, it meant until now as I grow older, realizing that it was preparing me for something that I was not sure at that time, but now I know that every human being is a very important.

00:04:53 Coming to Terms with Sexuality

KJ: Yeah. So you said that you started to realize that you weren't heterosexual around 12, right?

ND: Mmhmm.

KJ: Could you explain a bit more about, you know, what was going through your mind at the time?

ND: Okay. So apart from the fact that I looked at women in a different way. So at that time, I used to think it was a different way but I would like develop feelings, and, but I'd never... it was like that thing that I used to think that probably there's something wrong with me,

because none of the people around me... the boys were talking about the girls, the girls are talking about the boys, and then I cannot be talking about girls and no one else is talking about girls meaning that was my... I have a problem so I interpreted it as like that. So that is the reason why I kept it a secret until I was 18, 19, where it was exposed. But it was not something that I could explain in words, but it was that kind of a, you know, you are drawn to this person, a woman, but at the same time, none of the people around you are talking about that language. So it was like, get over it.

KJ: Mmm. Was it like, quite isolating?

(00:06:31) ND: Hmm, it was, it was, yeah, so we will end up- because now I ended up to- when I was at the right age to have a relationship, now I had a relationship with the father of my child, because of the fact that I was trying to fit into the bigger scheme of things. And it was- it felt more... I would not be normal and whatever that I was feeling, I'm not hearing other people talking about it. So meaning that it is this, that thing that said, I needed to find a boyfriend for myself also, and then get to talk with people around me who will be the girls at the same- my same age are talking about boys. I will always- I would also have to contribute to the conversation, but if now I'm not able to contribute to the conversation and I'm not able to even mention the fact that I actually love women more than men, then, ey it was very isolating and very painful, and very frustrating. And very confusing!

00:07:45 Coping With Feelings Of Isolation

KJ: And what did you do to cope with those feelings?

ND: So I'd do what other people were doing and uh...

KJ: Just force yourself?

ND: Yeah, force myself. But I guess what helped me more than anything, was the relationship that I had with my father's son [son's father]. So I then started opening up, because he was like, you know we are expecting a child, so meaning that we get to marry, you know, get married... And so then I started opening up to him to say, actually, I am having a problem, I can't- the reason why I am on and off in this relationship that we have, is because of the fact that I am- I have feelings for women, and he laughed at me and said, but then we can still marry! So when that time comes, so he thought it was something that will come, then something that will be on and off. So then he said, as soon as those feelings come while we are in the marriage, then meaning that we can be able- he, he will help me to find even a woman for me type of thing. But then, it was very... not fair. It was not gonna be fair for him. So then we ended up breaking the relationship but we continued taking care of my son together, and he married somebody else. But we then continued being a bigger brother sister type of relationship where, you know, because he made me to be able to be open and talk about all the struggles and what it meant to have these feelings of being... identifying myself at that time, I did not know that that was my part of my identity. It was fear. It was feeling more like confusion. God cannot create. And on top of it, you hear the messages in the church that says this is wrong. So he was the first one who are was open with him and we were able to... to work it out.

KJ: So, he was like, the first person that you voluntarily came out to.

ND: Yes.

KJ: Okay. And just to make sure... at the time when you were like exposed in the church, you weren't out as, as a lesbian, they just assumed?

ND: They just assumed.

KJ: Okay.

00:10:31 Community's Reaction

KJ: And... what was like the larger community's reaction to you like outside of the church setting?

ND: So, that's another... That is a- So, the outer part of the community is more of a, uh... So, some people assumed that I did not look lesbian.

KJ: Okay. So, I did not fit in in that world. So, if, if then I come and say actually, I am a lesbian, they look at me like, uhhh no, not you. So, it was both out and inside that my fitting in struggles until up to today, it becomes that kind of a thing that so I had to fight and ask people, what do you mean when you say I don't look lesbian. So, the assumptions was, one, one, you become a lesbian only when you look like a man, you are masculine, you drink alcohol, you smoke, you do- you sit with boys in the corner, you wear trousers, like men clothes and everything. Now, this me comes through from semi... like I am from a semi-rural and now, you know, in location, I'm here like it is quite... it has been quite a journey of... uhm, because these are myths, these perceptions, these are you know the things that people assume that because they knew a certain kind of a lesbian woman who was masculine, it's like that notion to think that immediately when you say lesbian, meaning that you say you want to be a man. And, and I have been refusing to be fit into people's boxes. As I said, even outside the community or within the community of LGBTI people I have been confused. I still refused to say, No, you can label- like labels are labels and labels are sometimes wrong assumptions about how you know when you are comfortable with yourself, when you know and understand who you are as a person. You don't necessarily need the boxes that we fit; we try to fit people in these boxes. So it has been a journey and

struggle. And you know, until I had to realize that actually, probably I was not created to fit in any other people's boxes, whether outside the community, where women think I am not straight enough or I am not lesbian enough, or I am just doing this just for fun of it. And yeah, so it has been...

KJ: And, uh, your friends? What were their reactions?

(00:13:58) ND: Okay, so my, my, my friends were like I am- they assumed that I was confused or I was running away, or there's that kind of a- So people sometimes they tend to link that you probably have issues with men or... and then, then those ones who know that I was gang raped then they think that and say probably I hate men because they did this to me so now I feel comfortable with women. So there's that kind of a- I don't know whether it's a myth or what. But others thought I was confused because I did not look like a lesbian, others thought because I hated men that's the reason why I am in a lesbian relationship or others they were very accepting. And yeah, so I had you know so many people that were very like still accepting the fact that in your confusion, we are your friend. So, you know, you'll get over it, if you don't get over it we are here, we don't have issues with you as a person.

KJ: Mmm.

00:15:14 Moving Away from The Church

KJ: Okay. So... did you at any point kind of like distance yourself from the church, uhm, after everything that happened?

(00:15:30) ND: Yes, I did. A lot of my time, after that incident, I spent the whole year and a half, but I went to a Bible school, [chuckles] for some strange reason. I... because it was, it, it was hard to just disown the church fully. But I had to make a decision to say, which of the

God I want to... the one that I understand, the one that understands me, the church that I understand in the church, I think that whole process helped me when I started coming to an LGBTI church, that helped me to say, God loves me, regardless, so I don't need to distance myself from church. So I need to embrace that part of my life and, and embrace the fact that I might be different, I'm created as, as a- one of the image of God, so I won't... I don't allow anyone to tell me any other thing, apart from the fact that nobody knows the image of God but both of us are here in this call, we are created in the image of God. So, so I then stopped distancing myself from church because I realized that I am more needed, with all the experience that I had with the church. And with all the challenges that I had to face, was really preparing me to be able to help many other LGBTI people who went through same or more even harder, you know, who are struggling with themselves into how, as I've mentioned before, it is hard when a person has been told to hate themselves. Because that is what this message from the religious, especially in Christian communities, that is what the message is about. When one person tells another person that God hates you, or God did not create you, automatically whatever that I have internalized for myself, I had to work it out and realize that it's how much of the hate that people end up having to because they have internalized, internalized so much hate for, for themselves and the hate that they are receiving: rejection from feminists, the rejection from churches, the rejection from... So my role as a person is to make sure that I stand against those things. And I stand for people who have to go through that, to tell them that if I am able to stand, and if I am able to integrate my sexuality and my spirituality and be able to use my mouth as a mouthpiece to say, actually God loves you, regardless of what or where you come from, God loves you, God created you. So that is what I am not gonna distance myself in what, what was meant to be harmful for me. But I turned the message around for myself, given how you know, I use the

Bible, as a contextual Bible study that you know and then I got myself involved in work with religious leaders or having to have these dialogues with different kinds of pastors and religious leaders say, having these conversations about faith, sexuality, gender, and the integration of all this that- Because I have to learn to understand that all of us are spiritual beings, we have a body, we live in a body, we have a soul and sexuality forms part of who we are, it's like, these are four elements of me as a, you know, I am a spiritual being. I embrace my spirituality, and I embrace my physical body. I embrace my mental health, my, my mind, my soul part of it. But I also embrace my sexuality. And so these things had to change in my mind to realize that immediately when you say to someone, I'm actually a lesbian, or I'm part of the LGBTI person, uh, community, people make assumptions that you are talking about sex, or you are the only- we are the only community that is actually embracing our own sexuality. And you know, with these conversations with dialogues around issues of faith, and gender, and sexuality, I always remind everyone to say, all of us, none is an excuse to say, except that people don't want to embrace. Even heterosexual people have part of themselves a spiritual, physical, soul, and they have sexuality as part of themselves. So why would now our only focus becomes on LGBTI people because every time when someone say, Are you a lesbian? You say yes, and then the first thing that they think is about how you do sex.

00:21:25 Hope And Unity MCC

KJ: Mmm. And then the church that you mentioned, is that Hope and Unity?

ND: Yes.

KJ: How did you come to hear about it?

(00:21:36) ND: So I... when that part of the church that was happening, that hurt and the pain, so someone, then sent me, uh, contact details of Rev Tsietsi Thandekiso who was the pastor at that time, to say, actually, you need to have a conversation with this man. And that's how I got to find out about the church. And then I came, and I was helped. And even though it was very overwhelming, I did not believe that there's actually a church that caters for LGBTI people. But it was a church that really helped me into becoming the person that I am, and I was ordained in 1998, as a senior pastor in that, for some reason, things get connected [shrugs].

KJ: [chuckles] And what was it like, uh, being there?

(00:22:40) ND: Wow, it was more loving, kindness, an open environment where I did not have to look over my shoulders to see who's here. I felt at home. I felt... Yes, first few weeks was a struggle for me, because, you know, my background of how much of the internalized belief that God did not create LGBTI people. It was hard, frustrating at some point. But at the same time, it was like, these are people that I identify myself with, you know, same, you know, they speak the same language, they understand that God loves us regardless, because that was the message that was preached over and over to say, you know, some Psalm 139 says I am wonderfully made in the creat- in the image of God, you know, so I must embrace myself for who and what God has created me to be. So it was more of a healing space for me, it healed me and made life much easier and I could see life in a different manner. What I can say my worldview changed, and how I view and my understanding of God, and how you know, Christianity- because it was not only that, but getting to being... because where I come from, I was taught that Christianity was the only religion or was the only faith and other

faiths and other people did not., are not part of- but I have to learn to say people are from different backgrounds, and people are from how their understanding of God is the same way that my understanding of God was that not that one. So I had my own understanding of what God is, Jesus is and so everything that I was socialized to believe I had a hard time to get rid of those things one by one and be allowing myself to feel that actually God loves me. And I don't even have to do anything, or, you know, to do something, or... but I can come to God as I am, I don't have to be somebody else to really connect with God. So everything about it, that space taught me a whole lot of things. So all my reference, it's, it's like that, because I had to learn that there's lesbian, who are masculine, who are feminine, there's bisexual people, who I had hard time to accept [laughs], because of how I used to believe that you have to choose, I had to learn about trans people, I had to learn about intersex people, I had to learn about humanity, and how we all are, you know, we all connect in one way or another. So I was exposed to this world, that was full of like, How did I not know that this is how people look like or this is how human beings are like and how I did not know- My only focus, when I grew up was church, Christianity and God that was the only thing and when that God and church space disappointed me, I was able to, you know, to evolve, if I can use that word, evolve into something that and I realized that actually God is like **beyond** how I didn't, I'd never, it never crossed my heart, my mind to realize that I could re-find and redefine, and understand God, in that space from that church, where it was labelled as an evil devil church and devil whatever but I have found and re... read scriptures with an open mind, learn to know contextual Bible Study, learn to unpack these things, learn to understand that, you know, there's many possibilities with God, you know, and got to expose myself to say, you know, what is queer, you know, all these different languages and different kinds of things that, so I give that, and I always go back to saying that, place shaped me to be

the person that I am today and to be able to continue with the work that I'm doing to help many other LGBTI people. Because at the end of the day, we need each other, and people are struggling with themselves. And when people are struggling with themselves, they are struggling with how to navigate the world, you know, because they are not part of it. Other people have told them that they are not part of this world so they can't fit anywhere. So I make all these lived stories and from my lived experience to say, you know, I can be whoever or whatever and I can be in this world and find my purpose and this is part of my purpose, to be able to art-, articulate very well to say, I don't want people to tolerate me. And if people don't want to accept the fact that you are different, then it's their business. It has nothing to do with you. And no-, none of us is created in one. But we are all created in the image of God to fit the bigger picture of what this world must look like. The same way that we have animals that are so different, we have plants that are so different, including us as human beings. We are in different ways with our own physical ways of how we look and how we feel and how we think and how, because if we're all created the same way, probably we will not, we will be thinking the same things, we'll eat the same time, we'll do... we'll cause traffic [laughs], because like it's it will not make sense. So I think of God as someone who has such a sense of humour, because of all this diversity, of creation, of different kinds of things that God created and, you know there's diversity in how our colour look like, there's diversity of our... including our own sexuality. So uh-uh.

KJ: Mmm and how old were you when you found Hope and Unity?

(00:30:18) ND: Twenty...two! 22, 23, yeah.

00:30:23 Dating Other Women

KJ: Okay. And so, at what point did you start feeling comfortable dating other women?

ND: A year after? Yeah, I think I was 24 or 25. I needed to do so much work with myself.

KJ: And how did your family react to that? To you starting to actually date other women.

(00:30:57) ND: So my family was okay. Because, like, as I said, it took us 20 years of some kind of... from that- uh-uh, it didn't. Like my mother was confused, it was that period of confusion. So, so, like, even though she knew as... So I got ordained in 1998, so I started dating, I think, in the year 2000, so... but the funny thing about this whole, my mother will come to church, a LGBTI church, but my mother will say, I don't have issues with them, I have issues with you, because you are my child. So even with, you know, bringing people home to introduce to her, it was that kind of like a... My mother was a very friendly and kind person. So she will not be like our issues will not be... like she will not show that we have problems so it was that kind of thing. So I did not know whether she approved this or not. Like it was that confusion type of thing. But my brothers and my sisters because we were taught to love people so they will embrace whoever I brought, then they will say no, no, no, this one is not the right one type of thing. Not because of the, you know, our issues, but because of the fact that probably they see something that I did not see and that kind of situation. So it was very interesting. It's still interesting to think about it now to say actually, my mother was really having a hard time.

KJ: Did you ever live with another woman?

ND: Yes.

KJ: That you were dating or that were romantic with?

(00:33:08) ND: Yes, I did live even though it wasn't not full time, then I got married at some point in my life with a woman and I stayed with her for three years and then we ended up having some challenges and got divorced.

KJ: Oh, when? What like year was this? How old were you?

ND: Ey, now I'm 48. When I got married, I was in my late 30s... 30...35. I can't... It's too many, many years ago [laughs]. But yeah, it was then that yeah... But I got divorced so now I am... So I was almost 39.

KJ: When you got divorced.

ND: Yeah, when I, when I got divorced I was 39. So I was in a relationship with - So I was in my... 35,36.

KJ: Okay. And how did your family take that?

ND: [laughs] So the thing about that part of my life was the fact that my family was not part of it. So it was that; those moments where you met someone, three months down the line you got married, and nobody from both our families, no one knew. They only saw us with rings. It was only when now the divorce processes were... because now there was some wars that was happening. So I needed to tell my family so that if something happens to me, then they know where, what, what is happening. So everyone - but like my mother did not get to see that whole process with my divorce because she passed away during that moment, but I did not want to give her heart stress and everything. So that was my thing my sisters had to find out about it because it was that, that those moments that you feel that actually I'm going to court, to divorce someone, like people need to, people need to know. But at the same time, it was also the fact that I am known, mostly within the LGBTI spaces so I did not

want now you know with media, and there's many things that can happen. So then I had to let my family know my son and everyone to say, actually, I was married, but now I'm getting divorced. And my sisters were like huh?! like, when did you-? I said it doesn't matter, whenever this process is over, we'll be able to talk about it. So it's always a laughing matter now like when we talk about it, because it was a very funny like that I can kill someone and hide them. Because how do I get married and with no family. So now, because I have a fiancé now, so my family made it clear that that whole thing that they wanted to see. So we've been together for four years now. So we are engaged now it's our first year. So I was very grateful that all my family, my sisters were part of the whole process of, you know, that whole engagement. So it was the change that I've seen that I did not feel shame anymore and even with other- like just to link your question with other, even with- because I don't, I have many other pastors or my peers, who I be friends with them who are like, I can use that word, I hate using that word, but straight or hetero-, heterosexual people that I'm friends with. So it was the like, it's so beautiful when you are comfortable with yourself. It's easy then to start having conversations and... but at the same time, it's like other people get shocked when they find that because I always believe that it seems like... so it's like how I have these conversations with people that are associated with me it's like, the same way that I don't expect you as an heterosexual person to come out, I don't go around and say ey actually, by the way, I'm a lesbian, I want people to know me and then if that element of my life comes out, then it's the conversation that we can have. Because I believe that I have talents and gifts and skills and beautiful other things that people can really get interested in and it doesn't become that is what the first thing that I give people that you know, being a lesbian, what, what is the lesbian? I want to be a human being first and I want to be you know... so it becomes like, so what I have learned from all the years that I have been and up

to, up to now is to learn to say, you know, you treat human beings the way that you would want them to treat you and you also are more of... sexuality is my little thing that form part of me, it's not everything about me. So my friends and my family or you know, it's not something that I impose on them. Like it's not whether then you asked me and I'm like, oh, okay, you want to know then I tell you, if then you accept or not, it's not up to you to tell me to say I accept you so that you make life easy for me. No, it's all about... it's your issues that you need to work on. Because I did not create a situation where our friendship should be based on the fact that one accept each other and the other one is like [shrugs] so it's like-
[ND cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:39:59]

Tape 2 ends

Tape 3:

[00:02:34 third Zoom meeting starts after a short break]

KJ: Yeah, sorry. We keep getting cut off, what were you saying?

ND: Oh, no I was ending that part of that. You know when people don't really... it's not the first thing that I tell people about me, ja.

KJ: Okay.

00:02:55 Marriage

KJ: [Zoom audio distorts] If you don't... mind... speaking a bit more... about your marriage? What was the process like?

(00:03:05) ND: Okay. The... so the process, we just went to Home Affairs and booked a date and find two witnesses. And we got the date and there were two friends who were shocked, because they were told a day before [laughs] and then they were willing to come and be our... because I guess both of us because it was that kind of a situation from the very staunch Christian background, so she did not want to put a burden over her family and I also did not want my family too. Because I guess when you know... agh, because... so I saw that when we're doing, uhm, so we were the first church to marry after the Civil Union passed on December 9, 2006. So, we hosted a marriage, you know, for the first time so I could hear what people were saying, even, you know, with other Christians who were against the issue of homosexuals now getting married is like, you know. So, I remember there was a lot of churches organizing themselves into being against the Civil Union and they... there was a lot of those kinds of things. So, with... when I made a decision to- for both of us to get married it was that kind of thing we did not want pressure from both families and also being asked, this is wrong or right or whatever.

KJ: And Home Affairs were they like quite willing to do it?

ND: Mmhmm.

KJ: Okay.

ND: They did it.

KJ: Okay, so there wasn't any issue with Home Affairs?

(00:05:18) ND: Yeah, no, no, it was not that kind of an issue.

KJ: Okay.

ND: Even though that, that man who did it was very grumpy. But I guess it was like that thing that they have to do as public servants. You know, I would, I would not have it because I have more knowledge at that time to say, you know, as a public servant, this is part of your job description, so, so... But even though he was very grumpy, but we did it; we got married.

00:06:00 Children

KJ: Okay. And then you said that you, you do have childr- Is it just the one child?

ND: Mmhmm. I have a child and a granddaughter.

KJ: Oh nice, congratulations! Um, and how would you characterize your child's relationships with your family and your friends?

(00:06:21) ND: So, it is a good, it's a good, like, I feel like I am very blessed. Because he's my child, who, with everything else, he was, he's still my main person who will say, whether grandmother or whatever, whoever says anything, I don't care, you're my mother, I like the way you are, and I would not want you to have it hard. But I think the main person who played so much role was the father. Because, you know, he was the one who accepted me first more than any other person. So he would have these conversations with him to say you don't choose, you don't choose to have parents, you know, we did not choose to have you the same way that your mother is... doesn't love men, and doesn't mean that me and your mother we are enemies, but we love you but at the same time, we need to respect the fact that people are different. So, he grew up with that, even when he got to be teased or bullied at school at some point because most of the work that I do would allow me to be on media or sometimes speak and then other kids will know and then he, he got himself into a situation where he was bullied at school. But he's been very kind and gentle and loving and

accepting. So, we have a beautiful relationship, but he's also just a guy who, I guess, as I've said that, you know, I feel blessed that, you know, he's open minded and very accepting. But I think the environment that I grew up in with my mother, my grandmother and my aunt, and how, you know, we have been taught to love regardless, that is what we have took that as a very important part of his life, because that is what we are all about in my family.

KJ: So, when you say that he was bullied, was it because of your presence in the media or because of your sexual orientation?

(00:08:59) ND: It was my presence in the media due to my sexual orientation.

KJ: Okay.

ND: Yeah.

KJ: But uhm, how did he, how did he feel about that?

(00:09:14) ND: It was a difficult time for him, you know, we even had to arrange for him to go see a psychologist and we had to take- to talk it over with someone, but because at that time also, it was the mix of his father passed away when he was 12. And at the same time, I'm also now like doing so much work and so he did not have a father figure type of, you know, the person who was always on his side. So, we had to arrange for you to go see someone, but at the same time, it was feeling like, uh, very hard, tough. So, we had to go through that whole journey and make sure that he's able to stand up for himself. And he started talking more. And actually, those kids ended up, like, having to apologize, because they did not understand. So, he, he got it right, I guess [chuckles].

KJ: [chuckles] And how old were you when you had him?

(00:10:34) ND: I was nineteen.

KJ: Okay. Oh, so this was all happening at the same time. The church and the-

ND: Yes. Yes.

KJ: Oka, uh, sorry, [sneezes], excuse me, and then the psychologists that you took him to?

Was it an LGBTQ focused...?

ND: [shakes head]

KJ: No, it was just a normal psychologist.

ND: Normal, yeah.

KJ: Okay.

00:11:05 Persecution Based on Sexual Orientation

KJ: Okay, besides the instances that we've already discussed, are there any other occurrences where you felt persecuted based on your sexual orientation?

(00:11:17) Hmm, there's, there have been many of those kinds, I still have to deal with those. But mainly, it's within the church environment and I have mentioned that I do work with LGBTI pastors or churches. But I also have been involved with issues around gender-based violence. So, with the previous work that I was doing, with another organization that was working with interfaith, religious leaders who are living with HIV, so there was one project that they, that I was part of that was dealing with, you know, building capacity of religious leaders into talking more around issues of gender-based violence. And I would visit different kinds of churches, and different kinds of religious spaces. That is where most of the hate I would get, or, you know, issues of rejection. Immediately when people or you know, maybe a pastor or members know that I'm actually a lesbian, then everything will turn into a

very sour kind of situation. But with the whole process that we will do the gender-based violence, we'll talk about violence that affects women, children, and violence that affects LGBTI people. So, we'll take a journey, and do the contextual Bible studies of finding stories in the Bible. Like for instance, there's a story on Judges Chapter 19, where the Bible talks about that woman who was killed, was gang raped and killed and her body was des-, you know, body, her body was cut into twelve pieces. So, we locate violence and talk about in, in a church setup and unpacking how do people feel about the violence that we've seen from the Bible that we are using is the same Bible that we use against LGBTI people. Promoting the same violence that we use, or the same scriptures that we use because there's many other churches who still believe that women cannot be ordained, or women cannot play any leadership roles type of thing. So, we mix this conversation and then it becomes that kind where people will just pick and choose and say, you know, LGBTI people or lesbian women we can't be talking. So, every time then I was forced to come out to say, who chooses a life that is so difficult, that you know we get scared to go anywhere without people knowing then you know that they will reject you or hateful messages or all those kinds of things. So it was that, but I never experienced it within my own community, especially here where I stay. People have been because I've formed part of the community. It's all that we- also talk about the intersectionalities of struggles because that makes it as I've mentioned before that I'm always the person who wants to be recognized as a human being. So, if then there's struggles with for an example that we are seeing right now we have struggles with Eskom, we have struggles with electricity. So, my lesbianism doesn't fit anywhere, where we all are struggling with electricity. So, when I, even when I have these conversations with LGBTI, people, I always say, we also need to move from our corner and making assumptions that our own struggles are the only struggle. There's many different kinds of struggles, that

makes us as human beings to be part of the struggles. And I, I find it when you don't separate yourself, you become the human that is struggling with electricity, the human being who is struggling with job losses, the human being who's struggling with the issue around COVID, and you become part of the community. So, I have never experienced these kinds of exclusion in my own community, especially where I'm staying currently, even in my hometown. Even wherever I go, but mostly, it's the church, that has been a problem that we are trying to really do some work in those kinds of spaces.

KJ: Um, is there like a certain denomination that you find is more prone to like hateful speech and stuff? Or is it just like throughout?

(00:17:08) ND: It's more often of, uh, your charismatic and Pentecostals. Like, so now I work for a Global Interfaith Network. So, we are currently doing work with different, like different uhm... Council of Churches, like here in South Africa, the South African council of churches that have member churches, so we work inside the country. So, what we'll find is that there's, you know, your mainline: your Anglican, your Methodist, and, you know, those are more open into allowing, creating spaces-

[KJ has unexpected personal issue arise]

KJ: Ugh, sorry. Sorry one minute.

KJ: Sorry about that.

ND: No problem.

KJ: Yeah, you were saying?

(00:18:40) ND: So, yeah. So, like I'm saying that those are like, because this work is happening now and where we want to create this safe space of having these conversations,

even though, like, I think, a lot has been done. And I think that the day when we realize that the hate actually comes from the religious spaces, because you even hear someone who have never experienced or has never been to church, when you start, then they talk about Sodom and Gomorrah story, and then you ask them, where did you get that? What? And then they say, no, I've heard the pastor preaching from the radio or whatever. And have you been to church? No, I don't go to church, but this, that is the message that they hear. So mostly, you know, with your charismatic and your Pentecostal, we still have those kinds of struggles. So right now, we're also including now traditional church spaces, where your Zionists, your you know, so different, uh, those traditional churches or African traditional churches, also, because we cannot lie and say, we don't have LGBTI people in our churches. They are full, they are there. It's just that you know, it's when the issue is around acceptance and we're preaching the message of hate all the time. You know, people don't find themselves with no home where they can go and that they feel comfortable. And that is where we'll find. But actually now, we also have been finding more of, uhm, the same issues within the LGBTI churches, like, you know, when we speak about patriarchy, heteronormativity, you know, issues around sexism, all those things that we are trying to clean out there, we are now beginning to realize that the same problems that we are, you know, because in some of the LGBTI churches, you hear preaching, like, when someone is bisexual, for an example, and then, you know, the preacher will be saying, you know, they need to change, they need to, you know, you know, so it shows that there, it's what we have socialized, we have been socialized to believe, and othering other people, because my understanding is that, you know, how me as a leader, or a religious leaders, how I use the scriptures, and how I unpack the scriptures for my people, and also how, you know, there's that issue of sexuality is a broad and it's fluid. But it's actually something that ey, is now

beginning to be a problem within our own LGBTI community because of how we don't really accept each other. We've seen that, you know, we still have issues of patriarchy, we are finding issues of sexism, that, you know, we find issues of class and race issues, like it is, it is a whole lot of things. So, I, this year, beginning of this year, we then created a, a pilot of a project that is called Cleaning Our Own Backyard. So Cleaning Our Own Backyard, it speaks mainly... the target is targeting LGBTI churches and pastors and religious leaders in those spaces to start unpicking things for ourselves around sexuality, gender, and, you know, issues of our own faith and, you know, our own theology, how is our understanding of God and how when we're talking (about) inclusivity or when we are dealing with the issues of exclusion out there, we can't be excluding other- our own people using the same Scriptures or the same Bible that has been used against us into destroying other- our own people's lives. So, like, we want to unpack it for ourselves. So, we are hopeful that eventually we will get an opportunity to find more resources and start beginning to have all that we're doing outside; the stigma, hate, discrimination that we are dealing with it out there, we need to work it out for ourselves to be able to become better people.

KJ: I'm sorry to go back a bit. And if you don't want to answer this, that's fine. But how old were you? When you were, when you were gang raped?

ND: I was 19.

KJ: Okay, so still all around the same?

ND: Yes at 18/19.

KJ: Okay.

00:24:39 Coping with Rape

KJ: And how did you, how did you cope with everything that you were going through at the time? Who were you leaning on?

ND: Okay. So, I have leaned on- you remember when you asked, like, you asked a question about, uhm, how did that I find out about it the Hope and Unity MCC.

KJ: Yes.

ND: So that is where my leaning became... Because that's when I first met the pastor who was the pastor in that time, that helped me through that whole journey of processing, everything that was, that had happened. It was, was not, it was the rape, being rejected at home, being rejected in the church and my own internalized struggles with everything. So that was my saving grace.

KJ: So then, how were you like coping during that time? Because you said it was like, 18, 19, that that's all happening and it was only like, (at) 22 when you found Hope and Unity, you know? So, like, how did you cope with everything that was going on.

(00:26:01) ND: So, like, I coped because even though like, probably I can say that fully with, with, with the, with the church and fully streaming some way, like I mentioned that I had to learn to really find God for myself. So, I established that kind of finding ways to read the scripture in a different way and finding ways to deal with the issues around forgiveness. That was the main thing that I needed to do. Uh, finding ways of, you know, start to think about the other God, the God that is kind, loving and, and the God who is not punishing people, the God who, probably because when I was trying to commit suicide, and I did not die, there was a reason for me to be still alive. And that was my thing that became my anchor, for some reason, that makes me want to live and I did not want to live the same way that I have

been. But I wanted to live with the new ways of understanding myself and accepting who I am and wanting more for myself. So that that also helped me a lot.

00:27:50 Counselling

KJ: Mmm. And did you seek any, like, counseling from a psychologist?

ND: Yes, I did.

KJ: And was the psychologist LGBTQ focused or just a normal psychologist?

ND: It was a normal, but very open someone who really helped me to... yeah.

KJ: So, would you say that the pastor that you went to, like, provided you with more support than like counseling?

ND: Mmhmm, yeah.

KJ: And was that pastor also a member of the LGBTQ community?

ND: Mmm, yeah, he was part of Hope and Unity.

KJ: Okay, but was he also queer?

ND: Mmhmm.

KJ: Okay and like, what was that experience like? When you found a pastor who was also gay.

ND: Liberating, it was a liberating experience, because he knew what to say. He taught from his own lived experience. And so, it was not like that thing here, but it was something that comes from his own lived experience and how it was able to reach me where I was, and we

were able to journey together with what the knowledge that he had for himself, so that helped me a lot.

00:29:31 Creative Forms of Expression

KJ: Are there other mediums that you use to express your experience as a queer person?

(00:29:42) ND: I guess mostly it's talking to others in a setup, but also, I have created uh, so it's a group of young LGBTI people or you know, others who are still questioning themselves. We have been together for almost three years now. So, we have been doing some work. So, it's called Ashes to Purpose. So, we meet once in a month, it depends sometimes, you know, maybe after two months just to have conversations about who am I, as a person. So that gives me an opportunity to learn from others from their own experience of who do they define themselves to be. And we take a journey of what is in my name, who am I as a person, my gifts and talents, my skills and, and you know how to deal with your mental health issues, and you know different kinds of conversations. But in between, we get to find - because I guide the process, but I get to find other you know, like when we have issues where we want to talk about mental health, we draw someone who's an LGBTI person who is a psychologist who comes and offers some help. And because th- these young people are people who are interested in writing. So, for this month, we, we, we are working on getting someone who will come and do, uh, mapping on how writing is a skill, like, like that kind. So, we bring different kinds of people into the space. But it's a very closed space that you can't find anywhere, except the people who knows, but people are telling other people that this is what we have done. But I've seen that it has helped others to find - we have two people who decided to go back to school now and they're in college now. So, it was an exciting moment. And two people in the group who started their own businesses, because this is a safe space

that helps them to be creative, in thinking about what, who they are as people. So, I use those type of platforms to talk about my journey. But I also use the platforms to get invited in different churches or come preach, and I normally talk about my own journey and my own understanding of God, and you know, and, and get to be able to talk about all my- because I don't believe that it's only... so the, the challenges are important to speak about, because it helps people who are stuck somewhere to realize that there's many possibilities that I can be two steps ahead, or you know, my past or all that was I carry is something that is shameful, I can be able to, you know, to shame the things that have shame, shamed me for. That they made me feel like I am a prisoner, you know, because people feel like, so I use that kind of but I also because I am not full time, full time in the church space now. So that is also something that I have realized that I have a lot of people that are on my contact list, that I am doing pastoring outside the walls of the church. So, there's people who were harmed by the church, who are not going to be able to go back to those moments of having to go to church Sunday. So, I do this course in groups setups, and I do these kinds of having one on one conversations with people. But I am fully more present with people more than when I was pastoring the church for, for the past 15 years. Because that has allowed me to be.... It's like I call myself everything for everyone. Like I am always able to go to a church setup and I'm able to fit in. I am also able to go to a church setup, a space where people are not changing. Like for an example we have a lot of cases of LGBTI people, especially lesbians who get killed and there's no preacher, there is no pastor who will do their, their, their burial. So, I'm always available to do those kinds of things. Because I believe that, you know, my calling is beyond what the walls of the church, or the requirements of being a reverend or being a pastor. That means that every LGBTI person, whether they go to church or not, but help them to integrate their own sexuality and their spiritual lives. Others are able to go back to

those spaces that has harmed them, and be able to participate fully, because then they had to deal with the things that have had to hold them down. But then they are able to do that now, because they have all the time and have dealt with their own healing. So, I use different kinds of platforms, to be able to do that work that requires you to be just fully present with people where they are and be able to reach everyone where they are and be able to journey with anyone without conditions.

KJ: Okay.

00:36:19 Self-care

KJ: And what do you do for self-care to look after your mental health?

ND: Yhoo, I do a lot of things yeah. I do reading. I do- So I am interested more mainly also on these free online courses of like, so I do that, that is part of my... finding myself more but I do fun stuff, I have fourbies (sp?) that I love, I have like... I spend my time when I really want to get down downtime. So, I have this a Korean series that I watch so they require me to watch the subtitles, and so at all understand what is going on. So, they ground me into making sure that my wholeness is in it. So, I'm able to switch off my phone, I'm able to go out with my friends with my partner and just do fun stuff that is not related to the work. Because then I had to learn a thing during COVID, I learnt to separate my life into... self-care is part of it. Because you can't be doing self-care and be doing the work. You have to do self, self-care by separating yourself. So, with Global Interfaith Network, also they have given us you know, from Friday, that is the last day, so you never get to here to see me or anything. Friday, Saturday, Sunday. It's your time to do whatever that you want, except when we are traveling. But that that helped me to learn more about self-care. So, I do fun stuff, or just sit here and watch all these movies or series and, and laugh my lungs out.

KJ: Okay, cool.

00:38:15 Leaving HUMCC and Joining GIN

KJ: So, you said that you're now with the Global Interfaith Network, right?

ND: Mhm.

KJ: When did you leave, uh, Hope and Unity?

(00:38:30) ND: Okay. So Global Interfaith Network, it's a workspace. So, uh, Hope and Unity was the church. So, I left the church in 2010. 2010 and then I took some time away and then I went back and then I started another small group of people that was called House of Prayer and Worship. And then from 2015 until 2018. So, from 2018 until up to now, I have been a pastor with no church. I do, like, like, I'm all over the place.

KJ: And uhm, what's that like to not have like, a church space where you're constantly at?

(00:39:26) ND: It's freedom. Free, it's like, it's, it's liberating in a sense that it makes me feel like I can do more for people. Because not everyone who is part of the church. So, taking that notion to think that we only help people who goes to church, we're not helping other people. So, for me, it has really helped me to understand better of when- [ND cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:39:59]

Tape 3 ends

Tape 4:

[00:00:00 fourth Zoom meeting starts]

(00:00:04) ND: So, it's like, when God is not put into our little like... that's, that's how I understand it for myself. Because from 2018 until 2020, it was a bit of a struggle for me

when people asked me, where do you go to church? And I'm like, nah, I don't- I go anywhere, and then people will say no, but then can be a pastor with no church. And I was struggling to, you know, to, for myself until I realized that, actually, it should not be a hard conversation, it should not be something that I'm trying so hard to defend, or try to explain to people I am doing what I feel more of part of what I am as a person, there are pastors who are more... they do more work within the church space, there's some of us who can be able to do more work, uh, outside the church space. And that is the more outwork that I am doing. Like, right now as I am talking to you, so the one family that I got called (to) yesterday. So, they have a three year- a five-year-old child who passed away, so the family did not have a church, or anything they are struggling to have that, they don't have means to bury the child. And the mother of the child has a three-year-old, so two kids, and the one who has passed away. So, I get these calls from families, it doesn't matter whether you are LGBTI, or whatever, it's like my duty as a pastor, to make sure that none of the people we are leaving them behind. Because imagine when a family is frustrated right now, and they don't have means. I have to go there in the morning to, to go see what, how I can be able to help to make sure that the, the five-year-old child gets a decent burial. And also, I have been myself to make sure that I will run that service. So, it's these things that confirmed to me, like all the time to make me realize that actually, it has nothing to do with having a church. Those who can, they can. But for me, it's more about how can I be the feet and the arms of God. While I'm still in this world, I might not fully understand the reason why I had to leave the Church and be the church without, you know, no walls. I call myself the church with no walls [laughs]. But church for me, it's like that kind of an everyday thing. It doesn't have to be that I wait for Sunday to help someone. But if someone has a need right now that I can be able, but also have to learn to separate myself to say I do what I can. And I'm able to say yes and

I'm able to say no. And I'm able to say my no without wanting to explain sometimes. But it's that kind of feeling of how sometimes these things needs to be done in a way that it doesn't become a burden to me also as a person, that I take care of my mental health and be able to work with other people who are able to help me and yeah, so we tap into each other's ways of giving each other strength and to make sure that we work; all of us together.

KJ: Okay.

00:04:25 Socializing with Other LGBTQ People

KJ: How did you come to socialize with other LGBTQ people prior to Hope and Unity? Was it only the one person that you met at church?

(00:04:40) ND: So, it was that only person that I met and then, then Hope and Unity created whole load of opportunities for me to meet different kinds of people.

KJ: Okay, and what sort of, sort of parties or social gatherings were important to you as a queer woman?

(00:05:08) ND: [chuckles] I guess because I come from that socialized ways of anything that was not churchy, I would not go.

KJ: Okay.

ND: So, because I, I... it's only when now I'm learning, you know, to deconstruct all that I was taught, the beliefs, the, you know, so I am able to attend. So (I'm) able to go with friends, you know, with their parties, birthday parties and different kinds of, you know, social gatherings that people have. So, my first year and second year, I think, to until up to year two, it was a very hard time. Because I'm not- I, I was not used to these things and gatherings and now I'm exposed to this different world that have all these different kinds of

things so... But now with HUMCC, now, you had to honor the fact that there's many people who would have parties: their birthday parties, we'll celebrate their weddings, or, you know, different kinds of celebrations. So, then I got to learn. But it was not something outside the church. It was something that is more, more mainly within the church.

KJ: Okay, uh, were you part of any social or sporting clubs were women who loved women socialized?

ND: Uh-uh.

KJ: No? Okay.

00:06:53 LGBTQ Activism and Fighting for LGBTQ Rights

KJ: What drove you to fight for LGBTQ rights?

(00:06:58) It comes from my own lived experience of all the things that I had to endure, and the, the pain, the hurt and that, that grows me to start thinking about what would I do? And why would I be silent and not speak out against everything that I had to go through as I come out and realizing that there's many other people that would have had to go through those kinds of situations in their lives?

KJ: Mmm. Uhm, were there any particular issues within the LGBTQ movement that were not tackled at the time, particularly issues surrounding woman? Uh, this has more to do with like legislation.

(00:07:56) ND: Mmm... [sighs] I would not know how to respond to that question. But I think it's just to do with legislation, the things that are... when- I think we still it's, whether you are in lesbian, or women are still not considered into different kinds of ways of living, like when patriarchy is still that on the rise, we still have women who, you know, who are not given

enough opportunities, we still... whether you know, you... as you fall into the category of being a woman, that time until this time, things are moving, but are not moving at all at some, some point, I guess. That will be my own little knowledge of how to respond to that question.

KJ: That's okay.

00:09:03 Participation in the Women's Movement

KJ: Uh, did you participate in the women's movement?

(00:09:10) ND: Yes, I did. So, I'm also part of the Circle of Concern of Women Theologians, and African Women Theologians. So, I am also part of different kinds of like I, as I've mentioned before, that I also worked for an organization that was doing some work on issues of gender-based violence. So, in gendered-based violence affect women so I've also been part of the- this women's movement, feminists groups of people sometimes getting confused in, in all these spaces, but yeah, I have been.

KJ: And did they provide us apart as a queer woman?

(00:10:05) ND: [sighs] That is a topic for another [laughs]. So, with the African theologian, women, we give support, I get support, I get to voice out my, you know, because some of these spaces, they want to speak on women, without unpacking the fact that women's experiences are different. And women's bodies are different. Women's contexts are different. And we can't be just talking about women's issues without having to unpack the fact of that, you know, women face racism, sexism, women face class, there's class within the women's spaces, you know, there's issues of uh, you know when other women wants to speak on behalf of other women, because of, you know, the issues around academia, where

we are assuming that only feminism can be understood, where around when we talk academia, instead of talking, and including all kinds of women, from all walks of life, in different ways that we can be able to create that kind of spaces. Some of the spaces that will feel like, it's just a waste of my energy, some of the spaces, I would feel that they are open to really be open to the fact that there's women who are lesbian, who are trans women, who might be bisexual women, you know, so like, they are willing to create those kinds of opportunities. But it's still, there's still a long way to go.

KJ: Mmm. Would you say that there's like, still quite a bit of like, homophobia in the woman's movement.

ND: Mmhmm. A bit of that.

KJ: Have you experienced any?

(00:12:11) ND: Ja. In some ways or another. It's like, you know, it's people talking about you as if you are not in the room, or your issues are not important. It's like so, so, then it becomes that kind of a feeling that you can't be talking about something that you don't know, or you can't be talking about something that you are talking on behalf of someone, every one of us have a voice. And when sometimes you feel that your voice has been silenced a bit, because of you know, I, I am a preacher by... so I speak, I talk, we can go on and on, I talk. So, I would raise issues of concern to say, we don't, we're not allowed to speak on behalf of anyone, we're not allowed to speak of other people's experiences, if we understand them. Let people whether, you know, whether in their local language or whether in their own understanding of how things should be. So yes, homophobia is still something that is there in some women's spaces, not all, but some other women's spaces, people are

willing to talk about the intersectionality of struggles and make sure that everyone is included.

KJ: Okay.

00:13:42 Racism within LGBTQ Community

KJ: Uhm, have you experienced any racism within LGBTQ organizations or the LGBTQ movement as a whole?

(00:13:57) Hmmm... No, I guess not. Not necessarily so but yes, somehow that is still a thing. It's like, it's the thing like that, that I can maybe sum, sum it up as the same way how the women's spaces get to think that all women is the same way that sometimes in when, you know, some, **some** white people will think that especially within the LGBTI they're speaking on behalf of everyone else. Or the issues that like for one example that I can make in townships, lesbian women, Black women are a target of killings, rape and in suburbs, where some white people probably are staying there, they're not, uh, not really their issues, it's not their issue. So, it becomes that kind of, like, my racism issues will be when someone makes assumptions that they know, like they understand or they, you know, they're thinking that this is the solution for you as a black person or... So, it's more similar, like how even within the women's movement that we get, you know, in, within the women's movement, we find racism, because of the fact that people's understanding of each other creates that kind of the one voice that makes it hard for other voices to rise up and speak out against these things.

KJ: Okay, yeah. You're doing great so far. I just have a couple more questions. Do you want to take a break?

ND: No, no, no we can because I need to leave by four also.

KJ: Okay!

ND: Yeah.

KJ: We'll speed through them then.

00:16:28 How Does Legislation Fail Women

KJ: And in what ways do you feel South African legislation fails women, particularly queer women of color?

(00:16:36) ND: I think because all these like, for one instance, so like, as I'm explaining that, lesbian black women, are targets of hate crimes and all this, and then there's a Hate Crime, Hate Crime Bill that was put together. But at the same time, none of these things that are on paper, and are really beneficiary, uhm, benefiting from those kinds of things, when, when still black lesbian women are walking in fear, when, you know, that shows, you can't go to the police station to report a case of assault, or even if it's an intimate partner relationship, violence type of thing, you are not able to do that. Because, you know, with all these things are on our paper, but things are different on the ground. So, I think it is failing, mostly more, more and more every day, it feels like, like, **failing**. There's something that is not adding up to what we have in our legislature, to what we have with our Bill of Rights, with all the things that are on paper. Uh-uh, I don't believe that there's something that is shifting because on the ground, things are totally different.

KJ: Mmm, mmm, mmm.

00:18:08 Pride

KJ: Um, what are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for women to speak on LGBTQ issues?

(00:18:17) Sjo. I think that is messed up. Like, it's completely messed up off the fact that, you know, until the day when, like, we will allow women who are affected by violence, women who are lesbian, who are affected by, you know, all kinds of violence, be able to give, to give an opportunity to speak, then I can really go to any Pride and be like because then it has a meaning. For me right now, I feel people have hijacked it. Now we are celebrating. I'm not sure what are we celebrating when last week, not, not, not long, last week, a body of a woman who was kidnapped and thrown, was found last week, only last week, a lesbian woman was killed. So now what are we celebrating? When we still have these kinds of violences that are happening. People are losing their lives and, and, and so ey, I don't even want to go deeper on that. But that is my thing that that space is a mess and the mess that we need to really rethink about how we want to really have intentional conversations about and be honest about the fact that our Black people, Black lesbian women are getting killed every day. And no one is raising, no one is standing with us. It's like it's our own issues, and other people are not part of the issue, but then want to celebrate Pride. Uh-uh.

00:20:09 Work That Still Needs to be Done

KJ: And then, last question, in your opinion, what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

(00:20:18) ND: Okay. So, I think what needs to be done for it's like me, me, me, I am making, to think that we need to start cleaning our own backyard before we can want the outside

world to really think about, you know, we have allies now, we have, you know, but all the things that are messed up are still within our own, we still have patriarchy, we still have, we still have sexism, we still have, we still have all these things that are very harmful, you know, you know, we exclude each other, you know, we have adopted heteronormativity into our spaces. It's like there's so much that we've adopted, that I believe that what we can do, we need to start really having honest conversations within ourselves, and within our own community, to be able to say, to raise these things, because we can't be cleaning outside there. But then what? We let our own space to be toxic, and spaces that are harmful to each other. And the fact that the more we have in this killing and violence and things that are happening within our own communities, and we are not together, you know, we cannot expect the world to be for us, when we are against each other, when we are not able to work together. Organizations, one person is doing whatever, sometimes we're revamping things, and we are not able to work together, we are not, you know, there's ways in which ways that we can collaborate, or we can work together and not restart things that are not beneficiary, to our own communities that we're trying to serve. The day when we can be having these intentional conversations that are open, I think that will be the day that we will see much impact and much that is moving towards seeing no more killings, no more rapes, no more violence, no more hate speech, no more of all these things that we are going through. And others are choosing that they cannot be talking or speaking against the violence that we are seeing. And now we were celebrating Pride Month and all of us forgot one thing that yes, in the midst of this celebration, but **we** are still having problems with our siblings getting killed. How on earth are we going to be saying, we have forgotten that part of why we exist in the first, in the first place, and why we can be able to work together and raise all these issues that are very important to all of us. That will be my last.

KJ: Okay. Thank you so much. Is there- That's all my questions, is there anything else you would like to add?

ND: Uh-uh. That is all. I'm going to sign the consent and then I will mail it back to you.

KJ: Okay, thank you so much.

ND: Thank you. Thank you so much. I hope I did not eat all your time.

ND: No, no, no. Thank you so much for taking time to do this. And I know it's a long interview, so thank you for being such a good sport.

ND: Okay.

KJ: I'm going to transcribe this... and then I'll email it to you for you to just look through if there's anything you want me to remove, just let me know and I'll take that out.

ND: Okay.

KJ: Yeah, okay.

ND: Okay.

KJ: Thank you so much!

ND: So, there'll, there'll be those kinds of things probably with the dates and the years and you know, so it's been a long... I'm towards going to my 50th. So probably, then I can look in those things and correct if then they just are not corresponding very well.

KJ: Okay. No, that's great. Thank you. Thank you so much.

ND: Have a blessed day ahead of you.

KJ: You too. Thanks so much, bye!

ND: Bye!

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:25:05]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 2 hours 28 minutes 52 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form; interviewee has restricted access to the raw audio to everyone but the interviewer.

Interview 8: Roché Kester

Name of the Interviewee: KESTER, Roché [RK]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, Kirsten [KJ]

Date of Interview: 18 January 2022

Place of Interview: Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

Number of tapes/recordings: 1

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, Kirsten

Date Transcribed: 5 May 2022 – 27 May 2022

00:00:45 Introductions

KJ: Hi!

RK: Hi KJ, how are you?

KJ: I'm well thanks and yourself?

RK: I'm good. Thank you. I'm gonna show you briefly what I look like. I look horrible, by the way, but so you know who you're speaking to.

KJ: No [chuckles].

RK: Uhm. Gosh, I don't know what's wrong with this camera, you know? Oh, there we go. Hi!

KJ: Hi! Would you feel more comfortable if I also turned my video off?

RK: If you want to keep it on no problem, but I don't think I can stand looking at myself like this. This is still my morning face. So if you don't mind, I'll just keep mine off [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] Oh, no, that's fine, that's fine. It's totally okay. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my master's project, just by the way.

RK: Oh no problem.

KJ: I've been struggling to find people who are willing to participate so I really, really do appreciate it.

RK: You're so welcome.

KJ: So just to discuss it a little bit. The title of the project is Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010, and so the basic premise and flow of it will be discussing your journey, as- in South Africa, as a queer woman, what your social worlds are like, and are like currently. So your relationships with your family, friends, communities, and how these all kind of play into your activism.

RK: Okay, cool.

KJ: Also sorry, I kind of just assumed, how would you define your sexuality?

RK: Uhm, I identify as queer.

KJ: Okay, okay, that's great. Cool. And then I do have ethical clearance from the University of Cape Town. And just to run through the ethics for this project, if at any point you feel uncomfortable, you wish to redact information, or you want the entire interview to remain confidential just let me know. That's why I sent the interview release form if you could just

sign that. It's to say that you know exactly what I'm going to put in. But also, even later on, if at any point, you're like, Oh, I wish I hadn't said that. You can just contact me and I will leave that out of the official transcript. So this conversation will only be between us, and then I write it up to submit to the university.

RK: Okay, no problem.

KJ: Okay, yeah. So, also, if you want to stop at any time, if you want to recant any information, if you want to anonymize people's names, just let me know and it won't be included.

RK: Okay, perfect.

00:03:45 Family Background

KJ: Cool. So let's just start a little bit with your background. Where did you grow up?

RK: Uhm, So I grew up in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, in a suburb called Kraaifontein, ja.

KJ: Okay. Um, what was the community in your area like there?

RK: Uhm, it was previously a white area. But I think when we had moved in, and that was just in 1994, there was a step towards integration.

KJ: Okay, and so were you quite close with your neighbours?

RK: I mean, we knew our neighbours. Next door and also like, let's say two houses down as well, ja.

KJ: Okay. And in terms of your family, what's your family's background? Like, who was in the house growing up with you?

RK: Um, so my parents are both from the Boland in Paarl, which is, you know, they're Afrikaans speaking and they kind of grew up in different socio-economic backgrounds. And then when they got married, they moved to a place called Belhar, which I lived in first for like, I think my formative years until the age of four. Then they moved to Kraaifontein. So it was basically, I was the firstborn. And so I have a mother and a father. And then, four years after my birth came my sister and then eight years after myself was my brother. So we're a family of five.

KJ: Okay. Sorry and how old are you? If you don't mind me asking?

RK: I'm 34.

KJ: Oh 34! Oh you're quite young! [laughs]

RK: 34? I think that's old.

KJ: Oh, no, no! I was looking, I was looking at sorry, I kind of did a little bit of stalking last night [chuckles], and I was looking through, like your resume and stuff. And I was just like, wow, you've accomplished so much and you're only 34?

RK: Ja, I've done a lot of things in my life. I'm exceptionally tired. That's what made me feel old [laughs].

KJ: That makes sense. The work never stops.

RK: It never does, ja.

KJ: So, you have two younger siblings each four years...uh, there's like a four-year gap in between each of them?

RK: Yeah. Yes.

KJ: Okay. And what type of work is your family involved in or was involved in?

RK: So my, my parents are both surprisingly in IT. So they work in information technology in various degrees. My father was at first a business analyst, and, and then he moved on to testing. So he tests systems to see how they work, if they work, within the IT realm. My mom does similar work. But he works in for the insurance company. And she worked for, in a fashion- in the fashion industry for a long-time doing IT work. And then subsequently, she's now moved to, uhm, the banking arena. So they both involved in information technology, uhm, something that I didn't understand for a very long time. And it's also quite interesting to me, uhm, because given that, you know, my father he has, his... he only has Matric, and I think my mother has Grade 10, but you know, that they are in the- this IT business, and they've been working these subsequently each, let's say for about 40 years plus. It's a bit wild.

KJ: Yeah, no, it is. I don't know. Um, so what was like the conditions you grew up in? Like, were, were your parents' home often? Or were they at work a lot?

RK: Um, I think, you know, it's kind of uh, uh, uh like a balance, because, in essence, you know, they were full time... both fully employed, but I don't think there was any measure of absenteeism in the home. They were always there, we'd do a lot of things together and not just as an immediate family, but also an extended family. And so, you know, any free time was dedicated to family.

KJ: Okay, that's great. And so, you would say like, your family was like, uhm kind of like your community growing up more than like, your neighbours or anything like that.

RK: Definitely.

KJ: Okay. And so, has that relationship been constant throughout your life? That closeness?

RK: I think, um, yeah, I think to a certain degree. There was like a disjuncture in my relation to my parents specifically. In particular, maybe when I started university, and I was like, oh my god, the world is so big and I've been living in this cocoon. And I think in relation to university, that's where I realized that a lot of my ideologies kind of fit with, with a broader sense of thinking. And my parents are very traditional in a lot of senses, like [clears throat] in terms of religion, and then also background and upbringing, you know. It's... so there's a leaning more towards a conservatism than anything else. And so I think, then at that stage, my peer group became more of an anchor and more relatable means of community than my immediate family did, but that's not to say that, you know, the same environment with family didn't just exist, there was just an extension, perhaps to, to the peer group.

00:10:54 Family's Reaction to Coming Out

KJ: And are you out to your parents?

RK: Officially this year, [chuckles] but, but actually, I came out when I was like, 16...

KJ: Okay.

RK: Ja, or I wouldn't, yeah, I wouldn't say I came out, no, my mom found a letter about myself and my girlfriend and then it was like this whole thing of actually never ever speaking about it again. And for a long time, I had internal homophobia. And so subsequently, after that, I was involved in a lot of activism and I think that's kind of where I found a sense of community again, and the courage to be myself, you know, outside of the domestic realm. But only recently, uhm, I had this conversation with my mother and my father separately.

One when I was very drunk with my father after my cousin's wedding, and then the other one was on an Instagram Live that my mother attended, which I was speaking about queer issues. And, of course, I couldn't sugar-coat what I was going to say, because I was going to say it regardless, so, we subsequently had a conversation after that, yes. So really newly freshly out of the closet, again!

KJ: [chuckles] And how, how did they take it in comparison to like, the first time that you came out?

RK: My dad was actually very cool about it is he was just like, you know, you are who you are. My mother didn't exactly like the way in which it happened. And I think she's still, she's still... even though she knows I am her daughter etcetera, you know, the conversation was also around certain hints of, you know, only God can judge me, which comes with the insinuation that she doesn't completely agree with, you know, my sexual, sexual orientation. But it wasn't necessarily something that has caused a void in our relationship going forward, we still speak on a weekly basis. I'm not with him in the same province anymore. So yeah, we still speak on a weekly basis, and there's no animosity or let's say, there's, there's, there's been no strain on the relationship.

KJ: Okay. Um, and then in terms of like, you were talking about, like ideology and like them being quite traditional and stuff. Did you notice any of that growing up?

RK: Well, definitely, I mean, just even listening to the way my mother would describe a child. You know, they were a household of seven siblings. And in essence, it was the kind of environment where they would be the family hosting prayer meetings, they would basically go to church from Monday to Sunday, etcetera. And then also just I think, because, you know, we're so called in inverted commas Coloured and, you know, also that racialized past,

you know, in the, just in the vocabulary, certain things that in relation to other races, I could also just pick up you know, there's a definite means of socialization that was completely different to mine. And that was so kind of made itself apparent, you know, in certain measures of language, etcetera, you know, and also just social circles. Even though they're very family orientated, but it's also so to speak, you know, all of their acquaintances, close friends who are of the same race, same background, more or less. So I think in that regard, there was- I could, I could pick up those nuances from, from a very young age.

KJ: Right, that makes sense. So you say that your mom grew up, uh, in, with, uh, like seven siblings?

RK: Ja.

KJ: So that must have been quite like difficult. Did any of those difficulties occur within your relationship with your extended family while you were growing up?

RK: Um, you mean the fact that they were so many, or...?

KJ: I mean, I'm sure that must have been a sort of financial strain?

RK: I mean, when they were growing up, it seems like they were doing okay. My grandfather was kind of self-employed, he sold [chuckles], this is funny, but he worked on a farm in, on, in the Boland, and then he also sold chickens and eggs, you know. It seems like my grandmother was a housewife. But also subsequently, my grandfather was a philanderer. So of the seven children uhm, there are actually like nine altogether, but seven that are considered from him. And so he also subsequently went on to marry someone else [sounds distorts]. I know that, for instance, my youngest uncle, when my grandparents had passed away, he was taken in by my parents. So my parents also raised my younger uncle to a

certain degree, and so we're exceptionally close [sounds distorts], but I think for all of them, they've all been hardworking people, and kind of maintained a middle class, uhm, background. So it's never been nothing of immense financial strain.

KJ: Okay, yeah. And would you say that, uh, growing up, you would also like, label yourself and your family as middle class?

RK: Uhm, yes.

00:17:20 Family Struggles

KJ: And so, obviously, outside of like, financial, like struggles or anything like that, were there any challenges that you and your family faced growing up?

RK: Um, I think one of the biggest things might have been my, my eldest uncle. He committed... uh, he was involved in white collar crime. So he went to jail for a period. And I think that was really hard on the family. But subsequently, after coming out of jail [laughs], he became a priest, and now works in correctional services to help reform criminals. But I think that's one of the biggest things that kind of marred a lot of relationships at that time, because it's, it was also like, uhm, do we support our brother? Do we leave him to kind of just reform in prison? What kind of support? Uhm, you know, do we help hide him from the police? Because there was also a time that it was like, mentioned on what was then Crime Stock, which was like a big deal in South Africa. So I think that was one of the probably the biggest things. I think, in the extended family, definitely narcotics, and a lot of my cousins falling, or being rather susceptible to drug use, to very harsh extents of like, family theft, of financial ruin, of just

violent behaviour, you know, especially from cousins that are around my age toward their parents. And how those family dynamic caused a, let's say, a rift, because there's a distrust in inviting these people over to your home, you don't know if you can look after your positions, et cetera. And then also just disrespect you know, toward their parents, because they will literally threaten the parents to say like, if you don't give me money, I'm going to throw the windows in of your house or like... To a point that my aunt had to, for instance, you know, lock up a freezer to just like, keep meat in the freezer and not have them sell it off. So I think those are probably the biggest issues.

KJ: Yoh, that sounds really that's... wow. Uhm and like, outside of your family? Were there any challenges like from, from the outside? I mean, sorry, so like, what you're talking about is, like internal challenges and struggles that affected like the dynamic of the family? But like, was there any, like, uhm, society... kind of... societal challenges that that you faced as a family?

RK: No, not necessarily. I think even the drug use could have been attributed to geographical placement. You know, most of my family lives in Kraaifontein, but my, these particular cousins that are speaking about, and I think there's probably four sets of them, uhm, you know, it was also because it was a breeding ground for that kind of behaviour, you know, to the extent that the addiction doesn't become, let's say, recreational, but it becomes an addiction. So I think that's the difference.

KJ: Right, yeah. And are you... uh, do you still speak to those family members currently?

RK: Um, I speak to one cousin. The others not so much, because there's a lot of other things that have also happened. But also, yeah, I, there's just no level of relatability toward them,

either. And they've also kind of, you know, remove themselves to a certain degree from attending family functions, or just being together with the extended family as a whole.

KJ: Okay... So they... would they be aware that you're queer, or not? Um, yeah, I think most of my cousins knew from like, the age of 16 that's who I was. And so it was never like a secret. It's just like, you know, they'd asked me, if I, whenever I was single, you know, if, or the question would be, do you have a girlfriend or boyfriend? You know, it wasn't just like, Do you have a boyfriend?

KJ: Okay, so would you say that they were quite accepting, like, from quite early on? Your extended family?

RK: Yeah, well, definitely in relation to my cousins. There was never any remarks, or no sense of homophobic, uhm, behaviour whatsoever. And, actually, my mother's siblings as well, even though they're really religious, it was easier to speak to them than to my mother, she's way more conservative than they all are.

00:22:44 Religion

KJ: Right. So you speak a lot about like religion, so I'm assuming it plays quite a bit of a role in your family's life, at least. Does it does play a role in your life?

RK: Um, I wouldn't say that I'm religious. I don't necessarily, you know, sometimes I like the rituals of religion, but I can, I've also seen how awful it can be in kind of marginalizing people. But I mean, I am very spiritual. And I do pray maybe at least four times a day, if not out loud, internally. Yeah. So I mean, I don't necessarily remove myself from such, but I don't necessarily, you know, preach a condemnation, like most religions do in relation to sin and

hell, and all of those things is not necessarily my belief. So what I choose to focus on within the context of religion.

00:23:53 Coming Out as Queer

KJ: Right. Yeah, that makes sense. So, uhm, circling back to when you first like came out when your mom first... Was that when you first realize that you weren't, uh, heterosexual?

RK: I mean, yeah, I think at that age, I didn't really question it because it didn't... I mean, to a certain degree, myself, and my girlfriend at that time, we weren't necessarily, you know, public, flaunting it or whatever. There was a measure of secrecy around it. But to me, it wasn't like, Oh, I'm a, I'm a lesbian, or I'm a bisexual, I'm just like, I'm in this relationship, you know. And it also became very normalized because a lot of my girlfriends at school were also in same sex relationships. So we were kind of just those people. But it wasn't something that was political, or, you know, had a... it was just like existing like that. And I think only when I got older, it became way more political for me.

KJ: Right. But yet it was still quite, uhm... something that you did like in private. Is there like a particular reason for it? Uhm, yeah?

RK: Yeah, obviously, my family and their views, you know, and I mean, like, just you'd hear certain remarks, and you feel like this is not a safe space to be yourself or to say these things. So there was kind of that apprehension.

00:25:29 Dating Other Women

KJ: Okay, well, that makes sense. So then, when did you start feeling comfortable to publicly date woman.

RK: Uhm, I really didn't... feel comfortable at all [chuckles]. I've always had like, like I said, I had internal homophobia for a long time. And even though I identified as being queer, my queerness was not necessarily in relation to someone else. It was just who I was, as well. And I don't think people need to validate the orientation by being with someone either. Uhm, I do have a partner now. And so in, in, in relation to that, it was also the thing of if I'm going to be in this relationship, I need to own all aspects of it, you know, I'm not going to be hiding or tiptoeing around the situation any longer. And there needs to be a measure of transparency, or at least, you know, standing within myself to say, well, actually, this is actually who I am. It's unfortunate that the conversation with my parents only took place at this late stage now that I have a partner. But in essence, my queerness has always been, you know, this contention of owning it in different ways and spaces. And so now, because I'm with someone it seems somehow more validated, but in actual essence, you know, uhm, yeah, I don't think it should be that way. Just because you are dating someone publicly or dating someone doesn't mean that you are more validated as a queer person, in my opinion.

KJ: No, definitely, I agree with you. And it's also quite like, an argument that happens a lot when talking about bisexual people and them in straight appearing relationships, so...

RK: Yeah, definitely.

KJ: No, I definitely agree with you on that. Has your partner met your family?

RK: Not as yet. But maybe next month.

KJ: Uhm [laughs] Okay. That's cool. Good luck. Have you-

RK: Thanks!

KJ: Have you met your partner's family?

RK: I have-

KJ: And what-

RK: They're wonderful.

KJ: No, that's great. That's great. And... uhm, would you say that... I'm sorry, I'm trying to think how to put this... do you think that, you know, Oh, okay, sorry. Sorry, have you dated men before?

RK: Yes, I have. Unfortunately. [chuckles].

KJ: [laughs] And would you say that there's a difference in the way that your family views your relationship with a man versus with a woman? Or with a non-gender conforming individual?

RK: Yeah, I definitely think so, I mean, there's no hesitancy. There was never hesitancy on my part being around a male. You know, and it was like, it didn't appear to be a big deal. But like, even now, in thinking about introducing my partner to my family, you know, I know what their background is like, and so that becomes a bit more difficult.

00:29:03 Living Together with Partner

KJ: Right, right. Do you currently live with your partner?

RK: Um, I think we are cohabitating at this point, we planning to move in together next month.

KJ: Okay, so do you think that that's had any effect on like, any... Has it affected like your relationship with your family or your friends? Or neighbours or anyone?

RK: No, Not, not, not necessarily.

KJ: Okay. And your friend, your friend group? Are they also like quite accepting? Or was there like any instances, maybe perhaps when you were a bit younger where you felt a bit, uhm, uncomfortable expressing your sexuality around your peers?

RK: So I think for the most part, like, in my school environment, like I said, you know, most of my girl friends were in same sex relationships anyway, so we were queer people. And then I've kind of always just gravitated to queer communities throughout my life. So most of my friends are queer, you know. So there's really no issue in relation to, to that. I think the only space that I've really felt contention in is, uhm, I was in the poetry community for a long time. And so, you know, ugh, doing art for years in Cape Town, you know, you do come across, you know, the patriarchal male, uhm, men that also perpetuate micro and macro aggressions within the space. And so I think that would be an issue, especially in terms of poetry. And it's, it was very linked to also the hip-hop community, and then also the Rastafarite community. And those communities are very dominant in hetero-heteronormativity and heteronormative behaviours. So I think that's probably the only space where- but even in that space, then the art was used as a means of activism, obviously, to contend with those things.

00:31:33 Poetry Community in Cape Town

KJ: Yeah. Okay, well, there's a lot of things I want to ask based off of that. But so would you say that you've... you perhaps felt like persecuted based on your sexuality in those spaces?

RK: Um, ja, persecuted in terms of sexual orientation, but then also, just, you know, thinking about woman would, in those spaces, you know, and what it means in relation to, to the dominant narrative in South Africa and how it kind of became a microcosm for that. And I think, you know, there were certain times that we've definitely, for those who are, who kind of mix or let's rather say marry activism and arts, there needed to be a collective voice to also ascertain positions within that space and also to consistently, you know, not educate, but I, I suppose voice, the nuances of identity within those spaces.

KJ: Right, right. Um, no, this is so interesting, because one of the themes that I'm actually looking at is, like, cultural expression as a form of activism. So this is really interesting. Would you say that your poetry and your art helped you to cope with, you know, those, those feelings of like, not being accepted based on your sexuality? Or like, you know, being... uhm, like, just misogyny in general?

RK: Um, I think so. I think my, my body of work is not necessarily queer orientated. But, you know, there are certain pieces that I used for those means, you know, especially within the framing of gender-based violence in South Africa. So I would say, a lot of my work has also focused on, you know, a kind of a feminist ideology in that regard, more than a, uh, you know, framing of sexual orientation, but it does touch on that as well. And then, I mean, besides, you know, the poetry, there's also just been literature in general as a tool for, for, for that kind of, measure of nuance. So, it's definitely, I feel, you can, if you are an artist use art as a tool to speak directly to these issues in a way that's more palatable than just for instance, ranting or writing a social media post. It becomes more impactful because people

will digest it easier, it sits with them. They remember the feeling more than they remember the words so to speak. So for me, that's always been interesting. But then there are other ways in which I've also used poetry to be very deliberate about it, you know, like, I would for instance, curate specific gigs around, uhm, I had this one thing called Slam for Blood, which focused on like, menstrual dignity for young girls. And we'd have poets come and have people donate sanitary towels, etcetera. And then obviously give back to disadvantaged girls, or, you know, whatever mechanisms in which we'd kind of interlace social ills, through, through art mechanisms to ensure that there is a measure of giving back to whatever community. But also, I was part of the team that curated the first Queer Feminist Film Festival. And that was, that was a very interesting experience, because it's like film speaks in itself, in terms of narrative, but also organizing that was also just bringing together various groups in, in the community, you know. Some would be vendors at the festival, others would be panellists, speakers, you know, touching on different representations within the community and how that comes together. And I mean, so that was also interesting to see then how this artistic form can also be a political tool to make an expression because it did quite get a lot of attraction when we first started it, and it's still in existence.

KJ: Is it Out in Africa, or no?

RK: No. So, um, there's an NGO in Cape Town, you probably know it Triangle Project. And they-

KJ: Yes.

RK: Yes, they started the Queer Feminist Film Festival.

00:36:44 Organising the Queer Feminist Film Festival

KJ: Okay. So, um, do you mind speaking a little bit like more about it in terms of like, the experience, like your personal experience of, like, having a Queer Film Festival in South Africa, you know, and being a part of organizing it, and like, just kind of seeing it all come together?

RK: Yeah, I think it was a bit wild because we were working from nothing, and, but also knowing that this could cement a community space that is so necessary in terms of narrative, and then also visibility. And the support was just overwhelming. We had so many people come through and even just sitting in a theatre together, going through all have these films together, discussing it, unpacking it afterwards, you know, it speaks to then a greater, uh, narrative of community and what that means and how important it is sometimes to cement queer communities, not just in terms of struggle, but in terms of leisure and, and, you know, just being, you know. I think often the narrative around queerness is always this dreary struggle, we consistently have to be made visibilised to violence, or discrimination, but there's hardly spaces where, you know, you can come together and there's a celebratory element about it, or just a measure of community without having to necessarily feel like you're always under a gaze or, or a, you know, the lens of heteronormativity. So, I think it was important in that sense that it created a different sense of community.

KJ: Right, right. No, definitely. And then, like, also just kind of an observation is, is the fact that there's like, very little queer media, you know, within South African media. So that also would, you know, create, like, some community as well to be like, you know...

RK: Yeah, yeah, I was, yeah, yeah, I was a host of community weekly radio show, called The Salon for about three years, and it was a queer show. And so that was also, you know, a different sense of community as well, because it was, you know, through a broadcaster, but we had a definitive audience, these people would listen every week, religiously, to the show. And it was also interesting, because we had such varying degrees of the communities, you know, engaging with the show, you know, from people that were pageant queens to drag queens, cabaret artists, we would attract certain identities on the show, you know, We'd speak about sex workers rights, we'd speak about the varying NGOs that existed in the city, the needs of the LGBTI community, the struggles, we've had people who experience hate crimes. And so it was quite, you know, broad based, a mixture of what we would what we call edutainment. So, obviously unpacking queer identities in relation to orientation, and then also gender identity, but also the social aspects of being queer. And, you know, you know, the lives of individuals and the lived realities of those individuals and what that means. So, for me, that representation at that period of time was so magnificent, because, you know, someone in, for instance, I mean, the show was based in, it was on a, on a community radio show, but you could also live stream it. So people in Atlantis who were on the outskirts of Cape Town would tune in, you know, and it kind of created a measure of, of knowing that if a young queer person is to listen to this, at least they know that there are, there is this measure of, of, of support, and that there are people like them out there. And so I don't know if I completely took away your question [laughs] but yeah, I did do some work in media in that regard.

KJ: Yeah, no, that's, I mean, yeah. And just like, being able to have that like consistency, because, like you were saying, I mean, if you even just look at the LGBTQ+ history in South Africa, it's almost like straight into activism, and then just like lobbying, and stuff like that. So

I think that there's definitely a need for more social aspects. And I think the arts really does help to bring that, you know, into the community.

RK: Definitely.

00:42:01 Socialising with Other Queer People

KJ: Yeah. So in terms of like, if we carry on with socializing, how, how did you come to socialize with other LGBTQ people? You mentioned that in school that most of your girl friends, were also in same sex relationships? Like, how did that... did you, like did you find them? Or was it like, kind of like a natural progression?

RK: I didn't know, we just... I think before the orientation, we gravitated towards each other. And then that was like [audio distorts slightly] secondary, you know, it wasn't like, oh, we are lesbians that are just going to hang out with each other. No, it was kind of like, okay, we're all friends. And then we also happen to be this thing. Yeah. And then I think in university, you know, because of, of the network that I created in high school, there was a natural kind of gravitation toward queer individuals, I just felt more comfortable. And, I mean, even at, in university, I was involved in various, uhm, you know, projects and volunteering, particularly in relation to activism. I was an HIV peer educator, my first year of university, and then there after I joined the Gender Equity Unit at the University of the Western Cape, and they add an arts component to it. And so my activism then spoke through that, but it was also broadly based on feminist principles of inclusivity. And a lot of queer representation was there as well. And so it always just seemed like a natural progression and obviously, with other

aspects, like the radio show, you know, the circle becomes bigger. And so yeah, now I only have queer friends mostly, which is really wild.

KJ: And, like, are there particular, like, social gatherings that you will engage in when you'll get together? Like to go clubbing? Or? Yeah, like kind of what, what activities do you'll do when you do get together?

RK: I think for me, Cape Town was very nuanced in that because it had a lot of options in relation to queer gathering, you know. Some of it would be very political, so you know, general panel discussions or conferences, but then there was also known gay clubs or the known gay strip, you know, like Zer021, there was the bar called Beulah Bar, Bronx and in Greenpoint, you know, the Manhattan, so very, the spaces that are designated to queer people, but I think also for me in terms of art and queerness, you know, there were, there was, for instance, this thing called the Naked Girls Reading, which I participated in and it's just like putting on shows, creating pieces of art that are predominantly for queer people with queer representation. And so I think the nuance of social, social gatherings is very dependent on the person, whether you're into those kind of things. But I've, I've done it all. And I think pageantry also formed a large part of my life in Cape Town because I was consistently either attending pageants or judging pageants in the drag realm. So yeah, that was kind of the vibe.

KJ: Um, and are you currently involved in any social clubs? Or sporting clubs? Where queer woman socialize?

RK: Um, well, I mean, in, in Gauteng, I've gone to a few parties that are specifically designated for queer people. There's one that's called Same Sex Saturdays. There's also... my partner started this initiative called The Queer Market and so there's The Queer Market, for

instance. But I think because generally... on both sides of the fence, she has some queer friends and so I, and so, but predominantly, I don't do as many social activities in relation to queer people. It's a lot more work orientated and ja, that's how I usually catch up with people.

KJ: Okay. So I kind of just want to ask this question to get it out of the way, but are you a parent?

RK: No.

00:47:00 What Led to Activism

KJ: Okay, that's fine. So to speak more, a little bit about your activism? What kind of drove you to, like get engaged, uh, like with activism?

RK: Yeah, so I think for me, it's, I think it was always that thing about social responsibility, particularly in the university arena. And then afterward, obviously, being involved in things like poetry, and the radio show, you know, it kind of shows you the gaps that are needed to, to, to ensure us a measure of safety and access for people. And so that was always important to me. But I think, uhm, when Triangle Project also had this political training course that spanned for like a year, and we would gather quarterly, and it was a constituency of people, nationally, and in that way, I think it also activated my interest in politics and change and legislation and, you know, how that works. And so it wasn't really a conscious choice to do these things, it's just kind of how the trajectory of my life evolved. Because after that training with Triangle Project, I got a job at Parliament. And I was working as a media liaison for the Congress of the People, a very small political party. And at that point in time, they taken out the Civil Union Amendment Bill. And I was kind of rallying a lot around

the Bill, engaging communities nationally, also within Cape Town, speaking about it everywhere I went to just create awareness about this thing, you know, and so, and because of the networks, I'd established in previous, you know, measures of work or volunteering, you know, I was able to create, create support and awareness around that. And so eventually, when it came to elections, we were, it was recommended to us that we apply for other jobs. And then I saw this position in Gauteng, as this organization called Out LGBTI Wellbeing and I worked there for two years, two and a half years, as a Hate crime Manager. And so in essence, everything becomes like, paid activism, you know. And now, after OUT, I did a month at Triangle Project [chuckles], and I was gonna move back to Cape Town, but then I got another position, which is now the Director of the LGBTI Desk here in the Gauteng province, and so, so, so as much as it's like you know, a passion that turned into work. It is still a passion and a vocation of mine that's important. So I don't think [audio distorts slightly] sometimes it's an active decision, but it's also just when you see human rights violated on, on any level, you know, you do want to make a difference. And luckily, within the career trajectory that I've followed, I've been able to, I hope, contribute positively.

KJ: Yeah, definitely. Do you also feel that it's kind of also something that just occurs naturally when you kind of sort of have to take on this role of being someone who advocates for, for queer rights, you know, especially in South Africa, the moment that you do come out as queer?

RK: Um, I don't know. I think-

[00:50:59 Audio distorts]

KJ: Sorry? Uh, you're breaking up.

[00:51:14 Audio issue resolves]

RK: I said, uhm...

[00:51:17 Audio distorts again]

RK: Okay, you've...frozen...

KJ: Can you hear me? Hello?

RK: You just seem to be...

KJ: Can you hear me? Oh.

[00:51:47 RK disconnects from Zoom]

[00:52:13 RK reconnects to Zoom]

KJ: Hello?

RK: KJ, can you hear me now?

KJ: I can you hear me now, yes.

RK: [audio distorts] Okay, okay, perfect. I think it's just the internet connection.

KJ: Yeah [audio indistinguishable].

RK: So yeah, I think some people... ja, I think there are some people that are able to live their lives and not necessarily be an activist all the time. But I think as a queer person, eventually, even if you're not speaking on public platforms, you know, there's a measure of having to navigate your own world, your own community in which you actually have to be an activist for yourself, you know, but there are people I know that don't constantly, you know [audio

indistinguishable] let's say, outwardly advocate for these things, but just try to, to, to [audio distorts] live their lives.

00:53:18 Involvement in LGBTQ organisations in South Africa

KJ: Yeah. Yeah. So you've been a part of quite a few LGBTQ organizations. Do you mind walking me through, uh... [video connection freezes] Hello?

RK: Yeah, I can hear you.

KJ: Okay, sorry [laughs] Do you mind walking me through your career path again? Was it...? Did you start at the Triangle Project first, and then go to COPE or?

RK: No, so um, I was actually- that was not, this was all things that I was doing on the side. My, my initial career path, I was in publishing for a while. I think I was in the book industry for about nine years. And all of these other things were just things that I literally did in my spare time, like the political training with Triangle Project. And then after the political training, that's when I went to, um, Parliament and then after Parliament, OUT, and then the short stint at Triangle Project and now the government.

KJ: Okay, um, so do you mind speaking a little bit more about your, your roles in OUT and the Triangle Project like, what, what did you do basically?

RK: Okay, um, so at OUT I was, the title of my job was a Hate Crime Manager. And it was basically running the advocacy program there on various levels. So, in essence, providing support to victims of hate crimes, uhm, you know, looking at various levels of support, whether that be health, psychosocial, or... uhm, legal. And then also escalating their cases to various government departments to ensure that there was then monitoring of their cases. Then there was a sort of an advocacy component in terms of legislative change and policy

change, you know, meeting with various civil society organizations to drive policy and change in various government departments. We also had safe spaces which I conducted, specifically for LBQ women, so they would be themed [clears throat] and we'd gather women in the province. And then later on when COVID came around, we did online safe spaces, but there's also trainings that I used to do. Training government departments, communities, healthcare workers, police, etc. And then also engaging with the community itself in, in, in community interventions going to various communities, educating them around issues, and also media visibility around issues of discrimination. And then also, you know, com- commemorative days, and speaking on issues basically surrounding the lived realities of LGBTI people. So that was at OUT. At Triangle Project, when I joined them for a month, it was also in a political capacity. Uhm, my title there was Political... Shit, I forgot it. Uhm, I think that was something Political Coordinator, Political Advocacy Coordinator. And the expectation of the job there was to bring political education to queer individuals themselves, but then also, you know, sensitizing political parties to the needs of LGBTI rights, and then also ensuring that they are aware of the, the realities of- that queer people face, but a strong sense of policy and legislative change. And, yeah, that was basically it.

KJ: Okay, um, what were some of the challenges that you faced working with these organizations, well, in these organizations?

RK: [audio distorts] Well, I think a lot of the time, you know, with civil society organizations, you try to provide services that kind of fill the gaps that government does not provide. So we would, in essence, try to give queer people you know, access to certain things that they would not find elsewhere. So for instance, you know, the medical services, the psychosocial support, shelter, food relief and all of these things are obviously very donor, donor

orientated. So with funders, they have very specific mandates as to what you can do with the funds, which often lead to limitations on what we could offer queer people, but also just kind of scrambling in terms of resources to, to ensure that every individual, whatever the query or difficulty is that it is fulfilled. So those are some of the things that prove the hardest.

KJ: Okay. And then recently, you've been appointed as the Director LGBTI And Others In The Office Of The Housing Premier, right?

RK: Yes.

KJ: Do you think that that will be able to help, you know, the organizations that you did work for having like, such a higher position working within the government?

RK: I definitely hope so. Um, I've, I've spoken to a lot of people now because I think usually- Can, can you just give me one moment KJ?

KJ: Yeah, that's fine.

[00:59:26 Break]

[01:00:28 Break ends]

RK: Sorry, that was just my boss. Uhm, so, um, yeah, in terms of this job, I think it's establishing the Desk and looking at exactly those kinds of gaps that civil society doesn't have or that needs to be kind of the gaps that needs to be bridged in terms of ensuring inclusivity in service delivery. And so my hope is that when we do start implementing our strategies, in terms of operational plans, and just oversight of government, that we are able to hold these government departments accountable for it. And yeah, that that will actually bring about positive change.

KJ: And uhm, sorry, let me think about how to phrase this. Well, I was reading up about it, and it's taken, like seven years or something for the desk to be established.

RK:14.

KJ: 14?!

RK: Yeah, it was asked for a long while back.

KJ: Wow. So how does it feel to be a part of this initiative?

RK: Lots of pressure. But also, I'm excited you know about what the possibility of this means. Because if this prototype works in the Gauteng province, there's obviously an opportunity to roll it out throughout the country, and then to have that kind of representation within each province would be significant for LGBTI people.

KJ: Mm, but then, given the fact that it's taken this long, do you think that, you know, you'll be able to do that quite easily?

RK: Well, like I said, it's the establishment of the Desk first and then also learning the mechanisms within governments and the frameworks in which we can function and what we can actually execute. And so for me, it's important to get the groundwork, uhm, correct before we just jump the gun into immediate action, because we need to think about sustainability. We need to think about measures that will consistently ensure that beyond this term that I am employed, that there is a, a, a longevity about what, what needs to happen in the province. And so for me [audio distorts], it's setting up this Desk, in the most functional practical way, is important first, before just, you know, jumping the gun and making rash decisions. So I think it's definitely going to take some time to also cement those

kinds of things. But once they are cemented implementation can happen, and that implementation will then be sustainable.

KJ: Right. Well, that sounds great though. So, obviously, this is necessary, because there were a lot of issues that weren't kind of tackled during the initial LGBTQ gay rights movement in like the 1990s. Do you want to speak a bit about those issues? Exactly that the Desk plans on tackling?

01:04:01 Issues Not Addressed During the Initial LGBTQ movement in the 1990s.

RK: Yeah, um, so I think within each government department there's obviously necessary certain things that need to be addressed. I mean, just speaking to, like, one of the more, more obvious things like health, you know, when it comes to queer health, in general. Is there a focus on LBQT women and what does that mean? Because we know MSM funding, there's a lot of MSM funding but obviously in the community, the other you know, other letters of the acronym, don't get that much attention. And then we also have to look at things that are like trans-inclusive health care and what does that look like in terms of medication, the availability and distribution of them, stock-outs, and also just the facilities itself, you know. Does it lend itself to, to being inclusive? Are people experiencing discrimination from healthcare workers or professionals. So, you know, within each department there's obviously an ask for something different, you know. Just off the bat, social development with for instance, the, the need for an inclusive LGBTI shelter. And also within the South African Police Service, which doesn't necessarily form within the national, the provincial framework, but rather the national framework. Like are they sensitized? Are they implementing the standard operating procedures in relation to queer people? Is there secondary victimization taking place? So it's a lot of things within each department that are

very specific, you know, but also then speaking to broader opportunities, because I think like things like economic inclusion haven't necessarily been at the forefront of these things. But now there's opportunity to ensure that there is a mechanism of inclusivity and employment equity for queer people, for instance, and what it what does it look like in the workplace. So those things within each department, there are different things that are gaps that need to be addressed. And before departments didn't really have indicators, in terms of what they needed to implement for LGBTI people, but this is a definite opportunity to have these things inclusive of the annual performance plans, and to also monitor the implementation of these gaps.

KJ: Right. So this is quite a bit too much you have to do [laughs].

RK: [chuckles] Ja, it is.

KJ: Yeah, again, I mean, like, like you said, it's, it's more of like a long-term battles, and like, everything happening right now.

RK: Yeah, definitely.

01:06:51 How the Legislation Fails Women of Colour

KJ: Um, and then if, if we speak towards more, like, woman, particularly queer women of colour, how do you think that the South African legislation fails them?

RK: Mm, well, I think, um, you know, I mean, despite our Constitution, and despite this national strategic plan on gender-based violence, there's always a measure of victim blaming, there's also still economic exclusion, there's the dominance of patriarchy in our society. And, you know, the focus needs to be on monitoring and implementing these things, as opposed to a theoretical framework, which South Africa is really good at doing. But I think

actionable, uhm, actionable programs that focus on enhancing the safety, and also empowerment of these individuals is what needs to be done. And so it's need not necessarily always be a reactive response, but also a preventative response. And I feel like, that's where we've kind of let a lot of queer Black women, uhm, out of the conversation, because we're always thinking about reacting to measures of violence or inequalities, versus kind of creating a benchmark of, of preventative measures, you know, kind of putting structures in place that, that ascertain that it's not even get to that point. And so the unlearning and education surrounding, you know, gender norms in diversity in orientation, those are the kinds of things that, that I think are definitely needs that need to be addressed still.

KJ: Oh, yeah. All right. Definitely. And like you said, it's probably gonna take quite a while. Would you say, okay, like, during, like the 1990s, when all the- 1990s to like the early 2000s, when all the lobbying is done? What do you like, if you could kind of go back in time and wish that they had implemented, you know, or looked at a particular issue? Is there anything specific that you can think of?

RK: Well, I definitely think, you know, a lot of the work of that time was kind of undoing laws. And at that point in time, I don't think that beyond the scope of what activists had done they could have done much more, you know. We are still in the process of undoing a lot of policy and legislative changes. Even if we look at something like Act 49 that's supposed to protect the rights of intersex and transgendered individuals. There's so much gaps within that legislation itself, that we are still working on that. So I think with every, for every error, in every time the was what can we do right now to ensure a measure of, of inclusivity, you know, but now it's gone beyond, or at least a rather representation. And now it's gone

beyond representation with the enactment of rights in every aspect of our Constitution. And I think that's where the move is towards now. So it's not necessarily to say, what could you have done when you were at that point, just trying to undo these apartheid colonialist laws that oppressed people at the time, you know, and then I think we move on from the and we're still in the process of doing certain things. But obviously, innovation also happens in various pockets. You know, as much as the lobbying seems to be the predominant measure of that era, I think there were also safe spaces, for instance, in communities, but they weren't necessarily called that, or they were social clubs or support groups. And just because it wasn't documented in an historical sense, doesn't mean that queer communities haven't organized in various ways beyond just the lobbying for legislative change. So I think there's a measure of speaking to seen and unseen work as well, that we need to be cognizant of if we're speaking about these issues, you know, because they don't exist necessarily in the history books. But definitely we speak to activists of those that time and era they'll speak to the scope of the work being much larger than what it appears in the media or what can be documented in an archival sense.

KJ: Right. No, that's exactly correct. I mean, that's, that's basically what's kind of driving my, my master's project at the moment to, to get more information and stuff like that, but also to look at intergenerational like, knowledge transfer and stuff like that.

01:12:12 Involvement in the Women's Movement

KJ: So, uh, uh, did you participate in the women's movement?

RK: I think for me, the women's movement is very interlinked to the queer movement. And I say this from a feminist perspective. There's a lot of work that I've done in that arena that kind of intersects. And so I don't think the one can be spoken about in and removed from

the other. Because obviously, in the framing of feminism, we want to break down gender norms, we want to breakdown, you want to, you know, speak to the diversity of orientation and identity. And I think within feminist movements, that's a huge aspect of that work to kind of- look our patriarchal systems also speak to systems of oppression and the unlearning of those things. And so for me, I can't necessarily say that the involvement of one doesn't include the other or vice versa, you know, queer perspective, for me is a feminist perspective.

KJ: Right. No, yeah, that makes sense. But within that kind of work, and like, that space, where there any instances where you kind of came in, into contact with someone who, you know, was, you know, sorry, like very, very forward thinking in terms of like feminism and stuff like that, but not so supportive in terms of like, homosexuality, and queer rights.

RK: Um, I think well, like, are you asking me if I meet a lot of terfs in my life? [laughs]

KJ: Yes [laughs]

RK: Not necessarily. I think, even if it was, because spaces have been so intersecting, that there wouldn't necessarily be space for that kind of narrative in the South African context. I think that's very particular in terms of women movements, and feminists movement, and what representation means in terms of economics, race, class, you know, geographical placement, and so to have someone like that in our spaces would most likely that person will be more marginalized than queer people, so to speak.

01:15:04 Racism Within the LGBTQ Movement

KJ: Yeah. And then did you ever experience any racism within LGBTQ organizations, or from LGBTQ people?

RK: Ah, definitely! I think a lot of civil society organizations struggle with this. And there's kind of people that have been in place for a long time and using people of colour as tokens to get the work done because of their access to certain spaces, and their inability to, you know, kind of access them themselves. But it always remains that view of what does the organogram look like? You know, who are the directors of an organization? How long have they been in this position? Um, has there been a move towards transformation, in terms of organizational structure, in terms of capacity building, in terms of, you know, just positionality within organizations as well? So I think as much as it may not being necessarily one on one violence, it is definitely a measure of structural violence that occurs.

KJ: Right, right, definitely.

01:16:22 Pride's Movement Away from a Political Platform

KJ: And then, what are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform to wo-, for women to speak on LGBTQ+ issues?

RK: Um, well, I think it's very... In Gauteng, for instance, it's very nuanced, there are about a million and ten Prides that exist here [chuckles]. So some of them are very political in, in kind of still doing the march, speaking to the issues on hand, being cognizant of the people that struggle with discrimination and access, and others are just parties. But I don't think that you know... everybody deserves to own their space. And so just because one exists, doesn't mean the other shouldn't exist. And I think that it's also a major expression of a different kind of freedom, in what you can celebrate on pride, you know, what is the messaging behind it? Is it political? Just because... is it not political just because it's party? But then that also speaks about, you know, the gathering of community and visibilising the community. So that, in essence, is also a political act. And so I don't think there can be a

monitoring of what is deemed political in the queer space and how, how it should, what the, you know, the, the measuring stick should be for activism.

KJ: Yeah, that's great. Um, that was actually my last question. Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or discuss?

RK: No, I think we're quite covered.

KJ: [laughs] I think so as well. Thank you so much, again, for doing this interview with me. It's actually like, wow, the work that you're doing is incredible. And I wish you all the best setting up the Desk. It's, I really hope that it's going to be quite successful. And yeah, it's just, there's still a lot of work to do, but, but it's good. You know, it's good.

RK: Well, thank you so much for asking me, uhm, for, for involving me and I look forward to hoping to read your thesis, then.

KJ: I will send it to you definitely. Thank you so much.

RK: Okay.

KJ: Have a good day.

RK: You too. Bye-bye.

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hour 18 minutes 56 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form; no restrictions.

Interview 9: Sazi Jali

Name of the Interviewee: Jali, Sazi [SJ]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 27 January 2022

Place of the Interview: Johannesburg, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 1

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 09 August 2022 – 21 August 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:04:50 SJ joins Zoom meeting]

KJ: Hi.

SJ: Hi, I'm so sorry I wasn't even looking at the time.

KJ: No, it's okay, it's okay. Are you still comfortable to do it now or we can reschedule?

SJ: No, no, no, now is best. Now is okay, it's just extremely hot.

KJ: [laughs] It's okay, it's okay. Thank you, uh, for agreeing to participate in my master's project. I really do appreciate it. Just to talk about it a little bit to kind of give you some like background information. The title is examining the intersection between queer woman's

resistance and their social worlds in South Africa from the 1980s to 2010. So, kind of just looking at like, how relationships influence activism, and vice versa.

SJ: Ja, okay.

KJ: In terms of ethics of the project, I do have ethical clearance from the University of Cape Town. That was the interview release form that I sent you on WhatsApp.

SJ: Ja, I forgot to send it back. I'm going to send it back right now.

KJ: Yeah, no, that's fine. Um, but that's just to say that, you know, that I can use whatever we discuss here in my master's thesis, bar, whatever, like exemptions you want to make. So, if at any time you want to redact information, or anonymize anything, you just let me know. Even after the interview is done, you can just say, hey, I don't feel comfortable talking about this. And I'll leave it out. Do you want to keep your video off? It's fine.

SJ: Uh, I'm looking for a charger because I don't want to have an epic thing of saying my battery just ran out. So, I'm kind of looking for it. I'm not seeing it anywhere. But you can continue. I'll ask for someone to bring me a, a cable then I can just plug it in.

KJ: Okay. Okay. Um, so, yeah, just, uhm, if you feel uncomfortable at any point, or if you want to, like stop, you know, if you want to just completely cut the interview, just say so. I kind of view this a little bit more like a conversation than like an interview, you know, so yeah. Cool. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Silence]

SJ: Uhm... No, not at all.

KJ: Okay.

SJ: The first time I don't have a question [laughs].

KJ: [laughs] That's fine.

00:07:46 Family Background

KJ: We'll just start with your family background if that's okay. Where did you grow up?

[Zoom audio distorts]

SJ: Yeah. [Zoom audio clears]. Okay, I normally put it like this. I was born, buttered, bred at Umlazi. It's one of the, it's one of the it's one of the second- it's the second biggest township in [inaudible] Africa. I grew up. Okay, I followed up the question [laughs]. Like, right now the questions are already in my head as they follow within the questionnaire and I'm like I'm on a roll now. So yeah.

KJ: [laughs] What was your community like in Umlazi?

SJ: As I stated that it's one of the second biggest, uhm, township in Africa, following from Soweto. Uhm, my experience was very unique, because I grew up not even knowing that there was an identity called transgender. Uhm, I grew up in a setting whereby all that my peers, or my friends, were male and we had only one stray which was a cisgender female. Which, then, still, there's only two females therefore, [inaudible] what... [Zoom audio clears] to be in a space whereby there wasn't any gender roles or anything when we were playing as kids until I had to go to school whereby- it's whereby I understood that all along people referring me as [inaudible]... and everything [Zoom audio clears] but growing up on my, uhm, I don't want to say titles, ages but before I started school, it was very, very diverse and it was very nice because nobody- I feel like maybe we were in a space whereby everybody

had an idea of gender but because of the language and everything, we never really look in it and we just played however wanted to play.

KJ: Mmm, um, would you say that that was also like that was also the case in your household? Where there was like, no gender, uhm, rules?

SJ: Uh, to be quite honest, I grew up as, uh, a spoiled child because, uh, I'm the youngest from my sibling, which is late. So, I grew up having not to do many things. Go to school, come back from school, study, sleep. if you have to wash yourself, wash yourself. Uh, watch TV and uh, clean, cook! So for me, because I didn't have anyone else to say this is the role for male and this is the role for female, every role [Zoom audio distorts] was... to... be... done by the both of us and within the family settings for me at that point of time, it didn't instil this is how- besides [Zoom audio distorts] how I used to [inaudible] or how they [inaudible] call me names but... [inaudible] this job was specifically for men [inaudible]... It's a household that everyone within the house would have to do it. If you don't, that means everybody who will go to bed hungry.

KJ: Sorry, you cut off... Okay.

SJ: I'm so sorry! Uh... ah!

KJ: That's okay.

SJ: Okay. Can you hear me now?

KJ: Yes. Would you prefer it if turn my video off?

SJ: [inaudible]

KJ: So that it can like help with like data and stuff?

SJ: Yeah.

[00:12:30 Person speaking to SJ in the background]

KJ: Is everything okay?

SJ: I'm gonna turn off my video as well so that I can charge easily.

KJ: Okay. Yeah, that's fine. Um, and what was your family background? Like you said that you were one of five.

SJ: No, uh, we were only the two of us. Uhm so... and my older sister was very older than me like, I was like, actually, uh 10... No. 15 years apart. So I grew up with my mom, uh, my sister and my aunt. This was just my family settings until they had kids and the family grew and then they passed away. The family went back to being a family of four. So we just had a family of four having my mom, my sister, and me and my aunt, and currently it's now my mom, my sister- Oh, it's now my mom, my sister's son and my, my niece.

KJ: Okay. And you still all live together?

SJ: Ja, we all live together.

KJ: Okay. And what type of work is your family involved in?

SJ: So my mum before she retired because she's now has retired, she used to work as a technical engineer at uh, one of the refineries, SAPREF, and uh and my other sibling- Oh, and she also did so much of community work, uh, bringing back to the community. And then it would be just me working and then my other- uh, my nephew is actually still studying. So yeah. So nobody's currently employed besides me.

KJ: Okay. Um, so what were the conditions you grew up like? And you said that you, you know, you're from the biggest I mean, the second biggest township in South Africa, what was that, like, to experience that?

SJ: So once I started school, the conditions that I started to facing was, I had to now start, uh, I could say manning up, I could put it that way, and present myself into more of that gender that, uh, was assigned to me at birth because of sex. So those were the conditions of saying, now you don't have to play, uh, house, you have to play cars. Now I cannot play, now you have to play something else. So those were the basic conditions and coming from a very strong cultural background, and also in an environment whereby religion also has so much happening. I had to also face those challenges of saying, If I don't clean up my act, I won't make it to heaven because however I'm acting is again sin, so I had to clean up my act so that I could be a good person and see God in one day.

00:17:39 Religion and Culture

KJ: Alright so what- Are you still religious?

SJ: I am still religious. But I still, I still, I still see myself as a reborn again Christian.

KJ: Okay. And is your family also quite religious?

SJ: Eh, not... I could say to a certain point. They are just a cultural people. I'm the only one who's very much religious and I'm the only one who wakes up every Sunday to go to church. Yeah.

KJ: What role does that, religion, play in your life, you know? If the rest of your family is not as religious as you, it must have a significant role.

SJ: So, for me, I feel like before it was for me, seeking God, trying to find God to help me and change me and become this person that I wasn't and... To only find out that God loves me the way I am. So that has brought me very much closer to God, because many people have this old me or told me that whatever I am is not being recognized by God or ancestors or anything. So for me, being very much religious is saying to them, I still know how to communicate with my God and if God can still communicate with me, that means he sees me for who I am.

KJ: And like at what point you said that, you know, you started like, praying and crying out to God, like at what point in your life was that? What age were you around about?

SJ: Okay, so I was reborn again Christian, uh, back in OMG 2018. Uh and uh- So okay, let me just take you back. So within growing up, I had a neighbour, and my neighbour they used to go to church. So at home, they didn't go to church, but my neighbour used to go to church, so I used to go to church with them. So every Sunday, I'll go to church with them and I started being like, a strong believer in the Catholic Church, because they used to go to a Catholic church. Soon after, in 20...20...in 2008, I received, uh, I was a reborn again Christian so it's whereby I changed churches from the Roman Catholic Church to another church. And for me, at that point of time, I experienced talking to God in a very different manner, because while I was growing up, I used to have certain prayers that I would pray whenever they say I must pray. But when I started going to this other church, I could say whatever to God, and God would listen because that's where I started praying and saying, God, you see me, and that's where I started when I was very dysphoric. And because those were the times when I started being dysphoric, back in 2008, whereby I had to change my school uniform. Because I was in a new school having to wear a male version of school uniform. While by

growing up I used to wear tracksuits because I had a big body. So wearing a tracksuit, it's unisex, everybody's wearing it. So for me, that point of time was very hard times for me, maybe that's why I needed to just have a platform just to talk to him and tell him how I really felt and I started doing that a lot. And for me talking to God was like say writing to a diary saying Dear Diary, I would say Dear God, and it's how I've gotten closer to him with my prayer, with praying.

KJ: Right, yeah. You mentioned that culture also plays a big part in your life. Do you subscribe to the spirituality of your culture?

SJ: So for me, at home it was, uh, my mum is a traditional healer. So I was born to believe into the ancestors, believing on cleansing and stuff. And when I became reborn again Christian at first I was very rebellious of what their culture was until I find it out myself and got to understand that I am made out of different elements that makes who I am today. So it was those elements that brought me also back to saying I'm a very spiritual person. I do believe in upper power that I do not see; the supreme power, which might be God or ancestors whoever it is, that is paving my way. It is there and it is out there so that's what I currently believe in.

KJ: Okay, that's, that's cool

00:24:34 Relationship with Family

KJ: And uhm, what's your relationship with your family like?

SJ: So my relationship with my family, uh, since I have transitioned has become a relationship. Because prior transitioning, medically transitioning or socially transitioning, it

was just having people to live with and not having a family setting because for me, I was holding things inside me and not even sharing about them to anyone, which made me very antisocial. So I grew up as a loner. I ended up being a prayer warrior because that was the only person I knew I can communicate with. So for me, that was, uh... just no relationship. But since I started transitioning, I think I've started opening up and starting to talk about what I do not like, what I do like, what are my pronouns, what uh... what names they can use around me, they shouldn't use my dead name. So the communication became very much easier after I started transitioning, because now they understood when they were saying the wrong thing and when they were not saying the wrong thing. So the relationship is quite good. Even though we have hiccups every day, but the relationship is quite good.

KJ: Okay.

00:26:33 Realisation About Gender Identity

KJ: Um, so this is kind of a two-part question. When did you start realizing that you were not cisgender? And when did you come out to your family about that?

SJ: So, growing up, I always knew I was different. Uh, uh... I always knew. But because of the terminology, I didn't have the terms to call myself as a transgender person. Back in 2010, my mom called a secret meeting, meaning she called all the neighbours, everybody within the whole section came and talk about my sexuality, and my gender identity, which, for me, I was still young, I still had no clue. I had no language, I had nothing. Yes it was 2010 but because of the background where I'm coming from, Google for me was too far for me to even googling for someone who was like me. So when they asked if I was gay, she could vouch for me today that my answer was, No, I'm not gay. And they asked me if I love men, and I said, at that point of time, I was sure that I loved men only. So I said, I do love men. So,

I never, uh, said, uh, came out as anything until I started transitioning whereby- it's whereby I came and told them that this is my gender and I will be changing my gender marker, because it's whereby I started having the topic of saying ah! 2017, I am changing my gender to female and I am actually a woman.

(00:28:41) KJ: Mhm. [Zoom audio distorts] And what was like their initial reaction to that?

SJ: Uh, well, because 2010 for me, maybe that's why there wasn't any communication, because of how she involved many people towards my personal dilemmas, my personal experiences, my identity was very hard. But 2017 I've started socially transitioning... So I started socially transitioning back in 2010. So for me, it was more of saying, I'm not a professional, gay person. I'm actually a woman because there wasn't any language prior that... and I guess, along that time, they started recognizing my gender. It's just that we never had a name for it. It's whereby we will now say, this is now me and I have a name for this. So the reaction wasn't bad.

KJ: If you don't mind-

SJ: [inaudible] Sorry?

KJ: No, no, no. What were you saying?

SJ: I was saying so the reaction wasn't that bad, but it also wasn't welcoming because, uh, this is uh us now talking and she felt like I was actually taking away her son away from her. And I wasn't taking away anyone, I was just becoming myself.

KJ: Right. And, and now? How would you say that uhm.. Like does she still feel that way?

SJ: I'm sure she still, uh, feels that way since she can never have biological, uh, grandsons or grandkids since I've done my orchiectomy and that literally lessened any chances of me

having kids biologically mine. So for her that was a decision that I should have taken with her because that will be one of something that she would love because she raised me as a single parent. So she was looking for someone who can carry her surname.

[Zoom audio distorts]

(00:31:50) KJ: Uhm when did you kind of first find the terminology-

SJ: Pardon?

KJ: When did you first find the terminology for like transgender and, you know, transitioning?

SJ: Oh alright. So... So back in 20... oh no. The actual time I got the term transgender, this was 20... Okay, the first time I knew about the term transgender was back in 20...12. While I was doing Grade 12 but the first time I identified as a transgender person was back in 20...15. Because all along, I, I, I just thought a transgender person was a person who is already transitioned, uh, medically, surgically, and all. So I knew about the term about 2012, but I never assumed the identity because I never saw myself fit to qualify as one because I wasn't medically transitioned. And it's whereby I then started learning more about transitioning and oh, and then I said, Oh, I am trans. I remember in 2013 I was only using pronouns she and her just that I didn't know I am trans by just identifying. I just... thought identifying I needed everything to be trans!

(00:33:40) KJ: Uhm, how did you feel when you kind of first identified as, as trans?

SJ: For me, uh, being honest... For many years, identifying as trans, it has been - Uh, the first time I identified as trans I was like, Oh, I'm so relieved. I'm not gay. So I am gonna see heaven. This was the first reaction I got because growing up they never said trans people or

being trans is a sin. They always said being gay is a sin. So I wasn't gay, so I could see God. So for me it was just that one relief of saying, oh, one day I'll see God because I'm not gay.

KJ: [laughs] Oh okay. And then after that?

(00:35:00) SJ: For many years now, as a transgender person, I feel like our identity has been... killed, been used wrongly, has been... uh... has been taken away from who we are. And people still don't understand what is a transgender person, or who, who is a transgender person. What's so different between trans and gay, what's so different between being cis and trans because many people still believe that our sexual partners are gay, or oh, if I am pansexual, and now I'm dating a woman, that means I'm not trans enough. So for me being trans now, or identifying as a trans person, even though I have legally changed, and partly surgically changed, which I read as a correct gender. And if I like, I can speak very differently from how I'm speaking now, because I've undergone through speech therapy, and for me it was just taking away... or because when I started talking, in a higher pitch, people tend to not listen to me more. But when I speak in a low pitch, people tend to listen and say, oh! So for me, identifying as a transgender person right now is more for activism. It's more of saying I exist. And I- my trans-ness is different from the trans-ness that you know, and there is no look for being transgender person.

(00:37:06) KJ: So, you know, you're talking about like, people like misinterpreting what trans means and everything like that. Is it solely cisgendered people? Like, cishet people, or is it also like cisgender people in the LGBTQ community?

SJ: I feel like it's everybody. Not only the cisgendered people, but everyone within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum is not understanding uhm... what trans actually means... and what is trans. So it's being misused by everyone like, from the trans bodies themselves because

everybody has that idea of how trans should look like. And if it doesn't do it like that, that means it's not trans. So for me, I feel like not only just the cis heterosexual individuals, but also the trans community and also the cis people from the LGBT- [chuckles] from the LGB community. Ay, terminologies!

(00:38:38) KJ: When you say that you don't think that they understand, what is- what is being trans mean to you?

SJ: For me, being trans is an identity. And for one to identify as trans, they don't need any other box. For me it's a gender identity that one can be and... regardless of what they are wearing, regardless of how they express themselves. If they say they are that gender, one has to respect that because they are the gender. For me being trans is just an identity and it's not overlinked with any sexual orientation or gender- or any other identity. You can still be trans and still be a lesbian, you can still be trans and still be gay and be whatever as I am. Like I'm a, I'm a pansexual person and I am trans which for many people [Zoom audio distorts] ... saying that means if you are dating a woman that means you're not trans. It's not about how I sleep and most people, that's their mind. That's why I was so happy, saying that dysphoria is now taken out from mental illnesses. So for the longest time, we've been fighting that because being trans was also overlinked with also having dysphoria. And if you do not have any gender dysphoria, that meant you are not trans, which was not true. And we are shifting maybe to the right direction with the laws and the policies. But we still have to work on people's mindset.

(00:40:42) KJ: Yeah. So within the LGBTQ+ community, have you ever experienced transphobia?

SJ: I, I've received transphobia from internal, first from the trans community. Uh, people not recognizing your gender. Because of... uh, of saying... because you haven't fully transitioned so you don't have a right to say you're a woman. So for me, or a person who would just compliment you and say you pass as the correct gender, but by I'm not passing I am. So that means I read as the correct gender. For me, all of those small nitty gritty's has been something that has been happening to me of saying this is actually internal transphobia, because many people would then believe that if you are trans, you should not be... uh, able to identify otherwise. So for me, uh, as I'm saying, I have received it throughout the trans community and also throughout the members of the LGBTQI community, because they will feel like you are less of a woman because you are trans. Whereby if you read correctly, as I read correctly, they will also dispute that I am trans or if I am trans enough to even identify as trans. So there is that internal transphobia within the trans community, and also external, coming from the LGBTQIA+ community because they are the ones who will also out you. Like there are these posts that have been trending on social media of SA's finest transgender people, and some people don't even identify as trans, they identify as female and you then put their post there so now you've outed them, even not knowing that you are doing harm to them or bringing harm to them. So for me, it's all of those small things that happens when people are not careful to look at what the end goal of what they are doing, especially when it comes to trans bodies.

KJ: Right, yeah. And I mean, like, like, also what you're saying, like being [uses air quotes] trans enough, that doesn't even make sense, you know?

SJ: Ja.

00:44:02 Sexual Orientation

KJ: Okay. Um, so coming back a bit you say that you identify as pansexual, right?

SJ: Yes.

KJ: And when did you realize that you were pansexual?

00:44:28 SJ: So, uh, I was once assaulted [inaudible]... again and gangraped, uh, when I was an adult, and I started not wanting men next to me, which many people felt like, girl you are crazy. And for me, I... at that point of time, I never dated a woman and I have never thought I'll be able to date a woman. So uh... This les- butch lesbian met with me and she thought that I was lesbian because I had so much lesbian friends on my account. And they approached me [laughs]. So when they approached me, we connected honestly and- Okay! They, they catfished me like, because they had posed as a male and they don't even identify as trans so that's why I'm saying a woman. So it's whereby I found out that I was actually pansexual, but I didn't admit it then because this was just one person. And again, I started dating. Oh, we broke up because of long distance relationship doesn't work sometimes. I dated another trans man who was my friend. They helped me through one of my weakest, uh, my baddest, uh, heartbreak, so they thought maybe they can do better. So I was like, oh! All along I thought I'm into cisgender heterosexual men. But actually, I'm just into masculinity. So that happened in the phase of back in 2016...17, or no... 17, 18, 19. And in 2019, I came out is pansexual.

00:46:57 Dating Women

KJ: And have you dated other women since then?

SJ: Uh, I have dated... In my entire life, I've dated three women and two trans men so yeah, I have dated quite a lot [laughs]. Which is bad.

KJ: [laughs] No it's fine.

SJ: No it's bad [laughs] Now, I'm like thinking now, and yeah no! No! It's bad [chuckles].

KJ: [chuckles] No, it's not. Um, when did you start feeling comfortable dating other women?
Was it from the butch lesbian?

SJ: Yeah, I believe it was from uh... the lesbian... because they treated me the way I wanted to be treated. And funny enough, they understood my body more than I understood my body... They understood my dysphoria. So I started being- Like, uh, at first I, I, I took time to actually identify as pan because at first I was just saying it was just good sex [laughs]. Good sex makes you feel other things. So I was like no, it was just good sex, it was just good sex. But only to find out that no, it wasn't just good sex, this is just me being attracted to masculinity, not just a person because uh, the- I have dated a woman a transgender woman, and we've never had sex but emotionally gotten support and emotional gotten... uh, felt the love that I needed, that I wanted to gain from someone else. So it's whereby I said fuck, I am actually pansexual because this time around, it wasn't just about sex, but it was just about connecting to a- with a person.

KJ: And does your family know that you are pansexual?

(00:49:36) SJ: They do know, but they don't know what that actually means. Oh! I think my mum, my mum does know what that actually means. That's why she was hoping that I'd never done my orchiectomy at first because they were- uh, because I remember we had this topic of saying they could have now had grandkids.

(00:50:13) KJ: Um did you ever live with any of your partners?

SJ: Yes. Uh... which is really toxic. I wouldn't recommend [laughs] I wouldn't recommend that! But uh yes, uh, okay no you can ask before I justify.

KJ: What were you gonna say?

SJ: You can ask!

[Inaudible]

SJ: My experience?

KJ: Yeah.

SJ: Okay, so I didn't get the question very well.

KJ: Oh, sorry, I asked if they identified as a woman, the person that you lived with.

SJ: Unfortunately, the two of the partners that I have actually lived - No. Three of them. Okay, but the other one is cis. The two of them identify as trans. One of them was identifying as a woman, but when we were still seeing each other, they identified as trans when we were dating, so yeah.

KJ: How did that affect your relationship with your family?

SJ: Honestly, for me because it was a very toxic relationship, it affected the whole family badly. Because of how uh... the abuse was, but for other things uh living with the same sex is still as they would've put it while we started dating, it was a confusion to them. A huge confusion because they just pictured that now they have a perfect girl so they are now waiting to have a cisgender heterosexual guy who would come in and say, oh, I want your little princess to be my wife. Then here is your princess saying, Oh, by the way, your prince might be a princess also. So it was very confusing.

KJ: Was that initially or is it still like that?

SJ: No, it was that- that was initially. So currently, I don't feel like they... they have those kinds of thoughts. It's just that they have that certain person that they picture me dating one day, and I'm not quite there yet; dating what they believe is a perfect person for me.

KJ: Mmm.

00:53:52 Children

KJ: Are you a parent?

SJ: Pardon?

KJ: Are you a parent? Do you have children?

SJ: I don't have any biological kids. But I am a parent. A parent of three kids assigned male at birth so I call them boys which is very wrong, I know, but yeah [laughs].

KJ: [chuckles] Um, what, what is your relationship? Like how would you describe your relationship with them?

SJ: Okay. So I'll go according to the least to the most. So Monde is my current partner's kid and they're still very young so they do not understand anything about gender. They are only 3 this [Zoom audio distorts] year. They were only three, they were only three last year 2021, sorry. And then they- so for them, I'll just put them aside a little bit. And then with Cairo they have, they knew me as my true self. But because of the age that they are in now and people talking around about my gender and me being on TV vocalizing that I am trans has affected him also in a way, of saying they started questioning if your mom is what, so we had a seated talk with him or them or... for now I'll say him because they haven't come out any other way

and we had a talk, but with Khanyiso which is very different. Khanyiso is my godson, he has been living with me since he was born. So he grew up with me, and I've transitioned with him. So for him, it's very much different, because, uh, from birth, they were not given an option of saying, this is- who, who is this? I was just only a mother to them. And it only seems weird to talk with their kids about my gender, and gender identity. It's whereby we came out to them. My relationship with them has been quite amazing. And I feel like with all of them still do not understand what [it] actually means that I'm trans. And besides being told that this person is gay whereby we have actually sit them down and explain what trans-ness means. But to them, they respect me as their mom and nothing else.

KJ: Okay. And how did they take it? Like? Were they confused at first? Did they ask a lot of questions?

SJ: For Cairo, he was con- he was confused. That's why I'm saying maybe he still doesn't understand. But with Khanyiso they did ask few questions of saying how it happened and what not, but because of him being also in an environment whereby there is so many LGBTQI+ people around them, they were also conscious of saying not everybody's the same. But, uh, they were just curious of saying, oh, so Oh! How? Really? This happened? And yeah.

KJ: Okay. And do they live with you as well?

SJ: Ja.

KJ: Okay. So, approximately how many people would you say live in your house currently?

SJ: Okay. Currently, I would say it's... six, because Monde is not staying with us. So it's just my mom- my mom, my nephew, my niece, and I and the two kids.

KJ: Okay.

00:59:06 Persecuted Based on Sexual and Gender Identity

KJ: Okay. So we've kind of touched on this a little bit. But if you don't mind speaking more on maybe instances or experiences where you felt persecuted based on your gender identity or your sexuality.

SJ: Yeah. So back in 20...15 I was raped, gang raped, whereby they call it correctional rape, which I don't understand how... because of something I wanted, according to them. Because you, you are trans, you say you are a woman so you're supposed to have dick in you. And that trauma... became very... hard for me. When I sought help through police stations and other places, I had gotten the fucking injustice that anyone can ever get. Because they ended up not even opening the case, because the first question they asked me was, what I was doing there at night and then when they realized that I wasn't cis female, they asked the second question, are you a boy or are you a girl? It was then a joke to everybody else within that place. So I ended up not filing a case and got robbed of the justice that I needed. And just, uh, four months down the line I was... quite abused by a friend saying, I have led them on. And they wanted to know how it feels like to sleep with someone like me. So for me, mostly, the persecution that was happening most of the time was through people just confirming that you say you love dick, that means you should do this. And this was the most hardest time of my life. And I'm glad I have survived it because I'm here now talking to you [chuckles] that means I'm a survivor.

KJ: Yes, definitely. I'm so sorry you had to go through that. That's awful. And the fact that the police like react like that, it's just like... I've read about it, you know, but it's, it's so different. It must be so different to like, read about it, and then actually, like, experience that first-hand.

SJ: Yeah. So for me, for me, it wasn't the first time... because that was- the other times was maybe okay, because I always felt I needed to be okay with it. But the, the last time was actually saying, No, this, I cannot take it. Because nobody, and when I say nobody, [I] could go to nobody. I couldn't go to my mom, I couldn't go to anyone to talk about this, because it happened when it, when- The first time I was assaulted, I was very young. And I didn't realize it was assault because there wasn't any penetration. So for me being raped was by having someone put something into you. So growing up with all of those things, and having those flashbacks, where like, when finally it happened, uh, when I got raped, oh... this is how I really have to feel like and I assumed maybe the pain and the suffering because I felt if it doesn't happen to me who else would it happen to. Maybe that's why maybe I was so distant from the family because nobody could understand my pain uh... and could see my pain. But when I started transitioning and started, again, seeing the psychologist, it's become easier for me to talk about what I have went through and... so people can then relate.

(01:04:53) KJ: Right. So, like, how did you cope with those feelings if you're not like really speaking to anyone.

SJ: So as I said, I'm a born again Christian so I used to pray and blame God, blame myself. Like I still have that tendency of always assuming the blame and seeing myself as the person who did something wrong. So for the longest time that was just me looking in, saying I'm wrong. And me not talking to people it was about me saying, I brought myself this. And I remember a point of time whereby my rapist would sleep with me on a daily basis. And when it was not happening, I started saying, Maybe I did something wrong? Why did they didn't want to do it with me? That's why I'm saying, for the longest time, this was maybe my coping mechanism of saying, this should happen to me. And this is validating me saying I am

woman enough of even someone wanting to sleep with me, it's a blessing in disguise.

Because there was so many things happening and, uh, I tried cutting myself. Which really helped but didn't help with my skin tissues because sometimes I look at my skin I'm like ah... and some of the tattoos don't even cover well the places that I wanted them to cover. So it was just me writing, cutting, me constantly going back to uh the perpetrator... me praying just to cope. Like, this is what I shared with one of my friends saying, but, uh, you are now- you think you're now enjoying sleeping with this person, because this was more of now a drug abuse like I was very... if I didn't get my next fix, that means there was something wrong. So I'd just ensure that this person gets it. Sometimes I would actually walk there myself, not them telling me to come or anything. So I guess it was for me now being in that space of saying this was my life and if this was not happening, that means there was something wrong. Because I remember an incident whereby... I refused. And my niece got raped by a different person. So, uh, that was also was like, so if I refuse for it to happen to me, it's going to happen to someone else, someone close to me, so I didn't want that.

01:08:48 Counselling

KJ: And then you said that it's only after you saw a psychologist that your like mindset kind of changed, right?

SJ: Ja.

KJ: And, uh, when did you start seeing a psychologist?

SJ: So I started seeing a psychologist back in 2016 because I wasn't actually okay, because the... the gang rape really got into me and started really... not... coping and stuff. So I started

seeing a psychologist. It's whereby I started even exploring myself. Dating a woman in 2016 because of what has happened previously.

KJ: Was, uh, was it LGBTQ focused counselling or just a normal psychologist?

SJ: So it started with a normal psychologist. And then one person referred me to Dr. C who has been working with trans [Zoom audio distorts] communities in KZN. So for me it was now a plus saying this person is going to help me medically transition so I shifted the boat and went to someone that can help me in another way.

KJ: Okay. [inaudible] Would you say that it provided some mental and emotional support?

SJ: I guess with uh... both of them so it's just me talking about something else, not talking about what actually happened that helped me. So yeah, I will say they helped me through my emotional and provided me with support because I only came out about my rape and everything in 2018, that is just two years later after I started seeing a psychologist. So for me, it was just me seeing someone to help me cope and finding other ways to cope.

01:11:35 More About Religion and Spirituality

KJ: So we did speak about this previously, but is there anything else you want to add about, uh, the role that religion or spirituality has in your life?

SJ: I guess within spiritualism it's gonna be saying I am going back to God and Him reviving me and making me new. Maybe that's one of the things that have made me stay closer to him because when all of those things were happening, He never left me or never judged me he was just there. And I felt like because You are okay with it happening, that means it's okay to happen. So I guess that's why I never gave up on Christianity. It was like saying, Oh, so it's Your will, it's Your will oh God.

KJ: Are you quite- Do you go to church? Sorry.

(01:12:55) SJ: Yeah, I go to church, but currently I am going to a LGBTQIA+ friendly Church, which is full of members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

KJ: If you don't mind me asking do you mind mentioning the name?

SJ: It's Victory Ministries Church International. VMCI, in short, under the post of Pastor Z Zungu and the late Pastoress M Zungu.

KJ: Okay, and are you quite close with your church community?

SJ: Yeah... Oh, if you say close, how close maybe? [laughs]

KJ: Up to you [laughs]. Whatever you feel is, is, is close.

SJ: I will say I... I am not friends [laughs]. I am just... we just go to the same church. I do support some of their businesses because queer to queer support is very needed. But I'm still a loner like, the people who call, call me their friend, they'll know that they'll have to text me Hi so that I can reply and say Hi back and do not ask how was your day. I will never visit anyone. So I'm still that type of person who is more like that.

01:14:44 Socialising With Other Queer People

KJ: So besides church, how do you socialize with other LGBTQ+ people?

SJ: So I, uh, currently... uh I work for an organization called TransHope, which is a non-profit organization that, uh, started working- or was registered back in 2019 June 6th to serve the trans community of KwaZulu Natal. So prior to that, we have been running support groups for transgender diverse people who are starting medically transitioning. So, uh, I saw the need that there are so many transgender people who do not have the platform to see a

psychologist, uh, to even be part of the support group. So started the organization TransHope. So that's how most of the time I will socialize with the members of the trans and gender diverse community. But also, what I tend to do within eThekweni, I am also sitting as an acting chairperson of the LGBTQIA+ sector within the province- not, not the province, I'm lying if I say the province- of the district. So it's whereby I also then meet many people throughout the work of advocacy and the work of just helping transgender people and [Zoom audio distorts] human [inaudible] and that's the level of me meeting other queer and gender diverse people.

KJ: Okay, do you often work alongside other activists?

SJ: Uh... I work with- uh, you cannot work in silos. So I could say yes, I work with many different people, which have put in me in big trouble sometimes.

KJ: [chuckles] Uhm, are any of the people that you work with, like, part of like the initial uhm gay rights movements in South Africa?

SJ: Uhm, so I could say, yes, most, uh, part because I feel like I have an old soul, I hang out with a lot of old people. So most of them would be saying they have been direct, uh, helping the queer lives in RSA. I can mention few names like Pastor Moore (sp?) 1:17:57, one me one of the people who started the first church which was LGBTQI friendly, Prof Zanele Muholi, uh, the photographer... Nonhlanhla Mkhize who started working within, uh, the, uh what do you call it- Gay and Lesbian Centre in KwaZulu Natal, uh, having people- but the others I wouldn't really say that we are friends [laughs]. I'm mentioning people that I wouldn't go a day and sleep without them checking up on me. So, yeah but there are so many- there's so many people that you have worked with, but these few I- they're in my

head, because I know, even if maybe sometimes it's two days after, but they will then come and check up on me and say how are you kiddo and be like ja, I'm alive.

KJ: [chuckles]. Uh, uh, sorry, I don't really know how to phrase this, but like, what's that like? You know, because some of the people that you mentioned are, you know, like, older activists, uhm, is there like differences in views or anything like that compared to, you know, you?

(01:19:38) SJ: Alright, for the ones that I mentioned, I wouldn't speak much about them, but in the activism space, there are certain people who really felt like, uh, I am coming in - especially when I started the organization, I am coming in taking their funds away from them. They started seeing us as competition not just [Zoom audio distorts] but mostly other trans- not trans! But other queer people who are growing up within the activism space. They look at the community as the threat of saying there is actually uh- what are you trying to say? You are not doing the work and stuff. And then there are some few who will be like, the work that you are doing is valid and that it's needed, but you can improve here and here. And there are some who will be like Nah, nah, you're too young for this, you do not understand where we're coming up with this. Uh, especially the gay community, if you are now imposing what they thought they were doing justice for, for the transgender community. I remember having this question with Este (sp?) and saying, you messed up! or denying brah, you messed up. And they're like, Yeah, but we are now fixing it. And like people like Este (sp?), who will, like literally be like, recognized this and this. But for others it would be like, No, you do not know what you're talking about, you do not appreciate! Which is sometimes very hard to take in because we are talking about our identities here and about why they don't even identify as the gender that we are. So we do see the work that have

done, it's so much- Amazing! And the sad part, most of the time, they were using us as kids [Zoom audio distorts] ... I got into the activism space back in 20...10. After that because there's 2010 is whereby my mom started even questioning me and calling the whole community to come and check if I was gay, because they were championing with us as young kids of saying, These are the kids, they want to wear their correct school uniform at school, they wanna enter pageantry and this and that and we were too young to even understand that, uh, putting us as the face, the queer community, and the spaces that we live in was putting us in danger and also putting our lives in jeopardy of then hate crime. But you have to also acknowledge the work that they've done, but we feel like most of the time, sometimes they shouldn't have put in minors because at the point of time we were actually minors, we were under the age of 18 and hence, we're now labelled the face of gays and lesbians.

KJ: Mmm. Uh, sorry to ask this like halfway through the interview, but how old are you?
[laughs]

SJ: My age? [sings] Age is just a number [laughs] I'm young [laughs]. I'm so sorry like every time, every time I get asked about my age, I'm like [gasps] I look old? But I'm young... But I also act young but I'm [Zoom audio distorts] [inaudible] ... I'm 20...7.

KJ: [Zoom audio distorts] So... born in...

SJ: Pardon?

KJ: [Zoom audio clear] '95 or '94? '95.

SJ: Yes.

KJ: Okay, I'm sorry. No, I was just, I was just asking to kind of like place the, the ages that you were at, like, the time [chuckles].

SJ: Ja.

KJ: Okay so-

(01:24:39) SJ: So you see how young I was back in 2010 when they were doing this...

KJ: Sorry?

SJ: So you see how young I was back in 2010.

KJ: Yeah, yeah. Uhm-

SJ: Some of the things, some of the things today like I sit back and question them and I'm like, like, really? But I guess they groomed us to be who we are.

(01:25:13) KJ: Do you- Is it okay to talk about some of the things that, you know, that they did that you found upsetting?

SJ: Did I mention before maybe... the people- No, I didn't! So I'm very comfortable talking about them. So they, as I said, uhm... uh... I came into the gay thing very young, uh, 2009... it's whereby- because I was at church, I was going through things of saying, I'm a demon, so you cannot praise God, you must pray and change. So started going out, started meeting friends on Mxit, going out, uh and doing things at that point of time [pauses] It was Mxit, I remember and we were introduced to an, an organization that provided support groups for the members of the gay and lesbian community. So, uh, going there for us was just like, Oh! I'm not the only one, we are so many. And I remember I was even under the age of 16 because my birthday comes very late. So it being introduced in- Okay, this was a good thing,

because many of us were now [inaudible] from many things, but for introducing kids to adults, because in this safe spaces that they are providing, they didn't even cater for only kids; they catered for everybody. So within the community, there are certain people who are old and who would then fish around the kids. So for me, that was the first biggest thing that has happened to me because it was more of not a support club, but more of a Grindr of, of those days, uh, having to actually meet face to face and afterwards go out in a club, or meeting in the club and then having to have someone, also think that you are their partner or something, because you are so young. So I feel like they needed to protect us from such things. I feel like, uh, also championing us as kids. In a way it's felt good, but uh looking back, they should have done something different having to just label me. Because growing up every other gay person that was coming after me, they were called by my name. That's how I knew that the person's gay, because of how they would do it. They would call them by my dead name. My dead name was my nickname. So they'll say oh, [says dead name]. It was like, very, very hard, because at that point of time, we didn't even know of identities. We were- they were not even teaching us of anything. They hosted these seminars or workshops, whereby the workshops were not pro- or helping anything. So it was also sitting here talking hardships, talking about other things, but we're not learning terminology. We were just learning about sex; having protected sex, having this. Which actually killed the kids in us because we're now prepared to learn about douching before sex. We were now being prepared to know that my life just revolves around HIV and AIDS, nothing more, nothing less and one of the biggest things they had done was, uh, pushing us to enter cisgender, uh, Ms. Pageant or something that was happening around. So it was a hell of a good experience competing around cisgender girls but at that point of time, some of the people that entered don't even identify as trans to date. So you're just demeaning the word trans, but they were

not even using trans at that point of time. So that's why I'm saying for us, it was not just only about just language but it was just the absenteeism of everything else, but also just talking about HIV and AIDS only.

01:30:46 Issues Around Women That Weren't Tackled

KJ: Mmm. Okay. So, uh, do you feel that there were any other issues that weren't tackled at the time, especially issues surrounding woman, besides the HIV and AIDS... uh, I mean, the lack of terminology sorry!

SJ: Uh there wasn't so much vocalists on diversity, I wouldn't talk about just women only. But diversity, it was not there. The only time we will stand up and march, 'til this day it's still happening, is whereby one has been murdered and killed. And that's why they have taken so much to look at the Hate Crime Bill and even identify what is hate crime, is because there wasn't any advocacy around all of those things. And it was just killing us because if someone had to die, we would be told let's go and march, and you'll see yourself in the newspaper the following day, you will be happy, I'm a celeb. You'd see yourself, I'm in the paper, front paper. Like that was just it. And most members of the LGBTQIA+ still do not know what is their basic rights, they still do not know [Zoom audio distorts] what the Constitution says about them. They know that they have protection within the Constitution, but they do not know the actual- what it says! They know that they are covered by Bill of Rights, but they don't know what that means to them. So for me, it was not just a women issue but just whole issues that were not covered, as well. Yes, women were, at that point of time, were most targeted, because many would be the ones who are raped because of correctional rape. Many would be then excluded in power, because of... at that point of time like yes, they might have *uNonhlanhla*, 1:33:24 but for me, I still feel like you're fronting with her

because most of the time, the people who are in power were, uh, gay white men and that was just not it. And yes Nonhlanhla, if you look back at the history of the Gay and Lesbian Centre, you will find her in many things! in many other things but looking really deep they were just a pawn that was just being used. And for me, it was just not looking at the woman, the queer woman because even till to date, the whole LGBTTTTQQIA+ community doesn't exist. Yes we start by the letter L, but it doesn't exist, only G exists. So that's why even most prides are not even called LGBTQI Pride, they're called Gay Pride because of what has been around the identity and also many identities have been killed and one has always overcome and it has always been, uh, about men, uh, mostly men. And maybe that's why even today one of the policies of TransHope is that TransHope, even if I live or I die or for God's sake whatever happens, the person that needs to be in power or most people that need to be on, on the management team must be female and must be trans. And because we are [Zoom audio distorts] [inaudible] and be now around [inaudible] ... non-binary people because they are also being left out because the shift started maybe back in 2014, whereby even- but still, I'll be lying saying within all these arguments and stuff. The lesbian community is being pushed, but they are being pushed because looking at all the other things, mostly because of the B- what do you call it? BEEEE, they are now fronting with it, but the masculinity part of everything is always gonna take parts on everything. So I feel like as much as I'm in love with masculinity, but it has actually been dead for a long time, let's change the narrative and put women first because yoh! We're tired of this masculinity that has been leading us.

KJ: Yeah.

01:36:45 Misogyny within the LGBTQ+ Community

KJ: Um, so have you experienced, uhm, like misogyny from within the LGBTQ+ community?

SJ: Hello?

KJ: Hi? Did you hear me?

SJ: Uh you cut? I don't know maybe the network or something.

KJ: Oh, okay. I asked if you've ever experienced like misogyny within the LGBTQ+ community?

(01:37:38) SJ: I, I would say yes. Especially coming to the gay community. They, uh... I really do not understand but yeah, I have.

KJ: Even like now, currently, you would say that it's still quite like misogynistic.

SJ: There are certain people they are just like that.

KJ: Mmm.

SJ: Uh, mostly gay people... And, uh, especially- I, I, I really don't understand the hate between the gays and lesbians, but there *is* 'til today there are certain people who doesn't even like- they will like literally certain people would then speak badly about a certain gender. But it's also rare, but it's also there whereby you're going to find it. I don't know how I should call it. Maybe, uh, it's a trans woman, uh, phobia or something. But there are certain people who just hate transgender people, just for being them. Without anything! Within the LGBTQ community, and sometimes within even the lesbian community who feel like... I don't know. So that's what I'm saying it's still there a lot. I don't know if you're getting it.

(01:39:41) KJ: [Zoom audio distorts] So would you say... there's still quite a lot of di...vide within the community?

SJ: Pardon?

KJ: There's still a lot of divide within the community?

SJ: Uh, there was never a unite in the community, that's what I could say. Like, there are certain people who work together, there are certain people who understand what this all means, but, uh... there are certain people who wouldn't. And the sad part is that the person who feels that way has power because the people that they... they hang out with or around with, then take those ideologies or ideas and go around with them and feel like this is how a person should feel like around other people. So I guess the reason for that is also more of the education. We are not yet educated as the LGBTQIA+ community.

01:41:17 Racism Within The LGBTQ Community

KJ: Mmm. Okay, have you ever experienced any racism within the community?

SJ: [laughs] I almost said a name! After the looting, I have actually felt it from different people that I look up to, and that.... highly believed in so yeah, I have.

KJ: Mmm... and do you think it's like-

SJ: And it sucks.

KJ: Yeah. Do you think it's like a systematic thing within, like the LGBTQ+ movement?

SJ: For me, also sitting as part of it as an activist and also sitting is, uh, a member of the sector, I feel like it is, it is because of, uh, I get their frustration for other people because racism, don't go only one way, but goes both ways. So I feel like it is because many people feel obliged or feel intended, because of what? So yeah, it is. The systems are very bad than the community.

01:43:07 South African Legislation Fails Women

KJ: This kind of leads into my next question. In what ways do you feel that the South African legislation fails women, particularly queer women of colour?

SJ: So [Zoom audio distorts] ... we got *uRoché* for a new position [laughs] I was so happy, but not just- it's what we are looking for. But for us, I feel like within- that's something I've been vocalizing everywhere I go. Number one, the legislature are the rule makers. So they bound us to everything. So if they can just one, make one amendment to one legislature that will then include queer bodies, not just only queer female bodies of colour, but just queer bodies as a whole, because I feel like in most places, we are not being represented because there isn't any number that is being channelled that each place must have a number of queer bodies, maybe that will then will speak in volumes and say, we are not seeing this, we are not seeing this. Because, uh, honestly, we are not seeing any of queer people in power. Anyway, the only time you will see a [Zoom audio distorts] queer... working within an organization or working in a law firm fighting for human rights but in other aspects we do not see ourselves, we're not well represented. So I feel like the legislation has been failing us. And I feel like they need to amend some of the policies and just implement this. And I said to Nothemba (?) as she's a very good ally and a friend to me, and saying, Girl, you must push for KZN to be the one who comes up with saying, in, in, in the house of the legislature, they need to have maybe at least- as much as the Nothemba's now having queer people working within her office, but have its own laws saying queer people must be in each office and a number of certain people need to be visible there, then this will also change many things for many queer people. Because right now, I will say they're not doing anything for queer women of colour. But there's actually nothing that is being done for queer people without colour, which I don't understand [laughs]. If we're gonna say queer people with Africa, but for white queer people, but and also for white, queer, or for queer men, there is

actually nothing that has been done. Yes the other people might have the privilege of saying, I grew up into this, but it's their own privilege of how they grew up, but there is actually nothing that has been done. Like for everyone. That's the truth.

01:46:43 TransHope

KJ: And how would you say that your organization TransHope plays into like alleviating that.

SJ: So 20...19, we started having conversations with the legislature, uh, 2020 we had the pandemic COVID so everything was shut down like where they pulled back. So in 2021 we hosted the first LGBTQI summit within the legislature whereby we involved all the districts within KZN but it's not only the work of TransHope but the work of all different stakeholders. We came in, sat within the table, we talked about these things, talked about these issues. Unfortunately, because I am transgender diverse I would champion first the issues of transgender bodies higher than everything else because I understand the struggle which is quite fair because most of the time we are being left behind. So we still own those processes of saying we are communicating while knowing Nothemba is still at the office we are trying to push for change and shift within the legislature to see ourselves, uhm, up there involved in everything and I'm glad that other places have beaten us towards those things as we see Roché sitting as a member of parliament [laughs] and other things but we are literally moving in the right direction, it's just that... we shouldn't push like we're tired of pushing. We should just need people to just act now because we have other things that are being put on the table and people just need to see that we need this [Zoom audio distorts]

KJ: Sorry? I think you broke up for a bit.

[Extended pause]

KJ: Hello?

SJ: You are cutting, I'm not too sure I'm also cutting.

KJ: You are cutting sorry.

SJ: Can you hear me now?

KJ: I can hear you now. Can you hear me?

SJ: Yes.

KJ: Okay cool [laughs] Oh, uhm... uh, I kind of forgot my question... What, what kind of like are your objectives for TransHope? Like what, what would you like TransHope to achieve?

(01:49:53) SJ: So just [Zoom audio distorts] ... the name- I wouldn't say even the objective, because the objective will come out from the statement I'm gonna state right now. This whole vision for TransHope to even exist was to see human rights equal for all people within the community uh, for transgender diverse community, regardless of gender and identity or sexual orientation within the Republic of South Africa. That's why we exist. And for all the objectives that comes from that saying, we need to educate the community, we need to create safe spaces, creating a safe space is also about providing knowledge to people and those are working with different entities to ensure people have, uh, I'm so sorry- have the certain knowledge and have the certain things that they provided. For us is for me to say, this is how we gonna achieve a better South Africa for all because many people do not know their rights. And it's very sad that our rights are being taken away from us almost every day. And we actually see it and do not care if the person taking our rights or not, because we, we do not know. So for me, that's it. It's just educating people, ensuring people understand that that they are valid, and what is their purpose in this life, because people tend to exploit

trans and gender diverse community or just queer folks. So if queer folks are educated and their communities educated, as I said, the reason why there is so much not unite within all genders within the LGBTQIA community is because of language and within language, comes back to education. So for me, if we get educated and people start educating themselves, they will get the language part of it, they'll get everything and then start understanding that I don't have to love this person, but I should respect what they are saying about themselves, I should respect their pronouns, I should respect what and what about them, because this is their identity. This is how they identify, then that will be something that will take us out... from all the miserable life that we are living in.

KJ: So do you- are you focusing on like running workshops and stuff?

SJ: Currently, TransHope has been providing- Okay, we were... we have been providing workshops, we have been providing trainings, we have been synthesizing- uh, sensitizing clinics and other stakeholders, but due to funds, limited places that we can reach but we also host dialogue within the community, just including them, because most of the time there is a [Zoom audio distorts] backlash between the two communities; cis and trans communities that we do not overlink ourselves with everyone. So a person might have another view of me and because I'm also not gonna share with [Inaudible]... about who I am becomes that issue. They'll always have that idea. And nobody's come and told them that that idea is wrong, you need to change it.

KJ: Yeah.

01:54:45 Pride

KJ: And then- we're wrapping up sorry, I know we've been going for a while. What are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for women to speak on LGBTQ+ issues?

SJ: Pardon?

KJ: What are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for women to speak on LGBTQ+ issues?

(01:55:21) SJ: Ehh... [sighs] It's just that I don't believe in Pride anymore. Like as much as I still wanna go to Cape Town pride this upcoming February, eh... they actually have like, as you're saying, it was very political. It was not about queerness, it was not- it's just, just a tick off the box of saying this happened. And yeah, and I feel like maybe we need to start looking at that. What is Pride exactly? And as South Africans, should we celebrate Pride or not? What are we celebrating while there is so much happening, like in KZN [Zoom audio distorts] don't... think people should celebrate Pride, because so many killings, hate crime cases came out from KZN last year, and saying, we're gonna be celebrating while not addressing these issues. If the government says we're gonna give you a place to celebrate your pride, I will see that these people really do not care about us because they needed to be there for fronting, conversing on, or confronting the hate crime cases or killing. I don't recall seeing it on the mainstream. Yes, we did see it on TV, we did talk about there and there once in a while, but it wasn't mainstream. Like, if you had to kill a cisgender woman today. It would be mainstream, like forever, but with our killings like- killing people, just like cockroaches, like Doom, boom, they're gone. So for me, Pride, it can move and then talk about actually, the issues of the LGBTQIA+, that would be great. Because it will also increase the knowledge of us. Like I know, uh if we do advertise whenever people are having Pride, saying, we're gonna

have a Film Fest on, on this day, we're gonna have this on this day, we're gonna have this on this day. But people actually become free on Friday because any other days, they are working, they are at schools and everything. Maybe if we can then now start looking at celebrating Pride Month, looking at targeting, actually where people they are in championing LGBTQI rights and involving LGBTQI from all decision making, because I know many people who make these Prides in South Africa, they opting for money and they don't care about us. They might be queer, but they don't care about us. That's what I would like to say.

01:58:39 Socialising With Other LGBTQ People

KJ: And then sorry to circle back, outside of your work and church are there any like social organizations or clubs that you attend or are part of where you meet other queer people?

SJ: Mmm, I wouldn't say there are such clubs. The only time we will use the club whereby maybe we'll have to, uh, what do you call it? Uh, a Pageant day or something that is queer. There are queer clubs that are situated but because- I mean I'm an indoors type of a person. I normally do not attend clubs. Like it's really the only time maybe you'll see me going to a club is whereby I'm going with a friend because most of my friends, especially uh... they're what do you call? Are actually drag performers.

KJ: Oh, okay.

SJ: People I can consider friends. So as they are performers, I'll have to be a designated driver sometimes and take them there to perform, but, uh, it's not my kind of thing like, my mom told me that if you want to drink, you can drink at home, you do not have to go and make the world see that you drink alcohol like, dude!

(02:00:26) KJ: So then what sorts of social gatherings are important to you as a queer woman?

SJ: Uh, beside church, for me [Zoom audio distorts] in the queer space, the most meaningful ones are whereby, we are providing each other support, those are the most- like not those boring seminars, whereby we're gonna say, we're coming in and sitting and talking like, let's go and sit in a roundtable and let's have lunch, let's talk. So let's talk about our successes, that sort of other things. It's empowering the queer child or queer businesses. For me to be able to push me to go out, I need to know [laughs] that it's something that would benefit a queer person, I cannot go to Kwandonga (?). Because there is this place in Johannesburg called Kwandonga(?) that has been trending just because it's well known, it's not even owned by a queer person. So I'd rather take means to say let's go meet to this because we are now bringing this person business if we are not supporting each other that becomes an issue. Even right now I'm wearing Somguni's (?) earrings, which is a queer woman, yes, I do wear other jewellery or other stuff but- even though they're not queer but women to women support is very needed. Because if we do not push each other, who is going to push us? So for me, my social gathering, whereby we are pushing each other and enjoying each other's businesses or if the person is going to grow or gain something from that, let not just meet and end up having to say cheers, we had fun! Let's just say, Oh, I'm going to apply for a business loan. I'm gonna try this, I'm gonna do this. And yeah, because honestly, since we are not being recognized as queer folks, nobody is gonna be like- because most of the time we say we aren't, we are unemployable, which is true but if we start being entrepreneurs, starting our own things, and still do not support each other, that becomes also an issue. So if we come in, by supporting each other, giving each other ideas, that means that we become

strong, and in my culture, they normally say, queer people have money and to have that money, we need to support each other for everybody to have money.

02:03:34 Final Thoughts

KJ: Okay, that was my last question. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

SJ: Nothing... but just saying that the work that has been done prior is amazing. And the work that we are doing uh...is not like **amazing** but the work that the next generation will get, there will be no work because we are literally trying to ensure that the next generation do not get into the space of saying they have to prove who they are in order to exist. The reason why I'm saying this, South Africa is one of the countries that have the laws that are decreed and I remember 2004 I was very young when the bill was passed of marriage. But till to date, we are trying to fix those smaller inner glitches that were in those policies. That's why I'm saying the next generation should not work and, uh, people like you are doing this research and putting it there, will also put the archives of saying, these people were fighting for this and- they shouldn't be born about this, they should learn about this, like we learned about apartheid, they should learn about our struggles as everything so- because most of the time there wasn't any evidence of life of queer people because it wasn't documented and these researchers and things will stay forever, and be able to help the next generation to even know what's gonna happen. I'm not talking about the next generation, our kids, I'm talking about their kids, because our kids are already here like, but yeah, we should build that strong space for others and I just wish you luck with everything and yeah.

KJ: Thank you so much and thank you once again, for agreeing to do this interview with me. It's actually like amazing, all the work that you're doing. And thank you for sharing all of your experiences with me. Yeah. If you know of anyone else who would be interested in doing an

interview, if you wouldn't mind like, passing their name along or anything like that, I'd be really appreciative of that. But yeah, thank you so much.

SJ: All right. I will check with them if I can just share their numbers with you and if they agree then I will then do it.

KJ: Thank you so much. Have a good day.

SJ: Thank you. Bye.

[Zoom meeting ends at 02:07:02]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 2 hours 7 minutes 2 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form; interviewee has restricted access to the raw audio to everyone but the interviewer.

Interview 10: Sheila Barsel

Name of the Interviewee: Barsel, Sheila [SB]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 7 September 2022

Place of the Interview: Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 2

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 15 November 2022 – 18 November 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:00:12 KJ joins Zoom meeting]

KJ: Hi, can you hear me?

SB: I'm coming now, I'm on my way.

KJ: Okay, okay.

SB: I'll just be a second.

KJ: No problem.

SB: I took the opportunity waiting for you to send a quick email and you know, when you think you're sending a quick, quick email, it's never as quick as you think.

KJ: [laughs] No, that's okay, that's okay. I, uh, I thought that you said that you were rescheduling for 12:30.

SB: Oh, oh, did I say that?

KJ: Ja, that's why I had changed the Zoom, uh, the Zoom link [laughs].

SB: [Laughs] Gosh! I'm sorry. That's my, my head.

KJ: No, no, don't worry about it [chuckles].

SB: I'm afraid that this kind of long Covid that I have plays games with my, with my brain.

KJ: Yeah no, don't worry about it, don't worry about it. I'm also setting up in the meantime [chuckles].

SB: But here I am.

KJ: Nice to meet you.

SB: Good to meet you. Okay, I did print out your list.

KJ: Okay. Um, but I mean...

SB: I'm afraid to say I can't answer most of them.

KJ: Oh [laughs]. That's fine. We'll just, you know, we'll just go through it and see where the conversation takes us.

SB: Let me know when we're starting, neh.

KJ: Oh uh, whenever you're ready to start we can.

SB: Oh, alright, let's go.

KJ: Okay, okay. So yeah, just thank you for agreeing to do this interview with me. Just some, like admin things, is that recently, they've been cutting down on Zoom times so normally by like the 45 or 40 - 45 minute mark, it'll cut but then you can just re-join it with the same link and we can just pick up from there. And then the, the interview form that I sent you, that's also just for, like, ethical reasons. So, I do have ethical clearance from the university and if there's anything that you, you know, want to leave out or change, if you want the entire interview to be anonymous, whatever, that's just, you know, there as kind of like a safe, safeguard for that.

SB: Which university is it?

KJ: University of Cape Town.

SB: Okay.

KJ: Ja, uh, ja so we can like... if, if there's any questions you have?

SB: No.

KJ: Okay, then we can get into the actual questions. So-

SB: In fact, your questions were very good. They were nice and detailed, so it leads us into conversation, even if it wanders off a bit.

KJ: No, yeah, that's fine. That's completely fine if it wanders off. Don't, don't worry about that. I mean, they are- the interview can get a bit long so if you need a break or whatever, just like let me know.

SB: No, I think we should just finish it.

KJ: Yeah [laughs] but maybe like if you need to get some water or if you, you know, need to use a bathroom, whatever. Just... we can do that.

00:04:41 Background

KJ: Okay, so to begin, please can you state your full name, age, preferred pronouns, and your sexual orientation?

(00:04:49) SB: Okay, my full name is Sheila Barsel. My age, I am now 78. My preferred pronouns are she and my sexual orientation is I see myself as a lesbian feminist.

KJ: Okay, cool. Where did you grow up?

(00:05:12) SB: In Johannesburg.

KJ: Okay, and what was the community there like?

(00:05:16) SB: What community are you talking about? You mean just generally a description?

KJ: Like your neighbours, the neighbourhood that you were in?

(00:05:27) SB: Well, I was in two neighbourhoods, both of which were very white because it was the apartheid-, the era of apartheid. The first, the first area- I suppose they were both really middle class. Although the second place where we moved to, Rosebank, was a bit smarter than the bottom, than, than Parkview-, Parkwood. But in fact, in the last 15 odd years, that area where I grew up Parkwood, Parkview, Parktown North has become very chichi and sought after, uhm, uh, sort of by yuppies, in a way. And so that's, that's where I, that's, that's where I lived. The neighbourhood was pretty much white. Some, some people were academics. Others were just ordinary businesspeople. I don't, I can't say we had a lot

to do with a lot of the neighbourhood. There was one particular family that we were close to, in the beginning part, but my, my, my, my family were much more oriented towards their own family. And in some, in some ways, we lived in a kind of Jewish family ghetto, kind of, although not that we didn't interact with others, it wasn't a ghetto, like the Orthodox Jews live in. But because the brothers and sisters, etc, were very close to one another, uhm, that was where, that's where, you know, where a lot of the interaction was, was cousins. And that's, that's... ja.

KJ: Okay. And what were kind of like the views in, in that neighbourhood at the time? Was it quite conservative or it was more liberal?

(00:07:37) SB: It was quite conservative. The family we were quite close to, the father was a professor at Wits University and I can't say he was one of the radical professors or the politically active ones, but he had a more probably, uhm, had a more open mind, I'd say. Yeah, I'm, I'm- as I'm thinking the people on the corner although they were Jewish, I suspect that actually had German origin. So they kept very much to themselves. Of course, I remembered after the war because I was born during the war. And up the road, people that I was, who we were friendly with, were also kind of- but they were more open. I think they had come out earlier, like probably at the turn of the century, as opposed to around about the war. So there was a kind of a bit of a Jewish ghetto feeling, in a way, but it wasn't. It wasn't like, the Kensington in those areas where it was mainly, mainly Jews, you know, but there was a bit of a ghetto feeling in that the Jewish families interacted and didn't always connect with other neighbours.

KJ: Okay, yeah. So it was like, kind of, like a community within a community kind of?

SB: That's right, ja.

KJ: Okay and so, at the time-

(00:09:14) SB: I do need to say my family background is quite checkered in that my mother's- , my mother and her siblings came from what was then Russia when they came, but ultimately became Poland. It was integrated into Poland. My father's family came out from Palestine. And I'm very careful about how I name them because in 1948, some of that part of the world became Israel. But when they came out, it was not Israel. It was called Palestine; it was part of the Ottoman Republic. They came from a small town called Safed, which is in the northern part close to the Syrian border. And my mother's side of the family, they didn't really-, there was not much memory, or they didn't speak about it a lot. And that's very common with Jews who've been through Holocaust and, and pogroms and things. They don't want to inflict it on their children. So there wasn't discussion about it. My father's family because they fled much more for economic reasons, they were very open and spoke about it a lot, a lot about it. So I know a lot about my father's side of the family, and their origins and where they came from, and that they lived as indigenous Jews, and then fled at the time of the Crusades in the 12th Century and fled to Spain. And then they got booted out of Spain, by Isabella when she decided to go for the Jews, and they moved out and came back to Palestine to the Ottoman republic in 1650 sometime. So they're very, they were very steeped in that. So our family became very steeped in that kind of tradition. Moreso than being Ashkenazi Jews, which is what my mother would have been. So there was, it was a bit of a mix, a mixed, mixed, mixture of, of Jews that... But I also need to say clearly that my father's brother and his wife became very active in the underground, they were in the Congress of Democrats, and ultimately, my, my uncle, seemingly did not join the Communist Party of South Africa from but my aunt did. And they were both charged, uhm, in a trial, that was what was called the Original Fisher Trial. My aunt went to jail for three,

three and a half years, my uncle was, was acquitted, because there was a confusion about, about him and one of the other people who had escaped. So there was a very strong political strain that came through on my father's, father's side but there was a lot of fear. We didn't interact so much with them until later in life. Although there wasn't, there wasn't an intention of not seeing them but their interaction was not intensely close. And it was because of the restrictions they both had; my uncle was banned for five years and then when my aunt came out of prison, she also had a banning also, I remember. And I got banned later on in my political life, but we'll come to that. So in those early years, we used to visit I mean, it wasn't, it wasn't not visiting but there wasn't a... as in closeness, with that side of the family as there was with my mother's side of the family, because she was very attached to her brother and sister and their families.

KJ: Would you say that that put like a strain on your family relationship?

(00:13:12) SB: No, not really. I think other things put a strain on my family relationship. And that was, I don't know if that'll come to it, I suppose I should mention here- is that I had an incest connection with a grandfather, my mother's father. And I... I've only, I've only been working on it much later in life and it's taken me a long time to come-, to think about it and open it up and open up what the impact of that was. And not physical impact, it was the strain of being in a family where it was not recognized and even now, because I do a thing called Re-Evaluation Counselling, which goes looking for that early stuff, and now I find I see things which are as a result of the repercussion from, from that early stuff. And I suppose I didn't remember it when I was younger, I only remember it in my 30s. But looking back, I can see. I begin to understand why there was a separation.

KJ: Right. Um, would you-

(00:14:25) SB: Which is why I never really felt at home in my family. That was, that was the upshot of it. That I never really felt... I suppose at home is the best way of putting it.

KJ: Yeah. So would you say like, in general, there was kind of this thing in your family where you there's like, if there's problems, it's not really addressed and spoken about.

(00:14:52) SB: Probably you're right, probably that is so. That's very common, it's very common in Jewish families that have fled places, that they didn't want to impose that, that, that pain.

KJ: Mmm. I think it's... I mean, just generally speaking, I think it could be just common in a family setting in general, as well.

SB: Ja.

KJ: So, like, in your early years, who's, who's living with you? Like who's in your household?

(00:15:28) SB: Well, my mother and father, brother and sister and an intrinsic part of the household for me, were the two servants who worked in the house. It was the female servant; I look back now and understand then the intense attachment I had for her. I spent the first two years on her bum when I was strapped to her back. And I think that this stuff with my grandfather seemed to have happened-, and I'm not completely clear on a whole lot of the stuff, it seemed to happen around about the age of five-ish, four to six, I think. And she, she, I think, was aware of it because in trying to go back and think about the attachment that I had for her... It was first of all, that my mother and I did not get on all that well, we weren't close. My mother was very attached to my eldest sister who is eight years older than I was and my father was very attached to my brother who's four years older. And

that's partially what happens in Jewish families, I think. And I'm not sure my parents should have had a third child.

KJ: Uhm to be clear, you're the youngest?

(00:16:47) SB: Because I kind of quite often feel that I was... that I had a feeling of left-outedness and that I wasn't **actually** a part of that family. I desperately wanted to be in a family of my father's brother and, and his wife and children. Because they, they kind of did much more things that they had really fascinating discussions at the dinner table and my aunt was a classical piano teacher, and so she used to take people to the concerts, and I desperately wanted to do that kind of stuff but I never, never did. So I think that I felt disconnected from the family unit from a very early age. And it's only now in, in my attempt to try to understand what was, what was happening, that I've realized that.

KJ: Right. Uhm sorry, just to check, you're the youngest of the three?

SB: I'm the youngest of the three.

KJ: Okay and-

(00:17:56) SB: I'm told by other people who are the youngest, in the youngest category that it's quite common, what I'm feeling is quite common.

KJ: Yeah.

SB: I've, I've learnt that. Interesting.

KJ: And what type of work was your family involved in?

(00:18:13) SB: My father was a pharmacist, my mother never worked. She worked as a secretary before she and my father got married and then she didn't work. But my father was

in partnership with his two brothers-in-law. And they kind of had some kind of a... where they would buy their stuff together because they were all pharmacists. And in fact, my father went and- in his early years, in their early part of the marriage, he went to work at a pharmacy in Trompsburg. And my uncle, who was married to my mother's sister, was working in Edinburg and they sent for my mother. And I have- it's clear to me, that was an arranged marriage. And that doesn't mean to say they didn't have affection for one another, but I think the fact that they would have gotten in, gotten involved in arranged marriage, says something about their personalities.

KJ: Yeah. And so would you say that you are also like, quite close with your extended family?

(00:19:28) SB: Yes, I was. We were, we were very close. I mean there were three of us cousins and because we were always together, and especially on things that Jewish holidays and because there was an essential thing of keeping the family together, particularly those three siblings who came out from Poland together, and they'd come up with the fourth sibling who, who stayed in, stayed in Zimbabwe, Rhodesia as it was then. Southern Rhodesia. So we were, I mean virtually every weekend, we were together. I mean, the first group of playing together and things that I can recall is with my cousins.

KJ: Okay. And who would you say-

(00:20:11) SB: And Jewish holidays, you know, the family was together.

KJ: Yeah. Who would you say you were closest with in your extended family?

(00:20:22) SB: Haven't a clue.

KJ: Okay [laughs].

(00:20:29) SB: I don't think I've been close to anyone actually. I suppose who I was most attached to was a girl cousin who was six months younger than I was. But that also separated off when we became teenagers, you know, because she went to another school and developed other friends and I was somewhere else. And I was alienated. I was very, highly alienated by this stage.

KJ: Uh, what age was this?

(00:21:00) SB: I'd say between 10 and 13.

KJ: Okay. Is that when you started feeling disconnected from your family?

(00:21:08) SB: Oh, I think I felt disconnected from my family from very early. Very early. That's why I say, I don't think they should've had a third child.

KJ: Yeah. Was it just a general kind of sense of like feeling neglect? Or was it like, more an internalized like, difference that you felt that maybe they didn't feel?

(00:21:38) SB: Look there was definitely a difference and part of the reason I wanted to attach to my, my other part of the family was because my, my father's intellectual mind, intellectual focus was on, on Jewish affairs and the Torah. He went to synagogue, virtually every day of his life, you know, and he was very steeped in kind of Jewish affairs and stuff like that. And I think, I think that I had a mind and- To this day, my brother is not alive anymore, but to this day, my brother also became very religious as he went over. So all his reading was done in reading the Torah, and commentary. My sister reads novels, but there was never any kind of intellectual pursuit. Unless it was connected with Jewish stuff, which I must admit that my father did ground me in thinking intellectually, but it was only about Jewish stuff. And it's not to say that he couldn't think intellectually, he could. And when, and

when there was a need to have a discussion, we would, but I think he was scared to and he certainly wouldn't enter any kind of politics when I became a teenager, late teenager and went to university, because he was terrified because my aunt and uncle and, and their, their involvement in the Security.

KJ: Right. Do you think that maybe it could also be to do with like, the politics of the time as well?

(00:23:21) SB: Yeah well that's why I think he was terrified. I think he was terrified.

KJ: Okay. And so what were some of the challenges that you faced-, you and your family faced growing up? You've mentioned your aunt and uncle who were banned by the state. Is there anything else?

(00:23:45) SB: I think there were a lot of financial challenges. I mean, although our existence would've been classified as middle class, I actually think we were kind of lower middle class. And there was a lot of pressure on my father.

KJ: Okay.

00:24:06 Anti-apartheid Activism

KJ: Uhm, sorry to jump around a little bit. You, you mentioned that your, your aunt and uncle were, you know, deeply involved in politics and stuff like that. Do you think that that kind of shaped, helped shape your activism?

(00:24:21) SB: I have no doubt. But I think what deeply shaped my activism was my intense closeness to the woman who was my nanny. I think it was very confusing for me as I grew up, that I, that people didn't- I wasn't allowed to see her as the human being that I knew she was because she had protected me. My mother fired her when I was about seven or eight

and I think it was one of the spurious reasons of that she came back late from her day off or something like that. Those two people who worked in my house were my saviours. Uhm, I... the African man who was largely in the garden, but also in the house a bit, he would, he would play games with me all the time. We would play with the ball and I remember he taught me about climbing up a tree. And the African woman, I think she realized because my grandfather would visit on a Sunday, that's when all the stuff happened and I think she realized that on Mondays when she came back, there was something different with me. And then she disappeared. And I was distraught.

KJ: How did you, how did you deal with that feeling and was that feeling acknowledged by your parents?

(00:25:52) SB: I used to have temper tantrums when I was young when I couldn't, when I couldn't handle what was going on internally. I would have temper tantrums. And I think I used to take it out on myself.

KJ: Okay, I see. And like, did your parents ever like, you know, acknowledge it?

(00:26:19) SB: I don't know. I don't recall that.

KJ: Okay, okay. And then if you don't mind us kind of jumping more into like, because we're discussing the topic a bit, into the anti-apartheid liberation stuff. When did you like join it exactly? Join the movement.

(00:26:38) SB: It was when I went to university at 18. I turned 18, in July, and in that September, when it was Jewish new year, I went to synagogue. And as I walked downstairs, because the women all sat upstairs, I went downstairs to go to the toilet and I heard some people talking about politics, not politics, about economics. And I just thought, this is not

the kind of thing you do in a synagogue. And I clearly remember walking out of the synagogue that day and saying to my father, who was the religious side of the family, I'm afraid I'm never going back there. So six months later, I go to university at Wits. And as I walked through the gate, literally, a friend, a friend of my cousin's, came up to me, he was the SRC President at the time. And he came up to me and he said to me, you're studying science, we need a representative from science, you have science and I got anointed, literally anointed by him. I then very rapidly joined the NUSAS, National Union of South African Students local committee. And from there it was, it was quickly forward because I then started to have interaction with people who were not white, on a one-to-one level, not necessarily at Wits but people from other, other campuses. And I became, I became friendly with Essop and Aziz Pahad who was, who was Indian students at the University at the time. And they, they had been given permission to study there and they lived in Vrededorp area, which is where my father had a pharmacy. And I am- because I was swarthy my face was, I was, I had very dark skin in my younger years, and so I would put on a sari and I could quite easily pass. And so that's, that's what I did and I used to go to movies there. Now I didn't get, I didn't get recruited by them but I think that opened up my eyes to what was happening in a way. And then when I could, I joined the NUSAS local committee. And I then joined a thing called WITSCO, which was the Wits' Class One Student's Community Organization, the similar thing to SHAWCO at UCT but it, it hadn't started then, and we started it and we, and we set up and we went to a Coloured township because getting into African townships in Johannesburg was very-, much more complicated. And we used to take Kupugani food, Kupugani was an organization that distributed nutritious foods, like Pronutro and stuff like that. And so I then got involved through that. But then it-, but it was my involvement through in NUSAS. I don't know if you've ever heard of NUSAS.

KJ: [laughs] Yes, I have.

SB: As you're at, as you're at UCT you're very lucky. Because when we, the organization was going to be banned, I think there are entire archives in the Special Collections at UCT.

KJ: Well, I'm not sure about that [chuckles] because of the library fire.

SB: No, they're there. They're there, apparently.

KJ: Oh, they survived?

SB: Ja.

KJ: That's nice.

SB: They were behind the steel doors.

KJ: Oh, that's very lucky. There's a lot of stuff that didn't survive.

SB: Mmm.

KJ: So, uhm, at this point in time, are you still living with your parents when you're in university?

(00:30:40) SB: Ja! I... At about 23, when I was in my last year of university, I was approached by the person who was then the President of NUSAS and asked if I would come to Cape Town to become the General Secretary of the organization. There had been a woman there that had been the General Secretary for 22 years. And so I was approached in that July of that last year. And I agreed to, I jumped at it even though I came down and earned a paupery amount of R150 a month or something.

KJ: So how did your-, what was your-

(00:31:15) SB: I think I knew I had to leave Johannesburg. I think I knew I had to get away from my family.

KJ: Why, why do you say that?

(00:31:25) SB: Uh because I just felt displaced. I didn't feel I was part of it.

KJ: Yeah. And how did they feel about your engagement in NUSAS?

(00:31:38) SB: Very scared, very scared.

KJ: Mmm. Um, so then, just like in terms of like, NUSAS was it mainly like... what were, what were like... Was it mainly white people, black people, or a mix?

(00:31:57) SB: It was white students. They were white, there were a couple of black campuses. And then there was the major split between, it was SASO in 1972,73. But, and then it became completely white. At that stage, there was sort of an agreement. Before then there was, before then there were some black people inside the organization, but after that, it became a white organization, and took on the mantle of working within the white community.

KJ: Okay. Um, and then was it majority, like... predominantly male or mixed between, between...

(00:32:38) SB: The leadership was particularly predominantly male, although when you went to a Congress, there were, there were quite a lot of- there were some females there. I believe up until the 80s somewhere.

KJ: Mmm. And what were some of like, their concerns besides like, the, the obvious, like, was homosexuality ever something that was addressed? [SB shakes head] No? Okay, but

were there like any negative views around homosexuality that were discussed in the organization?

(00:33:14) SB: Nothing.

KJ: Not, not at all. Oh okay and so then-

(00:33:21) SB: One of the presidents was a no-, was a homosexual and many of us knew.

KJ: Oh okay, but there was like nothing said about it.

(00:33:31) SB: I mean, if people knew about the person they kept it hush hush.

KJ: Okay. And then what were the views towards woman?

(00:33:43) SB: Look there was largely a male leadership remember, you know. I wouldn't say they were anti-women, but I don't think they were particularly supportive of, of women.

KJ: Okay. Yeah. And so then just letting you know, there's five minutes of this meeting, and then we'll just re-join.

SB: Do you want to go in and out now? Let's do it now so we didn't break in the conversation.

KJ: Uhm, I'm not sure if it will restart, or if it will just show five minutes again.

SB: I do it, I do it all the time.

KJ: Okay, sure. Sure, we can do that. All right.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:34:25]

Tape 1 ends

Tape 2:

[00:00:24 SB joins Zoom meeting]

SB: I do it all the time. This is Zoom, Zoom behaviour that you learn about.

KJ: Oh, you see, I've, I've never had to deal with it before. Before when I had one on ones, they would go for however long, but only recently I've been experiencing the whole cutting down on time.

SB: Oh really?

KJ: [laughs] Thanks for the tip. Now I know for the future. Okay. So, um, just to continue, so when you're 23, you moved to Cape Town, um, and then around what age, um, did... were you, like, how old were you when you, um, were banned by the state?

(00:01:12) SB: Well I was born in '44 and I was banned in '73. So what's that? 50, 60, 70? About 29 odd. But in between that, seeing that we're talking about sexuality, in between that I got married to a man and I had the most idyllic... life with him but then he [Zoom audio distorts] ... of a heart attack.

KJ: Oh wait, sorry, you cut off, you got married to a man did you say?

SB: Yeah!

KJ: Okay.

SB: Yeah!

KJ: Sorry. Okay. Um, do you wanna speak more about that?

00:01:54 Romantic Relationships

SB: I'm trying to think. I think he died in '71. And we were married for about five years, so I think it was 60... We were together for about five years and we... we were married only for

about three and a half or something. Um, I can't remember exactly the year we were married... But I had, I had a delightful existence with him. Delightful. And he never, for one minute tried to suppress any, any sense of, um, my taking charge of situations. He never tried to kind of overrule me taking-, in fact, he did all the cooking in the house. I hate cooking. He became very connected to a lot of the NUSAS leadership that I was friendly with. Um, yeah. And we had a wonderful exi-, life together. Probably would still have been married to him if he hadn't popped off from a heart attack.

KJ: And, um, your parents approved of, uh, the marriage and everything?

(00:03:15) SB: I mean, they pushed us into, we got pushed into being married. We, we wouldn't have bothered to get married and my mother was having a... kind of getting a bit nuts about it all. So, uh, we, so we got married, but we kind of got married for, for, for the formality of it.

KJ: Mm. Um, So this was in like your mid-twenties, right?

(00:03:44) SB: Yeah. Early. That's true. Early to mid-twenties.

00:03:48 Realisation of Feelings for Women

KJ: So... sorry, I'm just like jumping all over the place. But, um, so then at what point do you realize that you, you know, um, had feelings for women?

(00:03:59) SB: Many years later. After I was banned, I was banned in '73 and during my ban, the banning was '73 to '78, towards the end of my banning or quite in the middle of the banning, I got involved in Rape Crisis. I got a Rape Crisis talk that I heard some woman talking about an incest connection with a grandfather, and that's when it suddenly, I started to remember that. Um, a number of those women had been, were lesbians and had been

lesbians all their lives. I think at that stage I was in a state of being asexual probably. Um, I flirted with asexuality on and off. Um, I didn't know what it was called then. I mean, you know, um, and... [long pause] then just before, around about the time that my banning order expired in '78. Um, I then, I, I had started at that stage to begin to think of, I suppose, feeling an attraction to women. Um, but then I got into my car at, literally, at the stroke of midnight and went to spend time in the Eastern Cape with two women who were lesbians. And I spent about 10 days with them, um, me and my two dogs. And it was, I suppose, it was round about that period because they were, they, because they were lesbians and living together, I suppose I started to toy with the possibility. You know, it's never been a concrete decision of mine, I suppose in the reality I probably, I don't know-, if I had to label myself, I would've been called myself bisexual, but moving towards asexuality. Um, cause that makes much more sense to me and I think that it's my life experiences, uhm, that, that, that, that closeness and connection that you experience with, with asexuality and removing a lot of the intensely sexual stuff that's, that's never made sense to me, that, that intensely sexual stuff. Um, I've had, I've had times when I've been strongly sexual with people but it's always been the other aspect of sexuality, and it's only in the last four or five years that I have been talking to somebody who calls himself asexual, that I've begun to understand what it's, what it means. I think probably all my life, that's, that's been kind of where I've been on the, on, on the spectrum, but it was at that time that, I suppose it was '78, '79, and then somehow I started to see myself as a lesbian. I still continue to see myself as a lesbian. I don't understand, I don't think I understand enough about the stuff around the pronouns and all the differences and stuff. I've never liked the word queer cause I think it has a negative connotation.

00:07:39 Gay Association of South Africa

(00:07:39) SB: And then in about 1983, I got involved with a group called the Gay Association of South Africa, which was largely men and um, a friend of mine was the chair and he said to me, you should take over and be the chair. And so I agreed to it and I sort of regretted it about 10 months later cause this chairing went on for 15 months and it was hell being a woman there of a predominantly male organization with what they wanted to do with the organization. And quite interestingly enough was at one of the meetings that I met Julia. That was 1984 and Julia passed, uh, passed on in 2019. So we were together for a long time. And our relationship, our relationship was very close and, and, and, and intense. The sex was never a stronger part of a relationship, as in some other, as I understand in some other relationships. Maybe, maybe we were both kind of asexual people cause it was that closeness and comforting, comfort stuff. Um, and she lived for about 12 or 13 years with quite a severe disability, um, which kept her very isolated and it had quite an impact on me as well. Um, but I learned that it was much harder for her than it was for me. So you kind of deal with it, you know.

KJ: Uhm, yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, I'm sorry for your loss. Um, it's still pretty recent now. Um, so you, uh, sorry, I'm just checking my questions.

00:09:50 Banning by the State

KJ: So, so, um, um, going back to, to the, the ban, what was their reason for banning you?

(00:09:57) SB: Uh, because I was the General Secretary of the new-, of NUSAS and NUSAS was an unlawful organization doing things that they shouldn't be doing.

KJ: Mm. And, and how was this ban enforced?

(00:10:11) SB: Well, the Security Police used to watch you. And you always were aware that you must look over my shoulder in case the Security Police were watching you.

KJ: Mm. So they would be like, stationed outside your house and stuff like that?

(00:10:27) SB: Sort of on and off and checking if, if there was a, a function that they thought you might be at illegally, they would be checking. Uh, we figured some years later that the guy across the road might have been a spy.

KJ: Oh, I see. And I mean, like, how did that, how did you feel like during that time?

(00:10:48) SB: Very watched and surveilled.

KJ: Mm. Must not have been like a very comfortable feeling.

(00:10:57) SB: No, it wasn't. I mean, I think it still impacts on you, you know? Yeah.

KJ: Would you say like, even like up until now you still kind of, you know, like kind of have, like maybe a bit of like PTSD from it in a sense.

(00:11:14) SB: Look, I'm sure, yes. But I think that it's more sus-, suspicion.

KJ: Ah, okay. Yeah. I see.

00:11:23 Rape Crisis

KJ: And then, um, so you said, um, after that, you ended up joining Rape Crisis? Um, what, what led you to Rape Crisis?

(00:11:35) SB: I dunno. The fact that I started to be, started to befriend other women who were doing it. I suppose subliminally, um, it might have been that I was trying to sort out my, the sexuality, you know, I mean the, the early stuff. Uhm, we must, we must move a little faster cause I'm feeling quite tired.

KJ: Okay. Um, I mean if-

SB: Um, let's just move through it.

KJ: Okay, sure.

SB: I don't wanna do it again, but it does tire me a little.

KJ: Yeah, no, definitely. But I mean, um, if you do feel tired, you can also just, we can reschedule for another, the rest of the questions for another day.

SB: No. That's all arduous.

KJ: Okay. Sure. Um, so, um, Rape Crisis at the time, because I think they were like newly formed, right? What services did they provide?

(00:12:29) SB: Uh, it's, they were doing counselling and training.

KJ: Mm. And, um, were you, trained as a counsellor?

SB: Ja.

KJ: Okay. And how frequently were, um, homophobic rapes reported? [SB shakes head] Not at all? And how, um, how long were you there until?

(00:12:58) SB: Only two or three years. Because I had quite a, quite a big eruption with people who were very key to Rape Crisis.

KJ: Uh, okay. And so in that time there, like, even as it like the organization grew, there was still very minimal reporting of homophobic... [SB shakes head]. Okay. Cool.

00:13:15 GASA and LAGO/OLGA

KJ: And so then after that you say, um, you moved to um, GASA, right?

SB: What?

KJ: GASA...

KJ: And so how long after joining GASA did you become the chairperson?

(00:13:34) SB: 10 minutes.

KJ: Okay. Um, and so, I mean, what was the main focus of, of the organization at that time?

(00:13:44) SB: There was a newsletter which we produced, it was reaching out to people who were, um, unsure of their homosexuality or, or who were isolated and Julia did an outstanding job in, in that regard. Uh, we set up a thing called the Pink Door, which was like a club meeting place for people, but because it was mainly male, it... I quite quickly got quite alienated. As soon as I could I got outta there. KJ: So, um, they had like quite a negative view towards women, uhm, but how many women were a part of GASA at the time?

(00:14:29) SB: There were not many women who were members at all. Just, I mean, even at committee meetings there was like misogynistic comments and I couldn't **bear** this whole thing of, you know, the gay vernacular of feminizing stuff drove me mad. So I put up with it, but I [Zoom audio distorts] ... had... to the organization, **but** I had also started to become involved in the UDF. And that's why I got out of it as soon as I could.

KJ: Um, would you say that they... like, how... what was GASA's reaction to, to your involvement in the UDF?

(00:15:12) SB: They-, I didn't discuss it with them for a minute. Because they were, they were reactionary as hell. They were so reactionary.

KJ: Oh, okay. Yeah. But because like, from my understanding, they took like a very like, um, apolitical stance, so...

(00:15:31) SB: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

KJ: So, um, then you and, uh, Julia broke off, uh, I'm assuming.

(00:15:42) SB: We never-, what do you mean we broke off?

KJ: Like, um, away, broke away from, from GASA.

(00:15:48) SB: What happened was that five or six of us decided to get together and started to think about becoming a-, connecting with the ANC in exile. Some of us who were in GASA, who were political people got together and we broke off when we set up LAGO.

KJ: Yes. Yes. Yes. Um, so did many people outside of the five of y'all follow, um, follow y'all?

(00:16:16) SB: No, not for a minute. They were delighted when we got the clause in the Constitution, but they never did any work for it.

KJ: Mm. I see. And what was, um, like LAGO's demographic?

(00:16:34) SB: Mainly men... Mainly white, because that's why ABIGALE got set up, because ABIGALE people felt that there wasn't space for not white people.

KJ: Mm. Um, and so, uh, just out of interest, was there a particular reason why, uh, you ended up changing the name to OLGA?

(00:17:15) SB: You know, uh, calling ourselves an Organization Of Lesbian And Gay Activists rather than Lesbians And Gays Against Oppression, made the name more political. And by that stage, we were affiliating to the UDF so we wanted to be much more in line with the, with the way political organizations were naming themselves.

KJ: Right. And so what was some of the like key differences between, um, what, what, what would you prefer me to call it, LAGO or OLGA?

SB: Nothing.

KJ: [chuckles] Okay, but no, I meant, um,

SB: It was literally a name change.

KJ: No, no, no. Sorry, I wasn't, sorry, I wasn't asking between that. Um, I mean, between that organization and GASA.

(00:18:30) SB: Oh gosh. It was apolitical as hell! You know, and if you talk, if you said the word ANC, they would run a mile, or UDF they'd, they'd run a mile. They were completely reactionary. They were completely-, the most of them might have been, would be in the progressive party at the time, whatever it was called then.

KJ: Okay. And so then OLGA-

(00:18:58) SB: Most of, most of them were just really very worried about trying to find somebody to fuck. That was what it was. That was what GASA was.

KJ: So it was more like a social organization?

(00:19:09) SB: Yeah. And counselling. They set up a good counselling thing, which became Triangle.

KJ: Okay. Um, were you a part of that counselling service?

(00:19:20) SB: I was for a while, but I never, I never actually did much counselling because I was chair of GASA and it was a GASA project. I used to-, I was involved in the organizational side.

KJ: Okay. I mean, just out of curiosity, um, what were some of like the things that people were coming for counselling for?

(00:19:40) SB: Haven't a clue because it was mainly, was mainly psychological, isolation. I don't know. Cause I never, I never really got involved in the- I don't suppose it would be very different to what Triangle does, deals with now. Except Triangle does, gives much more into queer stuff and things. It was isolation, homelessness, being thrown out of home, those sorts of things.

KJ: Okay. Okay. Um, and it was, I'm assuming predominantly like, um, men reaching out for counselling? [SB nods]. Okay. So very few, if any, uh, lesbian women or bisexual women. [SB nods]. And, um, just out of curiosity, what was like, um, GASA's kind of view on like, uh, trans people?

(00:20:35) SB: I think it was tolerant but I don't think it was affirming.

KJ: Okay.

00:20:42 NCGLE and Legal Activism

KJ: Um, and so then, um, OLGA ends up, you know, getting, becoming part of the NCGLE...

SB: Yeah.

KJ: And you were part of that.

(00:20:56) SB: Yeah, I was on the first executive of the NCGLE.

KJ: Right. So what were some of the challenges that you faced while you were in that position?

SB: From which side?

KJ: Any side. Just any challenges at all that you faced.

(00:21:12) SB: The challenges were having to find the ANC, get to the ANC, um, make sure that, you know, that people understood that what lesbian and gay meant. There weren't- ... I suppose the homophobia, I mean, there was all, there's always that kind of underlying thing of people's level of homophobic, which varied obviously, some people were more homophobic than others. Uh... [long pause] ... other challenges... and there was a, there was a challenge at one stage because of ABIGALE, which became part of the NCGLE, but ABIGALE had split from OLGA because, um, OLGA was seen to be dominated by white people. So they set up ABIGALE, which was mainly coloured which was, which was absolutely excellent and they did amazing work, uhm... [long pause].

KJ: Are you okay? Do you wanna take a break?

SB: No, I want to finish.

KJ: Okay. Um, I'm just trying to think what the main challenges were then.

KJ: Okay. Um, so I just... let me try and sum up these questions.

00:22:40 Out in Africa Film Festival

KJ: Um, oh one, did you ever attend, uh, the Out In Africa Film Festival

(00:22:47) SB: Often.

KJ: And what was your first experience of it like?

(00:22:54) SB: I can't remember the first or the fourth or, or the fifth, but I went there often. And some of the films I enjoyed, some of them irritated me. Some of the politics in the films

irritated me. Some I thought were delightful. So I think like any film festival, you know, some work for you and some don't.

KJ: Yeah. And like, uh, were there a lot of lesbian or women loving women films?

(00:23:19) SB: No, there weren't, there weren't always a lot of lesbians, but I think that Nodi did an amazing job in getting, getting lesbians together with it.

KJ: Mm. Okay.

00:23:30 Religion and Spirituality

KJ: And then, um, you mentioned that you, you know, you come, um, from a Jewish background and faith, um, does it still play a significant role in your life?

(00:23:41) SB: No, only just because of the tradition, you know, knowing that that's my, my heritage, but I don't, I don't go to Synagogue or any of that stuff at all.

00:23:50 Sexuality and Socialisation

KJ: Um, did you have, uh, a difficult time accepting, uh, your sexuality?

(00:24:01) SB: No.

KJ: Okay. Um, did you ever, uh, attend any like, um, social or sporting clubs where women who loved women socialized?

(00:24:16) SB: Not much actually. I suppose my social life was much more inside political structures.

KJ: Okay. Oh, actually, sorry, I meant to ask this a while ago, what, uh, led you to GASA?

SB: To GASA?

KJ: Mmm.

(00:24:39) SB: I suppose isolation at the time.... Looking for a group that I'd have something in common with.

KJ: Okay... Um, sorry, I'm just quickly skimming through to see if there's anything I missed.

00:25:00 Women's Movement

KJ: Um, did you participate in the women's movement?

(00:25:03) SB: Yeah, but my participation in the women's movement was very much from a political angle, not a gay and lesbian angle.

KJ: Um, but within that, uh, was there any views towards like homosexuality?

(00:25:17) SB: No, but a lot of the women in the, in FEDSAW and, um, the organization of women, whatever it was called, um, many of them were lesbians and they were people who were women who were looking to work with women. Um, none of them were out as lesbians, but they were substantial numbers of lesbians in those [yawns] those organizations and, uh, I didn't really join those organizations specifically as much as other women did because my connection to politics was much more through an ANC type of connection, like a, a, a party connection, you know.

KJ: Mm. Okay. I see.

00:26:06 Racism Within The LGBTQ Movement and Organisations

KJ: Okay. And then, um, did you ever experience any racism within the LGBTQ organizations or the move-

(00:26:15) Piles of it! Piles of it! I mean, the, the, the, the older white men, many of them came looking for a black fuck, you know? I mean, and I remember one magnificent man called Faheem, who set up a thing called the Pink Triangle and set that up because he would go to clubs where white older men were, were being predatory on young black men and of course it was a financial, it was a slavery thing that the white men were after, and he used to counsel these black men as they were being picked up and he would say to them do you know what's ahead of you? So the racism was endemic and it was actually just the whole thing of, of, of male supremacy and white male supremacy. Because the white man were top of the pile. It was hectic. It was very hectic. That's part of the reason that put me off GASA.

KJ: Mm, I see. Would you say that there was anything that you noticed similarly with women?

(00:27:29) SB: I had... did notice it with women.

KJ: Okay. And then-

(00:27:34) SB: Not as-, it wasn't as, as endemic though, but it was there so I noticed it.

KJ: Okay.

00:27:42 Pride

KJ: And then last two questions. Um, what are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform?

(00:27:50) SB: **Disgusting!** I think that it's just another pick up scene, pick up scene. Except that I think that some of the women, like Funeka, and I haven't really spoken to her about why, why she-, I think that Pride plays a political role for some of those women from the townships. But I think pretty much the organizing of it is shocking.

KJ: Would you, would you say that's more like mainstream Pride you're talking about?

SB: Yeah.

KJ: Okay. Yeah.

00:28:24 Work That Still Needs to be Done

KJ: And then lastly, in your opinion, what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

(00:28:38) SB: You see, this is very difficult to say cause I think that with people having, with people having, um, attained a level of freedom, I mean, classically the clear things that go on are the economic differential, which includes a whole lot of things like access to education, access to advancement. Um, I think some of that has not changed for poor, you know, black gay people, gay men and lesbians. And I don't see that... as changing. I mean, I think that the fact that Triangle, organizations like Triangle survive ... because of funding from donors is a travesty because when I was involved in NCGLE, we tried to make it self-sufficient based on donations from the wealthier people in the community, and it never took off. So I think that needs to become much more self-sufficient and I still think that there's probably a lot of political work that needs doing. I'm sure that there's a lot of homophobia that goes on in terms of the way the police arrest people. I don't see that kind of political, and I mean political with a small p, thinking that goes on in the community anymore. And, and I think that the women too, I mean, I think the women are still quite alienated from one another. A lot of isolation amongst the women. Um, and I think that there isn't any kind of women's organization that makes people feel at home.

KJ: Do you mean women's organization as a whole or like an LGBTQ focused women's organization? (00:31:14) SB: Both actually. I think, I think the organizing goes on in pockets, in silos.

KJ: Yeah. That's something that's been mentioned before.

(00:31:27) SB: Maybe also a fantasy that I have of people being able to come together. Maybe that too.

KJ: Mmm.

SB: Okay. It's been an hour just about.

KJ: Yeah. So, um, I think those are the majority of the questions that I've had. Is there anything else you would like to add?

SB: No, and I, must say that your questions are very good because they're prompting me to think a little bit.

KJ: [laughs] Okay. Um, so-

SB: What, what are you producing out of all of this?

KJ: So, um, I'm-, my topic is, um, the intersection between, um, women's social, uh, well I use the word queer, but queer women's social worlds and their activism. And so kind of how the two interconnect, they're not just separate things. Um, they're not separate identities, but rather an intersection of, you know, either sometimes your social situation produces your activism or vice versa, the activism, um, makes a person more political, that kind of thing. Yeah. Um, but also kind of looking at, you know, more than just like legal activism that was covered, 'cause that's quite covered in academia, but also looking at other forms of

activism, um, like the NGOs and uh, I'm also looking at Out in Africa that's why I threw that Out in Africa question there, um, and like photography...

SB: It's tragic what's happened to that.

KJ: Yeah, yeah.

SB: Especially as Nodi really devoted herself so much, so completely.

KJ: Yeah. I mean, when I was in, uh, GALA, uh, it took me weeks to get through that collection, it was so expansive and you would think that because of that it would continue to last. Um, but yeah. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

SB: Does GALA still exist on campus?

KJ: Uh, yeah. Yeah. But, um, and it's not on the main campus anymore, I don't think. It's on, it's like a separate building. It's above like a, uh, an art gallery, the Wits Art Gallery.

SB: Yeah. That's, it's interesting why they've, they've shoved it there.

KJ: Um, I dunno [laughs], probably some like politics or something like that.

SB: Sad because it's a political, political, I mean, you'll see Julia's stuff all over that place. Julia's collection is a huge part of GALA.

KJ: Yeah. Um, no, it's a, I don't know what it used to be like, obviously, but I mean, um, it's like quite a small space, just a couple of offices, um, and like a, a library room where you can go and look through the, um, uh, the archives and stuff like that.

SB: But if you go into those archives and you look at the Julia Nichol collection, you'll see the work that Julia did. Because, um, all of that stuff, um, cause she was a librarian. It's got all her GASA thing as far as I recall. I mean it took like a pantechicon to, to bring, to take it up.

Um, it's got her GASA selection, which includes I think some of the letters that she wrote to people when she was doing the outreach stuff for GASA and we continued it with OLGA, with LAGO. And all of that stuff on LAGO/OLGA is, is her pedantic way of putting it all together. So if you wanna know anything about LAGO/OLGA it's sitting there. All of it is sitting there.

KJ: Yeah. Yeah. I think, um, I, I might be wrong, but I think they digitized the, uh, LAGO/OLGA collection so they can actually just send it to you to look through.

SB: Oh really?

KJ: But I mean, it's like a huge file [chuckles].

SB: Is the- The cats decided it's lunchtime [laughs]. But is it, do they have a, a librarian for it at all or is it... [cat meows] Because at one stage they employed people who were particularly looking after the archives.

KJ: Yeah, so there's Linda Chernis is still the head archivist there.

SB: Okay.

KJ: Yeah. But it's more like everything is stored in a warehouse and then she, um, she has to like, send for it and then you go through it. It's not like actually at GALA.

SB: Oh, right. Okay.

KJ: Mmm. Yeah. Um, so just in terms of this, so what's gonna happen is that I'm gonna transcribe the interview. Um, it might take-

SB: Good luck to you.

KJ: [laughs] And then I'll send it to you for review. I'll, I'll transcribe everything and then I'll send it to you for review. Um, and if there's just anything that you want to take out or change or anything like that, you just let me know and then I'll use that edited version if you do end up wanting to edit anything, in my thesis.

SB: Okay.

KJ: Yeah, and I mean, if there's any other questions that I have, can I just contact you?

SB: You're welcome to do that.

KJ: Okay. All right. Thank you so much.

SB: And if it's too much for me to write, I'll say to you, let's set up another meeting.

KJ: Or you can send a voice note because you have my number. Um, if that's easier.

SB: Voice notes don't ever work for me.

KJ: [laughs] Okay. Yeah. Then, then we can definitely set up another meeting and discuss it further. Yeah.

SB: Okay. Well, you know that Wits is my alma mater.

KJ: Oh, really? Nice. Nice. But thank you so much for, for sharing your story and your journey. Um, like you, you've done amazing work, uh, throughout this, all this time, and so thank you for, for taking me through it.

SB: It's a pleasure.

KJ: Yeah.

SB: Okay.

KJ: All right. Have a good day.

SB: Thank you.

KJ: All right. Bye.

SB: Bye.

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:38:35]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hours 13 minutes

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form, raw audio access restricted to interviewer.

Interview 11: Tish White

Name of the Interviewee: White, Tish [TW]

Name of the Interviewer: JOHNSON, KJ [KJ]

Date of the Interview: 8 July 2022

Place of the Interview: Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa

Number of Tapes/Recordings: 3

Transcribed by: JOHNSON, KJ

Date Transcribed: 2 November 2022 – 5 November 2022

Tape 1:

00:00:00 Introduction

[00:02:08 TW joins Zoom meeting]

KJ: Hi. Hi, can you hear me? I can't hear you at the moment. Ah, no, I can't seem to hear you.

I'm so sorry, I don't know what's going on. Um, let me see if it's something on my side. It says that you're muted. Okay. Hi.

TW: Cool. Can you hear me now?

KJ: I can hear you now.

TW: Okay, great. That's awesome. How are you doing today?

KJ: I'm good, thanks. How are you?

TW: That's good. I'm well, thank you. I decided to take some leave, so that's why I'm not in an office environment.

KJ: That's okay. That's fine. That's perfectly fine. Thank you so much for agreeing to do the interview with me, I really appreciate you reaching out.

TW: Of course.

KJ: I can speak a bit more about it. Just give you like a brief summary. It is mainly a... uhm- So it's looking more at like the intersections between resistance and social worlds. Particularly though, looking a bit more at women and, in your case, nonbinary individuals who aren't really like... their stories aren't recorded, especially in the struggle and in terms of like the work that they do. But also, just in a sense of like, what people kind of were getting up to at that time. And what sort of resources were available to queer people in South Africa during the time period of 1980 to 2010. So that's just like a basic brief summary of what my project is looking at. I also sent like- sorry, I, I kind of forgot to attach it to the email that I sent you, but I sent you an interview release form.

TW: No problem. I'm just looking at it now. Do you need me to send it to you before we start the interview, or can I send it to you after?

KJ: Yeah, you can send it to me afterwards. Um, but just to explain it properly, it's just for ethical purposes, because I am cleared, I am ethically cleared with UCT. But it's just to say that you give consent to doing this interview, and that whatever... I can use whatever you stipulate from this interview in my research, so. Also, just to like, kind of clear that up, in terms of like ethics, if at any point you feel uncomfortable, you'd like to stop the interview, you need to take a break, you need, uh, you want to like remove any information, redact

names, that kind of thing, you just let me know. And then I will make sure that that is not included in the research. Basically, after this interview, I will have to write, like transcribe the entire thing. And then once I'm done with that, I'll send it through to you, to you to look through it. And if there's anything that you want to change, remove, you let me know.

TW: Sounds good.

KJ: Cool, cool, cool. I'm gonna be very upfront and honest with you. It's gonna take a while for me to transcribe it. It is like a bit of a time-consuming process, but I'll definitely send it.

TW: I get that. Um, have you tried using the Otter.ai software before?

KJ: Yeah, I use Otter. Just at the moment, I, I have like a backlog of interviews that I'm going through. And they normally do take a while. So yeah, if at any point you want to take a break, just let me know. Because some of them, the norm is about an hour and a half. But some of them do go for like three hours [chuckles]. So yeah, just... if you need to take a break, yeah.

TW: It's all good! Sure, uhm, I might get some medication delivered to me, in which case, I might need to like, run to the gates of my property, but that shouldn't take more than like 5, 10 minutes.

KJ: That's absolutely fine. That's cool. Also, sorry, just like going through all the admin before we actually get into it.

TW: No, it's important.

KJ: Uh, thanks. Lately, I've been having a bit of a problem with Zoom where normally if I do a one-on-one Zoom meeting, it will go on forever. But lately I've been getting, I've been

getting the 40 time limit and then it'll kick you out. So, if you just like re-join with the same link, afterwards, we can just pick up where we left off and continue.

TW: Yeah, sure. Sure. Sorry. I wish we could reverse that. I have a premium license. I'm always just like, hey, does anybody want to borrow my license? [laughs] [Zoom audio inaudible] ... I'll re-join, no worries

KJ: Thanks. Yeah, it's, like peak COVID, it wasn't a problem. But now for some reason, 2022 it's become something that's been happening lately. So, I just thought, just to get that out of the way.

TW: Of course, it's important.

KJ: So, are you ready to start? Do you have any questions?

TW: Um, I'm ready from my side. I just wanted to find out more about like, what department and faculty you're studying in? I'm sorry, if that was included in previous emails, maybe that just didn't come through to me. Not, not because like, I want to, like report you or anything just because like, I'm interested, what department is hosting you and your studies.

KJ: Okay, so yeah, I'm with UCT Historical Studies Department. My supervisor is Dr. Mandisa Mbali. And my focus is women, gender and LGBTQ history.

TW: Okay, cool. Awesome. Thank you. I'm on the same page. I'm good to begin.

00:09:13 Background

KJ: Cool. So, could you please state your full name, age, preferred pronouns and sexual orientation?

(00:09:23) TW: My name is Tish Morpheus Geddes. I'm 33. I use they/them pronouns. And I have two positions, both at Wits University. In the mornings, I work for the Disability Rights Unit, where I support students who have a variety of disabilities as well as staff in an administrative perspective. In the afternoons, I work as the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Advocacy Programmes Coordinator at the fifth social- sorry, the Wits Transformation and Employment Equity Office. At the moment, I've kind of like merged the two somewhat so that they're all in one office so somebody who has a disability could come to me for condoms. Somebody who's LGBTQIA+ could come to me, because they have a disability, and they want extra support from the university. So I do hold those dual roles. Yeah.

KJ: And your sexual orientation?

(00:10:27) TW: Oh, sorry. I knew I forgot something. I am a panromantic demisexual. Yeah.

KJ: Cool. Thank you.

TW: Was I also supposed to mention my gender?

KJ: I assumed it was nonbinary, but you can if you want.

(00:10:48) TW: Oh, okay. Yeah. I'm a transgender, nonbinary gender queer person.

KJ: Okay. Cool. Thank you.

00:10:53 Family Background

KJ: And then to get into, like, your family background and stuff. Where did you grow up?

(00:11:03) TW: Um, I've lived for most of my life, in an area in Johannesburg called Westdene. I grew up with, like, my mom, my dad and younger brother. It was a very difficult space, because domestic violence was almost a constant thing growing up, and yeah, when I

was seven, I lost all of my hearing to meningitis. And that became something that made connecting with other people, even with my own family even harder. And then, yeah, in 2006, I testified to get a restraining order against my dad who was perpetuating the domestic violence and was awarded one. After that things were a bit easier. Uhm, I had some problems with my family when I came out as being transgender in 2015. And I had to find alternative accommodation for a few years. But for the majority of that time, I've lived in Westdene and now I live in my own space in Westdene with my little cat.

KJ: And what's the community in Westdene like?

(00:12:35) TW: The community in Westdene is generally divided between very conservative, older white people. And a mix between younger predominantly people of colour, who are students who are staying in student accommodation. And other people of colour, different ages, who come across as far more driven towards supporting their neighbours, supporting the community. There are gatekeepers and the gatekeepers are predominantly older white women. And it's generally not been a space where I felt that I'm comfortable to disclose my sexual orientation or gender identity. There's a lot of very problematic behaviour that happens in... A lot of people who are residents in the street that I live in, have cameras and a person of colour will walk down the road and the street WhatsApp group will just go crazy and it's just, it's disgusting to witness. It's disgusting to feel like that is a part of where I live. And I think I hope at some point, you know, there's going to be a shift where that older generation has to let go of that power.

KJ: And has that been like consistent throughout your experience living there?

(00:14:39) TW: Uhm, living on the street where I'm living in, yes. Previously, when I was living where I grew up with my mother and father and my brother, we didn't really know our

neighbours. The one neighbour that we did have kind of like a partial connection with was the one who would call the police when things got really bad. And then when my mom moved to another space in Westdene with my late grandmother, and my brother after the restraining order had been finalized, I have to say I never met my neighbours. If, if you were to tell me right now, something's gone wrong with my mom's place, and I need to go and check on her. I wouldn't know who to call.

KJ: Okay.

TW: Yeah.

KJ: What's your family's background? What work were they involved in?

(00:15:41) TW: Um, so my mother's a medical professional, a retired one at this point. She was a physiotherapist for most of her working life. She trained and studied at UP and Wits. And she had extensive experience working in mining hospitals, during apartheid. And that gave her access to quite a variety of different languages, access to learning about different cultures. And that's something that, you know, I think she's taken to today, even as a retired person, she continues to make sure that she can influence her colleagues in making healthcare accessible, providing it even to people who are in her street who are homeless, who need medical intervention. She is, She's very passionate in that regard. My dad grew up in Zimbabwe, and he was uhm... living, you know, as I did, in an environment where domestic violence was very much commonplace. His father was an alcoholic. And there were ongoing issues throughout his upbringing, where I imagine he didn't feel safe in his living space. He enlisted to join the Rhodesian, then, army. Got involved in one of those really ridiculous wars, in this case, it was a border war, between I think, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. And there would be some terrifying things that would come out of that. He

would glorify and revel- in revelling in his military days, and how he just go into spaces and just murder people without any reasonable directive to do so. And I will admit that for quite a bit of upbringing, I really, I felt like I was in an alien space. That yes, I was genetically related to the people that I grew up with, but I was just nothing like them. Yeah.

KJ: And your extended family, were they living close by?

(00:18:38) TW: So the extended family are a bit of a mess. On my mom's side, there was a family feud that happened, and happened over the treatment of my late grandmother. So I'm not technically really supposed to contact anybody on that family side. On my dad's side, I've cut contact with my dad now for about a year and a half. I mean, I saw that there were elements of his past behaviour that we were resurfacing, and I decided that it would be safer not to engage with him. Um, I'm in contact with some members of his family. But only really, you know, it's like to wish people for birthdays or whatever. I don't really come into physical contact with them.

KJ: Would that be the same growing up? Were they also quite distant from you growing up?

(00:19:45) TW: Oh, no. When I was growing up, I was very close to them. Like family on both sides, on my mom's family and my dad's family, there are people who are really special to me, including one of my cousins who was very supportive when I came out for the first time, at that point as being a lesbian. And I mean, her support and influence really shaped a lot of my empathy going into advocacy work. And unfortunately, yeah, the, the family relations have, I think broken down and as a result, those are people I just can't get in contact with without upsetting other people.

KJ: I'm so sorry to hear that. What were some of the conditions you grew up in like? You said that it was quite a conservative area? Was that also in your own home?

(00:20:52) TW: Um, yes, definitely. I mean, I grew up in a free-standing house. I had the privilege of living in a suburb, having access to electricity and water and such. Growing up, uh, both my parents were, like, I'm not sure if conservative is the right word. But they were both relatively, you know, trapped in a very toxic relationship. Um, my dad would use homophobic and transphobic language all the time. My mom would just avoid the topic. Both of them would, you know, talk about times in their lives where they'd met people who were LGBTQIA+ and I mean, there was one story that continued to circulate about how my mom and my dad had gone out to a social function at night and they were driving back and they saw a trans woman who had been badly injured. She was like, basically lying in somebody's driveway and bleeding out. It sounded like, she'd been attacked in a hate crime based on what I understand now. And they laughed at her and they left her. And that's... so that for me, it was one of the hardest aspects of that legacy. And I suppose one that I've tried the hardest to, to break. I mean, even necessarily, just recently- and this is a very random connection, that when a friend of mine who's a trans woman fell down some stairs. I mean, I was immediately like, No, I'm not going to do that. So like, I got a first aid kit, and I went and found her. Purely because, like, firstly, I mean, she's my friend and secondly, aside from really caring about her, I wasn't going to be part of another generation, just perpetuating the idea that if somebody is different, you leave them to die.

KJ: Yeah. Um, were there any other challenges you and your family faced growing up?

(00:23:47) TW: Um, like, when I lost my hearing, my dad was very direct in, you know, putting that it was my mom's fault. That was her fault that I got so sick, that I didn't get to a

doctor quickly. And, you know, obviously, I mean, medically, it's very difficult to substantiate this, but that was his blame and she lost her touch with reality and started having a series of what we now understand were psychotic depressive episodes, and that went on for many years. And I'd live with you know, I'd go from school after school, going live with alternate family members, with my brother, and have no, no place of home or stability. When I was seven, I took on the role of mainly caring for my younger brother. And I mean, on top of that. If it makes sense, for me, my experience of losing my hearing was like being placed in a prison that was just this bubble, that nobody else could see but I could see other people outside and I couldn't interact with them. So it was only after a few years that my family took on the idea of learning South African sign language. And so we learned some of the basics, we were able to communicate for the first time in a very long time. And soon after that, I asked my parents, if they would consider allowing me to get cochlear implants, which I now have, and that was a huge point where I really, after I had this surgery got to reconnect with the people I was living with. But up until that point for the three or four years that I was completely deaf, I'd just spend all my time reading, there was no way I could connect with anybody.

KJ: Are you okay to continue? Do you need to take a break?

TW: Yeah.

KJ: Okay.

TW: I'm good, are you?

KJ: I'm okay. So, over, over time what was your- I suppose you have kind of answered this, but like, what's your relationship with your family like now?

(00:26:41) TW: Um, so, with my dad, I mean, that relationship doesn't exist. I've cut those ties, blocked his calls. Like, if he came to visit me, I wouldn't open the gates, yeah that relationship is effectively over. My mom who was initially quite intimidated and surprised by my revelation of being transgender was ultimately really supportive. A few years later, I found myself dealing with quite severe health issues, I had really bad chronic fatigue syndrome and a number of other things that had been impacting on me in 2020. It was the start of COVID, things were really going wrong for everybody. And I was admitted into a hospital where staff left me to, like, get into a really frustrated and really bad space where I took a medication overdose and I nearly died. And spent a lot of time in ICU on a ventilator. I lost a lot of my memories in that process, because the sedatives that the staff kept feeding me through my drip were basically eroding a lot of long-term memories that I had to kind of like reconnect and recreate. And it was when I kind of like the, the ventilator was removed and I was conscious. I had no idea who I was, I didn't know what my name was, I didn't know where I was. I didn't know why I was there. Didn't know when it was. And it was soon after that, that my mother was allowed to visit me and she was so supportive, and so caring and affirming. And that was really something that changed the dynamic of our relationship. And, you know, since then it's been a very positive one. We call each other every day. You know, we're very much part of each other's lives. And for us, it's important to maintain that.

KJ: And with your siblings? Oh, it's just one sibling, sorry.

(00:29:40) TW: Um, yeah, I have a relatively good relationship with him. Um, he spends a lot of his time working. And he can work for almost up to a month at a time so I don't see him but I do try and check in with him as regularly as possible.

KJ: And growing up were y'all quite close?

(00:30:08) TW: Uhm, we were relatively close, ja.

KJ: And then are your parents still together?

(00:30:19) TW: Uh, no, they divorced, the year after there was a restraining order that was awarded.

00:30:25 Coming Out

KJ: Okay. Um, so do you mind walking me through your, like journey of coming out?

(00:30:34) TW: Sure. So, um, when I was in... uhm, I'd say like Grade One, I started questioning my attraction towards other people. I didn't have the language then to explain my identity or my sexual orientation. But I knew that I wasn't somebody who was solely attracted to men. And I kind of just left that because I didn't really as I said, have the language, or the courage or the support to express it. It was when I was, uhm, then in a public primary school, during my Grade Seven, that I had a crush on some of the people I was in school with... uhm, and I shared that with my parents, and I was told it was just a phase, as many other people that age are told- well at any point of their lives are told. And that kind of went underground for a bit. I... met my first partner, following coming out as lesbian at 12. And I met her in high school. Uhm, she was a very affirming supportive person. High school was absolutely hell for me. For the most part, I had to wear my given name on my chest, on a badge all the time. I had to wear a dress. I was with scholars and teachers who would, uhm, misgender me and call me by my given name. And my first partner really tried to mitigate that and to make things easier for me. And we dated for a few months. Um, and then yeah uhm, things kind of just didn't work in that relationship. She was super busy and so we ended our relationship. But it was midway through when, uhm, I told my mom

and reiterated look, you know, I'm a lesbian, and this is my girlfriend, you know her and she said to me, well, at least you can't get pregnant. For me [chuckles] which is just like okay, priorities but okay, yes, yes. I can get pregnant technically. But that involves a lot of, uhm, alternate medical technology. Uhm, and then that was my identity throughout, uhm, throughout high school. When I matriculated, I went to study at Wits University and it was a process again through which, uhm- sorry I should backtrack a couple of years. When I was in Grade 11, I was invited to work on an oral history projects with, uhm, some scholars, and it was an individual thing and it being 2006, I chose to focus mine on same-sex marriage and the Civil Union Act that was very much in the spotlight at the time. And I did an oral history, uhm, presentation on one of the advocates, Fayeza Kathree, who was involved in the case in the Constitutional Court and she was so affirming of the research I was doing. And I call it like research, because I was literally in Grade 11 at the time and Grade 11 scholars don't do research [chuckles]. But it was such an affirming process and I was guided by a teacher who was openly bisexual, and somebody that I'm still in contact with today. And it was at that point where I was giving that presentation locally, and then representing provincially, and then representing nationally, that I started meeting a lot of other people my age who were interested in what I had to say. Uhm, I remember sitting in a bus with somebody who was telling me that it only ever made sense to them that heterosexual relationships existed. And I remember sitting with that person and talking to them for hours and hours and I'll always remember the time when they turned around and they said to me, you've, you've changed my mind, you've changed the way I see this. And I thought to myself, like this, this is an amazing feeling. Like you can literally get high on this feeling, this is something I'd like to do and if there, there is a career that exists that I could take on in honouring this desire, I would. And so, yeah, again, um, you know, did really well in the competition, I was the only

person who did any kind of portrayal of LGBTQIA+ advocacy as part of oral history. Um, I think somebody like you would have had a lot of fun in a space like that. And ultimately, I came back from that experience, knowing that advocacy was where I wanted to be. And uhm, for a Grade 11 person, I did a lot of research, I did more research than I would have put into a school project. And I found out about an organization called GALA, the Gay and Lesbian Archives, and... uhm, I went to the, uhm, archives, I interviewed some of the people who went to the community library on a Saturday and I used that to build part of my presentation. But I also realized in that sense that it was a safe space that I could come back to and at 16, I became one of the youngest members. And I'd go there frequently, every Saturday and stay in the library for hours and hours and the library got books that were young adult appropriate for me to read as well. So getting cemented and connecting with that, uh with that community was so critical for me. And one of the other communities I connected with was that at Wits, the queer students society, Activate. I connected with them prior to applying to universities. And I was like, ah, Wits has this thing, I'm gonna go apply for Wits, and that was very centrally one of the reasons why I did so. At that point, I was publicly open about my sexual orientation. I had no issues about it and had the relative privilege to protect me from the repercussions of sharing it. Went to Wits, as I said, and I took on the role of becoming the chairperson of the LGBTQIA+ student's society there. And immediately that got me opportunities to connect with other activists. Not just activists at Wits who were doing research or learning about LGBTQIA+ identities, it did give me access to a lot of people who were in very vulnerable and difficult spaces contemplating their gender or their sexual orientation and, uhm, that, for me, really gave me a sense of responsibility in helping folks in those spaces find support, safety, solidarity. Uhm, I got to represent the university at a national collective of LGBTQIA+ leaders of LGBTQIA+ student

societies across South Africa and it was an amazing place. It was an amazing space that quickly ascended the ranks and got to the point where I was the National Convener of that space by 2013. And it was, it was just such an incred- [TW cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:40:54]

Tape 1 ends

Tape 2:

[00:00:40 TW joins Zoom meeting]

TW: Can you hear me?

KJ: Yeah, I can. Sorry about that. What were you saying?

(00:00:48) TW: No problem. I was forewarned. So, yeah, I was speaking about being part of a national collective of LGBTQIA+ leaders. Um, and it was, for me a space where I really wanted to push them to narrate their experiences. Uhm their experiences of being students, their experiences of being queer, experiences of predominantly being people of colour, and putting them all together. And they would be so unhappy with me. Because weeks before the conference, I'll be sending out these requests of things like, you know, I want an essay about these things or you can write an essay from one of these topics. But we have to build up an archive of what LGBTQIA+ student leaders' reality are like, because that archive doesn't exist. At least not at that point, in terms of contemporary archive. So going forward, what I did was, you know, tried to create workshops in different provinces that would upskill student leaders who were queer. That was the main focus. In 2008 and 2009, I ran the first ever iterations of Wits Pride in those spaces, which attracted a lot of controversy. At that point, the university had not offered any funding to spaces like Wits Pride and ultimately, it

was like going into space, which was an absolute unknown for me. The second year we did it in 2009 was the first time I received death threats, for being open about doing advocacy work, and being unashamed about being in the public space. And, you know, we dealt with it decisively, the student newspaper, ran an entire story just on the death threats topic and we managed to mitigate the risks. And I mean, it was in that place that I recalled something that my history teacher told me- Well, actually, she asked the class at one point, is there anything that is, for you, worth dying for? And at the time, I was like, you know, this, this, this is kind of like something that, you know, makes sense to me, I'm not sure if I'm prepared to die for it but okay. And at the point where I got those death threats, I was absolutely certain that Wits Pride needed to happen, even if I was going to be harmed or killed in making it happen. And it was an incredibly, incredibly powerful and positive space. It was quite simple, you know, we had guest speakers like Justice Edwin Cameron and Wits academics who were queer who would come to the marches and address people. We started off with, like 30 people in a march, the last Wits Pride had well over like 2000. And the momentum has grown, which is so important, and at that pla-, at that space, Wits decided in 2010 through the Transformation And Employment Equity Office, to afford, uhm you know, fiscal support to Wits Pride. And so, in 2011, I resumed the management of Wits Pride, but this time I was in a paid position. I was offered an opportunity to work for the Transformation And Employment Equity Office and I applied. It was on managing grants and I took that opportunity and then started working [Zoom audio distorted] in other regards on, uhm, like, the LGBTQIA+ projects that the office was simultaneously running. So the office was running a program called Safe Zones@Wits, which was an advocacy and support program, and recruited everybody across the university to be allies to LGBTQIA+ people. I was part of the pilot of that, and part of the, uhm, team reviewing the pilot training

materials. When we got to, uhm, the point where the projects were transferred to my management in 2014, I was at that point, editing, I think, the fourth or the fifth version of the manual that we were using for training. Uhm, we took the model of Safe Centre Wits from San Diego State University, and we completely made it our own. Brought in a lot of South African examples, terminology, and created something useful. Uhm, so that was a project I was heavily involved in. And for the first time, I was in a space where everybody knew I was queer. And my relevance of being queer was kind of like, related to how well I could do the job. It wasn't, it wasn't something that was like an issue or that I needed to skirt around, which I was really grateful for. Because that is not the reality for a lot of other [Zoom audio inaudible] ... people in the workforce. And I was getting paid to do projects that I'd wanted to do for multiple years at that point. So I continued to engage with people in the spaces and, and it was about, I think, the end of 2009, where I came out as being bisexual briefly. Um, and then I think in the following year, I came out as being uhm... It wasn't in the following year, it would have been like 2012, I came out as being a panromantic demisexual. I'd learned a lot about asexuality and different asexual identities, and along the way I'd also met a lot of gender nonconforming trans people that I was attracted to. So I settled on that label, which is the one that I use today. And then in 2015, I was... uhm, in a period of relative crisis- I mean, that is a, like, an ongoing thing for me, living with something like 23 different disabilities. Um, it's something that will always be part of my life. And so I was in a hospital space, uhm, a psychiatric hospital, and I was basically during a group exercise, uhm, the group exercise called upon people in the space to basically like, just close their eyes and draw and like, get a colour and think about, you know, something that's, you know, somebody that was trying to speak to them, somebody positive and somebody affirming, and then to open their eyes and draw that person. And that person was somebody who told

me that, as weird as it sounds, that I am a transgender, nonbinary genderqueer person, uhm, and immediately, I had to share that. I had to discuss that, I had to kind of make sense of that. So I contacted a new friend who was nonbinary and transgender themselves and we had a very powerful and very useful conversation. From which point forth I was just like, this is me. I went back to work, and I then reprinted my business cards to have my pronouns on them, I took on the gender-neutral title Mx, I had my email signature graphic redesigned, to have my correct name on it. I changed the name that was on the university system, that was the alias for my, my surname, and uhm, basically just took about a rebranding exercise, if I'm going to phrase it that way. All the media that went out had my correct name on it, my door sign had my name on it. And I was now settling into this new kind of role of accepting my gender identity. And it was an incredibly powerful and useful time for me. Um, I learned a lot about myself. And, yeah, as I said, that's, that's where I am now, today in terms of my sexual orientation, gender identity. There haven't really been any other shifts.

00:12:21 Societal Reactions Towards Same-Sex Marriage

KJ: Okay. Uhm, thank you for sharing that. What I wanted to ask was, what was the general reaction? You said that you were part of a competition where you were doing the speech about LGBTQI activism and stuff like that, especially around same sex marriage. What was the reaction of like, your classmates and then larger audiences?

(00:12:21) TW: Um, my classmates were divided. At that point, because I was very publicly out, I lost some friends. People who explicitly no longer wanted to affiliate themselves with me. And then I was advised I should present this in the school assembly meeting. And I did and there were no negative remarks. There was no negative sentiment, nobody wrote a petition saying I should be kicked out of school. So I was very much encouraged by that.

Going into other spaces, like presenting to other groups on that topic in particular, I did find some resistance and when I did, I challenged it. And I made friends with other queer people along the way.

KJ: And sorry, you said this was around about 2006?

TW: 20...2006, yes.

KJ: Okay. And then, prior to that, you have mentioned it a bit, but what was it like to grow up as a queer person in apartheid South Africa?

(00:13:52) TW: Um, so I came out as being queer after apartheid had ended, after the first democratic elections. Um, so yeah, that wasn't, that wasn't a specific factor that I encountered.

KJ: Okay. That's okay. But was there any remarks and stuff going around that you took note off?

(00:14:22) TW: Uhm, in my spaces just generally, like the first time I shared that I was dating a woman, I was speaking to my dad and he was in his car and he just drove away. Yeah, that was, that was really difficult for me. There was a very positive sentiment from family, extended family that obviously I'm no longer, no longer able to contact. Those were some of the people who were the most supportive and the most, like engaging. Uhm, outside of that... Yeah, I mean, having, um, a partner, I think he was so much older than me. And okay I say so much older, I mean, we're literally talking five years, you know, but at that point, especially if you're under the age of 16, you know, there are questions that are raised. And we weren't in a sexual relationship, very much in a romantic one but everybody around us seemed obsessed with the idea of preventing us from having a sexual relationship. Which

was really weird for me, because it wasn't something that I imagined would be something that would be part of our relationship, you know, but our parents would not want us to be alone together. Our parents would like, tell us like to do chores, our parents would you know, want us to leave the door open if we were in a specific room, and there was kind of like hyper vigilance. And I appreciate that that hyper vigilance was in part necessary, was very much legally necessary, was something that prevented me from making a decision that maybe I wasn't informed to make at that age. But that was the most rigid policing of any of the relationships I've been in and yeah.

00:16:58 Coming Out and Family and Friends' Reactions

KJ: Okay. How long did it- Okay, sorry, sorry. Excuse me. I'm trying to think of the way to word this properly. When did you first come out to yourself? versus, like, at what age did you come out to your friends, your family, etc? If that makes sense [chuckles]?

(00:17:30) TW: Sure, I mean, I came out to myself and friends, family, etc. in about... uhm... [long pause] Sorry, I'm just trying to place timeframes.

KJ: Oh, that's fine.

(00:17:52) TW: I'm going, I'm going with [long pause]. So if I matriculated in 2007... [TW begins counting backwards]. So I started high school in 2003 and I'd go with 2001.

KJ: Okay.

(00:18:24) TW: It was my second year of being in- Or, sorry, my first year being in a public primary School and that was when I came out to learners, to my parents, to myself.

KJ: Okay, so it happened kind of at the same time?

TW: Yep.

KJ: Okay, cool. And then you what was your, what was your, uhm, sorry, what was your sibling's reaction to you coming out?

(00:18:57) TW: Uhm, he was supportive.

KJ: Okay. Cool. Throughout?

TW: Yes.

KJ: Cool. And then you said, friends some kind of stop becoming-, stopped being friends with you?

(00:19:12) TW: Yes. That was both the case when I came out in primary school and later when I came out in high school around the time that I did the competition.

KJ: Okay. And then were your like, neighbours/larger community aware of your identity at that point? TW: Nope.

KJ: Okay, so not really a kind of reaction to that then?

(00:19:45) TW: Um, no, I didn't get a reaction from them. I mean, as I said, you know, we were living in a really kind of, like, space where you didn't really know your neighbours. And when you did know your neighbours, it would be because something had gone wrong.

00:20:07 Dating Other Women

KJ: Yeah. So when did you first start feeling comfortable dating other women?

(00:20:16) TW: Um, I was comfortable to uhm... to date women at that point when identified as a woman, probably 2003 though my first relationship was in 2004.

KJ: Okay cool. And your family's reaction to that?

(00:20:51) TW: Um, I mean, as I said, it was a sense of quite, like, heightened type of vigilance, and protection, and one that I don't necessarily think was homophobic. I felt like it was protective. Yeah.

KJ: Okay. Have you ever lived with a woman that you've been romantically involved with?

(00:21:21) TW: Um, as in like, full time? All the time? [KJ nods] No.

KJ: Okay. Part-time?

(00:21:30) TW: Yes.

KJ: What do you mean, when you say part time?

(00:21:36) TW: Like weekends? Weekends and public holidays.

KJ: And did that affect your relationship with your family or your friends?

(00:21:48) TW: It did, it affected my relationship with my family. Because I wasn't around to do chores. I wasn't around to support family with doing practical things or spending time with them and that was something that I think upset them quite a bit.

KJ: And any reaction from like neighbours to that?

(00:22:14) TW: Uhm, not that I can recall. No.

KJ: Okay. Um, are you a parent?

(00:22:23) TW: I have a cat. Does that count?

KJ: [laughs] Yes, it does but not in this sense.

(00:22:29) TW: Yeah, I do not have any children, no [laughs].

KJ: Okay, cool.

00:22:34 Persecution Based on Sexual or Gender Orientation

KJ: Are there any other instances that you'd like to discuss where you felt persecuted based on your sexual or gender orientation?

(00:22:44) TW: Uhm, yeah sure I mean, there were two specific issues that came up. Uhm like, the first one was quiet significance. I was in the Child And Adolescent Psych Ward at Tara Hospital and, uhm, it's a public hospital available to anybody who needs mental health [multiple notification sounds]- sorry, available to anybody who needs mental health services and I was there because I was self-harming. I was open to the doctors and staff to the patients that I was lesbian. And, um, that was about 2004. There was a night when one of the older male patients came up to me and pinned me against the wall and started sexually assaulting me. Um, it was something that for me really was incredibly destructive of my own sexuality because following that, I didn't feel like I could safely be intimate with anybody of any gender. Um, I felt without doubt that that instance was something that was likely motivated to be something that would have developed into what we would unfortunately refer to as like corrective rape in inverted commas. Um...

KJ: A homophobic hate crime.

(00:24:50) TW: Yeah, exactly. I mean, there was another you know, instance where I was living, uhm, with a friend and at that point, uhm like, we were living in a shared house space with my friend, um, her mom, myself, and another friend of my friend's. And there was a night when the friend came home and you know, the friend's friend, um, and she was high. And it was like to 2 AM and I was just getting some tea because I couldn't sleep. And at the

time, I was taking a lot of medications to help me sleep. So it really was quite unusual for me to wake up at 2 AM and try and, you know, find something that would make me sleepy. And I went into the kitchen, I found the person there. And she was getting high, she was snorting Ritalin and she was completely out of touch with reality. And we spoke and she told me, she wanted to get better. I promised I'd get her resources on how to get into a rehab facility and I told her, she should just go to bed and just try and rest and she followed me into my room. And like, at that point, my medication started working and like I was in my bed, she was sitting at the end of my bed, and I just passed out. And I woke up the next day like, my legs were covered in blood and I was just like, I didn't know how to make sense of what had happened, because I didn't know what had happened. The friend's friend had left. I didn't know what had gone on. And then I started having symptoms of a heart attack, which I guess is one of those things that can happen, I guess when you've been under a lot of trauma and stress. I went to a hospital I got admitted for cardiac observation. And I never told anybody there that I had been raped. Never reported it as I don't think it was necessarily linked to my sexual orientation, or gender identity, but it was a violation that really, again, fed into my own sexual agency and well-being.

KJ: If you don't mind me asking, why didn't you report the incident?

(00:28:16) TW: I didn't report the incident firstly, because by the time I realized that I should have- I mean, at that point, the biggest issue I had was that I felt like I was having a heart attack I had to deal with that first and that was like about a week if not more in hospital. Um, I didn't think about what had happened because I tried to block it out. And it was only after that that I talked to some friends and I was just like it's too, too late to do a rape kit. It's not going to be in any way helpful for me to go on ARVs now. Uhm, ultimately, you know, there's-

the only thing I can do, I can test for STIs, I can test for HIV which I did and that was all I did yeah. And I would say yeah purely because it was too late.

KJ: Mm. Okay. And then also with the male patient that you mentioned. Did anything happen with him?

(00:29:35) TW: He eventually ran away from the hospital.

KJ: Oh okay, so nothing then.

TW: No.

00:29:40 Coping with Experiences of Assault

KJ: Okay. How did you cope with, like, all of these feelings and experiences?

(00:29:51) TW: Uhm, so already being in hospital for self-harm uhm, and suicidality in 2004. At that point, I started having panic attacks. And I hadn't had panic attacks before. So I started looking for items around the hospital that I could harm myself with and the staff wouldn't know about and I got really creative and that was the thing. I wanted to get out of that hospital as soon as possible, possible because it wasn't a safe environment for me. And ultimately, leaving as quickly as possible, not addressing what happened because I didn't trust the staff there. I got into, back into a position where I needed to go back onto medication. I was self-harming again, I was having panic attacks, I was even having panic attacks at school. Um, so nothing good happened there. Um, and with the case of the housemate uhm [long pause] like, I wasn't in therapy at the time. Um, I just, I went on some more medication from my psychiatrist and yeah, I think I kind of just tried to binge eat my way through it. Yeah.

KJ: Uhm, sorry to break the mood, but I see that the remaining time thing has come up, if you don't mind having a break before we reconnect for the next one? [TW nods] To continue, who did you lean on when you're feeling like you didn't fit in or belong?

(00:32:05) TW: Growing up, I would say mainly extended family. Uhm... and later in life, friends, and then especially after I'd come out as being transgender, I found my chosen family.

KJ: And did the LGBTQ focused counselling, play any support- uh, play a role in providing you with mental and emotional support?

(00:32:37) TW: Uhm, I contacted Queerwell a few times, but our conversations kind of just fell apart. I wasn't able to really sustain them and we got out of communication around making appointments and stuff and that kind of just stopped. I was offered counselling at OUT but I obviously lived in Johannesburg and OUT is in Pretoria so that was not practical for me. Uhm, I'm trying to think if there were any others. Yeah I...

KJ: What's the first one that you mentioned?

(00:33:23) TW: Um, the first one that I mentioned, is Queerwell as in like queer and not sick.

KJ: Okay and when, when was like, when? What year or years was this when you were contacting them?

(00:33:48) TW: So I contacted OUT after I'd been raped, that would have been in 2016, probably. And then Queerwell was a few years later, I don't specifically remember which, but I was just in a place of crisis and needed some support, yeah.

KJ: Thank you. Um, do you think that they were well equipped to deal with what you were going through?

(00:34:29) TW: I do, yes.

KJ: In what ways if you don't mind me asking?

(00:34:36) TW: They absolutely knew the questions to ask, they were supportive, they were sensitive to what I was raising, they were practical and empathic in helping me find support strategies. Yeah.

00:34:52 Other Mediums Used to Express Experiences

KJ: Are there other mediums that you use to express your experiences as a queer person?

(00:35:02) TW: I used to paint and write and, like do that a lot. But in addition to that, I think that, uh, something that was really the only factor that made me feel safer was ending a continuation of living with other people. I started like living on my own, I got a cat and I think it's got a lot easier at that point. For me that coping mechanism might have been finding alternate company and you know, just finding a space where nobody could hurt me easily.

00:35:55 Religion/Spirituality

KJ: Did religion or, and or spirituality have a significant role in your life?

(00:36:01) TW: Uhm, only like, recently in 2020. When I did drug and alcohol rehab for the first time then I discovered through Narcotics Anonymous the idea of a higher power.

KJ: So prior to that, not really? [TW shakes head] Okay, cool.

00:36:32 Socialising with Other Queer People

KJ: How did you come to socialize with other queer people?

(00:36:40) Uhm, that was something that I only was able to really initiate in high school, when I met my then partner.

KJ: Yeah, so prior to that, not much?

(00:36:58) TW: Back at that time, there was like, what like, Mxit and MIG33 and you could go into these chat rooms where you could like fish for other queer people. And that would probably be cishet straight guys who just wanted to take advantage, yeah.

KJ: Okay. What sort of parties or social gatherings in general are important to you as a queer individual?

(00:37:26) TW: Pride is important, but parties and gatherings are not. Well, gatherings other than Pride. I also feel like gatherings at sites that are specifically around protest are important as are those around those who have died who are LGBTQIA+, who killed themselves or were murdered in a hate crime. That's also really important to me. I'm, I'm not really like an advocate for parties, sorry.

KJ: That's fine. That's fine. Were you part of any social or sporting clubs where queer women socialized?

(00:38:18) TW: Um, yeah, definitely in 2008, 2009, 2010 through Activate, I was actively in contact with LGBTQIA+ people in the university environments. That included sporting spaces, party spaces, Prides, national and international collaboration. Uhm, something that we did that specifically spoke to sporting, was in 2013, and 2014 as part of Wits Pride, we organized a rugby match against like, cishet rugby, like a rugby team, and a queer rugby team.

KJ: Okay and was there a predominant group in the queer rugby team?

(00:39:28) TW: It was pretty mixed.

KJ: Okay. Cool. What were like the dynamics in, you know, just in general, all of those places that you were with other queer people?

(00:39:49) TW: So, spaces like I mean, high school friendship spaces mainly didn't exist. I mean, especially following my partner matriculating that was no longer a thing. So, when I started going to the Gay And Lesbian Queer Archives, then I started socializing with people through- [TW cuts off]

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:40:26]

Tape 2 ends

Tape 3:

[00:00:00 TW joins Zoom meeting]

KJ: Sorry about that.

TW: Hey.

KJ: Hi, sorry about that. You were saying?

TW: No problem. I just need to quickly change my hearing aid batteries.

KJ: No problem take your time.

[Break]

[Interview resumes at 00:02:10]

KJ: We good? [TW nods] Okay, cool. Sorry you were saying about, uh, GALA?

(00:02:17) TW: Um, yeah, so at GALA I met a few people, it was kind of just like social space.

Um I wouldn't say I met anybody there that I had an ongoing connection with. But it was

when I came to study at Wits, that I met queer people that remain part of my social space for a long time. We had really profound relationships with each other, non-romantic, non-sexual, but nonetheless profound, uhm that was meaningful. And then after I came out as transgender, I joined a transgender support group called Ctrl-Alt-Gender and that was an amazing place for me, where I met some of the people who are still part of my chosen family today and generally just got the freedom to... to explore my gender identity on my own terms. And following that, I now work with an organization called Be True 2 Me, where I facilitate support groups for transgender people and that's also an amazingly practical and useful space.

KJ: Okay. So sorry, just to clarify, you're AFAB right?

(00:04:03) TW: I am AFAB, yes.

KJ: Okay... Just- Sorry, gosh, I can't remember where I left off.

00:04:13 Fighting for LGBTQ Rights

KJ: What drove you to fight for LGBTQ rights?

TW: Sorry, say again?

KJ: What drove you to fight for LGBTQ rights?

(00:04:24) TW: Um, I would say that it was in part growing up with homophobic and transphobic family members like my dad and wanting to know with certainty that the next generation of that family would be different. It was in part being inspired by my high school history teacher. She just broke the boundaries of what was acceptable and what was not and ultimately, definitely it was influenced by things like my bus ride to present at the competition with people who I connected with hours later said I actually didn't know about

these things and you've changed the way I see this. That was important to me. Attending Joburg Pride made me realize how many people needed the support of activists. And those are all factors that came together that made me realize that this was basically going to be my dream job.

00:05:50 Pride

KJ: Um, you said that you attended Joburg Pride, right?

TW: [Adjusting] Uhm... sorry.

KJ: No, that's okay.

(00:06:00) TW: Um, yeah, I've attended a few Joburg Prides. A few Soweto Prides. All of Wits Prides [laughs]. And, uh, one of the Prides at UJ I've also attended. What other Prides have I attended? Yeah, I think that's all the Prides, yeah.

KJ: When was the first one? What year was the first one that you attended?

(00:06:32) TW: That was in 2007.

KJ: What was that experience like?

(00:06:38) TW: Um, it was profound. Um, it was also the first time I made it onto the news for being queer, specifically, and that was pretty wild. I remember my mother saying, I really hope your great grandmother doesn't watch this and see you. And I was like well if she does, she does. And it was an incredibly affirming space. It was a lot of fun. I got to wear a feather boa, I got to dress up and ultimately celebrate with the people who I had met at Wits who I was hopefully going to study with in the next year. It was a place of power of unity, of solidarity and belonging.

KJ: And... sorry, let me just... What are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for like, especially black queer women to speak on LGBTQ issues?

(00:07:53) TW: I would absolutely say that my disconnect with Joburg Pride came with the protest of One In Nine campaign calling for a minute of silence at the last Joburg Pride. Or what was the last iteration of what was called Joburg Pride, and it was incredibly like problematic watching those videos, getting calls from my friends who were there. You know, saying that organizers are trying to get, uhm, guards to ride over activists with their bikes, watching the videos on YouTube afterwards, you know, seeing Pride organisers saying things like, go back to your location. I mean, there's a reason why I don't attend Prides like Melrose Pride or Sandton Pride anymore. Because they are absolutely politically irrelevant for me. They do not serve the constituents that I serve, that I feel are important to serve. They don't. And for as long as that is the reality. It's a classist, hyper sexist, homonormative space that is ultimately serving one demographic. And I feel like they're very, very willing to stay in that space, to not unlearn and to not engage with the people who are affected most in this country by hate crimes. And that makes me very bitter, it makes me very angry that that's a space that people go to, to celebrate. Um, for me, it goes back to the idea of what is there to celebrate? Uh 'cause if you're going to celebrate your own demographic in your own space in a classist suburb that is very difficult to get to using minibus taxis and expensive then ultimately what are you celebrating? Sorry do you mind if I just check my phone?

KJ: Yeah go ahead.

[Break]

[Interview resumes at 00:12:31]

(00:12:32) TW: Sorry. Dischem are on their way to give me like half of their store or what seems like half of this store. I think that's the thing with having like a lot of disabilities, you end up needing a lot of different kinds of medication. Yeah, so anyway, sorry, I was going on a mission about how I have lost respects and relativity for spaces like Sandton and Melrose Pride. I share some similar sentiments for Pretoria Pride and to a degree for Cape Town Pride, though, I know that those are two spaces that are actively trying to evolve and find better ways to engage with the communities around them. Durban Pride to a degree I think is doing better in that regard but has some similar foundational issues. And I would say I really love and enjoy engaging in spaces, like Soweto Pride, which is my favourite Pride. I mean, we're allowed to have favourites, right and it's one of the most powerful advocacy spaces I've been in. You know where you'll march through the streets of Soweto and there'll be whole families that will come outside and celebrate. Like kids who will take photos, kids who will join the march and come running around and having a party and their parents smiling. And for me that's so powerful because of all the narratives I hear of queer people I know who live in Soweto who don't feel safe. Um, it's powerful because it's basically such a momentous, Screw you, we are here to stay statement. And that's what I think Pride should be about. I think it should be about reclaiming unsafe spaces for people who live in them, even on their behalf if they don't feel safe to protest themselves. It should absolutely be about stopping a march and asking for a minute of silence, even if it's on a highway. I don't care where it is if only that, it is a pride that disrupts. Which for me is what I understand to have been the central component of the 1969 Stonewall riots, it was a space to disrupt. And it's also a space that I've tried as much as possible to bring into spaces like if Wits Pride, leading decision-making teams, with the perspectives of community members outside of university, engaging people of colour, people with disabilities, people who are in higher

salary grades- So at Wits the higher your salary grade, the less you get paid. So making sure that those people are in decision making spaces. And keeping with inviting organizations onto campus to share the work they do, be part of the march. It was also a space that surprised me in 2016, when we had Fees Must Fall, people wore the 2015 Wits Pride t-shirts to 2016 Fees Must Fall protests. And that for me it was an indication of the collective power of Wits Pride and how that collective power was applicable across other forms of oppression.

KJ: What are some of the struggles that you encountered with Wits Pride?

(00:17:13) TW: Uhm, certainly going into it for the first time logistically, nobody had ever done it before at Wits. So logistically, it was a lot of pull off. In the second year, there were the death threats. In 2010, I wasn't actively involved. But in 2011, up until I think 2019 minus 2016, because we specifically chose to acknowledge and honour Fees Must Fall by not having a Wits Pride that year. And within those years, I would say some of the big issues that have come up have been finance. Because if you want to make the biggest difference through a program like Wits Pride, you're going to need a lot of money. And this is the case even if you're going to run a smaller scale Pride than say Joburg Pride, but a much larger scale Pride, then say Wits Pride, then you're going to need resources and not all of these resources are easily available. There are new things that you're going to propose. You know hell, let's just put-up PrEP stations all over a popular area and try get people to learn more about pre-exposure prophylaxis. Oh, wait, that didn't work. Let's try something else next year. And a lot of this is experimenting and finding a commonality between what key stakeholders who are for example, in SRC are going to say about potential projects versus how successful they are at ground level. Like those are, those are some of the issues that I

would say have been encountered. We've made sure that since the first Wits Pride, all routes were accessible to people who might have had mobility disabilities. We've made sure then every space where there were speeches that were given where there were deaf people, capital or the lowercase d, that attended those spaces that SASL was provided. And, you know, if there were any other factors, they were made to be a priority. We really put the biggest emphasis and the most desire to share resources into visibility. Making Wits Pride in your face so that everybody, even the ones who didn't want to know about it, would know about it. And we did that also through distributing t-shirts, so that people would have something special to wear to remind them of that and remind them that they belong to the community. But yes, as I said, these are the things that need money even at their cheapest possible iterations. And these are things that sometimes we're trying for the first time. These are some things that have never been tried before at any Pride

KJ: And normally when do y'all have Wits Pride?

TW: Sorry?

KJ: When do y'all normally have Wits Pride?

(00:21:27) TW: So Wits Pride has been transferred to the ownership of Activate now.

Obviously, with support from Transformation Office. Um, so they had a march that we collaborated on in June, from the Wits campus to Con Court and that was like a once off during the exam period. Because during exams, we have a moratorium under which nobody is allowed to do anything that isn't studying. And then there is a second iteration of Wits Pride planned for I think, October, where we're aiming for, ja. For me, I've only ever run Wits Prides in October and that is because I wanted people to get hyped about Wits Pride. And then get hype about Joburg Pride. Sorry, in the order of get hype about Wits Pride, hype

about Soweto Pride, hype about Joburg Pride in chronological order. And now, especially with more popularity of celebrating Pride Month in South Africa, in June, there's a move away from this is a sense of, Well, this Pride isn't relevant anymore in the form of Sandton/Melrose pride, let's support Soweto Pride, but let's also have some flexibility around dates. So that's why there are two iterations this year.

KJ: Okay, yeah, I noticed that [laughs]

00:23:09 Issues in the LGBTQ Movement That Were Not Tackled

KJ: Okay, this question has to deal with like legislation and stuff like that. Were there any particular issues within the LGBTQ movement that were not tackled at the time, particularly issues surrounding women and transgender individuals?

(00:23:29) TW: Absolutely, Act 49 of 2003, is a disaster. Um, it does not allow the freedom to transition from being binary to nonbinary or vice versa, if you so desire. It is incredibly limited. And we've been promised by Parliament for years, that we're going to get Gender X, which would be incredibly, incredibly useful for people like me. And also make a lot of sense, because we have banks in South Africa, that are international banks that have their headquarters in countries that support Gender Marker X. So I would say 100% Act 49 of 2003, the Act that makes all the transgender people very unhappy when they as nonbinary people try and change things.

KJ: Okay. Any other issues?

(00:24:39) TW: Um, there are a lot of laws that intersect that support people of diverse sexual orientations and genders, which I deeply appreciate, but I don't feel like they're living up to their potential. I worry about the inclusion of nonbinary people and trans women

when we talk about triple BEE, because a focus that is solely on the experiences of cisgender women as one of the DGs is something that doesn't make me quite comfortable when I think about the experiences of fem nonbinary people, just for example, and trans women who have not undergone the Gender Marker X fun time with Department of Home Affairs, it currently doesn't exist. Those are people who absolutely are women, who should be seen and recognized to be a woman and should be included when a company tries to fulfil its mandate to meet triple BEE requirements, to fulfil their triple BEE scorecard. And there are a lot of laws involved in that. But I'm just saying as a principle, and that ranges from the employment Equity Act of 1998 to, as I said, a range of others, but changing that Act for me would resolve this issue.

KJ: Okay.

00:26:25 Women's Movement

KJ: Did you participate in the women's movement?

(00:26:30) TW: Um, I would say I participated in support of women's movements, spearheaded by One In Nine Campaign. I've attended some of their workshops and trainings. The black dolls that were on the ground as corpses during the Joburg Pride March, I was one of the persons who made them. That has been a space I have been involved in.

KJ: Okay. Would you say that the women's movement provided you support as a queer individual?

(00:27:21) TW: Um, I would say as a panromantic demisexual, but some of these spaces have unfortunately, at times taken positions, to say that anybody with a penis is not welcome in, in Space XYZ, even if they do identify as woman, and this is a very problematic

rhetoric, but it has since been withdrawn and corrected by the organization in question. And from that perspective, I do feel confident that I could call one of my colleagues at one of those organizations and say, Look, we need some help, and that they'd help, if they had capacity to obviously.

KJ: Okay.

00:28:20 South African Legislation

KJ: In what ways do you feel like the South African legislation fails women and transgender people, particularly those of colour?

(00:28:31) TW: Um, that would be like a similar iteration of my previous-, my response to a previous question. But uhm, I absolutely have to say that what we're seeing in GBV cases as current, is something that there is provision for in law, to discourage, to remedy, to support women, particularly women of colour. I don't, I don't know what legislative gaps we're looking at, perhaps because it's not a field of my speciality, perhaps because I'm not actively involved constant-, consistently in those conversations. But I would say that I would reiterate my, my last answer, ja.

KJ: That's cool.

00:29:42 Racism within LGBTQ Organisations

KJ: Have you witnessed any racism within LGBTQ organizations, or the LGBTQ movement as a whole?

(00:29:54) TW: Not an organization, thankfully but as a whole? Yes, definitely. Spaces like, as I previously mentioned, Joburg, Pride, as well as Pretoria Pride as well as Town Pride. I've seen some very not okay stuff go down. And I have seen if not in person, online accounts or

video accounts that are absolutely out there racism and cannot be interpreted any other way.

KJ: Okay.

00:30:37 Work that Needs to be Done within the LGBTQ+ Community

KJ: In your opinion, this is the last question I have, in your opinion what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

(00:30:47) TW: So in the LGBTQIA+ community, the work that still needs to be done firstly, we need to build shelters for homeless queer people in every province in this country. And we need to keep building them as sites of empowerment, of training, of advocacy, of health care, I have a model of the idea of buying a building, a multistorey building, and having specialities for each floor but having multiple floors of shelter spaces. I would say that we need to encourage schools to, I wouldn't say encourage, I think, I would say that we need to mandate schools and all places of learning to offer gender neutral toilets, to offer uniform options that are flexible, if not do away with uniforms altogether. I would argue that anybody who is studying towards a health sciences degree should not be allowed to graduate, unless they are fully aware of how to support and treat a LGBTQIA+ patient. I want to know that the teaching and learning facilities that universities use, their clinics, the hospitals, the, the schools, I want those to be safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ students. I don't want our students to be going into spaces where they're going to be treated like badly or violated. Um, I would say that there needs to be a specific intervention in mental health care to address the needs of LGBTQIA+ patients. Because every time I get admitted, I see more and more LGBTQIA+ people who are there and there is no specific intervention. Um, I definitely would support gender marker X. Um, I think that Act 49 of 2003 needs to be done-

, redone completely. Um, in addition to that, I would say that we are failing LGBTQIA+ migrants. We need specialist centres across South Africa that empower, support, resource migrants who are LGBTQIA+ especially our refugees and our asylum seekers. I mean, I would like to see more incentive programs where, like, say, I bank with FNB, so I get eBucks. What if there was a tax on part of my spending? And that tax is directly going into supporting women's movements and LGBTQIA+ organizations, I would definitely be behind paying that tax. I would say that we need to shut down, shut down all of the remaining men's camps that exist in rural areas in South Africa to masculinise what families may interpret their sons to be as queer men and I think that people who are in those spaces hosting them, who are literally killing queer youth should be held accountable to the harshest standards possible. Um, I do think that when it comes to issues relating to LGBTQIA+ identities, we need to have journalists who are absolutely trained to understand, support and respect the lives of LGBTQIA+ people, not as spectacles, not as tragedies, not as celebrations, but as real human lives. And absolutely, I would say that I will never feel comfortable walking into a department of [phone rings] Home Affairs without-

KJ: Do you need to take that? Is it Dischem?

(00:36:25) TW: That's Dischem, yes, but I want to finish the sentence [laughs]. Without them doing comprehensive LGBTQIA+ sensitization training, particularly for people who are getting Civil Unions Act marriages. Yes.

KJ: Okay, thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

TW: Nope, but I can email you, if I do.

KJ: Okay, cool.

TW: And thank you. Thank you for researching this. Thank you for your time.

KJ: No, thank you so much for your time and sharing your experience with me. Sorry, I know you have to go. But yeah, just to reiterate, it's gonna take a bit, but I will definitely send the transcript for you to review and you just let me know. And if you can also send the interview release form. And if you know of anyone else who'd be interested in doing the interview, please send them my way as well.

TW: Sure, of course.

KJ: Thank you so much.

TW: If you want to send me like a brief and a poster and I can put it out on our social media.

KJ: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

TW: Of course, have a great weekend.

KJ: You too.

TW: And take care.

KJ: You too. Bye!

[Zoom meeting ends at 00:37:51]

Interview Description

Length of Interview: 1 hours 59 minutes 11 seconds

Recording Equipment: Lenovo Laptop and Zoom

Copy and Access Status: signed release form, raw audio access restricted to interviewer.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

- 1) Where did you grow up?
- 2) What was the community in your area like?
- 3) What was your family's background? What type of work was your family involved in?
- 4) What were the conditions you grew up in like? What were some of the challenges you and your family faced growing up?
- 5) What was it like to grow up as a lesbian in apartheid South Africa?
- 6) What was your relationship with your family like?
- 7) Was there a particular point in your life where you felt disconnected from your family?
- 8) When did you realise that you were not heterosexual?
- 9) How did your family, friends and neighbours react to your coming out?
- 10) When did you first start feeling comfortable dating other women?
- 11) How did your relationships with other women affect your relationship with your family?
- 12) Did you ever live with another woman, if so, how did it affect your relationship with your family, friends and neighbours?
- 13) Are you a parent and how would you characterise your child/children's relationships with your family-of-origin and your friends? Have they in any way been affected by your sexuality?

- 14) Are there any instances that you would like to discuss where you felt persecuted based on your sexuality?
- 15) How did you cope with these feelings? Who did you lean on when you were feeling like you didn't fit in or belong? Did LGBTQ-focused counselling play in providing you with mental and emotional support? If so, how?
- 16) Did religion and/or spirituality have a significant role in your life? If so, how?
- 17) How did you come to socialise with other LGBTQ people? What sort of parties or social gatherings in general were important to you as a lesbian woman?
- 18) Were you part of any social or sporting clubs where women who loved women socialised?
- 19) What drove you to fight for gay rights in the 1990s? What role did you play in the organisation you were a part of? Did you have a leadership position within the LGBTQ community at large?
- 20) Were there any particular issues within the LGBTQ movement that were not tackled at the time? Particularly issues surrounding women.
- 21) Did you participate in the women's movement?
- 22) Did the women's movement provide you support as a woman loving women? If so, how?
- 23) In what ways do you feel that the South African legislation fails women, particularly lesbian women of colour?

24) Did you experience any racism within LGBTQ organisations or the LGBTQ movement as a whole?

25) What are your thoughts on Pride and its movement away from a political platform for women to speak on LGBTQ issues?

26) In your opinion, what work still needs to be done within the LGBTQ community?

Appendix C: Interview Release Forms



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM¹

This agreement² ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I, Bentah Durrheim (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Signed on: 15/06/20

Interviewee signature:

Signed by candidate

¹ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

² This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

I Deborah Bell, agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Regards

Deborah Bell



Deborah Bell

LEAD APOSTLE DGFC & THE DGAN GLOBAL NETWORK



Deo Gloria Family Church

A church for all people



+27 83 258 7492



deborah@dgan.org



www.deogloria.org





INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM¹

This agreement² ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I Ecclesia de Lange (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Signed on: 06/06/2022

Signed by candidate

Interviewee signature: _____

¹ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

² This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM¹

This agreement² ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I, Fikile Vilakazi (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Not mentioning other people's names where I may have mentioned them in confidence for purposes of conversation. My name can be used I do not mind, only those of others carry this restriction.

Signed on: 18 /11 /2022

Signed by candidate

Interviewee signature: _____

In the presence of (Interviewer) _____

¹ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

² This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

ACCESSION RECORD FORM

Interview Information:

Project Title: Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010

Project Description: This project focuses on queer South African women's activism, particularly during apartheid as well as the impact being openly queer during this time had on their social world (i.e., how it affected their relationships with their family, friends, co-workers, partners etc), during the time frame of 1980 - 2010.

Interviewee:	First Name:	Fikile
	Surname:	Vilakazi
Interviewer:	First Name:	Kirsten
	Surname:	Johnson
	Tel No:	0783275062
	Email:	kirsteber@gmail.com

Date of Interview: 18/08/2022 Interview Location: Johannesburg, South Africa.

Copyright Release Forms:

Number of Release Forms: _____

Descriptive Information:

Number of Recordings/Tracks: _____ File Format: _____

Number of Transcripts: _____ File Format: _____

Additional Material: _____

What are you handing in? _____

Additional Information/Notes: _____



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM⁵⁶⁴

This agreement⁵⁶⁵ ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I _____ Jamilla Madungwane (preferred name

Jade _____ (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

⁵⁶⁴ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

⁵⁶⁵ This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

_____ N/A _____

Signed on: __13__ / __06__ / _____ 22

Interviewee signature: _____ j.madingwane. _____

In the presence of (Interviewer) _____

ACCESSION RECORD FORM

Interview Information:

Project Title: **Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010**

Project Description: This project focuses on queer South African women's activism, particularly during apartheid as well as the impact being openly queer during this time had on their social world (i.e., how it affected their relationships with their family, friends, co-workers, partners etc), during the time frame of 1980 - 2010.

Interviewee: First ____Jamilla_____
Name:
Surname: ____Madungwane_____

Interviewer: First Kirsten
Name:
Surname: Johnson
Tel No: 0783275062
Email: kirsteber@gmail.com

Date of Interview: 03/02/2022 Interview Location: Gauteng, South Africa.

Copyright Release Forms:

Number of Release Forms: _____

Descriptive Information:

Number of Recordings/Tracks: _____ File Format: _____

Number of Transcripts: _____ File Format: _____

Additional Material: _____

What are you handing in? _____

Additional Information/Notes: _____



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM¹

This agreement² ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I Nikita Ramkissoo (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.

-
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
 - All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

If any names are mentioned, they should be edited out in the final text.

Signed on: 25/06/2022

Signed by candidate

Interviewee signature: _____

In the presence of (Interviewer) _____

ACCESSION RECORD FORM

¹ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

² This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

Interview Information:

Project Title: **Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010**

Project Description: This project focuses on queer South African women's activism, particularly during apartheid as well as the impact being openly queer during this time had on their social world (i.e., how it affected their relationships with their family, friends, co-workers, partners etc), during the time frame of 1980 - 2010.

Interviewee: First Name: Nikita
Surname: Ramkissoo

Interviewer: First Name: Kirsten
Surname: Johnson
Tel No: 0783275062
Email: kirsteber@gmail.com

Date of Interview: 29/06/2022

Interview Location: Cape Town, South Africa.

Copyright Release Forms:

Number of Release Forms: _____

Descriptive Information:

Number of Recordings/Tracks: _____ File Format: _____

Number of Transcripts: _____ File Format: _____

Additional Material: _____

What are you handing in? _____

Additional Information/Notes: _____

NR



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM⁵⁶⁶

This agreement⁵⁶⁷ ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I Nokuthula Dhladhla (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

⁵⁶⁶ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

⁵⁶⁷ This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

_____None_____

Signed on: 06/09/2022

Interviewee signature:

Signed by candidate

In the presence of (Interviewer) Kirsten Johnson

ACCESSION RECORD FORM

Interview Information:

Project Title: **Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010**

Project Description: This project focuses on queer South African women's activism, particularly during apartheid as well as the impact being openly queer during this time had on their social world

(i.e., how it affected their relationships with their family, friends, co-workers, partners etc), during the time frame of 1980 - 2010.

Interviewee: First Name: Nokuthula Dhladhla

Surname: Dhladhla

Interviewer: First Name: Kirsten

Surname: Johnson

Tel No: 0783275062

Email: kirsteber@gmail.com

Date of Interview: 06/07/2022

Interview Location: Cape Town, South Africa.

Copyright Release Forms:

Number of Release Forms: _____

Descriptive Information:

Number of Recordings/Tracks: _____ File Format: _____

Number of Transcripts: _____ File Format: _____

Additional Material: _____

What are you handing in? _____

Additional Information/Notes: _____



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM⁵⁶⁸

This agreement⁵⁶⁹ ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I Roche Kester (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.

⁵⁶⁸ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

⁵⁶⁹ This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Signed on: 26/04/2022

Interviewee signature:

Signed by candidate

In the presence of (Interviewer) _____

ACCESSION RECORD FORM

Interview Information:

Project Title: **Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010**

Project Description: This project focuses on queer South African women's activism, particularly during apartheid as well as the impact being openly queer during this time had on their social world (i.e., how it affected their relationships with their family, friends, co-workers, partners etc), during the time frame of 1980 - 2010.

Interviewee: First Name: Roche

Surname: Kester

Interviewer: First Name: Kirsten

Surname: Johnson

Tel No: 0783275062

Email: kirsteber@gmail.com

Date of Interview: 18/01/2022

Interview Location: Gauteng, South Africa.

Copyright Release Forms:

Number of Release Forms: _____

Descriptive Information:

Number of Recordings/Tracks: _____ File Format: _____

Number of Transcripts: _____ File Format: _____

Additional Material: _____

What are you handing in? _____

Additional Information/Notes: _____



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM⁵⁷⁰

This agreement⁵⁷¹ ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I _____ (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

570 This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

571 This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.

Signed on: ____/____/____

Interviewee signature: _____

In the presence of (Interviewer) _____

ACCESSION RECORD FORM

Interview Information:

Project Title: **Examining the Interconnection between Queer Women's Resistance and their Social Worlds in South Africa from 1980 to 2010**

Project Description: This project focuses on queer South African women's activism, particularly during apartheid as well as the impact being openly queer during this time had on their social world (i.e., how it affected their relationships with their family, friends, co-workers, partners etc), during the time frame of 1980 - 2010.

Interviewee: First Name: _____

Surname: _____

Interviewer: First Name: Kirsten

Surname: Johnson

Tel No: 0783275062

Email: kirsteber@gmail.com

Date of Interview: 27/01/2022

Interview Location: Gauteng, South Africa.

Copyright Release Forms:

Number of Release Forms: _____

Descriptive Information:

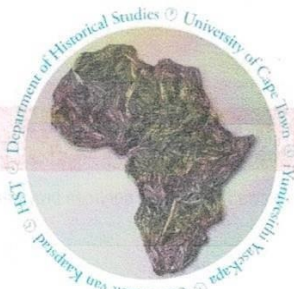
Number of Recordings/Tracks: _____ File Format: _____

Number of Transcripts: _____ File Format: _____

Additional Material: _____

What are you handing in? _____

Additional Information/Notes: _____



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM¹

This agreement² ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I, SHEILA BARSEL (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Signed on: 06 / 09 / 2022

Signed by candidate

Interviewee signature: _____

¹ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

² This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.



INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM¹

This agreement² ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the Centre for Popular Memory in accordance with your wishes.

I Mx Tish Morpheus Geddes (Interviewee) agree that:

- This recording will be conserved at the University of Cape Town. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for potential use in research, education, publication, broadcasting and the Internet. Copies may be made, in whole or in part, in any and all media, throughout the world.
- The University of Cape Town shall hold the copyright to this recording.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.

The use of the recording is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

Signed on: 15 / 7 / 2022

Signed by candidate

Interviewee signature: _____

¹ This form needs to be accompanied by the Accession Record Form (found on page 2).

² This agreement will be interpreted in accordance with South African law and, in the event of any dispute, the Courts of South Africa will have jurisdiction.