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We are claiming space we are visible The Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand as a space of solidarity 1980s1990s

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"We Are Claiming Space, We Are Visible!": The Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand as a Space of Solidarity, 1980s–1990s

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Abstract

This article seeks to reintegrate the history of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) into southern African queer historiography, which has inadvertently sidelined the role of the organisation, ignoring the plight of GLOW's activists, as well as many others, mostly black gays and lesbians. Through the use of archival material and interviews with former GLOW members, this article examines GLOW's role in connecting the gay liberation struggle to the anti-apartheid struggle. The article interrogates GLOW's role in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, which helped align gay and lesbian rights with the broader idea of rights for all citizens at a time in South African history when being against rights for any group of people was deemed unacceptable. This article further examines the various schisms within GLOW that facilitated its eventual decline, but which also made the organisation multi-layered. These multiple aspects of GLOW were crucial in creating solidarity between gays and lesbians who were able to successfully fight for a Constitution that would protect the rights of non-heteronormative society.

Keywords: GLOW; gay and lesbian activism; anti-apartheid; gay mobilisation; Simon Nkoli

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Introduction[1]

In "A Love Letter to My Queer Family," Beverley Palesa Ditsie (2019), a founding member of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), emphasises how queer history has been whitewashed in South Africa. Ditsie recounts how current Pride events have removed political elements in favour of focusing on celebrations and parties, and in doing so have further become racially and financially exclusive as they have moved into Johannesburg's suburbs. This is not a localised phenomenon, and has coincided with a global corporatisation of Pride. Daniel Conway (2022) argues that Pride has become "a site for corporate advertising and sponsorship," which has allowed "globalized capitalism to be reproduced" in queer spaces. This further excludes poorer queer people, who in South Africa's context remain largely racialised.[2] This suggests the fight for gay and lesbian rights has recently been sidelined by many, and suggests a normalisation of gay and lesbian rights in middle-class, liberal, and overwhelmingly white English-speaking society without recognising the fight that was required to gain Constitutional protection for non-heteronormative citizens. Normalised notions of queer rights are further stratified by gender, as white gay men have been considered the norm within queer society. Aurelien Mondo and Aaron Winter (2020) note that "liberal racists" align themselves with LGBTQIA+ rights "to set themselves apart from illiberal racists." Liberal racism and a lack of political awareness from Pride's recent organisers were evident in 2012 when black women members of the One in Nine Campaign disrupted Pride to highlight the need for queer solidarity.[3] The result was that Tanya Harford—then chair and main organiser of Pride—exclaimed "this is my Pride, this is my route," which was followed by white gay men nearby telling her to "drive over them."[4] Some One in Nine members were hospitalised following the altercation (Ditsie 2019).

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1 In order to reclaim this queer history, I have used interviews with GLOW members as the basis of this article. These interviews have been used for ongoing research about GLOW and its place in South African queer historiography. This specific article uses a select few interviews, which have been selected from a larger number of interviews. While predominantly made possible with the help of various GLOW members, this article also received assistance from the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) archive located at the University of the Witwatersrand. GALA has been helpful in directing me to useful documentation on GLOW, as well as connecting me with people who have been helpful by providing interviews. There are portions in this article which have also been supported by personal archival collections from some interviewees. I would like to thank everyone at GALA and all those who have provided their time and who have been willing to sit for interviews to help reclaim queer South African history.

2 Interestingly, this has also led to so-called "breakaway" Prides in and around Johannesburg, the most prominent of which is the Soweto Pride. These are ongoing tensions in South Africa's queer community, with those marginisalised by corporate-sponsored Pride calling for inclusivity and a return to politics.

3 One in Nine was a campaign for women to have safe access in society. It was formed in 2006 in support of Fezeka Kuzwayo in her rape case against Jacob Zuma. In 2012, black lesbian members of One in Nine protested Pride's exclusivity by lying in the street, demanding a voice and recognition that black lesbians were being targeted with hate crimes.

4 "[T]hem" here refers to the group of black women.

The silencing and rewriting of LGBTQIA+ history in South Africa have been evolving over the last few decades. However, through this process of recuperative historical writing, GLOW has been relegated to the margins and Pride has been co-opted by largely white gay men who refuse to politicise the gay and lesbian community, even at a time when many in the community are still subject to familial and societal ostracisation, corrective rapes, gender-based violence and other forms of marginalisation and abuse. GLOW was established to mobilise gays and lesbians in South Africa, and their work and history have been ignored. While the organisation had its flaws, this article recognises GLOW's role in creating solidarity among gays and lesbians in South Africa and emphasises its importance in queer history.[5] GLOW created solidarity through networks of gays and lesbians who supported each other and would eventually claim space for themselves, making the gay and lesbian population visible in the eyes of South Africa's broader community.

GLOW established itself in Johannesburg as the city's major gay and lesbian organisation, and from the outset sought to align itself with the anti-apartheid movement. Previous large gay mobilisation in South Africa in the form of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) had remained apolitical and was principally a space for socialisation among white gay men. From the outset, GLOW aligned itself with anti-apartheid groups such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) without ever formally affiliating itself to a single political organisation. GLOW became the first Johannesburg-based gay and lesbian organisation that sought to claim public space for gay and lesbian people, and in doing so challenged the perceived heteronormative notion of who was allowed and entitled to safe access to the city (Botes 2021). As GASA stated that it would not join the anti-apartheid struggle, a growing cohort of left-leaning gay and lesbian people had started suggesting that a call for gay liberation required an anti-apartheid struggle too. GLOW was formed in a moment of hope in the late 1980s, in stark contrast to previous Johannesburg gay and lesbian organisations, and envisaged and aspired to gain support for a South African Constitution that would guarantee the protection of gay and lesbian people. This article examines the importance of queer visibility as a way to normalise gays and lesbians in South Africa, and queer solidarity in order to strengthen arguments for gay liberation.

Origins of GLOW

While in prison and writing to his boyfriend at the time, Simon Nkoli had begun to ponder the possibility of a "new gay [and] progressive association" that would cater to the political needs of black gays and lesbians, and in doing so firmly establish itself as an anti-apartheid organisation.[6] This was the first time Nkoli acknowledged the need for a politico-queer organisation, one which would eventually become Johannesburg's most prominent gay-left organisation. While in prison, Nkoli was already becoming the

5 I will examine GLOW's complicated entanglement with gender later in this article.

6 Simon Nkoli to Roy Shepherd, 9 April 1986. GALA Queer Archive, University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter GALA).

face of South Africa's radical gay population, much to the disdain of the country's apolitical white gays with whom he had previously been aligned while in GASA and who believed that he had become too politically involved with issues outside of the supposed gay liberation. Nkoli would, however, go on to eventually combine his anti-apartheid politics with his gay liberation ideologies to create GLOW.

After his acquittal on treason charges, Nkoli was forbidden from meeting with more than three people at a time.[7] Ignoring the ban on meeting with large groups, Nkoli formed a group of politically charged gays and lesbians and founded GLOW (Ditsie 2006). The early meetings took place in Lee's shebeen[8] in Soweto, with the initial plan to establish an organisation for black gays and lesbians, but it was quickly realised that it would be beneficial to include anti-racist white gays and lesbians from middle-class suburbia. Meetings taking place in Soweto excluded white queer people, whereas moving the meetings to Johannesburg's largely deracialised inner city allowed participation from both white and black gays and lesbians, and effectively a larger group of people supporting queer rights in the anti-apartheid struggle. Shortly after the initial meetings, Nkoli placed an advertisement in *Exit*[9] magazine calling for a meeting to be held at the University of the Witwatersrand. That first meeting consisted of a majority of black gays and lesbians, although there were some whites too. GLOW was founded on the need for black queer bodies to have a politically mobilised space where their concerns could be voiced within the broader political struggles of the country.[10] GLOW's immediate position as the "outspoken advocate of gay people's political demands" (Croucher 2002, 319) and its predominantly black membership demonstrated that homosexuality was not merely a white issue; instead, it was also linked to queer struggles within the broader anti-apartheid struggle (2002, 319). The organisation's leadership recognised the need for cross-racial and class solidarity in order to create a lasting queer organisation.

By the late 1980s, Johannesburg's inner city had already established a reputation as being gay-friendly, but the impending collapse of the Group Areas Act had turned the city into a "crossroad of class and race" of people who were also politically motivated by the anti-apartheid struggle (Edwin Cameron, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 2 July 2019; transcript in possession of author). Hillbrow, a large inner city area, had gained and maintained a transgressive and relatively gay-friendly reputation in the 1970s and 1980s, which allowed a safe space for GLOW to establish its headquarters (Batra 2016; Botes 2021). GLOW's formation signified a new era for

7 The Delmas Treason Trial was the longest running political trial in South Africa's history, and focused on the activities of UDF members who were charged with violent crimes in anti-apartheid protests.

8 An informal place where alcohol is sold in South Africa's townships.

9 *Exit* is South Africa's longest running gay magazine, and in the 1980s and 1990s it was the largest and most successful gay magazine in the country.

10 GASA's expulsion from the International Gay Association (IGA) in 1986 made it impossible for queer organisations to operate outside of South Africa's political and social contexts.

gay and lesbian organising, moving away from the previously apolitical, mostly white organisers such as GASA before them, and into a political project that represented the needs of black gays and lesbians too.

> A Lesbian and Gay organisation which considered itself to be "progressive" would understand that freedom from discrimination and prejudice will only be won after a fight. It would understand that this fight is not separate from the fight against racism and sexism, or the fight for a living wage, a job, education, and a better life. Such an organisation would align itself unashamedly with the struggle for a broad-based freedom in South Africa, and would be an active campaigning organisation committed to the struggles and aspirations of Lesbians and Gays.[11]

GLOW's Constitution stated that one of their primary aims was "to oppose the apartheid system at all levels," indicative of the increased political awareness of gay and lesbian people in the country.[12] Mark Gevisser recalls the racial and class dynamics of GLOW, where the organisation had "middle-class rich white kids from the suburbs, like me [Gevisser] and Graeme Reid, and … black activists from the township like Simon [Nkoli] and Bev [Ditsie]," which was crucial for GLOW's ability to reach out to South Africans of various demographics (Mark Gevisser, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 23 October 2019; transcript in possession of author).

GLOW sought to encompass all races, expressly different to the largely white, largely male realms of GASA (Rundle 2006). More than 60% of GLOW's members were black, and the organisation had multiple chapters in townships in Johannesburg and held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Soweto.[13] To efficiently organise its black membership, GLOW provided various activities and forums in townships. The popular Miss GLOW drag competition, hosted in Soweto after the AGM, was the highlight of these activities.[14] Spectators from townships all over Johannesburg attended the event, but it does also highlight a fundamental issue—GLOW's political campaigns such as the AGM had a much lower attendance rate than the drag show.[15] By July of 1992, Margaret Auerbach, then Deputy President of GLOW, stated that the organisation had "grown to over 400 members, 80% of whom [were] black."[16] While GLOW's racial dynamics reflected the country's demographics, its gender composition struggled to achieve the same level of cohesion, with only 20% of GLOW's members being female by 1992, with very little increase over the following years.

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11 Simon Nkoli to Roy Shepherd, 8 November 1986. GALA.

12 GALA. GAL0001. GLOW. B1.1. Draft Constitution (as drafted at meeting held at the University of the Witwatersrand, 9 April 1988).

13 Anonymous. "Is Homosexuality Foreign to Black Culture?" *GLOWletter*, March 1991.

14 While popular, Miss GLOW drag contests were criticised by female members of GLOW who considered drag events anti-feminist.

15 GALA. GAL0001. C1.1.3 GLOW drag show.

16 Margaret Auerbach private archival collection.

It was precisely these racial dynamics that made GLOW a stimulating organisation to join. Other gay and lesbian organisations maintained a predominantly white majority, unlike GLOW's black majority, and even those that did accept non-whites still made them feel like outsiders. Khadija Dawood, a member of GLOW from 1991, states:

> I tried to [join gay and lesbian organisations] but I found that in the Cape at that time, [I] couldn't really break into groups and organisations that easy. … They were mostly white groups, … quite difficult to really break in. (Khadija Dawood, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 28 November 2021; transcript in possession of author)

As GLOW managed to successfully maintain a strong black membership in Johannesburg, Cape Town organisations struggled. The Organisation of Lesbians and Gays (OLGA), Cape Town's major gay and lesbian organisation and one which Dawood attempted to join, remained predominantly white and male. Regardless of their racial structure, OLGA's left-leaning policies aligned with GLOW, and the two would form a relationship that would later gather momentum towards gaining Constitutional recognition for gays and lesbians. Unlike organisations she had found in Cape Town, GLOW was immediately seen as an attractive organisation to Dawood, who stated that GLOW's racial amalgamation and political posture attracted her. She says that GLOW was unlike any other organisation she knew of, in the Cape or in Johannesburg, and that it "was the organisation [she] wanted to belong to." This was a deliberate strategy on GLOW's part.

The organisation had been founded on the belief that it should remain non-racial and non-sexist, ideas that ultimately shaped the structure of GLOW. These ideals, while not always perfectly executed, were the foundational pillars of GLOW, and were what members deemed vital when joining the organisation. There was an explicit understanding that GLOW was about gay and lesbian rights, but also about racial equality, a notion that until the formation of GLOW was not found in any other gay and lesbian organisations. GLOW struggled to replicate its successful racial structure within its gendered composition, ultimately creating rifts among members of the organisation.

Gender Issues and Separate Forums

While GLOW was founded with non-sexist ideals, the reality of the situation was different. GLOW's male leadership, perhaps inadvertently, created schisms between its male and female membership. By 1991 this had reached a point where lesbian members of GLOW created a subsidiary to the organisation in order to address issues that were largely ignored within GLOW. The Lesbian Forum (LF) grappled with the lack of feminism in GLOW, an issue that had continued into the 1990s. Auerbach, co-founder of the LF and Deputy President of GLOW between 1991 and 1992, stated that:

> [W]e started the Lesbian Forum because we felt there needed to be a stronger lesbian presence in GLOW. And it was a little, you know we battled a little bit with the kind of Miss GLOW competitions and that kind of thing because it went a bit against the

> feminist grain, and so we, I think that was, the Lesbian Forum was a kind of space to organise around those issues. (Margaret Auerbach, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 3 November 2021; transcript in possession of author)

GLOW's lack of feminist politics created an environment where lesbian members felt the need to create their own separate space in order to organise and address their needs. The LF called for recognition of lesbians in society, and for sanctity and safety, while also trying to address the anti-feminism they saw within events such as drag shows, which were always a highlight on GLOW's calendar.

The LF overtly demanded political action by advertising a national lesbian alliance in *GLOWletter*, specifically demanding lesbian rights in the Charter:

- The right for lesbians to have children, either by artificial insemination or adoption;
- The right for lesbian relationships to receive all the benefits accorded to heterosexual relationships in terms of the law, insurances, medical aids, pension funds and so on;
- The right to protection from discrimination;
- The right to be out.[17]

These highlighted issues suggest that GLOW did not adequately address issues that affected lesbian women. The above demands are only found in *GLOWletter*, and only in that single issue (June 1992), suggesting that there was little active campaigning done to publicise these demands. Although Glow dismissed demands that only mention lesbians, LF did align with GLOW's general list of demands, and that could perhaps be why less was actively done with them as a separate issue.[18] While demands may have overlapped, the LF existed as a space in order to address the inadequacies within GLOW surrounding nuanced gendered issues.

Kim Berman, another dual member of both GLOW and the LF, reiterated Auerbach's stance on feminism when asked about differences between GLOW and the LF, but also highlights the "serious" political tone of the LF:

> [N]ot all of us [women] were very comfortable with the kind of burlesque [drag show scene], we were very serious. The women were much more serious than the men who wanted to party. … [The Lesbian Forum was] very feminist … I wasn't [a fan of the drag shows] … we were much more serious, and also the first march we were determined to make it quite a political thing about human rights. So, it was very much about human rights as well, the agenda was very serious. The women were a lot more serious than the men in terms of the feminist agenda and the political agenda, human

17 GALA. GAL0001. A1.1.6. Newsletters (Glowletters/News). Anonymous. "Join the National Lesbian Alliance," *Glowletter*, June 1992.

18 GALA. GAL0001. B1.3. GLOW Organisational Material. Draft GLOW Constitution.

> rights agenda. The men want[ed] to party. (Kim Berman, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 5 September 2022; transcript in possession of author)

The LF became a space where a feminist brand of politics was discussed among those involved in order to raise consciousness of its membership. Tanya Chan-Sam, a founding member of the LF, agreed with this assessment when speaking at GLOW's fourth birthday party celebration, claiming that "communication is a big problem. We need to meet each other to discuss serious issues, not only to party."[19] She, and other LF members, believed that GLOW's male-centred approach to gay and lesbian issues was less politicised, and less feminist than what the lesbian contingency had hoped for.

The LF's existence implies a general lack of work done to address lesbian and female struggles within GLOW. Lesbian members of GLOW used the LF to do what GLOW would not do and address issues which affected the lesbian community. This included housing female members kicked from their homes because of their sexuality, monthly parties to create a jubilant atmosphere, and creating theatrical shows that exemplified and subverted traditional lesbian stereotypes in order to educate the public on lesbians (Margaret Auerbach, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 3 November 2021). Although members of the LF suggest that they were more political than GLOW's male contingency, there was still an effective political element within GLOW that had aligned itself with anti-apartheid organisations.

Homophobia in the ANC

GLOW made itself a visible organisation for gays and lesbians across race and class in and around Johannesburg, but it still had to gather support from political anti-apartheid organisations. This was considered a genuine concern among gay and lesbian South Africans who had noticed the rise of homophobic legislation and rhetoric in other postcolonial states and were fearful that the same might take place in South Africa. In August 1987, Peter Tatchell (Tatchell 2005) released verbatim interviews in London's *Capital Gay* newspaper recapping the opinions of two high-ranking international ANC members who saw no reason to support gays and lesbians in South Africa. Ruth Mompati, a leader of the 1956 women's anti-pass march, declared that:

> I cannot even begin to understand why people want lesbian and gay rights. The gays have no problems. They have nice houses and plenty to eat. I don't see them suffering. No one is persecuting them … We haven't heard about this problem in South Africa until recently. It seems to be fashionable in the West. … They are not doing the liberation struggle any favour by organising separately and campaigning for their rights. The [gay] issue is being brought up to take attention away from the main struggle against apartheid … I hope that in a liberated South Africa people will live a *normal* life. I

[19] GALA. GAL0001. A1.1.6. Newsletters (Glowletters/News). Anonymous. "Speaking for Ourselves," *Glowletter*, June 1992.

> emphasise the word *normal* … Tell me, are lesbians and gays normal? No, it is not normal. (Tatchell 2005, 142)

The assumption that a gay and lesbian movement would cause division was the same criticism that the women's movement had received from anti-apartheid activists previously. Ironically, it was Ruth Mompati, a founding member of the Federation of South African Women, who declared gay and lesbian rights as a separate issue.

Meanwhile, GLOW was attempting to create solidarity between gay rights and the anti-apartheid movement, calling for rights for all people within their anti-homophobic and anti-racist stance. Homophobia within the ANC ranks was seen elsewhere when Solly Smith, the ANC's chief representative in Britain, exclaimed similar homophobic rhetoric:

> We don't have a policy. Lesbian and gay rights do not arise in the ANC. We cannot be diverted from our struggle by these issues. We believe in the majority being equal. [Lesbians and gays] are in the minority. The majority must rule. (Tatchell 2005, 143)

Smith's remarks touch on the same anti-solidarity remarks voiced by Mompati, with both regarding gay and lesbian rights as a separate issue. While still only two dissenting voices, their leadership in the ANC was enough to cause global outrage among gays and lesbians who felt the ANC needed to strongly back gay and lesbian rights. Many English, Dutch and Scandinavian anti-apartheid and civil rights organisations threatened to withdraw their support for the ANC if the party did not retract and condemn the statements.[20] The ANC received letters of condemnation, with many people "appalled that a 'liberation movement' like the ANC [was] ignorant, bigoted and intolerant" (Tatchell 2005, 143) of other persecuted minorities. Tatchell (2005) sought to win over a now embarrassed ANC to the issue of gay and lesbian rights, and offered "the leadership a face-saving solution and a constructive way forward" (143) by privately appealing to exiled leadership in Lusaka.

In 1988, a year after Tatchell's *Capital Gay* was released, the ANC circulated a draft of Constitutional Guidelines that highlighted a commitment to social reforms, combating sexism, and promoting the role of women in a democratic South Africa in order to restore dignity after years of oppression, but had no explicit guarantee to protect gay rights (Mompati and Motsepe 1988). It was only in December of the following year that the ANC made non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation an official policy. This took place after OLGA had been in contact with Albie Sachs over how to

[20] International condemnation of these remarks signified an international solidarity for making rights accessible to all people, which was largely due to Nkoli's work with international gay and human rights groups. By the time Tatchell's article appeared, there was already a support network for non-heteronormative people in South Africa, who were aware that if their rights were not guaranteed post-apartheid that they would possibly never have access to safety. The international community demanded that the ANC show support to gay and lesbian South Africans if they were to continue to aid the party in its anti-apartheid activism.

address the issue of gay and lesbian rights throughout the year.[21] On the advice of two exiled anti-apartheid contacts, David and Norma Kitson, Tatchell wrote a letter to Thabo Mbeki, as he was considered "the most liberal-minded of the ANC leaders and senior enough to be able to push for a radical rethink of official policy" (Tatchell 2005, 144) that could include gay and lesbian rights. Tatchell's letter to Mbeki helped cause the exiled leadership of the ANC to re-evaluate its stance on queer issues in the anti-apartheid struggle. After internal debates, the ANC officially committed itself to supporting lesbian and gay human rights for the first time. Writing back to Tatchell in November 1987, Mbeki stated that:

> The ANC is indeed very firmly committed to removing all forms of discrimination and oppression in a liberated South Africa. … That commitment must surely extend to the protection of gay rights. … I would like to believe that my colleagues, Solly Smith and Ruth Mompati, did not want to suggest in any way that a free South Africa would want to see gays discriminated against or subjected to any form of repression. (Tatchell 2005, 145)

This happened quickly after Tatchell's September publication, displaying the ANC's recognition that they had to allow the public to know that they were taking a stand against all forms of discrimination. This new stance could be linked to earlier debates about feminism when, at the Nairobi Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985, the ANC reiterated that "there could be no women's liberation without national liberation" in the struggle for equality, as noted by Shireen Hassim (2004, 449).

The ANC's feminist project was political—a challenge to pro-American intervention that advocated for apolitical feminism separate from national politics—in its link to national politics. Zethu Matebeni (2011) explains that much in the same way gay and lesbian rights became politicised when the ANC sought to protect gay and lesbian people against all forms of discrimination. Tatchell (2005) reflects on the ANC's changing stance towards gay and lesbian rights, claiming that it was not his doing alone that brought about the change. Others before him had "pressured the ANC to change its homophobic stance" (Tatchell 2005, 145) without any success. It appears that the negative publicity generated from the *Capital Gay* article, as well as Tatchell's letter to Mbeki requesting clarification on Mompati's and Smith's opinions, had, with those pressuring the ANC before Tatchell, all culminated in the ANC rethinking its stance towards homosexuality.

Politics, Parties, and Pride

> GLOW is not only an amazing organisation, but a fundamentally revolutionary movement for liberation.[22]

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21 GALA. AM2805. Lee Randall Collection, 1983 to 1993.

22 GALA. GAL001. *GLOWLetter*. A1.1.10. Anonymous. "A Lot of Room to Dance," *GLOWLetter*, October 1992.

GLOW understood that effective lobbying and creating visibility were crucial to gain gay and racial liberation. The organisation had to actively fight for gay and lesbian rights in a historic moment in the country's transition as it quickly became a moment of hopeful realisation that gay rights were a distinct possibility as apartheid was coming to an end. However, members still had to make the public aware that gay rights were a necessity. While transition gave hope for a government that would implement laws regulating the safety of queer people, homophobia persisted among South Africans, a possible by-product of an over-masculinised, hyper-religious Afrikanerdom which proliferated in most sectors of society. Palesa Buyeye (2019) notes in an article published in the *Sunday Times*:

> [Nkoli] conceived the first Pride as a political statement but also as an opportunity to assert gay rights, for self-expression and to have fun—a combination of everything Pride should be.

The first Pride march in Africa, organised by GLOW, took place in Johannesburg on 13 October 1990. Conceived by GLOW's leadership, the aim was to follow the motivation of other Pride marches internationally where "the sense of moral indignation that forces people out of the privacy and relative safety of their homes and ghettoes and onto the more dangerous, more tenuous forum of the street" could be achieved through the march.[23] Donné Rundle (2006, 20–21), a leading figure in GLOW, recalls that by the time Nelson Mandela was released from prison in February of 1990, GLOW was "already well into the organisation of the march," but his release and "the unbanning of the ANC emphasised the importance of gays and lesbians becoming part of the struggle" and not being regarded as a side issue that could be ignored until after democracy. The fear of being seen as a separate issue was previously noted in Tatchell's findings by some ANC members. By being visible on the streets, Pride overtly challenged the idea of a perceived heteronormative space, and in many ways then had its own "coming out" process from hidden clubs, out into the open, to show the city and the country that queer people belonged in and were of the city (Matebeni 2011). Marius Pieterse (2015, 100) argues that the physical production and occupation of queer spaces in Johannesburg had disrupted the notion of heteronormative hegemony and "visibly queer[ed] and eroticiz[ed] pockets of public space," producing safe queer space.

Queer visibility on the street during Pride was also conceived of as a public coming out for South Africa's gay and lesbian population. The march increased gay and lesbian visibility in South Africa. Noted ANC member Albie Sachs endorsed the first Pride march in 1990, reminding people that "a number of homosexuals have played outstanding roles in [the anti-apartheid] struggle" and that marchers would make evident the number of gay people in the country.[24] The march would make gay and lesbian people more visible than ever before. Increased visibility was considered dangerous to

23 "Gay GLOW," *Weekly Mail*, October 18, 1990.

24 GALA. GAL0001. A1.1.1. Newsletters (Glowletters/News). Anonymous. "March!" *Glowletter*, September 1990.

some marchers, and for fear of repercussions thanks to heightened visibility GLOW had distributed paper bags to be worn as masks. One the day there was a rainstorm that ultimately made the paper bags redundant. No one seems to have been upset by this though, with a *GLOWletter* article suggesting that the destruction of paper bags could be regarded as an unintentional and symbolic reference that people had come "out of the closet" during the march.[25] Those involved with early Pride marches could be regarded as part of South Africa's gay and lesbian population's initial coming out. They took to the streets, demanding increased visibility and calls for decriminalisation, something made possible and feasible thanks to GLOW's mobilisation.

Though there was work behind the scenes between GLOW and OLGA to open communication with the ANC and other anti-apartheid groups, the Pride march was perhaps quintessential in garnering support for gays and lesbians. The first Pride made an oppressed group visible, and for the first time, gays and lesbians demanded rights and non-discrimination in South Africa. The march highlighted how numerous gays and lesbians were, with many aware that there were still those too afraid to join the march. Beyond gay and lesbian numbers in the march, it also showed the extent of international support GLOW had managed to garner for South African gays and lesbians committed to the anti-apartheid struggle. Although most of the encouragement towards GLOW came from LGBTQIA+ organisations, there was also approval from political organisations and campaigns. The Anti-Apartheid Movement of the Netherlands (AABN) wrote to GLOW exclaiming that "the AABN supports the struggle of lesbians and gays for a democratic and non-sexist South Africa," while the Human Rights Commission (HRC) stated that it "wishes to give its strongest support to the 'Unity in the Community Gay Pride March'."[26] GLOW received numerous letters of support, further exemplifying a need for a democratically elected government in South Africa to vow to protect gay and lesbian rights. The success of the 1990 Gay and Lesbian Pride march, and the growing support and increased visibility of successive marches throughout the decade all held in Johannesburg and organised by GLOW, emphasised the role of GLOW for the country's gay and lesbian population, but also signified GLOW's role in making gay and lesbian people visible to the public so that their demands for rights in a democratic South Africa could not be ignored. GLOW, largely through the blatant visibility of Pride, showed the country that gays and lesbians had formed a solidarity unseen before. The community fostered between black and white, and rich and poor queer people was created through GLOW's demands that the organisation be a space for all gays and lesbians with zero exclusion.

Following Constitutional recognition, it is possible to view the decline of gay and lesbian organising as a political event through the decline of what Pride originally symbolised and what it has come to symbolise. As mentioned previously in this article, there is an ongoing schism globally between what Pride initially represented and how it

25 GALA. GAL0001. A1.1.1. Newsletters (Glowletters/News). Dianne. "800 March!" *Glowletter*, December 1990.

26 GALA. AM2799. Donne Rundle Collection, 1990. Scrapbook.

has become involved with corporate sponsorship. While GLOW remained an expressly political organisation, it had to combine the need for militant queer activism with the needs of its members, which were predominantly directed towards the provision of a safe social space, itself a political act (Gevisser and Reid 1995). In organising the Pride, GLOW had attempted to combine both the "carnivalesque tradition of the annual New York Pride March … [with] South Africa's own tradition of the anti-apartheid protest march" to attract as large a cross-section of queer people as possible (Gevisser 1995, 63–64). S'Bu Kheswa, one of GLOW's members during the 1990s, recalls how Pride was multifunctional in its attempts to attract crowds, but also highlights the problems that developed in later marches:

> Pride, I'll say, served two purposes. It was Pride march; we are marching, we are claiming space, we are visible. But it was also a big party. So, it offered those two things—celebratory and political. That's what Pride served for us … It has always been the case that the marchers are fewer than the people who will be at the party. (S'Bu Kheswa, interview with the author, Johannesburg, 4 October 2019; transcript in possession of author)

Pride had been a powerful political act, but in the first few years it attracted fewer people than the Pride afterparty, which was attended by both black and white queer people, even those who saw Pride as being too political. Perhaps the afterparties provided safety for those who did not attend the march. Those who only attended the afterparties were not actively involved in the political aspect of claiming space in a march where many onlookers openly expressed their homophobic disgust towards those in attendance. The marches following 1996 became even more carnivalesque as entrance fees became commonplace while the march moved out of the city and into the suburbs, solidifying itself as a safe hub for white, middle-class gays and lesbians. Pride had moved from a base of solidarity and morphed into a class-based event in which only wealthier, mostly white gays and lesbians were able to participate. The loss of solidarity persists in the gay and lesbian community today, as evidenced by Ditsie's reprimand of the current status quo, and the One in Nine Campaign which was brutalised in 2012.

Pride, before the 1996 Constitution, was the culmination of creating awareness that gays and lesbians could find and maintain support networks among themselves. It was also a declaration to the country, and to the anti-apartheid movement, that queer people were claiming their own space, and in doing so, making themselves hyper-visible as people, but also as a subsidiary vehicle in the fight against apartheid. But while Pride made individuals more visible than ever before, it was the work done behind the scenes that created an inter-organisational solidarity that was required to effectively lobby the ANC and other anti-apartheid organisations in accepting that gay and lesbian rights would be a necessity in a post-apartheid Constitution.

The success of Pride marches as well as strong links with high-ranking ANC members allowed a space in which GLOW could lobby for Constitutional recognition. GLOW didn't do this alone, and worked closely with OLGA, Cape Town's largest gay and

lesbian organisation, as well as others to form the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) in December 1994. GLOW worked through the NCGLE to effectively lobby the post-apartheid government to create a constitution that would include a clause to protect gay and lesbian citizens. Between its creation in 1994 and the final Constitution in 1996, the NCGLE organised lobby teams to ensure that politicians involved in drafting the Constitution were properly briefed on gay and lesbian issues.

The political climate in South Africa after 1994, when the ANC won the national election, was one "in which it [was] 'politically incorrect' for mainstream constitutional players to oppose" rights to any group which could claim a history of social exclusion (Stychin 1996, 461). With GLOW's mobilisation to bring gay and lesbian rights into the public's imagination and a political climate where it was not possible to argue against constitutional equality for any historically excluded group, every major South African political party supported, or did not explicitly oppose, the inclusion of sexual orientation. ANC lawyers had first included a "sexual orientation" clause in 1991, largely due to lobbying from local gay groups and activists. This was shortly followed by the Democratic Party (DP) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) doing the same (Sanders 1997). The only large political party that vehemently opposed the clause was the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), which viewed the clause as immoral to their theological doctrine (Stychin 1996).

Due to a planned participative process where the Constitution would be structured based on input from the public, the NCGLE found a political space to operate which could be mobilised for queer rights. The NCGLE was formed in 1994 as a basis of queer solidarity that strived "specifically to coordinate the lobbying efforts to retain the sexual orientation clause" within South Africa's draft Constitution (Cock 2003, 37). The NCGLE represented 65 member organisations from around the country and focused its efforts on a single issue. In its submission, the NCGLE wrote that "equality and non-discrimination are fundamental and overriding principles of the interim constitution" and that discrimination against gays and lesbians "displays the same basic features as discrimination on the grounds of race and gender."[27] Graeme Reid, in an interview with Jacklyn Cock, notes that "it was important that the coalition wouldn't speak about gay rights, only about equality" (2003, 37), and in doing so formed a narrative that equated equality with non-discrimination. By framing gay rights in terms of equality rather than merely gay rights, the NCGLE succeeded in keeping the sexual orientation clause within the Constitution.

Conclusion

As Johannesburg's most diverse and politically active gay and lesbian organisation, GLOW provided fundamental support to the queer community, and worked alongside

27 GALA. AM2623. C1.3. Organisational Records. National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality. *Submission to the Constitutional Assembly*. 1995.

other gay and lesbian organisations in the country to make gay rights an attainable objective in South Africa. Gay and lesbian rights were hard-fought for, and those who were a part of the struggle deserve to be remembered and have their roles recognised. GLOW and the people in the organisation were pivotal in mobilising Johannesburg's gay and lesbian community, and leaders such as Simon Nkoli, Bev Ditsie, Edwin Cameron, Margaret Auerbach, and many others should not remain on the margins of queer history. GLOW's work with other gay and lesbian organisations, their convening of Pride, and the formation of the NCGLE were all pivotal moments in South African queer history. While liberal racists still align themselves to gay rights, it was the work of GLOW, a mostly black gay and lesbian organisation, that made those rights possible.

While the very liberal Constitution bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, human rights are not necessarily guaranteed immediately, but it is a necessary point of reference that, under the apartheid government, would never truly have taken shape (Reddy 2001). Constitutional inclusion, an impossibility in the 1960s under the rule of the National Party (NP), allowed queer people the legal right to claim space. The push from GLOW helped force the ANC and the country as a whole to recognise queer people as people who deserve rights and space in a country that had historically persecuted them, finally allowing them the freedom to move through space that had always been denied to them. The formation of the NCGLE, and the work it provided in gaining Constitutional recognition, was largely due to a concerted effort to create solidarity within South Africa's gay and lesbian citizens.

A campaign of lobbying, years of dialogue, and defiant acts to make gays and lesbians visible in South Africa helped GLOW establish itself as a prominent activist organisation that catered to the needs of a black queer demographic. The desire to gather black support helped establish a Constitutional clause that would protect gays and lesbians from discrimination based on their sexuality. While in practice there is still work required to help queer South Africans escape discrimination, the legal work done in the 1990s and the struggle to gain legal representation for the current generation came from a politicised queer movement, which is invisible in the current gay and lesbian scene. Throughout the 1990s GLOW was able to successfully implement a strategy of non-discrimination to work alongside the ANC as well as creating networks with other gay and lesbian organisations in order to successfully strive towards legal representation for non-heteronormative citizens. While in the post-1996 years this network of solidarity has declined, it was still an important decade highlighting the significance that camaraderie can create within political organising.

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