

WHO ARE WE?

About the ZwaKala Project

ZwaKala, is an isiZulu term which means to “speak out” and to be heard. Founded in 2015 by Iranti, the project’s goal is to contribute to the enhancement of LGBTI advocacy and strengthen queer communities in urban, peri-urban and rural settings. ZwaKala provides training and assistance to local CBOs in the North West, Limpopo and Gauteng provinces. ZwaKala is headed by Iranti in Johannesburg.

Through The ZwaKala Project, Iranti implements a programme where all participating organisations are encouraged to create and document stories, as well as engage their communities around LGBTI awareness.

ZwaKala further employs interns regularly for more in-depth training than can be provided at skills-development events. Such skills development is aimed at empowering CBOs to be self-sustaining by the end of ZwaKala’s operations in April 2018.

The ZwaKala Project is currently partnered with eight CBOs: Limpopo LGBTI Proudly Out, Gays and Lesbians of Rustenburg, Gay Umbrella, Vaal LGBTI, UTHINGO, IHAWU, EPOC and Tisa Tshireletso; and is also partnered closely with the European Union (EU) as the primary funder of the project.

To empower communities to “speak out” as ZwaKala suggests would not be possible without the continued support of the EU, as well as The Other Foundation, Foundation for Human Rights (FHR), ARASA and many more.

Together, activists from across target provinces are being brought together to cooperate and support each other, finding a united voice for the LGBTI community in the region.

About Iranti

Founded in January 2012, Iranti was established with the clear intention of building local partnerships and movements that use multimedia as a key platform for documentation, advocacy and educational interventions across Africa. We have made our mark through capacity building in multimedia and documentation for individuals as well as organisations.

Iranti engages in national, regional and global advocacy interventions that have brought to the fore the immense value brought to the LGBTIQ+ human rights discourse in the form of evidence-based documentation combined with story-telling and advocacy.

Our value to effective social justice action lies in our ability to integrate new media and traditional advocacy methods in strategies for change. At Iranti we forge ahead seeking restorative justice for LGBTIQ+ persons in our region and in the world so that we can live with dignity and autonomy, and have the liberty to freely express ourselves.

Iranti aims to continue probing and developing a deeper understanding of gross human rights violations; while seeking ways to change policies, laws and individual mind-sets; to bring about an end to homophobia, intersexphobia, transphobia, sexism, patriarchy and racism.

Iranti’s interventions are designed within an intersectional framework as an acknowledgement of the way in which poverty and systemic social and material injustices

impact human rights within communities. It is our belief that even a small contribution towards these immense problems will produce positive changes within our society.



The funeral of Kagiso Maema, the latest tragedy from the North West, serves to remind us why we fight. Story on page 2. Photo by Gugu Mandla.

Editorial

Nomsa Manzini

In 2017 ZwaKala worked very closely with CBO's, other Civil Society organisations, LGBTI sector movements and the government in various provinces. One of the most significant exercises that ZwaKala continues to engage in ongoing documenting of hate crime stories in target provinces. These stories mark the violence and discrimination in communities against lesbian and transgender women who were brutally murdered and raped, apparently because of their identities.

One of the platforms that ZwaKala created was a safe space event which allowed lesbian and trans women to come together and share their frustrations as well as plan ways to navigate life with minimised stress and fear. We are happy to have had wonderful moments where members engaged thoroughly and expressed their gratitude for the initiative.

2018 is a new year which Iranti and the ZwaKala network of activists have tackled with vigour, despite the ongoing violence that our communities faced over the recent festive season. In this new year we promise to continue equipping communities with knowledge and support structures, sensitising parents and families of LGBTI members and engaging with stakeholders to expand the reach and impact of our partner CBOs. We hope to hold yet more sessions which will allow our members to learn, refresh their minds and to create ways of responding to all violations they may be faced with.

As we head into this new year we also hope that our government will consider/ explore ways of aligning their resources to the LGBTI sector to improve the lives of every individual that identifies as part of, or is exploring their place within, the great diversity of sexual orientation and gender expression!

North West Province unsafe for Queer bodies

Over the past few years Iranti has noted a growing trend in the North West province towards violence against LGBTI persons. We are dismayed at the brutal rape and murder of so many young people in our communities, and vow to do everything possible in conjunction with local CBOs to bring perpetrators to justice and end these terrible human rights violations. Below we remember some of those that have been lost in recent years:

6 January 2018

Kagiso Maema, Rustenburg

Last seen with an unknown man the night before at a local tavern, Kagiso, a transgender woman, was found dead in a nearby dam with severe cut wounds on her body at a nearby dam.

10 December 2017

Joey and Anisha van Niekerk, Mooi-nooi

When Joey's father passed away this lesbian couple left their home in Mooi-nooi, to attend the funeral in Pretoria but never arrived. Eight people are believed to have coordinated the kidnapping, torture, rape and murder of Joey and Anisha.

1 July 2017

Pitso Tshelang, Swartruggens

After an argument in a local tavern about her gender-identity as a trans woman, Pitso's attacker stabbed her repeatedly with a broken bottle. Her boyfriend and cousin carried her to the nearest hospital, trying desperately to flag down a car for a ride, though nobody stopped. Pitso, passed away before she got to the hospital.

6 August 2016

Lesley Makousa, Potchefstroom

This gay high school pupil was found dead in a field by a passerby. Apparently strangled by a shoelace. The suspect and Lesley are thought to have known each other.

10 November 2015

Bobby Motlala, Potchefstroom

An openly queer music student at NWU's Potchefstroom campus, Bobby was found dead in their apartment bedroom, naked and with 39 stab wounds to the chest. Police stated that Bobby may have been sexually assaulted as well.

15 August 2014

Disebo 'Gift' Makau, Ventersdorp

Disebo was found dead near her home, having been raped then strangled with a piece of wire. A hosepipe was forced down her throat by the attacker with the water turned on. Water overflowing into a neighbour's property led to the discovery of the horrific scene.

CBO Profile: Gay Umbrella with Mildred Maropefela

By Kellyn Botha

MAHIKENG. “With me they are more accepting, maybe because my way of living and presenting myself are more acceptable to them than others. I think many people don’t know that I’m a “she”. They see a “he”; they approach a “he”; therefore “he” survives.” says Mildred Maropefela, who also goes by Milly. She is a founding member of Gay Umbrella, one of Iranti’s ZwaKala Project partner CBOs.

“Gay Umbrella is a non-profit organisation, founded in 2007 in the North West Province. We cater to the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and inter-sex people while empowering them through education activities such as workshops, seminars and summits,” says Mildred, who also goes by Milly. “It also lobbies for the rights of the LGBTI community through community awareness, education and empowerment campaigns, court picketing during cases of gender-based discrimination and violence.”

The organisation certainly has its work cut out for it, as the attitude toward the LGBTI community in Mahikeng, the capital of the North West and Gay Umbrella centre of operations, “is very much hostile, due in part to the conservative values of the region”.

“Mahikeng is very much rural and cultural; hostility may have softened with the years due to the work our organisation does, but it has not fully penetrated to the core of the hostility. In North West as a province it differs with areas. With towns such as Rustenburg and Potchefstroom, because they are closer to Gauteng Province, you find that hostility towards us is due to lack of information rather than traditional values,” says Milly.

The North West follows the pattern of many predominantly rural South African provinces where civil society is generally less active, and queerphobia more pronounced than the metropolitan centres. The North West specifically has been the site of the most of hate crimes cases which Iranti has documented and in recent years. Organisations such as Gay Umbrella, which work to fight against such violence, remain hindered by physical constraints though. The LGBTI advocacy sector is universally underfunded, but this impacts smaller, grassroots movements the hardest.

“The biggest challenge we face right now is office



Mildred Maropefela from Gay Umbrella, at a recent community dialogue in Mahikeng. Photo by Kellyn Botha

space and funds. There is a need to expand because our membership grows by day, and we do not have a safe working space, nor the funds to run operations. So we must compromise the services we render to our people. We would love to come up with support groups, but because we do not have office space to work from we find ourselves challenged to work on certain areas.

But despite the difficult conditions they work under, and the apparent increase in violence directed at LGBTI persons in the North West, Milly and her team feel hopeful that their work, and the work of their fellow Community-Based Organisations, is having an impact. Milly’s dreams for the future often feel like they are a long way off, but through the work of the Gay Umbrella team, there is constant progress.

“Working with projects such as ZwaKala has assisted in finding ways to be visible in our communities. I’d love eventually to see people being more accepting. I’d love to see the coming generation not suffer like we did. I want to see sexuality not be an issue anymore and to see our families being more loving towards their LGBTI kids.”

PFSAQ, in collaboration with CIL and Iranti hosted a Parents' Conversation



TO TALK ABOUT PARENTAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT ON
Lesbian, Intersex and Transgender issues



Most parents came out in support of their children, defending their right to be themselves no matter what.



Nomsa Manzini of Iranti takes notes during open discussion on LGBTI issues in the community.

By Kellyn Botha

POLOKWANE. On 24 February, Iranti, in collaboration with two ZwaKala CBOs, Parents and Family of South African Queers (PFSAQ) and Capricorn Ignited LGBTI (CIL), hosted a dialogue with local parents and families in Capricorn District, Limpopo. The aim of the meeting was to introduce parents to LGBTI identities as well as the issues faced by LGBTI persons to raise awareness and increase family support for their LGBTI children. 25 parents shared the space with dozens of other community members and LGBTI activists, coming from across the province to listen to one another openly at the Monkweng Community Law Advice Office (MCLAO) near Moria.

The morning began with basic definitions of what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex. Then followed an outline of the constitutional protections that queer South Africans enjoy and challenges, such as discrimination, that many still face. For many parents, these issues had never been explained to them before, so it was important to employ language that truly spoke clearly and respectfully.

“A lot of terminology used to break down the sexual orientation and gender identity topic isn’t as easily translated and understood in rural communities,” said Kanyanta Kakana of Iranti. “The use of jargon takes away the simplest way of understanding gender identity and sexual orientation in many contexts. It’s important to constantly communicate in a way that provides for the ease of interpretation of our message when we do our advocacy work. This helps our parents and families come to an understanding of us and who we are when we collectively engage and teach them about us.”

Later, Iranti screened two films about the life and struggle of Nare

Mphela, a transgender woman from Limpopo who faced severe discrimination in high school. Nare successfully won her case against the Limpopo Department of Basic Education, but many in the audience expressed shock at the events depicted in their province. Gasps filled the room as Nare outlined the offensive language and physical harassment she received from her school principal.

After the floor was opened for discussion on the film and the day's events, the families present made it clear that they had all come away from the event better informed than before, with a clearer understanding of what it's like to live as an LGBTI person in South Africa.

Many families in South Africa remain unaccepting of queer relatives, however through work like the Limpopo dialogue, more communities can be reached.

"I feel really, really positive," said Virginia Magwaza of PFSAQ. "To see new faces instead of speaking to the same activists as always is important. It is something that isn't done enough."

Photos by Kellyn Botha



Cate Mogale of Capricorn Ignited LGBTI translates for Kanyanta Kakana of Iranti as she explains the ins and outs of trans identities.



Thozamile Ngenelwa of PFSAQ introduces LGBTI identities to the group in the morning.



Virginia Magwaza of PFSAQ leads the group in an opening prayer before the meeting begins.



A group women join in the singing throughout the day. Many community elders do not speak much English, highlighting the importance of language in advocacy.



Lara Kruger was an inspiration to many LGBTI South Africans. Her loss hurts not only her family and fans, but the entire queer community. Photo by Gugu Mandla.

Community comes together to remember Miss Lara Kruger

By Kellyn Botha

RUSTENBURG. On 3 January 2018, the South African transgender community lost one of its most beloved voices when Lara Kruger passed away. The death of the Motswedding FM radio DJ, perhaps the first openly-transgender radio host on a mainstream station on the continent, left behind a loving family, a community of activists with whom she had long worked to shine a light on LGBTI issues, and countless radio listeners in her home-province of the North West.

Lara Kruger's activism started at a young age when she would vocally defend her right to dress and behave as she felt comfortable to members of her community who didn't yet understand what it meant to be transgender. Her mother, recalling those events, accepted Lara's identity from the start and even changed churches, despite being a Church Elder, when the local pastor began preaching homophobic messages to his congregation.

"I am not burying a son, but a daughter," said Lara's mother to members of the church and community ahead of the memorial service in Mogwase,

near Rustenburg. The memorial, held on 11 January, was live-streamed by the SABC and saw hundreds of friends, family members and activists join Lara's mother to pay their respects in what served as a time not just for mourning, but celebration of a life lived loudly and with pride.

Prior to her passing, Lara wrote on Facebook about the depression she was facing and the hardships she experienced in the workplace. She noted that if she were to pass away, she would want people to wear white at her funeral. If this meant Lara this meant Lara knew what was coming can only be guessed, but when the community at large gathered again to lay her to rest on Saturday, 13 January, they showed their true love and respect for this rising star.

The North West Province has seen a spate of violence against lesbian and transgender women in recent months and years, and LGBTI bodies face repression and rejection every day. But at Miss Lara Kruger's funeral, hundreds wore white out of love for a transgender woman.

Human Rights Festival

Between 23 and 25 March, Constitution Hill in Johannesburg will be hosting the *For To Be Free* human rights festival. Iranti and allies will be participating, featuring films and publications we have produced as well as offering insight on LGBTI human rights to the public.

The festival will feature a book fair, poetry festival, multiple panel discussions, food and live mu-

sic. All are welcome, and we strongly encourage everyone to help Iranti promote queer visibility at the festival.

For more information or to participate, contact www.constitutionhill.org.za. #WhatDoYouStandFor?

Rating Inxeba: The wound inflicted against LGBTI South Africans

By Jabulani Pereira and Kellyn Botha

Inxeba – The Wound, has been a center of controversy ever since its release earlier this year. The film depicts aspects of the amaXhosa initiation process known as Ulwaluko, and revolves around the experiences of the gay protagonists at the Eastern Cape initiation school.

From the start the film was the cause of heated debate which has revealed a harsh reality of South African society. Traditional leaders, claiming the film is an offensive depiction of private amaXhosa rituals have railed publicly against homosexuality and homosexuals, and many South Africans have taken to social media to attack the film and the LGBT community.

Inxeba was originally rated 16LS, meaning it was considered appropriate for audiences of 16 and up, but the Film and Publications Board (FPB) Appeals Tribunal of South Africa recently changed that. It was reclassified as X18 by the board, the same rating given to hardcore pornography, and thus banned from all mainstream cinemas in the country. Gladly, this violation of freedom of expression and apparent homophobia has been temporarily undone. A legal challenge from the film distributors has meant that, for now, Inxeba will be screened in cinemas at an 18 age-rating, pending a decision by a court of law. But this doesn't mean the damage has been undone.

Subjective, morality-based assessments are not the guiding principles in making decisions such as this; the constitution and the Bill of Rights are. Every citizen from the age of 16 (which is older than the age of most Ulwaluko initiates to begin with) has the right to watch the film and judge it for themselves. We must be the guardians of our right to artistic expression and South African filmmakers should have the liberty and support necessary to make films that entertain and educate the world about our lived experiences and social context. The film should be in public circulation, and this should be rectified with urgency.

We understand that cinema cannot satisfy everyone, as society comprises countless diverse persons and communities whose views often differ from one another, but this is the nature of a free and democratic society, to embrace diversity, rather than try to erase it. Stifling the chance to debate Inxeba, sets a dangerous precedent!

Cinema reaches its purpose when it evokes thought and emotion and becomes a public interest matter. We are pleased that Inxeba has done this. However, we believe that the FPB and traditional leaders must do some urgent introspection and see the shallowness from which they are critiquing it. As tax payers we contrib-

ute towards the salaries of traditional leaders, because we as a nation believe they occupy an important space in South Africa's society, and hence as public servants they too must abide to the law and the constitution.

The inflamed reactions and speeches with homophobic undertones have created an environment of fear and anxiety for LGBT people in many communities across the country. We have received reports of street harassment and physical violence against the LGBT community, particularly those who are visibly gender non-conforming, including effeminate gay men, transgender people, and butch lesbians. Harm against these ordinary citizens cannot be tolerated.

Though the ban on Inxeba was short-lived and the film's return to cinema is a great victory for the LGBTI community, we note that violence against the queer community is ongoing. The case for returning Inxeba to its original 16LS rating will be heard on 28 March. In that time, and in perpetuity, we call for peace and respect for the rule of law and the constitution! We will continue to monitor this matter and hold everyone accountable for every act of violence that is committed on black queer bodies. We call for this to stop and to find a solution that promotes peace and safety!



My Road to Self-Love

Thanya Bogatsu (*Gay Umbrella*)

I am a woman that has experienced such hatred in the world I live in, but I keep asking myself how I overcame it. I was born being called male but now I live as woman and I educate my peers about my journey as a transgender woman. I have been raped, discriminated against and humiliated but I accept that it needs to happen so that the generation that comes after us knows that life was not all roses. I question every role I take; I have questioned culture and tradition; questioned our own educational policies and mostly I question our constitution that looks good on paper but fails the youth of 1976, our forefathers, and the generation that is to come.

I never reported my experiences because of fear and guilt. Fear became my drug, numbing my pain while trying to make out what my life was all about. I have read books about forgiving my past but

Dyke

By Sandisiwe Dlamini

My heart is yours
 see it in my eyes that it is true
 when they break down our door
 eyes blazing with fire of fury
 fists clenched and weapons drawn
 hold onto my hand and never let go
 because I carry you in my soul
 when they throw stones at our windows
 and enter through the back door during the night
 ready to persecute and execute us
 Tell me that you love me
 because I recite those words to you in my thoughts with every passing moment
 when my parents reject or judge me
 tell me that it is okay
 because I love those close to you and resent those you despise
 when they call me a faggot or a dyke
 I promise to smile
 because I am your woman
 and you are mine
 and if they burn us at the stake
 I will only cry for their tragic souls
 I do pray the Lord be with us
 and protects your beautiful soul
 LET HE WITHOUT SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE

getting back to loving myself again has been a true journey. I now know it had to happen for me to be the woman I am.

I can never stop living life because of some uneducated group of boys and girls from the township who judge me. My story is not for the weak-hearted. I needed to grow and reading books of Maya Angelou and Iyanla Vanzant made me see that my words are tools to liberate and empower. I have gone back and forth on how to put my story into words until now. I hated men with all my heart because they hurt me, disregarded and disempowered me.

We live in a decade where black men fear women and they can only show their

power through violence. I look at men and ask when is it enough? How many people have to die for you to wake up and take a stand?

I trust that telling my story to you will not break you down but empower you instead. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, warm and ready to embrace. Not all of us face violence and not all who do are weak. But allow yourself to be weak sometimes because with every piece of hurt comes knowledge, and knowledge is power for people like me.

I AM AN AFRICAN TRANSGENDER WOMAN!

ZwaKala Speaks! is not just an Iranti publication; it belongs to all the CBOs in the ZwaKala network. Be sure to submit articles for our next edition, and send us feedback so that we can ensure everyone's voices are represented and included. Let us know how we can make *ZwaKala Speaks!* truly collaborative!

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