

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

Container Archiving Queer Erasure

Persons Present

Cassandra (C)

Keval (K)

C: Hello, and welcome to Archiving Queer Erasure in South Africa, a podcast from Container Magazine. This podcast is hosted by myself, Cassandra Roxburgh, I use fae/faer pronouns and it is in conversation with Keval Harie, the executive director of the GALA Queer Archive in South Africa. Keval uses he/him pronouns. The conversation covers a myriad of topics as it relates to the collection practices of the GALA Queer Archive in South Africa, particularly with regards to the challenges they've been experiencing in digitising the archive and in the very particular need for queer representation in South African media and how the archive can assist in representing queer stories in South Africa.

K: So, my name is Keval Harie, my pronouns are he and him, and I'm the executive director of the GALA Queer Archive. The GALA Queer Archive is a queer archive that's based in Johannesburg, South Africa. We're based at Wits University and the archive was kind of created on the premise of speaking against this narrative, or this trope of homosexuality being un-African. And the way in which we do that is by really uncovering the stories, lived experiences and histories of queer life in South Africa. But more and more considering kind of Southern Africa and... and the continent at large. GALA as an archive really does challenge the traditional notions of what an archive is. One, because our objective is to kind of reinsert and reimagine kind of voices within history, particularly because the project of archives has often been to silence or remove, or... or really, you know, use archives as a powerful tool in subjugation. The queer archive is... is really turning that on its head. But we also recognise that a part of creating a visibility which we think is an intrinsic role of an archive is by also focusing on... on creating an archive that is living and breathing. And so, we... we like to consider ourselves to be a contemporary community-based archive as well, which means that we engage in various forms of like community engagement, whether that's exhibitions, publishing books, doing podcasts. And... and really about creating a space of affirmation and visibility for our community, which I think is also particularly important in the African context, because the role of the archive is also to speak against the... the counter... or counter the narrative, which I think is particularly the perception from the West of Africa being this place that is dark, and we, our community, primarily suffers. And I think the... the objective of the archive is to say that in every corner of this continent, despite the laws, despite awful governments and violent governments and violent individuals, there are queer people

CONTAINER

living lives of remarkable joy and... and beauty and grace and community and resilience. And... and we feel that that's also a role of the archive.

C: Speaking of the living and breathing aspect of the archive, what... how do you go about finding the information like the... collecting documents and stories to be archived? What are the primary collection practices that GALA tends to use?

K: You know, that's a really interesting question. And there've been various ways in which we've done this in the past. I think our first and foremost, the... the first two questions that we ask ourselves is like, 'Is this happening on the continent? And... and is it queer?' And then, 'How do we go about ensuring that there's a visibility for this?' And there's various ways in which we do that. One... or we have oral history projects as a kind of mechanism and tool of engaging with communities, individuals, etc, and creating these collections. But I think... and that's just more practical, but I think, you know, kind of a broader picture, the... the role of the archive, we feel is quite important in engaging with communities, with activists, and with activist organisations that are on the ground kind of pushing for change. So, we often like to refer to GALA as a soft activist, wielding the kind of soft cultural ways of pushing boundaries, because we're not necessarily, you know, in the front picket lines, kind of, you know... or taking governments to court, for example. But our engagements with those individuals that are doing that are engagements with community centres and... and... and various institutions, whether it's religious, whether it's academic is quite important in understanding or get... getting a pulse of what's actually happening on the ground.

C: Yeah. Whenever you see historians talk about their role in preserving knowledge, particularly ones that take an activist role, there's this retrospective look back that you do. And a lot of like civil rights activists who also served as archives were actually their... their function as historians as people presenting the knowledge starts to actually form this conversation going forward of how you can actually progress and where to come from. So, while being a self activist, you still have this role to play in preserving the knowledge and... and pointing back to... and in... any way... many ways, actually, countering the narrative of queerness being in this Western import rather than something that'd always existed on the African continent.

K: Yeah, exactly that. And I think particularly in the kind of world that we now exist where it's so easy to falsify, or like, you know, deem illegitimate kind of, history and existence, that our role becomes even more important. So that like when governments say to you, 'Oh, but homosexuality is a Western influence and there are no gays in our country.' We're like, 'No, we know this because we are speaking to people and... and then being able to do that in a way that is sensitive and sensitised, so that we're at the same time, protecting the individuals that really are putting their lives at risk by... by, you know... by... by just it... by their very existence.

C: I must imagine there must be a... a definite constraint that gets played with geography when trying to uncover queer history, particularly if you're trying to uncover history of queer identity within rural communities. It's just something that you don't see covered a lot in any mainstream coverage of that queerness in South Africa, or what... in Africa in general, actually, [let's] not just focus it to South Africa.

CONTAINER

K: Yeah, absolutely. And you know, that's where we, as an archive, also have to be quite reflective and... and self-critical. So, for example, the majority of the collections in the archive are in English, and that's a problem as an African archive. One, because there's a strong oral history of like passing on stories within traditional African culture. And... and I think as a queer archive, it's like, how do we engage with that? I think it's also important for us to say that, you know, recording has to be done in... in a language that people feel comfortable with. And then that also means challenging the alphabet identity, you know, LGBTQIA+, because what does that then mean in certain rural spaces? And I think they... it's both important for us as an archive to be self-critical, but that's also what's really exciting about it because it allows us to really broaden our reach to say like... you know, a few years back, we published this book called "Meanwhile", which was a graphic novel, and it was done by the Qintu Colabs. So, it was like young people from Southern and East... East Africa. And the way in which Qintu the comic itself is archival. But it also allowed us to engage with communities to say like, there are different ways of telling one story, you know. A graphic novel or comic is really an important and engaging one, because it allows us to have this conversation over and above language, you know? And so, I think we're constantly trying to look at ways in which we have to be more sensitive to what it means to be an African archive. And language is one part of that, there's also issues around like, how do we engage with on the ground activists? One, well, it is still quite dangerous to do that, and then first and foremost, it has to be, how do we protect those who are willing to... to share their stories, you know?

C: And I just wonder, to what extent does the project...the digitalisation of, archives, especially GALAs archive, as I understand it, is a project underway to digitise parts of it, what role that actually plays in making queer history more accessible and allowing for unique ways to approach the telling of stories? For instance, hypothetically a webcomic where you can anonymise everyone's name in it, but still tell the story of particular queer people within a community.

K: Yeah. Yeah, that's also a really good question, because particularly during COVID, like what we've... what we found and I think the world in which we exist, we have to accept that technology and social media platforms have really allowed us to broaden the base of those accessing the archive. And that kind of goes across racial class lines, because, you know, the ways in which communities engage in various ways requires some access to technology, right? Having said that, we also have to accept that within this kind of digital world that we live in, accessing inequality are still intrinsic to that system, right? I'll give you an example. GALA has a youth forum, which is, students from Wits University where we are based, but also from other university and tertiary institutions based in Johannesburg. And... and the youth forum used to meet once a week at the GALA offices in our library, and it was really a space for young queer people to speak about what they wanted to. Well, I should say, young majority-black queer individuals, right, in creating those spaces are really important as one, as a space of affirmation and also as a space of safety. And so COVID happened, and we had to shut down our offices, which means that there was this space, this... you know, this physical space which didn't exist any longer and... but we still needed to create a sense of community. And... and so we decided that it was important to move the... the youth forum online as a way of still engaging with people during a time where people were then like literally forced back into the closet by having to go home.

CONTAINER

And we know that universities are such an important space for people to really question their own sexuality and engage in ways that are affirming, right? But we also realised that people, particularly students who are now pushed back into like rural spaces, certainly didn't have access to internet. And so how do we then engage with them? And we had to do it then in ways which didn't make it accessible. It's been providing data to students, like, you know, as a critical lifeline. It also meant, you know, platforms like Zoom were just not... not feasible, and so we had to like move the youth forum to like WhatsApp, which everyone has, and it's a little bit more easy to kind of engage on WhatsApp. So, I think thinking about the ways in which digitisation happens, like we have to complexify that... that question. And I still think it's important for us to do that, it's like... but we have to make those means available. And I think within our space, it also means like, one, like data is a huge issue like we... we can't not think about it. And quite importantly then even our... any of our events that we had last year, we had to ensure that there was an opportunity for people to join in ways that like, you know if you don't have your own internet or your own laptop or computer or whatever, that you're able to do that. And... and that's... but I think part of our role is like a community archive, you can't... you know, we can't always convince if like... the people that we're speaking about aren't able to attend. And so, in some ways, I'm also really glad that we we're like... we moved back to like physical, you know, activities and engagements, because I think as human beings, it's just important to start like... like psyche and like, you know, creating the spaces and this community. But I think the digitisation has allowed us to really think about ways in which we can extend that platform and also, yeah, kind of broaden our reach.

C: The kind of inequality of access to information and to internet... internet plays out a lot in discussions about any kind of access to education, especially when you've been living on this online world. And actually, I... the idea of moving things to WhatsApp is actually such a fascinating way of doing it because, in many ways, WhatsApp itself can be a kind of archive of language and conversation. I'm in too many queer WhatsApp groups than I can possibly count, and there's so much depth and breadth of stories that can... that can come from there, lots of preservation of knowledge. And in some ways that kind of speaks to, I think, Charles Morris's theory about queer archiving, how it's... queer lives past and present are then used to push back against the annihilating silence that you experienced within the mainstream media.

K: Yeah, yeah. It's literally like queers actually are doing the most for ourselves, you know, realising that like they... we don't like... we have to do this otherwise, you know, it's not going to get done.

C: Yeah, so it's... I... speaking more in... in the nitty-gritty of the digitalisation project, what are the kinds of selection criteria that you go through for deciding to prioritise what gets digitised?

K: So that's also an interesting question. And one, I suppose then it also goes to like gala strategic objectives, you know? So, we are an NPO that's like entirely dependent on like donor funding in order to exist. And so, in many senses, that means that we're also like... like many other queer rights organisations based in South Africa and on the continent, very much subjected to like, where can we get funding from, in

CONTAINER

order to like, run projects? And then, you know, our board... because we've gone through some really difficult times where it's like, 'Do we have enough to like, keep an archivist, which is essential to like the running of an archive, right, and like projects and all of that?' And the GALA board, which is, you know, made up of individuals or academics who are... activists within the kind of queer space have always been very committed to ensuring that the archives should always remain on... on the continent and in South Africa. Like that is a clear objective that... in that sense like, you know, it's... it's very easy for like, I don't know, the University of Texas just like, 'Oh, we will take this archive and like, you know, make it part of all our... you know, because it's... it's... it's such an attractive... like an amazing opportunity for like...' And... and then... and then the problem really does become of like this imperial sense of like, 'Where does his archive belong?' And for us, it's like, it's... it has to be long in the ground here. And... but then having said that, we know, and we knew that they had to be mechanisms by which we... we consider how to digitise certain parts of the archive, knowing that that's such an expensive project, like I think archive... like digitising archives, particularly public archives is like so expensive. It isn't much support from... from the state to do that, and so it was really asked about like... about us hunting and finding the right partners in which to do that. And then, you know, so with like the GALA archive project, they really were... we were able to kind of work with GALA who I think have digitised quite a few archives globally. So, that was the one thing, we knew that like, at least they had a sense of like, 'Why, that was important?' We also had to be... I had to... had to be able to direct them to say that, like, 'We will partner with you on this project, but one, we... we need to be able to make sure that even if this does... you know, some of the digitised archives do sit on some digitised platform, we still have ownership of how we engage in. We need to ensure that our public has access to it for free. And then the other element was that we wanted to know that each and every document, which was digitised, we did it in the same sensitivity and care, because it's one thing to have boxes of archived material, it's another thing to have something digitised where, you know, one, it's often then accessible to like, for example, Reichman groups and whatever, who can really, you know, use sensitive information in... in a queer archive to really make things dangerous for other individuals. And so, we went through each and every document which was archived to ensure that redactions were all in place, where we felt that that was necessary, and trying to make those judgment quotes, particularly when a lot of people are not even alive anymore. You know, how do we like make sure that like dead names aren't referred to? You know, within our context, those things are like really important to us and GALA, the... the organisation that we worked with to digitise that was... were very supportive of us doing that. And so, the way in which we then determined which collections made it into the like first round of like digitisation was one seeing which of the other, the collections, are the most access to kind of looking at data to provide us with that information. Two, it was around like, which are the ones which we feel, you know, if... if we had to engage with those, we'd be able to make the necessary reductions and still feel that there was an element of safety involved in protecting all of those who had donated or contributed to that, to those collections? And then three, it was... I mean, budget also played a role in it to say like, 'How much money did we have in how much time did we have for the first phase of that project?' And we had to get in people who really knew what they were doing. Community archives, it's also quite interesting. We also use it as an opportunity to really fine-tune the catalogue that we had. Those are some of the things that we were thinking about when we...

CONTAINER

when we embarked on that digitalisation project. The other thing is that, like, if I think about the QP archive... collection, for example, we have engaged with the trans-collective archive, because we felt like that's also a partner. So, partnerships are also quite important for us, particularly those who really have the skills to do it, but then saying like QP should really sit with, you know, the kind of trans-archive, because that's really where the kind of like symbolic home is in many senses, you know, together with the like... a global community of like, how do we identify trans-individuals and her story in that sense, is so compelling that we felt it was necessary? But I think first and foremost, it's just, I think, ways of ensuring that our archive is never... like no one is ever prohibited from accessing it. Like we have to make sure that like, even if it is that sort of... some like digital platform that... that accrues some funding for GALA, for example, which the [GAIL] one does, like we get, we get royalties for that, which ensures the like longevity of the archive, right. But at the same time, we can't restrict African scholars, you know, people who walk in and say, 'Hey, I want to look at this' like, we have to have control over that.

C: Yeah. The problems faced by infrastructure and restrictions and wanting to push back against imperialist state control of history kind of speaks to the role of journalists and writers and even amateur historians who just run blogs in preserving stories and gaining access... you know, making an appointment with GALA, getting access to the archives, even if it means flying to Johannesburg to view it. And I... I wonder if you have any thoughts on the role that digital media and physical media out... outside of the space of the archives can play either... you know, through storytelling or art in preserving the legacies of stories of... of queer identity and queer history in Africa?

K: Sure, sure. Oh, I feel like I might go a little bit of a rant here, so excuse me if I do.

C: This is... this is what this space is for. It's practically a podcast, go for it.

K: Well... and this is why I really appreciate engaging with like queer journalists. And I'll... and I'll give you like... what really frustrates me about journalism, particularly in engagements with the archive... and I really... really appreciate that like journalism in its current stage is like really difficult. Like journalists don't get paid a lot, they're under a lot of pressure. Like the... the pressure to create content and like soundbites must be terrible. And so, I understand... we fully understand the pressures that come with that industry. But what's really frustrating often in our... in our engagements is that journalists are... will approach us and say, 'I need queer content.' Like, 'This is my question. And can you give me a soundbite on this?' And our response? And then this must also be done within like two hours. We're a public archive, so one, we engage with whoever engages with us, like that's our role, that's what we... we're there for. And so, we take that very seriously, but we like... once again, my... advice then to journalists is like you cannot be reporting on gender-based violence and like violence against queer individuals in South Africa. Asking me to put you in contact with victims in two hours and expect like there has to be a sensitivity around that. Like it... that feels so extractive, and for us as a community like our whole history has been one of extraction. Like we're not going to be engaging with you on those terms. Like if you wanted to do a story on that, like my first thing is like, I'm going to like sit you

CONTAINER

down, I want you to come to the archive, I want you to read the catalogue and say, 'This is the environment in which you're operating, which is why that you... you cannot even begin to approach victims of sexual and like physical violence on the basis of their sexuality without an Australian [inaudible].

C: But actually, against the law as well. That's actually against the law as all, you can't just go and do that, that's wild.

K: You can't. And...and we will be... we will never disclose that, you know? And so, I... and then... and then often what happens is like people say to you, 'Oh, we went to images and all of those things, which we will rarely provide. But then it's also saying, 'Well, that in itself is also an archival project. So, what... we're helping you, but would you engage with us and say once this is published or like where is this going to go? Give us that information, because that also really helps us as an archive. Like this... you know, this is a relationship which we want to build. And once again... We are not to... we're not wanting to take editorial decisions; we don't feel that's the role of an archive here. But we are going to advise you on how to sensitively engage with the community... you know? And we will remind you of certain things like, you know, thinking about like the intersection between intersectionality... between like class/race. And then I often get so disappointed with like journalists when... when the relationship is really wide, in which at the end of the day just feels so extractive. Once you've got your information, you're never going to engage with this community again, because your story is out that we often feel like, 'No, actually then, we should have our own projects, which is what we did during COVID actually is we engage with certain academics and said, we're going to publish our own stories about like queer health workers in... yeah, during COVID, you know, and what that experience was... And at least then that way we have like more control over the narrative. And we can say to the communities that we're engaging with, that we have your back, like, we will never out to you, we will never disclose your names. We will, you know, like ensure that like, even if you're coming for this interview, for example, that like you have money to get back home and that like you have a meal. Like, you know, all of those things that we can then control. And so, it... it really... like, I think our experience... like we... we become, one, very wary of like engaging with... particularly like very commercial media platforms. And then often we... we feel like it's so much better engaging with queer journalists because they get it, right, hopefully, not always. But I'm saying like they get it being like, we... I want it... I need to have this conversation with you and the conversation, which might like... it might not even be... it's the kind of groundwork that like, you know, you're expected to do. So, I mean, part of it is also like, 'Just like, be better, man. Like, you know, help us out here.' And I suppose that's my rant.

C: It's... no, it's... it's something I think about a lot. My queer friend and I, we are both in the writer/journalism industry, constantly complain about when... obviously, there is not a single queer person in the newsroom, or the editorial team is just reporting on a story after it's happened because it's going to give them clicks. Like the most recent one was with Helen Zille, basically tweeting vague transphobia, and then just a bunch of those really commercial clickbaitees, South African news sites just going, 'And tweets responded to Hannah Zille with outrage' and all the people in it were just CIS and heterosexual, and it's just... there's no kind of awareness of the queerness in... in South Africa, and that there's no representation for it. And that kind

CONTAINER

of is the creative technology environment in South Africa. They are these small pockets of queer journalists and queer creators, but for the most part, it is the exploitation of a very particular type of queer identity, and it is usually white CIS gay male, rather than the flag and misrepresentations of transness and lesbian woman and so forth and so on.

K: Yeah, and like... just like even using this example of the Helen Zille story, I'm like, 'None of like... who cares, what Helen Zille's saying? Like the fact that we're even giving this person, like far more airtime than they deserve. And when like... like that's the story that you're focusing on, which is basically just a series of tweets. When we're saying to you that like last year in 2022, there were 26 hate crimes or murders of queer people, and that's not like the story?' Like how can we go back to our community and say, 'Oh? because I can just show you that like activists are not concerned about what Helen Zille is saying. Like no one cares, you know, in the broader picture.' But once again, it's like, 'Well, who's... who... who thinks the story is important, right?'

C: I think GALA has an archive also functions really well as this entity to show what the story is to curate what should be the things people care about more. It's... it's the lived experiences of people, rather than what some white lady said, who is past her best, on Twitter.

K: Yeah. And you know, in that sense, it's actually then quite interesting. I never like really thought about this, but often that's why it's so difficult for us to get our news... like our stories into mainstream media. Like even like... you know, sometimes we think like... I mean, this publication that we did [inaudible] which is like Mozambican queer history and like engaging with...

C: That's amazing.

K: Like, you know, news outlets saying like, 'Hey, and this is the book you should be reporting on. And there's very little like interest in that. I mean, we still now feel like we have our own, like ways of like engaging publicly. And so... and it doesn't become like a huge issue for us, like... but... but often those opportunities are not really taken up, you know, by like mainstream media. And I think that's partly like... that's, you know, the point that you're alluding to, is that like for us, we do feel like we have... we have things to say, and appreciate, or... or like understand what we feel are like important things to be topics of conversation, you know. We're just... we can feel like we're on our own when we... when we have those, you know?'

C: Yeah. And I wonder to what extent that's actually the remaining side effect of the social taboo around queerness. At... that is still very persistent, even in South Africa, which lords itself as a bastion for queer rights. Yeah, sure, we have it in the constitution, but what, 27 years ago we had the Immorality Act and we... queer people had to fight to get in front of... into the constitutional drafting process. And then actually it circles back to what you were talking about earlier about violent governments elsewhere in Africa. You meet... you... you have Uganda where you're not... gay is literally... being queer is literally a... a death sentence, and I wonder if that partially is also the reason why there's limitations for GALA to get the work. And

CONTAINER

a lot of these journalists, newsrooms might feel like, 'Oh, if we report on those, we're going to anger our reader base who might not like to hear about these things very much.'

K: Yeah, yeah. I mean, exactly. It's like, we don't want to be reporting it like hate crimes, particularly like... or queer hate crimes. Secondly, also it's like when women are central to stories, that's also a problem. Like I think our stories are so... like nobody wants... really takes much effort in... kind of a giving feminist voices, like, you know, airtime. And then, I think you're right. Like, for example, when we thought about like Ghana and all of the developments around like, you know, the legislation that the government is using, and like people are being in prison, how was that not being reported in... in South Africa? But it really wasn't. And someone's making that editorial choice, right?

C: Absolutely. Someone is definitely making that editorial choice.

K: You know, even when we did the Justice for Queer SA campaign last year with other organisations like I... I remember how... how... how they'd [waded] all of us within those spaces. You know, like people would just... broken by the end of it. And... and like, you know, attending the vigil, but trying to support families and their victims and having to report and then... and then still holding government accountable, it was all overwhelming, exhausting, it felt so real and like really just fucking depressing, you know, at the end of the day. Because it's like, we're doing all of this work, and yet it comes out to not when like people are still being... you know, our people are still being like killed. And then also being like, well... but also the majority of South Africans don't even know about this or don't care, you know? And I mean, that's just... just such a huge burden on assets, like queer individuals within the space to like have to continuously take on, it's a lot.

C: Actually, and focusing directly on that, what... what do you do as an... an... an archival team to unwind and to sort of shed the emotional load of the archiving project is... are there do... do... as a team, do you engage in some kind of group catharsis at the end of a week?

K: Yeah, we really do, we really do. One, we learnt... or at least since my tenure, like we learned very early on that like people within our team definitely require psychosocial support, particularly those who are on the face front of engaging with our communities is a lot to take on. And then COVID happened, and we were also like, you're all dealing with your own personal stuff, but then there was all this violence, and then we were like, time to do relief work. Which I mean, like... you know, it's not the relevant archive to do relief work, but we also felt that we couldn't turn our back on our community that like... our community, that like literally lost jobs, had nowhere to go, you know, all of these things. And so, we were like, 'We're going to have to help out.' And then realising one, which I think a lot of people within the kind of civil society sector go through is like finding mechanisms and... and being able to support people, but also knowing that there has to be times where we switch off and don't take on this like full responsibility. And then I think once again, you know, going back to this issue of like... the archive is not... it is about creating our own space for our own community, and expressing queer joy. So, like [inaudible] the... the publication that came out and

CONTAINER

like the launch that we held for that, was such an important reminder to us, particularly after like we hadn't had any public events in such a long time. And it... it reminded us that like, you know, we also have to be able to express queer joy in ways that like hold us. And... and so like, you know, even during the Justice for Queer SA Campaign, it was really about like meeting, like engaging, you know, like holding each other in that space. And... I will say, I... I... well, at least I want to say that, like, I think that also explains partly which I think is a huge issue. In... in the upcoming newsletter, we actually speak a lot about this. But I think our community struggles with like substance abuse, addiction, you know, mental health issues. Because it's actually... it is a lot to be in. So, we really do have to where we can respond to each other with like kindness and thoughtfulness. And I mean, I know that all sounds wishy-washy, but honestly, like if I think about the GALA team, like on the one hand, like when we say House of GALA, we really mean that because we know that we all... like this work means so much to us. It like means a lot to us when, you know, every day, like coming into the office and showing up. And so being able to show up for each other as well is... is like, that's quite important.

C: Definitely. There's definitely such a valuable role in community support, and yes, there's a role to be played with sort of activism and, you know, lobbying against the government. But there's also a really important role for grassroots, just engaging with the community. It's self-care, gently looking after one another, because our... our lived existence is painful, and it gets played out in these creative forms. Like it gets played out in the news, and sometimes, just rarely randomness violent ways, especially if you're paying attention to what's happening overseas in the UK and in the US. And... and I think actually, in some way, the deafening silence in Africa about these issues apart from a couple of, you know, entities is incredibly traumatic. It's this sort of reminder that we don't actually exist to most people. And realistically if we kept quiet, who would actually care if we just disappeared, you know?

K: Yeah.

C: Which is a depressing thought, I know.

K: Super depressing. But also, we're not going anywhere, so like...

C: Exactly.

K: That's a newer... do you know what I'm saying? Like I keep... yeah, like just reminding ourselves of that. And then I will say, one, what... what often really gives us hope is like engaging with young people. And I don't mean this in like a way that's like... it's... it's just, I suppose maybe... also because I'd have... feel like an elder almost, but like seeing the GALA Youth Forum or like, you know... the... the other day we went to St Mary's School, and like we were engaging with young matric learners. And like they're... one, they're like brimming with... with confidence, and like they know so much more than like I did when I was that age. And, you know, asking questions... I was like, 'Wow.' Like one of the learners at St Mary's was like asking what the relevance of the pink triangle was. And then we got into this whole conversation around that, and I was like, 'The... this is happening in high schools.' Like that in itself gives me just hope, and like, you know... and not to say that that

CONTAINER

means that everything is like resolved, but I think that younger people really, really do get it. And then, you know, people even asking, like, 'What does it mean to be an ally, like how do I engage with bullying online?' And... and part of our response was also like, 'One, when it comes to online bullying, the first thing you need to know as... as a young person is that it's fair for you to protect yourself. Like you don't have to take abuse, you know, just because it's happening online. So, protect yourself, speak out when you can. But, you know, like also just disengage. It's fine to do that, it's like... you know, it's good for your own like safety and that's what we sometimes also have to do in like, you know, stuff. We just have to disengage because it's... it's also about protecting ourselves.'

C: I actually want to circle back to the ideas of collecting information, because something popped into my head about two minutes ago of the idea of the archiving living and breathing and constantly growing. How... how do you go about preserving history as it's made right now? Is that sort of just looking at what's going on around or do you facilitate engagement and the gathering of our history and so forth with members of the community, of the queer community?

K: We constantly do that. So, we're constantly doing interviews and like having those transcribed as a way of like really preserving it. And... and once again, like... so for us participating in the Justice for Queer SA campaign, was about, one, creating a visibility in this like broader movement. But there were also conversations that were happening at the same time as this was going on. And one of the projects that we then did last year was called Relief on the Edge. And that project, which was run by the program's coordinator, Genevieve Lo was saying, 'We know that different organisations are supporting relief work during COVID. However, the experiences of activists on the ground meant that often the ways in which, you know, support was coming from like donor organisations and stuff, there was a bit of a... like a disjoint. Like, you know, the... the expectations of what that is are... and so, for example, like, you know, how do we... when there's lockdowns and stuff, like how do we provide relief packages to people? The easiest and most practical way is like an eWallet. But being able to do that means that we have to really reframe our understandings of like relief, because often it's like, 'Oh, we can't give indigent or poor people money directly because we don't know what they... what they're going to do with it. You know, which is such a patronising, but it really is the way in which like... donor organisations working in relief work. I think it's like, 'No, if you're not giving a bag of like a mini-meal and bread and peanut butter, then we can't really' and you were like, one, it's not safe, two, like give people urgency. Like I can't tell somebody whether they should like buy lipstick, if that's what they need in COVID, then like that's what they need, and that's what we're going to do, we're not going to question... question that. And because the other thing is that like we found during that time that like grassroots organisation, it's like people who are remarkably resilient, like the communities that were created over the time, like there was a Trans Hope organisation, which kind of created the shelter for people who were kicked out of their homes. And like, that's the kind of story that we want to know... is recorded from like COVID, because it says so much about, you know, queer communities really showing up for each other. It says interesting engagements with like our donor organisations and what activists were doing on the ground. And... and... and... and that for us is really about the living, breathing element of... of an archive. And... and that doesn't also necessarily mean not engaging with

CONTAINER

like historical archives. So, like the... the Queer Hillbrow Tour which we run once a month, which if you're ever in Johannesburg, you must join it.

C: I will.

K: There's a walking tour that we do with communities, and it's in partnership with GALA in J, which is based at [inaudible]. And that for us is also about a living, breathing archive because we are literally walking through the streets of Hillbrow, speaking to what Hillbrow currently is. And then this queer history and how, you know, those two kind of... are combined, and then give... giving people a... a better sense of what that history is. And I think for us as an archive, particularly when younger people say to us like, 'Oh, I didn't know that. Like, I didn't know that there's Simon Nkoli and Bev Ditsie who started the first Pride march in 1990 in October, that walked down [inaudible] Street in Hillbrow. Like that for us is... that's... that... then we've done our job, you know? And... and so I think, being able to... to really do that in both ways like contemporary and historical, but everything has to happen in the now is important for us.

C: Thank you so much for the work you do. I could keep fan girling here, but it's just is what it is.

K: Thank you. I mean, we love the work that we do, so it's good to know that it's appreciated.

C: You've been listening to a podcast from Container Magazine, an online magazine, exploring the humans, processes and motivations behind creative technology, you can find out more at containermagazine.co.uk. For more information about GALA and the work they do in South Africa, you can visit GALA.co.za. Your host, Cassandra Roxburgh can be found on Twitter at the handle [@cassroxburgh](https://twitter.com/cassroxburgh).

END OF INTERVIEW