

GAY PEOPLE ARE LIVING THERE

Reaching out beyond the cities: An evaluation of the *Out In Africa* satellite gay and lesbian film festival in Mafikeng, 2008



Case Study

By Marion Nel and Janet Shapiro (for The Atlantic Philanthropies) June 2009

Barbecue at the Kismet Hotel,
Pietermaritzburg, venue of the third gay and
lesbian satellite film festival, May 2004



Key

AP	The Atlantic Philanthropies
HIVOS	Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MAGI	Multi-Agency Grants Initiative
OIA	<i>Out In Africa</i>
Q&A	Question and Answer

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*Hennie Baird and Mildred Maropela,
co-ordinators of the Mafeking festival,
March 2008*

In summary

Out In Africa (OIA), a grantee of The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and a partner in its gay and lesbian programme, has organised an Annual Gay and Lesbian Festival in various South African cities since 1990. Since 2004, OIA has taken a selection of queer films to 18 small towns in rural South Africa.

These “satellite festivals” not only provide education and entertainment to isolated gay and lesbian (largely black and poor) communities in the country’s hinterland - often for the first time - they also serve a political purpose.

They bring gays and lesbians together in solidarity and help to strengthen embryonic organisations. They also provide platforms for gay visibility in often hostile environments.

This publication tells the story of one of such festival – Mafikeng in March 2008.

In the battle against homophobia in South Africa some of the ugliest moments of the war are likely to be reflected in violence and hate crimes against gay people in the townships of the major cities. But it is in the small towns outside the urban centres that the battle for equality will be won or lost. It is in these towns that tolerance and acceptance of the diversity which is at the core of the Equality Clause in the Bill of Rights will be tested.

It is easy to forget about such places. They are difficult to get to and gay and lesbian people living there are isolated and cut off from others. Visibility brings the danger of abuse or attack. There is safety in the numbers of the critical mass in cities. In the smaller and far-flung towns that dot the South African landscape, gays and lesbians have, until now, had little opportunity to explore their own lives as part of the spectrum of the country’s diversity. Things, it seems, however, are changing.



Ermelo satellite festival, October 2007

I. The film festival comes to Mafikeng

Mafikeng is a small, hot, dusty town in North West Province of South Africa, with a population of about 50 000, including those in the surrounding villages. It is remembered in the colonial history books for a siege during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) when Boer guerrillas kept British troops surrounded and trapped in the town for several months. Those who once donned their khaki uniforms for their weekly Scout meetings will recall Mafikeng as the birthplace of Sir Robert Baden-Powell's Scout movement. It was also the capital of the discredited "independent homeland" of Bophuthatswana and the scene of an abortive military coup by white right-wingers seeking to stall the country's transition to democracy in 1994.

It is a town with roots in the days of the British Empire, surrounded by Boer strongholds such as Delareyville, Vryburg and Potchefstroom. There are hundreds of places like it in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, North West Province and Limpopo, the hinterland of South Africa. The black communities in these towns have proud histories of fighting apartheid. In March 2008, a new kind of liberation reached Mafikeng. The *Out In Africa* (OIA) satellite gay and lesbian film festival came to North West Province for the first time and a surprising number of people will never be the same again.



Barbecue at the Kimberly satellite festival, March, 2008

II. Some background to the *Out In Africa* satellite film festivals

When AP began funding the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) sector in South Africa in 2002, all the visible organisations were located in the three urban complexes of Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town. But the strategic assessments of AP and other foundations pointed to unmet needs as well as an untapped richness in lesbian and gay society and culture in rural South Africa. AP made a stated commitment to reach out to these areas and has done so in a number of ways through direct funding, by providing mentorship to activists, by assisting emerging organisations to build leadership and capacity and by helping them to access seed grants.

However, one of the most innovative and successful ways of helping to build gay and lesbian organisation has been through supporting *Out In Africa* (OIA) to present its annual film festival in small towns. Thus far there have been 18 such satellite festivals. They are an annual feature of the OIA calendar and OIA tries to organise an average of four a year.

The satellites work on the principle that the films shown affirm gay identity and culture. They help to demolish stereotypes and stigma, empower LGBTIs and help them develop a sense of pride and self-esteem, all pre-cursors to mobilisation and organisation. This is especially important in that part of the community which is black – and which is told by many of its leaders that homosexuality is “unAfrican”.

The impact of positive images, of affirmation through the experience of watching the films, is nowhere more evident than at the satellite festivals in towns such as Mafikeng, Kimberley (Northern Cape) and Ermelo (Mpumalanga).

When OIA carried out a study of its audience it found that the festival was more important to those from these rural areas than cinema-goers in the urban centres, who were regularly exposed to gay media and culture.

The satellite festivals do more than present LGBTIs with positive images of themselves – they create a sense that people are not alone, that they are part of a larger, global community and that there is support available to them.

It is for this reason that OIA organises the festivals in collaboration with



Festival goers arrive from out-lying towns at the Ermelo satellite festival, October 2007

often embryonic LGBTI organisations in these areas. The festivals help to profile these organisations, provide them with an organisational focus and an opportunity to recruit new members and volunteers within a unique blend of jol (party) and consequence (substance).

In the pamphlet distributed to potential audiences in Mafikeng, OIA wrote: “The purpose of this festival is not only to screen queer films, but to bring people together, to create a sense of community.”

The audiences that come to the satellite festivals are not the same as the one that can afford the prices charged at the mainstream cinema chains in those big cities. They generally do not fall into the category of gay cinema-goers - who earn more than R 7 000 a month, are professionals, have a tertiary education, own a house and a car, and travel internationally on holiday frequently, that make up the patrons of the main festivals in the cities.¹

They are more likely to be black and poor. To prepare, package and deliver the festival to them so that the maximum number of people can attend requires funding, hard work and some superb logistical organisation. The costs of transport and accommodation for guest directors, producers and actors, screening fees, postal fees, and printing of posters and programmes all have to be covered, if a festival is to take place. On average some R120 000 goes into the planning and presentation of a satellite festival. Extra cash also needs to be made available for a “Plan B” should things go wrong or so that good ideas that come up along the way can be acted upon. Currently there is no entry fee for the satellite festivals although OIA is piloting charging a nominal amount of R5 to see what effect it has on audiences.

Measuring the cost-effectiveness of the festivals is difficult. It is not simply a matter of calculating the cost per person who attends, but also of factoring in the impact of the organising skills that are passed on, how local organisations are strengthened and the change in mindsets that results. Our evaluation of the Mafikeng festival suggests that it is all worthwhile.

¹ Results from a marketing survey done at the 2007 OIA Main Festival showed that high percentages of those who attended the main festival fell in this category.



*After party, Ermelo satellite festival,
October 2007*

When organising a festival in a small town for the first time, OIA first has to find gay and lesbian individuals or organisations that will give it an “in” to the local community. There are different ways of doing this and OIA has tried them all. So, for example, in one town, organisers contacted the “main queen” who drove them around the area to invite people to screenings; in others they worked through local gay hairdressers: “Queer hairdressers know every moffie² in town.” In other towns OIA has worked closely with newly emerging gay and lesbian organisations.

OIA hopes that local groups will take over the production of the satellite festivals themselves over a period of three to five years, once they have acquired the experience to do so. The “broad idea”, according to Nodi Murphy, founder and director of OIA, is to identify nascent organisations that “need assistance to gain basic skills in organising, need events like the festival to start building networks and then to help them develop organisational capacity through support and mentorship”. Once a local organisation is ready to run its own festival OIA will still provide films and print the programmes, but the rest – finding a venue, making contacts, distributing the programme and organising transport and accommodation - becomes the responsibility of the local organisation, which will also need to raise its own funds.

OIA hopes this kind of approach will free up funding for new satellite ventures in other provinces and even in places such as Soweto where, until recently, gay and lesbian people have been afraid of the consequences of the visibility the festival would bring and have preferred to go to city cinemas.

Pietermaritzburg is already organising its own satellite festival and Kimberley is planning to do so in 2009. In both these places, small, local organisations have taken on the main responsibility of organising the satellites.

² “Moffie” is South African slang for a camp gay man.

III. The satellite festivals – reaching out

When *Out In Africa* (OIA) began organising satellite festivals, attendance was often poor. Gays and lesbians were often afraid to be seen by their fellow citizens at town cinemas when the festivals were screened there, fearing hostility and ostracism. “We had,” one of the organisers told us, “to first build pride and then, hopefully, activism.” OIA began using less conspicuous, more accessible community halls instead of cinemas to screen films and hosted community barbecues (braais) using local caterers in each place to create a sense of community among people often meeting for the first time and building on people’s desire to “have a party”. An organiser tried to express to us “the joy and excitement of bringing people together, a huge group of lesbians and gays who are suddenly not alone – it is empowering in itself”. There is nothing blasé and everyday about this. In a small town the festival is significant. It is not just a social event, to be ticked off in the gay social calendar, which some say the festival has become in the big cities. It is where people who know each other well meet and are happy to see and be seen. At the satellite festivals, being openly queer and visible is still a new experience, requiring courage. For many it is a first openly gay event, a first encounter for the two to three hundred fellow gays and lesbians that attend with other gay people. For OIA, it is important that the event, and what it means to the audiences in the smaller towns, is respected and conveys the regard OIA has for these audiences. This involves ensuring that the venue is not just a community hall, but is dressed up as a “proper” cinema, that the showings are linked to social activity, with community braais, and with interaction between guests, audiences and “stars”.

In organising a festival in any new town, OIA begins by reconnoitring the area and developing contacts in the local LGBTI community. Once the initial reconnaissance is complete, OIA employs a small number of local activists to work with it. A network of volunteers is then established and each is expected to “go out and find 15 others” to bring to the festival. Volunteers make contacts with gays and lesbians in surrounding towns through organisations such as Rape Crisis and the Treatment Action Campaign. Transport to the festival is usually contracted from local taxi drivers: the team in Mafikeng noted, in

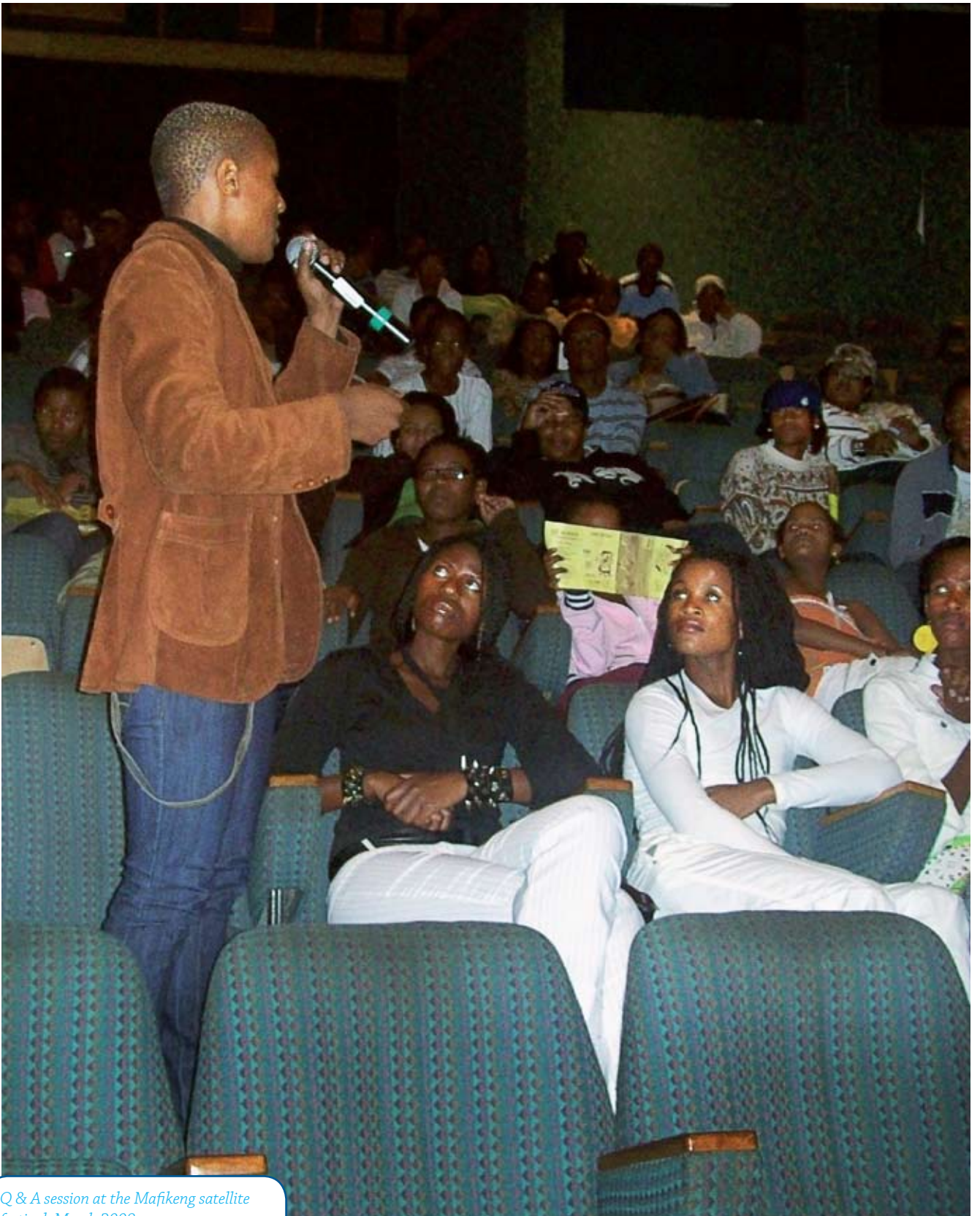


passing, that the taxi drivers were helpful and positive and seemed unaffected by the open show of gayness.

There are always problems at the festivals: Alcohol is expected, but this can be a problem made worse if there is a bar nearby. The lesson is to keep alcohol for the parties and out of the theatres (Pietermaritzburg, for example, has an after-party after the screenings, with a disco). Then there is the interaction in the audience (and this happens in both the big cities and the satellites): "There's the queen who sits in the front row and goes to the toilet 15 times just so as to sashay along the way; there are the people who hiss at the bad guy and cheer on the good guys; and the prissy whites in the audiences who disapprove³ – it's certainly interesting. We try to teach people a bit of cinema etiquette – no cellphones and if people are drunk they can't come in."

Despite the fact that money is often dealt with in cash (for taxi fares, for example), OIA has had few problems in this regard. On one of the few occasions when it did - a group leader absconded with the R900 for taxi fares - the offender was found and made to pay it back.

³ Although OIA tries to include whites, very few come to the satellite festivals. In the big cities, white people and straight people too come to the festivals.



Q & A session at the Mafikeng satellite festival, March 2008

IV. The Mafikeng experience

The Mafikeng satellite ventured further than others in terms of outreach to neighbouring areas. Initially, the local gay and lesbian organisation, the recently founded Gay Umbrella, with a gay man and a lesbian as co-ordinators, organised a meeting in Mafikeng attended by 70 people. Representatives were appointed to go out and publicise the festival in outlying communities. The team went to Rustenburg, Vryberg, Coligny, Klerksdorp and many more towns within a radius of 200 kilometres of Mafikeng. *Out In Africa* (OIA) hired a car for staff to drive around the province and provided a petrol budget of R22 000. Not all of the staff who worked for OIA in Mafikeng were gay. Tshenolo had had experience with the North West Film Festival but no real contact with the LGBTI community before. Now, she says, she has “read up and I go out of my way to ensure that this community is accepted and try to learn more about the issues”.

The other core member of the Mafikeng team is lesbian. Her take is a bit different: “People are very lonely – they don’t know there are others and they try to get away from it all by drinking. We want to get them to think about fighting for rights and not being discriminated against. Now we are working with the University of South Africa (UNISA) and OUT⁴ to carry out research to find out about the lives of gay and lesbian people in small villages and the issues affecting them.”

⁴ UNISA is the University of South Africa and OUT LGBT Well-being is an established organisation in the gay and lesbian sector, both are based in Pretoria/Tshwane.



(From www.bookinafrica.com)

Describing the gay community of North West Province

“There is a huge range – some people are openly gay, they dress up in dresses and disrupt meetings; some are very drag; some are totally straight looking. It’s harder for Muslims – they don’t really admit it. If you look further afield, you find teachers and gay icons.”

“The discrimination starts from home. At school, the curriculum is encouraging but men still have to behave like men. But some Potchefstroom gay students wear dresses.”

The period before a satellite festival is crucial to its success. Local activists are employed for six weeks to two months and spend the time beforehand making connections, contracting taxis and setting up transport schedules. They learn administration skills such as management of finances, keeping of records and writing of reports. In addition to the one or two main employees, additional production staff are recruited specifically for the weekend of the festival. In Mafikeng, in addition to Tshenolo, Mildred (local Gay Umbrella founder and co-ordinator), helped and Hennie found office space and equipment, including a landline, computer and printer. Hennie, who is employed by the Mmabana Foundation which is funded by the North West Department of Arts, Culture and Sport, is well-connected in the province and was able to secure the Mmabana Mafikeng Theatre as a venue for screenings.

Hennie was also politically savvy. When the local authorities vacillated about renting out the hall for a gay and lesbian event, he threatened to report “them” to the Commission for Gender Equality. Mildred recruited Khotso and Frank to help, while Andile, who knew the area well, joined as a volunteer.

Tshenolo and Mildred kept a daily diary-cum-report of the month before the festival that provides an in-depth account of what is involved in the organisation of a satellite festival, from logistics to high drama.⁵ The daily routine (if a process requiring extreme flexibility and responsiveness can be called that) consisted of making appointments to meet with gays and lesbians in outlying towns, following up when people failed to arrive for the appointments, organising festival after-parties, distributing programmes, organising transport and accommodation for the festival weekend, delivering press releases, and obtaining donations in-kind such as paint for the banners. Each meeting led to others – a snowball effect – with the team constantly building up its database of the local gay community in the area and how to contact them (usually by cellphone):

“We spoke to people and they told us about other people. Sometimes we contacted people as far as 300 kilometres away.”

The team feel that direct contact was crucial in putting a face to the festival and persuading people to come to the screenings. “People came mainly

⁵ We rely heavily on this fascinating record in the following section.



Deaf festival enthusiasts at the Mafikeng satellite festival, March 2008

“We’ve talked about our own homophobia – when we walk in the street with our boyfriends, we won’t hold hands.”

“And the traditional authorities are very conservative. People say: ‘If I go to Johannesburg I can be gay but in Mafikeng I have to be straight.’ In Johannesburg, there are places to go; here, if I want to have a drink I have to go to a straight place. That’s why the film festival is so important – it is where you can be yourself. It is one of the few places where gay people can be together, and also, through the movies, can see themselves and discuss issues.”

because we went to them – if you do it telephonically, people don’t come. We sat down with them and explained why OIA had a festival in the first place and why it was important for them to participate.”

The appointments and meetings could be with one person or more than 20 at a time. They often involved social interaction because local gay and lesbian people had gone to the trouble of organising a meal. From reading the weekly reports, our estimate is that the team met directly with more than 200 people in the weeks before the festival in Mafikeng, Lichtenburg, Jouberton, Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom, Hartbeesfontein, Wolmaranstad, Ottosdal, Delareyville, Vryburg, Taung, Zeerust and Rustenburg. Team members only stopped networking when the OIA team arrived from Cape Town and pointed out that they had exceeded their transport budget.

The local team also met students from North West University, Mmabatho Nursing College, and a local technical college. Often meetings took place in shopping complexes and even at municipal offices (which are usually central); sometimes they happened by chance on the street or, mostly by arrangement, in people’s homes. Meetings had to take place during lunch times or after school and work. Frequently, contacted people did not arrive, but the team always seems to have made use of the time, with an uncanny ability to identify those who might be interested (“We spotted Thato and Joseph who were both gay and approached and informed them about the festival”) and considerable tenacity in pursuing those who “got away”. “Some of these divas were very difficult to track down but persistence won in the end.”

Some local gay and lesbian groups seemed quite organised and came together for the meetings, but, in other instances, were scattered over an area and the team would have to travel from place to place to meet with just a few people.

While some gays and lesbians reported high levels of homophobia in their hometowns, others seemed relaxed and comfortable. The team had only one bad experience and it clearly shook them.



Moment of affection/reflection at the Mafikeng satellite festival, March 2008

Dealing with hostility

“We met with two students whom Mpho had organised for us to go and meet outside his secondary school. A few students started filing out of their classes because the last bell for the day had just rung. As we waited for our contacts to arrive, a group of students came towards us. Seeing that some of us were gay, they started hurling verbal insults at us about being gay and promoting homosexuality. Apparently, somehow they knew we were there to promote the gay and lesbian film festival and, we realised later, the situation was aggravated because some members of our group were unmistakably gay. The situation quickly got out of control and we jumped into the car and drove off, Andile nearly getting injured in the process. The situation was quite intense and shocking and, in getting away from the students, we received a traffic fine because we skipped a stop sign. We never met up with the students we were supposed to meet but we gave Mpho the responsibility of informing them about the the film festival and distributing the programmes.

“We as the whole team were quite shocked and a bit shaken up by the hostility we received. We hadn’t gotten that sort of reception before and some of



*Barbecue, Kimberley satellite festival,
February 2008*

us weren't really certain we wanted to continue with promoting the film festival in fear of a similar situation arising in other small towns we had yet to visit. That was a difficult situation for us because, firstly, experiencing homophobic behaviour from such young students was shocking and, secondly, getting the traffic fine was like being hit on the head twice.

“This was the most challenging part of promoting the film festival. We realised that there are towns that are still very homophobic and not willing to be open-minded about homosexuality.”

In fact, the team found out that there had been an announcement in the school that the meeting was taking place and it was this that led to the incident. In looking at how situations like this could be addressed, the team, together with Gay Umbrella, agreed that Gay Umbrella needed to persuade the local municipality to host educational workshops and awareness campaigns about sexual orientation. Gay Umbrella also recognised the need to work with local organisations to design awareness campaigns around hate crimes and discrimination “to eradicate such ill behaviour”. The incident was clearly a reality check for those involved, but it did not prevent them from continuing with their work of promoting the festival.



Information table at the Kimberley satellite festival, February 2008

Out from the cold

“We were warmly welcomed by three ladies who couldn’t hold back their excitement to finally meet us in person.”

“Our team was warmly welcomed by fourteen young lesbians who had been waiting eagerly to meet with us.”

“They escorted us to the road that leads to Delareyville and bought us lunch.”

“The reception (in Potchefstroom) was very warm, enthusiastic and many of the people showed interest in forming a committee for Potchefstroom to liaise with the committee in Mafikeng and around the North West.”

Each meeting involved explaining the objective of the festival and providing detailed information about it. The festival was “sold” as celebration, exploration, education, entertainment and fun. Frequently, the people whom the team met already knew about the festival, because the message was spreading rapidly by word of mouth in the gay community. One of the issues the team had to confront was balancing an interest in the social aspects of the festival – partying and clubbing – and OIA’s more serious intent to educate, raise awareness and strengthen Gay Umbrella as an organisation.

Some 2 000 copies of the programme were printed and distributed by Tshenolo, Maureen and the team in the weeks before the festival. It was a neat pocket-sized fold-up which, in addition to details about the screenings, also provided information about LGBTI organisations, with contact numbers (Gay Umbrella and other organisations in the bigger cities). Banners announcing the festival painted by volunteers were displayed around town. Advertisements were aired on community radio. A particular moment of exhilaration for the team was when an ad for the festival appeared in the local newspaper: “Happiness was the mood of the moment when we all saw the festival advert in the *Mail*!”

V. The weekend approaches

The weekend of the festival - 14 to 16 March - was marked by chaos and crisis, but somehow, largely because of all the preparation that had gone into making the festival a success, it proved to be a wonderfully memorable occasion.

The local team gives credit to the OIA team from head office – Sharon, Trish and Maureen – that arrived a few days beforehand and had the benefit of considerable experience in organising such events. Their efficiency and ability to work together “seamlessly”, made a big contribution to the overall success. A technical team also came for the weekend to set up and take down the equipment. Because rolling electricity blackouts were a feature of the South African landscape at that time, a generator was placed on standby but, fortunately, did not have to be used.

The arrival of the head office team provided an opportunity for review: “one of the most intense meetings this office has ever had”. It was here that the over-expenditure on transport was identified and the consequences explored. It became clear that gays and lesbians from some areas would not be able to come, after all. They had to be informed. In some cases there was anger, in others a refusal to be excluded.

Other crises occurred when contracted taxi drivers failed to materialise and alternative arrangements had to be made. There was a shortage of accommodation: finally, the manager of a local crèche offered to put people up. Some managed to find accommodation for themselves with friends in Mafikeng. The team welcomed these solutions with relief but not all the participants were pleased and there was some grumbling.

And, of course, it rained on the evening of the braai, which meant that the local caterer had to prepare regular food for 350 people. While this clearly didn't work out as well as was hoped (“the level of service and the food were of poor standard”), the report concludes that “the crowd mingled and overlooked the food incident”. Thirty or forty people gathered around tables taking photos of one another and of themselves with the “star” festival guests on their cellphones. Despite isolated complaints, everyone was eagerly anticipating the next festival.



Andy Spitz (camera) and Fanny Tsimong (director) on the set of Silenced, Soweto, 2005

Photographer: Helen MacDonald

VI. The shows

The films were screened at the Mmabana Arts Centre to full audiences. For the team, “that was the best part – that it was full – we were so delighted that so many came”. The films were a mixture of local and international productions. Some of the short films produced as part of *Out In Africa* (OIA)’s workshop programme were screened and received a very positive response.

Workshop productions

OIA is committed to ensuring that the programmes at the festivals includes local content that reflects the lived experiences of the audiences. To do so, it has facilitated a series of regular script-development and film-making workshops since 2004 (four in all) and these have produced 22 short films. The concept of the workshops was a response to the dearth of local material and a desire to screen films that authenticated the lives of black South African LGBTIs, especially black lesbians, who who were seen as a marginalised group within a marginalised community.⁶

Some of the “graduates” of the workshops have gone on to study film and into careers in the movie industry. These workshops are funded by local and international donors and are led by professionals, many from abroad, who provide training in scriptwriting, direction and editing as well as personal development (confidence, discipline and responsibility). According to Nodi Murphy, when recruiting participants for the workshops, OIA tries to “be as all inclusive as possible, so we don’t mind if the filmmakers are straight or queer, provided the material is queer and filmmakers have some relationship with queer people – we don’t want a vicarious feel to the films”. OIA staff interview potential participants on the basis of a brief proposal and interrogate the ideas put forward and then assess whether they think the would-be filmmakers can realise their ideas.

Participants work with professional crews who are selected for their openness and their ability to mentor without taking over the process. The

⁶ One of the films made, *Half a Lifetime*, in fact, deals with the experience of two young white gay male conscripts in the South African Defence Force in the 1960s, another marginalised group.



Phybia Dlamini directing her film *Outlaw Culture*, Yeoville, 2005

Photographer: Helen MacDonald

students have to make the decisions and take charge. Murphy recounts that, in the first workshop, for example, where people had never worked on film before, “every person came out incredibly proud, recognising that the film they had made was theirs and reflected their concerns”. One of the filmmakers, Phybia Dlamini, says that the experience gave her enormous confidence. She has since received a number of commissions from the South African Broadcasting Commission and has directed a number of short documentaries in other African countries. Dlamini’s workshop film *Outlaw Culture* raises important issues about the way in which the media contributes to homophobia or “heterosexism” and challenges the notion that homosexuality is “unAfrican”.

Fanney Tsimong has made one short film about trying to come out to his father and another, *Silenced*, about male rape. The main character in this film makes the heart-rending statement: “I felt like I was living on the planet alone.” Although not all the people who attend the satellite festivals have been raped, this sentiment speaks to the loneliness that many gay people feel in isolated towns and villages. Tsimong went on to make several other documentaries, including *Black Beulahs*, which explores what it is like to “be successful, black, gay and out in conservative Soweto”. Zanele Muholi, another workshop graduate, made the powerful documentary *Enraged by a Picture* on black lesbian identity. She is now studying photography in Canada and continues to make short films.

Sharon Jackson of OIA believes that one can do and say a lot in 30 seconds to a minute of film. At the first workshop, titled *Just a Minute* a series of very short productions were made. People with little or no experience of film-making learned a great deal – about discipline, script-writing, budgeting, directing, organising crews and editing. One of the workshop donors says that the OIA workshops are among the most innovative her organisation has funded: “They try new things, pushing the boundaries all the time. I enjoy seeing the products at the festivals – they are always innovative and different. The festivals are one of the tools to make society look at the issue of sexual orientation in a far more inclusive way.”



Zanele Muholi directing her film
Enraged by a picture, Soweto, 2005

Photographer: Helen MacDonald

Urban audiences are sometimes less interested in the workshop products. At satellite festivals they are greeted with enthusiasm and fascination: “This is our lives.”

Some of the workshop productions include:

- ***Possessed by Demons*** – a personal account of a congregation’s “medieval and masculine response to a lesbian in their midst”. Nokuthula Dlhadhla recounts how she went on to live her life as a pastor in a gay church. The experience of being castigated by a patriarchal, religious community was shared by some in the audience at Mafikeng, with whom Dlhadhla’s message that “no amount of prayer can change who God created you to be” clearly resonated.
- **Martha Qumba’s *Ndim Ndim (It’s me, it’s me)*** – is a portrait of Funeka Soldaat, a lesbian and gender activist living in the homophobic community of Khayelitsha, outside Cape Town. Soldaat’s message is that lesbians have to involve themselves in their communities and not isolate themselves, to counter stereotypes and hostility.
- ***Inkanyesi Yobusuku – Night Star*** – by Kekeletso Khena is told in isiZulu, with English subtitles, and portrays, beautifully, the love between two young Zulu maidens in a rural village. One of the Mafikeng audience members said the film had made her realise that “you can be a feminine woman who loves other women and don’t need to go with the butch persona. And it showed me that there are gay people in different cultures.”

The features at Mafikeng

Society is a local SABC drama series with a lesbian relationship as one of its sub-plots. OIA worked with the producers to cut the series down to a 90-minute feature, focusing on the lesbian theme. OIA invited the director, one of the producers and two of the lead actresses to Mafikeng, creating a



Still from *Inkanyesi Yobusuku – Night Star* which portrays the love between two young Zulu women in a rural village

buzz of excitement. There was a very successful Q&A (question and answer) session with the “stars” after the screening that had gay people feeling their opinions were heard and valued. The audience wanted to know if the actresses were “really gay”, which they handled professionally and with humour. The director said the festival was “fantastic – in many ways, it was inspiring. I went with a preconceived idea of Mafikeng as rural, convinced they wouldn’t enjoy the show and the gay/lesbian line. They were amazing as an audience; they were so participative and got the most out of all the jokes. When we sold *Society* to TV we sold it for a black professional audience so we were surprised at how much the people in Mafikeng interacted with and understood the story line ... there were real debates that started in the session and continued outside. It was wonderful. And I asked the audience questions – we were all trying to understand each other and ourselves.”

- ***Anyone and Everyone*** – produced by Susan Polis Schutz in the USA, deals with coming out to one’s parents. Parents from several cultures share their previous prejudices, shock, fear, uncertainty and heartache and their dawning realisation that they, as parents, are not alone. It resonated with many in the audience who had not yet come out to their own parents: “I wish my parents could have been here to be educated,” said one gay man.
- ***Noah’s Arc (series 1)*** – is American. The first nine episodes were screened at Mafikeng. It follows the lives of four black, gay men in Los Angeles as they “navigate complex romantic and professional relationships”.

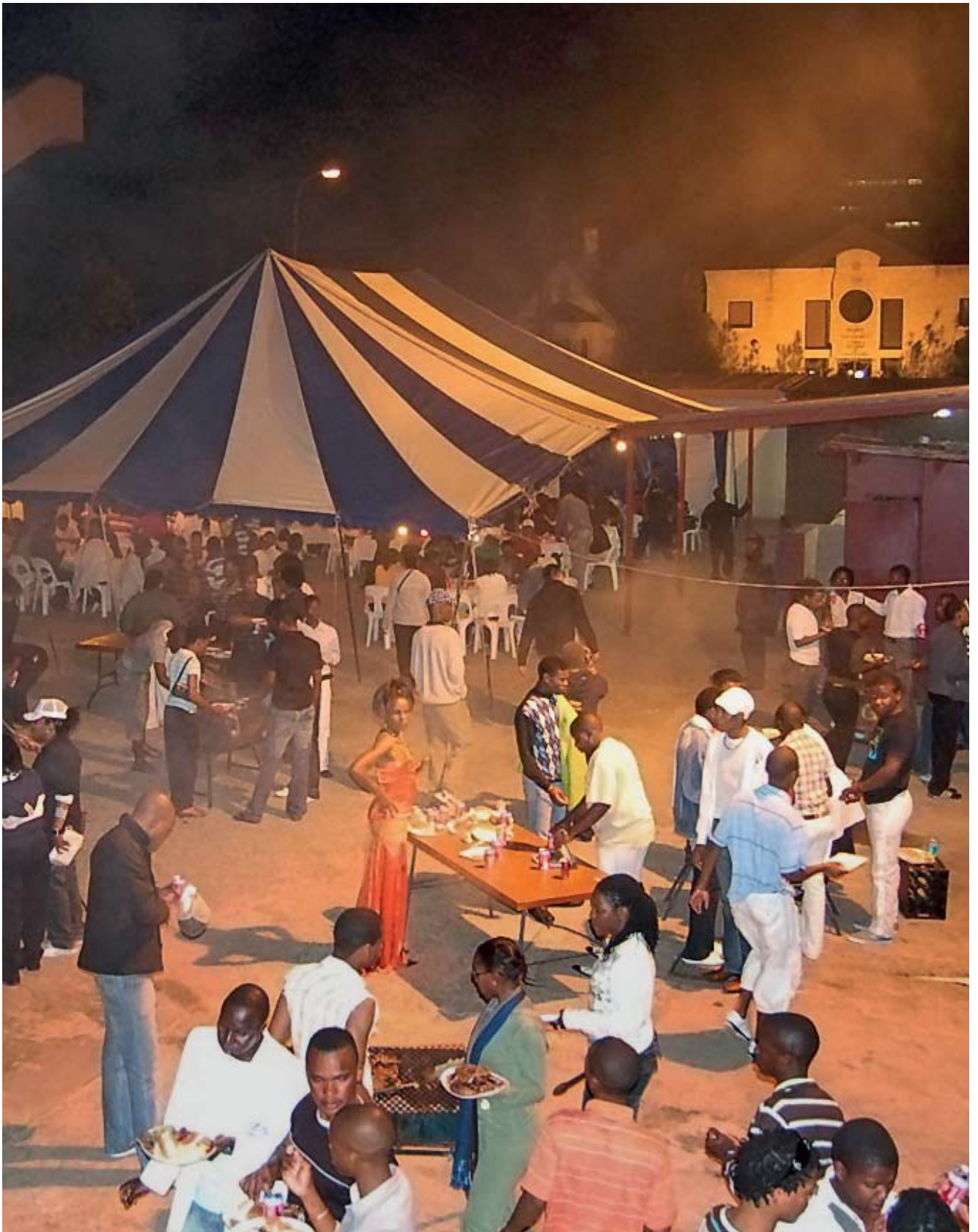
The format of the festivals, which builds in time for Q and As and discussion panels, helps to create a place where issues not normally discussed become a focus. The weekend becomes an extended conversation where issues of substance mingle with fun and legitimised titillation.

VII. The Weekend

Nodi Murphy of *Out In Africa* (OIA) describes the Mafikeng satellite festival as “extraordinarily beautiful, with a beautiful audience”. What emerges from our interviews is the sense of active engagement and identification on the part of the audiences. When actors kissed on screen, for example, the audience whistled and cheered. Their experience affirmed, they were charmed and entranced. This was not “old hat” to them, as it might be for an urban audience. This was new, refreshing, special. The universal messages to which the audience responded were “you are not alone, there are others like you” and “coming out is okay”. These are not the messages that gays and lesbians living in rural South Africa encounter in their everyday lives. A special effort was also made to include the deaf gay community of Mafikeng, a very marginalised group that often gets left out, and sign language translation was provided.

According to the OIA report on Mafikeng, “The crowd came in strong numbers and they were dressed for the occasion. Fabulous and glamorous was the order of the day for some of our Gay-lites.” The crowd puller was *Noah’s Arc*, which many couldn’t wait to see, following the teaser played the night before.

Aside from the “official” entertainment, after-parties were held at local night clubs, with no problems reported. Gay Umbrella held a meeting on Saturday afternoon to garner support and to recruit new members from all areas of North West Province. Again, it was “jol and consequence”, mixed.



VIII. The impact of the Mafikeng experience

According to Out In Africa (OIA) attendance at Mafikeng was “fabulous”. It believes that, wherever OIA organises a satellite festival, the key local organisation, in this case Gay Umbrella, is strengthened. The festival creates new networks, affects membership figures, puts the organisation in contact with more people and facilitates mobilisation. Tshenolo believes that the festival was “very important because it gave hope and awareness and opened people’s minds as to what could be done. So many people were motivated by the festival. They were mostly gay but there were some straight people who came too - parents, brothers and sisters of gay people.” Being Tshenolo, she invited her straight friends to come, and some of them did. She said she invited them “because we all come from the same community”. A gay team member said that, while they had attracted people to the festival largely through face-to-face meetings, they had also taken out an advert in the local paper because “we wanted to make it a normal thing rather than a closed event. As a gay person I want to be totally integrated into straight life and I want straight people to be fully integrated into gay life.”

Did the festival make a difference? One of the team put it this way: “I really believe that it did – the more you start doing, the more the community will realise that things can be done. People have no contact with other gays and lesbians and there is no understanding of LGBTI issues in their communities. The festival both gave awareness to the gay community as a whole, and it was also an acknowledgement of the existence of an LGBTI community. Also, now people come to the Gay Umbrella and talk about themselves and the issues and problems they face. The more this happens, the more impact there is.”

Gay Umbrella says it now has about 1 200 people on its database. It organises events more regularly, including the Ms Gay Umbrella pageant and educational lekgotlas (discussions) on sexual orientation, discrimination and stigma, relationships and gay marriage. OIA has also provided Gay Umbrella with a “video suitcase”, a selection of videos that can be shown to small groups; these can be combined with serious discussions and provide a basis for forming new support groups. Gay Umbrella is keen to open an office and has approached the Department of Arts, Culture and Sport for assistance.



(Left) Festival-goer Phindi Malaza from the Forum for the Empowerment of Women; (Middle), Teresa Raizenberg and (Right) Saron Jackson, festival organisers at Mafikeng

Both Mildred and Hennie learned a great deal about administration and believe “we are now in a position to organise the festival by ourselves. We could do the advance work next time and we want it in a bigger venue.”

They feel that the festival should become an annual event.

They also believe that the festival gave Gay Umbrella legitimacy and recognition as “an organisation that can do things”. In addition, “people still talk about things they saw in the movies and the volunteers who helped have also now become more actively involved in Gay Umbrella”.

Comments from the audience at the film festival: the organisation

“What I liked – they were helping each other – OIA and Gay Umbrella worked as a team. It is the first time I have seen such teamwork.”

“I got a message to thank me for coming and to ask if I had enjoyed the festival – that was perfect.”

“I loved the organisation [but] I would like it to be longer and with more social activities.”

“There has been follow-up with other events from Gay Umbrella and we go.”

“This was a new way of the gay community operating.”

“I was impressed that gay people could come up with something so sensible as a film festival.”

Comments from the audience at the film festival: what we enjoyed

“Bring it back again – it was beautiful.”

“I came out in Grade 11 – ten years ago. People were very judgmental – the elders of the community talked about heritage, culture, the Bible and morality. I saw I was not alone in this.”

“It shed light for me – it was a wonderful weekend.”

“The best part was getting together.”

“This was not just an excuse for a social event – there was real discussion. Most functions that have to do with the gay community are usually about alcohol. Here there was a serious purpose – to show the films and discuss them. If you wanted to do anything else you weren’t welcome. It meant there was order and for me it was good.”

“I thought that, as it was the first gay function I was attending, I was just coming to see. But, once I was there, I took a proper part in it.”

“This was the first time I ever saw gay films – I really enjoyed them.”

Comments from the audience at the film festival: the impact on people’s self-perception and world view

“Some people felt confident and came out after that.”

“Some people only came out after the film festival and even joined the Gay Umbrella. As a result we now have a small gay community in Mafikeng – the film festival brought people from the rest of the province and we ended up feeling we were home. We met people we



Technical team at the Mafikeng satellite festival, March 2008

didn't even know were gay. Now we can meet people and recognise them and we feel a kind of growth and recognition."

"It did a lot; people started coming out. It made a difference."

"I didn't want to be gay but I couldn't change and the festival helped me to accept it."

"I went with eight people who were not sure of themselves – they weren't out. Now they come and chill with me and are really comfortable with themselves."

"I thought that, because I was gay, when I grew up I would have to dress like a girl – after the film festival I learned that I didn't have to cross-dress."

"I support them and participate in all their activities. I like gay people because they are honest."

"So many people are in the closet – worried about what will happen if they come out – but people gained confidence from the film festival and were able to come out."

"Before I felt bitter and I expected homophobia. From this I learned how to carry myself and relate to other people."

“I so enjoyed the feeling of having a platform to be free to be who we really are. The film festival created a small planet for the gay community.”

“I discovered that gay people come in all sorts of different shapes and forms.”

“Because I was talking about Gay Umbrella, my mother knew and she was okay with it.”

“I became a member of the Gay Umbrella after the festival. I have made a lot of friends. I started seeing a lot of gay people around – before that I thought there were only three of us. There are a lot more! People are lonely and we don’t reach out to them.”

“For me as an individual it was important – I didn’t know there were so many gays and lesbians in Mafikeng. I realised it is possible to be gay and have a normal life.”

“It really helped us to meet gay people in the North West.”

“I learned a lot about people disclosing and parent reaction.”

“It was my first time for learning about lesbian life.”
(Gay man)

“It was my first time to see anything but pornography.”

“Black, white, Indian and coloured people came together and there was no difference – since the festival we greet one another.”

“I learned a lot – firstly talking to people around you and getting them to understand better. Sometimes you just need to talk to them and explain to them. After the film festival I realised we have to educate

them, to teach them how to live with us. People can be very rude – heterosexuals just come up to me and ask me how we have sex. Heteros asked a lot of questions during the festival – they learned a lot. People ask me if I was sexually abused. They look for excuses and explanations.”

“There was a person I knew from church who has a gay brother – I brought her to the film festival to the showing about parents and how they felt about their children being gay. It made a real difference to the way she saw her brother. Since then I have heard her defending her brother. “

“Straight people I know who came have behaved and responded differently since the festival.”

Some audience members said they would like to see movies that reflected the experiences of bisexual and transgender people as well. A number said they would like more films and a longer festival and all said they wanted it to be an annual event. One commented that she would like to have seen more Mafikeng-specific guests and interviews. Another thought that some kind of introduction or, as he called it, “orientation”, and conclusion would have pulled it together more.

For Gay Umbrella, the festival has given the organisation an opportunity to market itself, to develop a recognisable identity and profile, to build a provincial database of contacts, to begin the work of organising in the more far-flung communities, to learn skills of administration and event-organisation, and to build contacts with other existing organisations in the area, as well as the media. It also put Gay Umbrella more directly in touch with the community that it seeks to serve and what their needs and wants are.

That the festival made an impact is clear. Whether this translates into strong organisation and people doing things at an organisational level they would not have done before is probable but not given. (“I realised I need to do more – these people support me and I need to do more to support them.”) A great deal will depend on Gay Umbrella’s ability to build on the foundation created. While the organisation is already looking at funding possibilities, the visibility and success of the festival should also make it possible to get local sponsorship next time round. The proposed provincial sponsorship is also important and the festival has created a basis for some leverage in this regard – in terms of the palpable success of its outreach. Far more people are now clearly aware that “gay people are living here”.

IX. Learnings about doing this kind of outreach

The *Out In Africa* (OIA) satellite film festivals are an innovative and – judging from the feedback on the Mafikeng festival – successful way of reaching out to the LGBTI community in the isolated small towns and surrounding villages of South Africa. The key ingredients appear to be:

- A clear objective that includes building organisations to reduce the level of isolation felt by lesbians and gays where there is no visible critical mass.
- Identification of an effective partner organisation.
- Appointment of a local team that combines some experience and skill with local know-how.
- Strong support for the initial festival in a place with a clear intention to make the organisation of the festival local in the future.
- A budget that is transparent, realistic and carefully monitored.
- Preparatory outreach that involves intense face-to-face contact and the building up of a database.
- Some degree of general visibility that allows for inclusivity beyond the LGBTI community (for example, by advertising on local radio and in local newspapers).
- Good logistical organisation that allows for crises and “Plan Bs”.
- Good debriefing of the local team by the head office.
- A mixed selection of films that speaks to a range of people.
- Good selection of guests who are comfortable with the audience and able to engage, professionally and socially.
- Follow-up by the local partner with those who attended and ongoing activities to keep them motivated and involved.

There are other possibilities which bridge the gap between “essential” and “nice to have”. So, for example, a follow-up film-making workshop would be a very “nice to have”, but a follow-up workshop, not necessarily organised by OIA, on local fundraising might fall on the essential side. With regard to the OIA film-making workshops, one interviewee suggested a competition in



the satellite festival region in which people would be asked to put forward ideas, written as draft outlines of a story they wanted to tell. One would then be chosen to participate in the next workshop as the “prize”. This would also speak to people’s desire to “see ourselves”. “Each and every one of us has a story to tell, something you know, things you have experienced, something others can learn from.”

Underpinning all of this is the key combination of “jol and consequence” or “party and substance” that seems to have made the Mafikeng satellite festival an event at which organisers, guests and participants all had a wonderful time. They came away feeling they had participated in something worthwhile, something that made a difference, and something that established that gay people are definitely living in Mafikeng and North West Province.

Video suitcase

After each festival, OIA produces a video suitcase, a package of about 15 selected gay and lesbian themed films. The suitcases are distributed to emerging LGBTI organisations all over South Africa and can be used to host “sitting room” mini festivals and provide a basis for discussion and organisations.

The suitcases are also distributed in the region, in countries such as Zimbabwe, Uganda and Zambia, where homosexuality is still illegal.

OIA film-making workshops

2004 JUST A MINUTE FILM-MAKING WORKSHOP

Workshop director – Rikki Beadle Blair

Portfolio: My Life in 12 Frames per Minute

South Africa, 2004, Video 1.53min

Director: Carl Collison

Collison's photographic background is evident in this perfectly framed, honest and concise collage of personal images that portray his exploration of his sexuality.

I Have Two

South Africa, 2004, Video 3.08min

Director: John Meletse

An aptly silent movie, I Have Two demonstrates the frustrations of a gay deaf man.

Perception

South Africa, 2004, Video 1.24 min

Director: Bongive Louw

A simple, but essential, bodily function is thwarted through a lack of understanding, tolerance and a blind acceptance of convention.

Confusion

South Africa, 2004, Video 1.45min

Director: Thulisife Portia Msipha

Confusion uses stereotypical settings, language and attitudes to toy with gender roles and expectations. A girlfriend gets pregnant; her father is angry.

Possessed by Demons

South Africa, 2004, Video 4.09min

Director: Nokuthula Dlhahlha

This is a personal account of a congregation's medieval and masculine response to a lesbian in their midst. Their brutal quest to cast out her male demons hardens her resolve to live as God's creation.

Muted Screams

South Africa, 2004, Video 3.23min

Director: Lindiwe Nkutha

Succinct but tortured images wade through a weight of religious and social guilt and media expectation as misdirected questions are tackled by simple, not-so-straight answers.

Liberation

South Africa, 2004, Video 3.31min

Director: Lazarus Molelekwa

The outrageous behaviour of a classmate attracts the unexpected and confused sexual appreciation of a straight man. His feelings remain strong but his friendships might not.

A Page from my Journal

South Africa, 2004, Video 2min

Director: Fanney Tsimong

Confusion, guilt, failure, and godlessness are emotions flung into the turmoil of accepting one's sexuality. The questions raised by society's fathers are often the ones sought by the questioned.

Betwixt and Between

South Africa, 2004, Video 7.52min

Director: Bridgette Oliphant

Apartheid South Africa's Group Areas Act separated and devastated families, friends and relationships. It imposed the need to live a desperate lie - a lie lived to the full by the infamous and flamboyant Granny Lee.

2005 4 MORE FILM-MAKING WORKSHOP.

Workshop director - Rikki Beadle Blair

Enraged by a Picture

South Africa, 2005, Video 13.38min

Director: Zanele Muholi

A photographer, Muholi, is celebrating her exhibition in Johannesburg. Efficiently confrontational, the exhibition causes a stir and provokes an outcry on a subject that is particularly taboo: being black and, in this case, being lesbian. Fortright and beautifully shot, each monochrome photo captures the present reality of the photographer's subjects – the daily discomfort, double lives, abuse and hatred. The photographs present a window into their world.

Outlaw Culture

South Africa, 2005, Video 15mins

Director: Phylia Dlamini

Heterosexism is the assumption that an audience is heterosexual. This considered documentary accuses South Africa's media of repeatedly and consciously delivering gay issues and stories in a negative fashion. When there is a gay connection, responsible reporting gives way to scandal, be it Brenda Fassie's artistic choices, Mokoena's lobola payment or Professor Papo's murder. Seeking an answer, Dlamini interviews artists and reporters presenting the facts behind the homophobic drama.

Barman

South Africa, 2005, Video 14mins

Directors: Stanimir Stoykov & Sasa Stajovic

In Johannesburg's Melville night scene, one bar is particularly hot, sizzling to life every night with men seeking a gay ol' time. But the main attraction isn't the clientele or the music ... it's the irresistible chance to perve at the hot, muscular, semi-naked straight men behind the bar. A jaded old hand and an enthusiastic rookie tell us it's a means to an end. But young, educated and with washboard stomachs, these barmen unrepentantly flirt and titillate the night away, seeking that extra tip.

...Silenced

South Africa, 2005, Video 14.30min

Director: Fanny Tsimong

As revolutionary as South Africa's Constitution is, certain loopholes still exist in the wording of the law in our land. One loophole is gender determination in the legal definition of rape. Male South Africans cannot be raped. Through the devastating recollections of a victim, Tsimong boldly ventures into the subject of male rape, which continues to be shrouded in taboo and stigma in our society.

2005 TELLING TALES FILM-MAKING WORKSHOP

Workshop director - Patricia Plattner

Ndim Ndim It's Me, It's Me

South Africa, 2005, Video 8min

Director: Martha Qumba

This is a fascinating portrait of brave, quietly persistent Funeka Soldaat who is an out lesbian and anti-abuse activist. Living in the controlled homophobia of her Xhosa-dominated community in Khyalitsha, Soldaat's single-handed education of those around her progresses slowly but surely.

Thai Chi for Tipplers

South Africa, 2005, Video 5min

Directors: Jenny Radloff & Karen Rutter

This timeous, hilarious self-help film uses secret ancient teachings to assist lesbians from all walks of life in coping with the rigours and stresses of their daily activism and angst.

Wanted

South Africa, 2005, Video 7min

Director: Lisa Holland

From the age of 21, Matthew has wanted to be a parent. As a single, gay man he was subjected to meticulous physical and psychological tests before he was allowed to adopt Emilio. With quiet dignity, this gentle film examines Matthew's personal perspective on single parenthood and getting to know his son in the new South Africa.

2007 HAPPY SNAPS FILM-MAKING WORKSHOP

Workshop director - Laura Muscardin

Inkanyezi Yobusuku - Night Star

(ZULU WITH ENGLISH SUB-TITLES)

South Africa, 2007, Video 13min

Director: Kekeletso Khena

Traditionally, Zulu women were barred from household chores during menstruation, and the maidens were isolated in the girls' hut, a time for rest and contemplation called Ukuya Enyangeni, going to the moon. Lindiwe's dreams are disturbed by her desire for Amaqhikiza, her guide during this time.

Half a Lifetime

South Africa, 2007, Video 11 min

Director: Howard Smith

Two young men meet, become aware of and find ways of expressing their mutual attraction, as conscripts in the 1960s apartheid army. The charm of their liaison is contrasted with the dehumanising regime, at the time of Prime Minister Verwoerd's assassination. They go their separate ways, only to meet 30 years later.

Benni has 2 Mothers

South Africa, 2007, Video 10min

Director: Vivid Tjipura

Soccer mad Benni has two mums. The story unfolds as the Civil Union Act, allowing same-sex couples to "marry" is passed into law. Benni must contend with his schoolmates' reaction to the news of his mothers' impending marriage.

Self-help for Sapphists

South Africa, 2007, Video 6min,

Directors: Jenny Radloff & Karen Rutter

The un-PC middle-aged dykes who brought us the hilarious *Tai Chi for Tipplers* are back with important tips to assist the sisterhood with, well, just about everything... from clothing to health, and the essential tool to find a girl.

Dates and places of all the satellite festivals, since they were initiated in 2004

2004

George 29 April - 2 May

Bloemfontein 6 - 9 May

Pietermaritzburg 13 - 16 May

Potchefstroom 20 - 23 May

Grahamstown 3 - 10 July

2005

Grahamstown 2 - 9 July

Pietermaritzburg 19 - 20 August

Ermelo 28 - 29 October

Pretoria 25 - 26 November

2006

Pietermaritzburg 18 - 19 August

Kimberley 15 - 16 September

Ermelo 6 -7 October

Durban 9 -12 November

2007

Pietermaritzburg 17 - 18 August

Ermelo 5 - 6 October

We had two main festivals in 2007 –
in February and in November

2008

Kimberley 8 - 9 February

Mafikeng 14 - 15 March

Pietermaritzburg 29 November - 6 December

About the authors

Marian Nel has an MBA from the University of the Witwatersrand and an honours degree in psychology from the University of South Africa. She and **Janet Shapiro**, who has a BA degree in ethics and English from the University of Cape Town and an honours in sociology from Rhodes University, have worked together as organisational consultants for the past 28 years. Initially they worked with anti-apartheid organisations but, since 1994, have done consultancy work in development around the world, with a specific emphasis on Southern Africa.

They are lesbians and married in September 2008, after living together for 27 years. They feel privileged to have been able to record a small but important piece of LGBTI history in the post-liberation period of South Africa.

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Case Study

By Marion Nel and Janet Shapiro (for The Atlantic Philanthropies) March 2009