

**SARChI Chair in Sexualities,  
Genders & Queer Studies**



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

# SAQS NEWSLETTER

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# Molweni!

## Molweni, sanibonani, keteng, hello.

Here is a warm welcome to our very first edition of South African Queer Studies (SAQS) newsletter. This comes at a very crucial point when we are again having to witness Uganda, bringing into motion the anti-homosexuality bill to police and punish lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI+ hereafter queer). This is an indication of how much far behind we still are in so far as acknowledging the full humanity of queer people. We consider research to be one critical component of the 'undoing' work, that is undoing and challenging legacies of discrimination and violence against people who defy what is perceived the norm. This newsletter features some incredible work by queer students and scholars, scholars working in gender, sexualities and queer studies across the globe, allies and friends. We hope that you find this publication worth your read and that it creates an appetite for more editions.

Peace, love and light from us.

**Dr Princess Sibanda (Guest Editor)**



## About the SARChI Chair

The Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies Research Chair at the University of Fort Hare is aimed at stimulating research and interest in issues and studies related to sexual diversity and gender identities in Africa. In the absence of a gender studies department at UFH, the Research Chair invites scholars, students, activists and artists to engage the university community on gender and sexuality-related topics and research. The Research Chair hosts events, public dialogues and seminars at the university and invite key persons from outside the university space to be in conversation with students and academics.

In its initial phase the Research Chair paid attention to laying the foundation for queer studies at the university through monthly to bi-weekly interdisciplinary reading groups (what we call the *Afrika Reading Club*) where local authors are invited to engage with the university community on their books and issues related to sexuality and gender. A university-wide research project has been underway, to investigate the inclusion of sexual minority students within the university. Conducting this research at the university is significant because it is the first time that such a project, which specifically deals with LGBTQ issues, becomes the core focus of the majority of the student population. Through this research we are also highlighting the need to engage with diversity and inclusion at the university.

At the university the Chair also initiated a collective of LGBTQ students under the umbrella 'Queer Ambassadors'. The students are trained in queer-related advocacy and offered support that they cannot access at the university due to stigma, homophobia and transphobia. Annually, the Queer Ambassadors host an Inclusivity March, where the student community is invited to learn more about the challenges that LGBTQ students face at the university. The Queer Ambassadors are also trained to participate in research projects that the Chair initiates at the university.

In the second phase the Research Chair currently underway, the research now engages general publics (high school pupils and local NGOs), in particular communities around the University campuses, through different means including hosting events on key days (e.g Youth Day and Human Rights Day). Integrating the Research Chair with broader community of scholars, activists and practitioners has been key to keeping ideas and knowledge relevant and contextual. The Chair also works with other universities in South Africa (University of Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela University, University of KwaZulu-Natal) and other parts of the world (University of Huddersfield, UK and Ruhr-Bochum University, Germany) to organise research conferences, seminars, workshops, events, and a summer school (see last page).

More excitingly has been the regular symposia that the Research Chair holds to invigorate queer research in South Africa, with a particular focus on Sexuality Education. So far we have hosted graduate students, postdocs and early career researchers from different universities in the country (including UNISA, Stellenbosch University, University of Johannesburg, University of the Western Cape) and beyond (Warwick University) to contribute towards the Global Encyclopedia on Sexuality Education (Africa Region) co-edited by the Research Chair.

If you would like to get involved in our programs, check out our facebook page (SARChI Chair in Sexualities, Genders & Queer Studies) and email us on [asibanda@ufh.ac.za](mailto:asibanda@ufh.ac.za).

Queerly yours in research!

**Prof zethu Matebeni (Chief Editor)**

## Supporting LGBTQ students in Rural Universities in South Africa: Towards promotion of diversity, inclusion and visibility by Dr Bellita Banda-Chitsamatanga

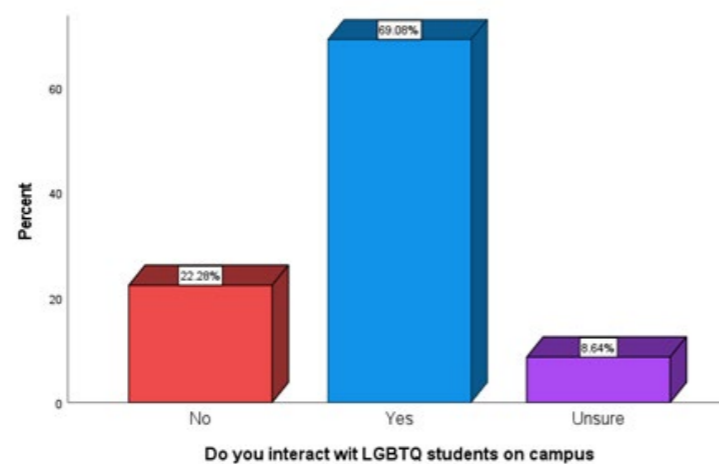
Existing research suggests that homophobic, biphobia and transphobic bullying remains a problem in institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, widespread assumptions in these institutions are that students are heterosexual, and cisgender thus leaving the specific support needs of LGBTQ students unaddressed. A lack of robust evidence in rural universities in relation to the inclusivity of LGBTQ students in terms of formal, hidden and null curriculum has also led to students and staff holding on to strong heteronormative attitudes due to misconceptions about LGBTQ population.

In response to this, the SARChI Chair in Sexualities, Gender and Queer Studies conducted a campus wide research titled, "Supporting LGBTQ students in Rural Universities in South Africa: Towards promotion of diversity, inclusion and visibility" between May and September, 2022 in Alice Campus 2022. The main thrust of the project was to stimulate debate and capture views, opinions and perceptions around inclusivity, diversity and visibility in the context of LGBTQ students on campus. We also sought to get an insight on levels and forms of awareness raising programmes, teaching and learning strategies used, access to health facilities and inclusive residencies. The current university policies also formed part of our contextual analysis as we sought to establish their comprehensiveness and efficacy in so far as combating discriminatory practices on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression is concerned. The project targeted both undergraduate and post graduate students.

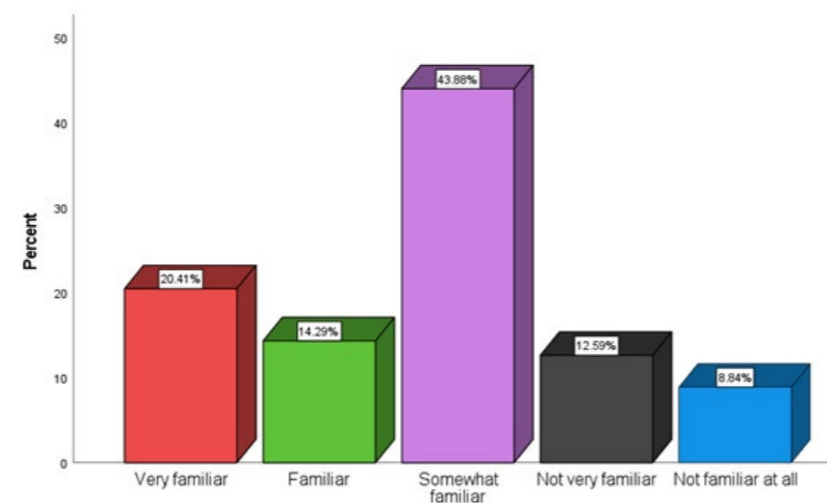
### Key findings were as follows:

Most respondents knew there were LGBTQ students on campus, however they did not interact with the LGBTQ students on a frequent basis. For instance, almost seventy percent of the research participants reported frequent interaction with LGBTQ students, while 30% had no interaction or were unsure of such interactions.

#### Interaction with LGBTQ students on campus



#### Familiarity with LGBTQ issues



Findings highlighted that nearly 44% of students were somewhat familiar with LGBTQ issues, 35% were either very familiar or familiar with LGBTQ issues and 21% were not very familiar or not familiar at all.

- Use of homophobic language and being ostracised also emerged as a form of bullying levelled against LGBTQ students by either peers, lecturers, or support staff.
- In instances where lecturers or support staff were not direct perpetrators, there were concerns around their failure to intervene and/or protect victims.
- Furthermore, the research evidenced that the broader awareness programmes on key issues are not inclusive of the LGBTQ students.
- A dearth of LGBTQ perspectives in hidden and formal curriculum emerged as one of the factors that caused discrimination levelled towards LGBTQ student.

### Way Forward

The above findings point towards lack of knowledge on the issues pertaining to LGBTQ community. It is incumbent upon the university leadership to come up with programmes that target all students. Thus, concerted efforts to increase awareness on what constitutes differential treatment and discriminatory treatment accompanied by inclusive information campaigns to empower the university community is needed. Curriculum offered ought to be cognisant of LGBTQ perspectives with a focus on critical pedagogy in teaching and learning processes. This should be guided by policies that specifically mention and address homophobic and transphobic bullying as tool for tackling institutionalized heteronormative propensities. Implementation of measures that promote inclusive and diverse university environment from registration process, access to inclusive residences and health facilities remain significant.

## Publications

Chitsamatanga BB. Student support can't end with first years' orientation. Insight. Daily Dispatch, 21 February 2023.

Chitsamatanga BB. Teaching spaces must lead way in advancing queer equity. Insight. Daily Dispatch, 02 June 2023. <https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/opinion/2023-02-22-opinion-student-support-cant-end-with-first-years-orientation/>.

Chitsamatanga BB. Promoting the visibility of LGBTQ in rural spaces in the RHLM. Public Opinion. Empuma News, 14 October 2023. <https://empumacommunitynews.co.za/researcher-under-the-nrf-sarchi-chair-in-sexualities-gender-and-queer-studies/#:~:text=the%20church.%20These%20spaces,remain%20a%20breeding>.

Chitsamatanga BB. Teen pregnancy must not become SA's Third Pandemic. Opinion. Dispatch Live. 29 September 2023. <https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/opinion/2023-09-29-opinion-teenage-pregnancy-must-not-become-sas-third-pandemic/>.

Matebeni, Z (2023) Queer Bodies in African Films, Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines, DOI: [10.1080/00083968.2023.2226929](https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2023.2226929)

Sibanda, P. A. (2023) Homophobia wears pan-Africanist regalia. Thought Leader: Mail & Guardian. 18 July, 2023. <https://mg.co.za/author/princess-alice-sibanda/>.

Sibanda, P. A. (2023) Not African Enough, Not Woman Enough: Interrogating the African Queer Female Narrative. In African Women in Digital Spaces: Redefining Social Movements on the Continent and in the Diaspora. Mkuku na Nyota Publishers.

Sibanda, P. A., & Ncube, G.(2023) African queer performances on social media as protest: The case of Zimbabwean TikTokers. In Global LGBTQ Activism (pp. 265-282). Routledge.

Sibanda, PA and Erwin, K., 2023. Women's Stories of Waste Picking in the City. "People Look at Us Like We Are Mad, but I Don't Care". Social and Health Sciences, 21n(1and 2), pp, 20 -pages.

# The Queer Ambassadors Project

Queer Ambassadors are a group of post graduate and under graduate students of diverse gender and sexual identities, as well as sexual orientations. The idea of forming this group emerged from the realisation that there is a need to steer the formation of or support existing queer student groups. Upon our arrival as the SGQ Chair, queer students demonstrated a hunger to be in community with others and we supported the formation of the UFH queer ambassadors group. The group focuses on developing positive personal relationships, kinship, intellectual community and forging safe spaces for LGBTQ students on campus. Efforts are also channeled towards supporting their engagement in activism both within and outside university spaces in attempts to transform campus cultures and that of the surrounding areas. Queer Ambassadors have spearheaded and participated in a number of projects on campus, among them organising a line up of activities for Pride day.



UFH Queer Ambassadors: From left Dr Banda, Khanyokuhle Matina, Prof z. Matebeni Samantha Gogi, Pumela Woshe, Lihlumile Nomavayi, Ambesa Mahlulo, Benathi Makiyela, Ms B, Mx Wenzile Khumalo.

“ A puzzle cannot be complete if there is a missing piece. The Chair was the missing piece at Forte Hare and it has brought with it a sense of belonging for the LGBTQI students while creating ways and means of educating the university community that life as we know it is not restricted to just binary genders – male and female. We are embracing diversity in sexualities and genders and headed in the right direction as the university. ”

(Mx Wenzile Khumalo)

# Personality of the Month

Our personality of the month is Mx Wenzile Khumalo one of the pioneers of the Queer Ambassadors project. We sat down for a chat with Wenzile Khumalo (WZ):

**PS: It is my pleasure and honour to sit with you today and thank you for taking your time to do this with me**

WK: It is my pleasure

**PS: To just get us started, I would love to know more about you as a person?**

WK: Okay, my name is Wenzile Khumalo, I am studying towards my Masters degree here at the University of Fort Hare. I grew up identifying as a lesbian because that is the only language I had for people like me. One was either gay or lesbian in my mind. But around 2014, I began to settle into my skin and locating myself within an identity that feels like home. Career wise I am still finding my path but one thing is for sure, I am a social activist. I am also hoping to add the title, academic activist some day because I really want to plunge into the area of research.

**PS: Tell me more about your interests in research. Of what importance is it to you?**

WK: I want to be the voice of the voiceless in academia. Why do I say this, being queer in the Eastern Cape is hard because culture, religion and tradition are the order of the day. Especially in the rural areas. Why am I saying that we are in the Eastern Cape where culture, religion, and tradition are the order of the day? We need to tell the stories from the peripheries so I am hoping that with the communication degrees that I have, and with the exposure that I got from from the Chair, I will be able to document the lived experiences of queer people in rural areas, how they navigate their spaces within religion and the health sector.

**PS: Now that you mention religion, what is your take on religion and sexuality.**

WK: I must say I am fortunate enough to have people who respect me the way I respect them. The Methodist church of Southern Africa which I belong to, has policies and a constitution that guides us and it is constantly being amended. This protects LGBTIQ+ members in the church. There is also a student chapter of the Methodist which I have been a part of for years. There's no segregation, no discrimination whatsoever. I think earlier this year a Reverend somewhere here in East London gave a homophobic sermon and he was made to write up a letter of apology by the church. So we are actually protected, the church is inclusive. At the national Level base, there's even an Lgbti desk. Some actually approach me to ask, "Oh, oh, my! My grandson is like this! How how should we treat him? What should we do with him?"

**PS: Let us now talk about the queer ambassadors project.**

WK: It had always been something that I had in mind to have. That is a space where queer students can find a platform where they belong. Remember most of these students will be coming to university for the first time. So it was really about creating a sense of belonging. So I was really happy when the Chair came to the University of Fort Hare. We started with a group of 12 and I am proud to say all of us will be graduating this year. This is a milestone and we owe it to the support that we got from the Chair and a community that we built for ourselves in a university that is informed by heteronormativity. We needed to change the views, the perceptions, the language on the ground as a collective. But we first needed to make sure queer students on campus know they belong.

**PS: How inclusive or non inclusive is Fort Hare as a university?**

WK: The research project that we did under the Chair revealed the levels of homophobia and transphobia at Fort hare. I personally encountered it several years ago. My friends and I decided to use the men's bathroom simply because the female toilets were full. By then I still identified as a lesbian. A group of guys noticed and gave us a beating. I am sure the idea of seeing masculine looking lesbians in the company of beautiful ladies angered them. We never reported this case. The university still has a long way to go in so far as making the space inclusive. They have to introduce gender neutral bathrooms and designate queer houses if they have to. Even the university social media spaces can be very dehumanising. You find people posting nude videos of queer students and the comment section is horrendous. The other time it was a gay couple who got bashed. Changing this narrative is part of the reason why the queer ambassador programme started.

**PS: Of what value has the project been to you?**

WZ: A lot has changed. I am more confident and feel like I have somewhere to fall back to, that is the Chair. I am now a full on activist and have vowed that the experience that I had with those boys will never repeat itself again. That I assume positions within the school as an assistant in the Residence Department at Fort Hare shows the strides that I have made. I wish to make more impact with my filming work and document stories of queer students especially those from rural areas.

**PS: Any last words?**

WZ: I would like to thank Prof Matebeni and the Chair for giving us a home. Fort Hare really needed this. The work continues.





## A sense of belonging

“ To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity. ”

Nelson Mandela

Historically words have been used to dehumanise and denigrate those that are considered to be less than. Words have been used to break, destroy and dehumanise. But we strongly believe that words also have the capacity to repair and heal. These words exist all around us and we bear the duty to fetch them from our various knowledge systems and cultures for the repair work. Throughout the past two years we have run the Words that Heal project, running every day in the University of Fort Hare bulletin. Every fortnight we flight a new word, which is translated in different African languages that speaks to ‘healing’ and ‘repairing’ some of the most pressing educational and social issues facing our students today and the importance of resisting sexism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and patriarchy, and all other forms of oppression within our teaching and learning spaces. In essence ‘Words that Heal’ calls on each of us to embrace diversity because it is through accepting our unique differences that we learn to appreciate the complexities and nuances of humanity.



## The Afrika Reading Club (ARC)

The Afrika Reading Club (ARC) is another initiative of the Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies which seeks to encourage and stimulate engagement through collectively reading queer texts and writing together. The idea behind the project was to introduce people to some of the concepts and existing works in the field. The reading group was initially set at the University of Fort Hare but has since extended to other universities. The reading group is an ongoing space of engagement and lively debates around some of the challenging issues around sexuality and gender in the continent. In July 2023 we read Gibson Ncube's *Queer Bodies in African Films* (2023) and hosted a book discussion with UNISA (see [here](#)) and have also engaged other forms of text such as music, journal articles and film.



Reference - 'Storytelling: how our people remember, archive and inherit the world'  
Kholeka Putuma

Picture This: it's close to midnight, it's you and your fourteen cousins by the fire listening to your grandmother telling you stories about life, love, pain and pleasure- stories about black joy.

## Poem-Untitled

OoRayiRayi, lintsomi, Namaqhalo

Rayi Rayi ndinasibhanxa sam sicingela ukuba siyathandwa kanti kuhlelwi naso nje ngenxa yemali yaso?

Sihle, sifundile kwaye sinuka kamnandi ingxaki sishumanekile  
uThabo umane esithi khawundisendele airtime, ndicela ibeer ezimbini, ndicela uthengele mna nabangani bam ibhotile sithandwa sam Esona sithandwa sikaThabo nguZukiswa lo ekumane kuthathwa imali apha kwesisibhanxa inikwe yena  
uHlumelo has been sleeping apha kwaso for about a week now, esitya sona, ehlamba sona kodwa Mihla yonke ucinga ngoNaledi Ngosuku lokuqala sazama ukumphuthalaza uHlumelo  
in his drunk response waphendula esithi 'be patient baby, kaloku ndimtsha mna kulento yenu. gimme time'.

Rayi Rayi ndinasibhanxa Sam sicingela ukuba siyathandwa kanti kuhlelwi naso nje ngenxa yemali yaso.

Izolo malume waso phantse wagabha xa esibona kodwa ngoba kaloku nguyen obhatalela umcimbi wezila, nozawuthenga igrocery for lamsebenzi ozawuba ngeweekend. Wait! ayinguye lamalume lo wayemane enyokonyhela into yakhe kulomgodi wesibhanxa ngela xesha sisesincinci? Nanku noMakazi waphezulu emane esinika ilooks of disgust but uzawuthini because the reason why abantwana bakhe besesikolweni kungenxa yesibhanxa

Last week esisibhanxa spent close to R2500 sithengela icute boys zaseObs Square utywala Kaloku besonwabele ukuba yi only queen ehleli with the hot masc guys zase campus Emveni koko bamshiya apho bahamba neegirlfriends zabo Ukhona kwisibhanxa ebesimane sincuma nezigirlfriends sinethemba lokuba 'inene nam ngelinye ilanga liyeza elam ithuba' 'uyandithanda tshomi, he is just not ready to accept himself yet'

Rayi Rayi ndinasibhanxa sam sicingela ukuba siyathandwa kanti kuhlelwi Naso nje ngenxa yemali yaso

By Nojenda  
(MA Candidate Stellenbosch University)

# The Chair wishes to Congratulate Our Queer Ambassadors on their Graduation



**Phumelela Woshe**  
Bachelor in Communications



**Ambesa Mahlulo**  
Bachelor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology



**Samantha Gogi**  
Bachelor of Commerce in Business Management

## Meet the Team

Professor zethu Matebeni is South Africa Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies at the University of Fort Hare. As a social scientist, writer and film maker whose work focuses on the development of African Queer Studies, zethu works collaboratively with activists, scholars and artists and creates interdisciplinary scholarly work. zethu is the Audre Lorde Guest Professor at the Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies, Humboldt University, Germany. She has been Visiting Professor at the Women's Gender and Sexualities Studies (WGSS) Department at Yale University; Centre for Women and Gender Studies at Nelson Mandela University (South Africa); the Marie Jahoda Professorial Fellow at Ruhr-University Bochum (RUB, Germany) and has received numerous awards including the African Humanities Program (AHP) Fellowship, and the African Studies Association (ASA) by American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Presidential Fellowship. zethu has published various key volumes on African Sexualities and gender diversity including: *Reclaiming African: queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* (2014); *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship and Activism* (with Surya Munro and Vasu Reddy, 2018); and *Beyond the Mountain: queer life in 'Africa's gay capital'* (with B Camminga, 2020). Prof Matebeni's essays, films, poetry and articles appear in various academic journals, books and exhibition catalogues.



Dr Bellita Banda Chitsamatanga (Miss B) is a Researcher under the SARChI Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies at the University of Fort Hare. She has published on gender issues and human rights in the higher education sector. Currently, Miss B is involved in various projects focusing on diversity, inclusion, support and visibility of LGBTQ students in Higher Education. She continues to serve in various leadership capacities within and outside academia.

Ms Thandiswa Magwaca completed a Bachelor of Social Sciences (Industrial Sociology and Economics) at the University of Fort Hare and soon after did her in-service training at ECSECC. Further she completed a Certificate in Project Management at Nelson Mandela University Business School. Ms Thandiswa Magwaca joined University of Fort Hare in 2011 as a Project Administrator for the NRF SARChI Chair in Social Change and now also handling administrative work for the SARChI Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies. Her responsibilities are to provide administrative support to the Directors and the Research Chairs.



Dr Princess A Sibanda is a post-doctoral fellow under the SARChI Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies, University of Fort Hare. She is a scholar-activist whose research interests lie in participatory performance forms and their intersections with gender and sexualities in Africa. She has curated a number of theatrical interventions in Zimbabwe and South Africa to facilitate space for queer people to tell their stories from their own perspective. In 2018, she was awarded the Canon Collins Scholars Scholar award as well as a community engagement award (UKZN) in recognition of her scholar-activist work. The Queer African Studies Association also recognised her scholarship with an honourable mention for her contribution to queer African scholarship in 2022.



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# Forthcoming Attractions

*First Annual Queer Indaba*  
University of Fort Hare  
19 October 2023  
[Click here to watch the event stream](#)

*Launch of the Care & Work Exhibition,*  
Bochum, Germany  
22 October, 2023

*Celebrating Love & Anger,*  
Roundtable discussion. Online  
23 November 2023

*Feminist Policy Conference,*  
Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister,  
The Hague, Netherlands  
1-2 November, 2023  
[Click here for more info](#)

*8<sup>th</sup> International SIMM-posium*  
20-22 November  
Brisbane, Australia  
[Click here for more info](#)