

# SARChI Chair in Sexualities, Genders & Queer Studies



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

# SAQS NEWSLETTER

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## Contents

*Molweni! p.2*

*From the Editor in Chief's Desk p.3*

*Publications p.4*

*Current Affairs p.5*

*Poetry Corner p.7*

*Reviews p.8*

*Feature Article p.9*

*Thinking While Playing p.11*

*Reflections p.12*

*Interviews p.13*

*Forthcoming Attractions p.17*

*Meet The Team p.20*

# Molweni!



## Molweni, sanibonani, keteng, hello.

I am excited and honoured to bring to you the second edition of the SGQ newsletter. It has been a minute. This edition features a number of articles from activists and scholars from various universities. All of them are thinking in one way or the other about queerness, queering and queer being in context of their studies, activism and/or lived experiences. It is more important than ever for us to document these stories and narratives as the world continues to threaten queer people's human rights across the globe. When the first edition came out, we were reeling with the Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill. Ghana has since followed suit. Their parliament voted to pass the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill (Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill). This ripple effect of queerphobia cannot be left to grow in leaps and bounds without being questioned and challenged.

While it is important to acknowledge struggle associated with these legal regressions, it is more imperative to also document stories of triumph, joy and love. This edition gives us both and other things in between.

It is my hope that this edition arrives with the same excitement that we share it with.

If you are keen to be featured in our newsletter do not hesitate to write to us on the contact details provided. We would love to hear from you and share your stories, insights and knowledges with the world.

Meanwhile, do indulge on this offering in peace, light and love

**Enkosi**  
**Princess Sibanda**  
(guest editor)

# What is your Pride?

We are thrilled to present the second edition of the SAQS Newsletter! The overwhelming response to our first issue has been heartening, and we are excited to share the voices and perspectives of queers and allies on all things queer.

Last October, we partnered with Student Affairs at the University of Fort Hare to host the first Annual Queer Indaba. The turnout was phenomenal, and it was exhilarating to engage in groundbreaking conversations at such a public scale. The theme, "Towards a Queer Inclusive University," was inspired by our research at the SARCHI in Sexualities, Genders, and Queer Studies. We envision Fort Hare as a vibrant hub for queer dialogue, a space that celebrates and protects the diversity of everyone in the university community. Our goal is for Fort Hare to champion inclusivity, visibility, and diversity, while addressing the myriad issues affecting queer students, staff, and surrounding communities. We are committed to working with university leadership to advance this mission at every level of the institution.

This March, we had the pleasure of co-hosting the first-ever Queer Masculinities Summer School with Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany. Participants from over 10 universities across South Africa, Germany, and Brazil joined us to explore what queer masculinities mean for us in the Global South, particularly in South Africa and Brazil. Examining masculinity through a queer lens was challenging yet enlightening. We discovered that queer masculinities in the Global South can diverge significantly from popular Western notions. We were charting a new course, redefining masculinity in a way that embraces diverse expressions. In this issue, Siphon Mckenzie and Sifundo Sosibo showcase the liberating potential of various queer masculinities.

As people around the world celebrate Pride Month, we stand in solidarity with all LGBTQI+ individuals who recognize that Pride is about standing up, speaking out, and challenging the status quo. The first Pride march in the US was not a celebration but a protest against state violence, with many transgender and gay individuals facing arrest and abuse. Similarly, the first Pride march in Johannesburg in October 1990 was a defiance against the apartheid regime, with Black LGBTQI+ individuals demanding their rights and speaking out against racism, homophobia, and systemic exclusion. As we observe Pride Month in June and again in October, we invite you to reflect on what Pride means to you. What are you willing to stand up for? What will you speak out against? How will your actions contribute to shifting the status quo? Countries like Uganda and Ghana need our unwavering solidarity as their governments continue to oppress LGBTQI+ individuals. Jen Shinta, in this issue, highlights various forms of activism to support and stand against tyranny.

In this edition, we also feature writings from Bongani Malinga, Leah Gerfelmeyer, Melusi Mntungwa, Paulena Müller, Tabea Speder and an interview with Mthunzikazi Mbungwana. We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to your feedback. Join us in our events and activities (see forthcoming attractions) and follow our Facebook page.

Queerly yours!  
Prof zethu Matebeni

## Publications

Chitsamatanga, B (2024) "LGBTQ Inclusive Curriculum in Higher Education in Africa". *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Sexuality Education*. Springer

Matebeni Z and Kiguwa, P. (2024) "Queering South African History". In Magaziner, D (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of South African History*. Oxford University Press, <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/45139> (forthcoming)

Matebeni, Z. (2024) "One Stitch at a Time – Black Women's Care Work in South Africa". Kochen, Putzen, *Sorgen /Cooking Cleaning Caring: Care Arbeit in der Kunst seit 1960 / Care Work in the Arts since 1960*, In [Friederike Sigler](#) and [Linda Walther](#) (eds). Hatje Cantz Verlag, 306-310.

Motimele, M, Ramugondo, E and Matebeni, Z. (2024) "Understanding 'Violence' within Protest: A Call for Further Research within Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science". *Journal of Occupational Science* (ROCC), 1-15 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14427591.2024.2319600>

Ncube G & Sibanda, AP (2024) "TikTok activism: how queer Zimbabweans use social media to show love and fight hate". *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/tiktok-activism-how-queer-zimbabweans-use-social-media-to-show-love-and-fight-hate-229763>.

Sibanda, P.A., (2024) "Itai Amen Satani Abhoikane": Killjoy Feminism in the Church. *African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 29, (2), pp. 30 – 55

Sibanda, P.A, (2024) "Popular Participatory Theatre for Sexuality Education": *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Sexuality Education*. Springer

Sibanda, P. A. (2024). *Amphibious subjects: sasso and the contested politics of queer self making in neo-liberal Ghana*: by Kwame Edwin Otu, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022, 216 pp., \$34.95 (paperback), ISBN 9780520381858. *Cultural Studies*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2024.2363193>

# Counter-narratives amidst anti-Queer rhetoric surrounding the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2023

Shinta Jennifer Ayebazibwe  
(Lecturer and PhD Candidate at University of Johannesburg)

In the face of a loud and relentless anti-queer vitriol and rhetoric, it is possible to miss little pockets of resistance and those quieter yet essential and positive voices arguing against the grain. As momentum built around Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill, considered draconian by observers in its punitively homophobic stance, I was/have been inundated with this rhetoric in the past few months, some from family members but mostly from the general public which appears to have become more and more homo/transphobic. While the bill itself does not directly refer to transgender people, a lot of the backlash has been directed towards this community. In fact, colloquially used to refer to the LGBTQ community, *Abasiyazi*, does not differentiate between the particular identities within the queer community but is equally against all expressions of non-normative genders and sexualities.

Although homosexuality is already criminalised in the country under the Penal Code Act 1950, Section 145, 6, 8, which was amended in 2000 to include same-sex acts by women, this is not the first time Uganda has sought to tighten its anti-homosexuality laws. In 2013, a similar bill known as the "Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act," proposed life imprisonment for people who engaged in same-sex sexual activity, as well as criminalizing the promotion of homosexuality and requiring individuals to report any suspected homosexual activity. The bill was met with international criticism and condemnation and was eventually

nullified by the Ugandan Constitutional Court in 2014 on procedural grounds. The recent Act which includes items such as "aggravated homosexuality" and conflates homosexuality with rape, paedophilia, and the abuse of the elderly to name a few, follows in the tradition of the 2013 Act but adds to the litany of offences and tightens degree of policing and punishment.

The world has been rightfully outraged by this blatant attempt to erase an entire segment of society based on such arbitrary ideas as culture, Africanity, and family, ideas which are never adequately explained by the proponents of the Act. As a Ugandan, I have seen this debate play out at a personal level as well by both family in Uganda and South Africa. For instance, in a heated debate on a family WhatsApp group, a cousin shared a fake video of the United States president, Joe Biden, ranting about transgender people which was accompanied by his own very transphobic and homophobic opinions:

*At last, the first President of the world has said it in clear, simple, and unmistakable English. Homosexuality is not natural and is also a debasement of mankind and has no place in modern civilization. I admire the force and beauty of this communication. You can't beat the Americans when it comes to effective communication. Enough of the hypocrisy that the*

*world has had to endure. This should go viral to alert the gullible being deceived by certain immoral human rights.*

Aside from the fact that this often-self-proclaimed Pan Africanist referred to Biden as the president of the world when it served his agenda, he did not see the irony in a western leader espousing the same homophobic values he has come to embrace as part of his unique African identity and legacy. When it was pointed out by me and other members on the group that the video was fake and maliciously intended to spread mis/disinformation, he responded that while he was aware of this fact, it nonetheless spoke a truth that needed to be spoken. By his own admission, he knowingly disseminated fake information to promote transphobia.

While the rhetoric from the supporters of the Act has been overwhelming and often seems to represent all of Ugandan society, I recently read a letter written by a group of mothers of queer Ugandans which challenged this narrative and filled me with hope. It is likely the first ever such piece of writing to ever grace the pages of a Ugandan newspaper. Although it is not uncommon for mothers of LGBT children to speak out in support of their children's rights and wellbeing, the narrative in Uganda has often painted a picture of deeply entrenched queerphobia cutting across all of society. Such advocacy can help raise awareness and promote acceptance of LGBT individuals in their communities, which can, in turn, lead to greater social and legal protections.

The letter, written by seven mothers who signed it with their names and published in one of the biggest independent newspapers in the country, begged the president not to assent to the Act because it would criminalise their LGBTQ children. It used language that those who profess to speak for African values and uphold African families would understand and respond to. It spoke of the love these mothers had for their queer children and the fear that their children who contributed to families, communities, and the economy would soon become criminals simply by existing. It spoke of the journeys these mothers had undergone to accept their children amidst a culture that painted them as amoral deviants.

This counternarrative is of course used in other contexts by parents and friends of queer people to defend their loved ones. Within the Ugandan context however, it demonstrates a bravery on the part of these parents who had to overcome their own fears and prejudices and come out openly and proudly as mothers of those who have been socially outcast. This is perhaps even more daunting if one considers the role placed on the mother to nurture socially acceptable behaviour in their children and when perceived failure to successfully do so is a reflection on the mother's own moral standing in society.

Such voices are critical to counter the well-organised and well-funded raising conservatism in the country and the continent as a whole. For instance, shortly after the passing of the bill the Ugandan parliament sponsored a 3-day African Family Policy Conference hosted by Family Watch International held in Entebbe, Uganda which was attended by the president, the first Lady and Minister of Education, members of the African parliament, African Bar Association, academics, clergy, and various prominent politicians from Uganda and 22 other African countries. The president's opening speech was on "Protecting National Sovereignty and the Institution of the Family: An African Imperative." Various "experts" from the global North presented on issues such as "Protecting Women & Children from Abortion: Policies that Work" and "The Serious Harms of the Transgender Agenda: Professional Experience and Personal Testimony."

Without a push back from parents and families of queer people, the narrative portrays queer people as deviants whose own families find them disgusting and unlovable. Such narratives make public and state violence towards queer and trans people acceptable. However, alternative voices such as those from the mothers of queer people in a context where African values of family are supposedly central to the construction of family and nation, the support by the mothers is one small step towards humanising trans and queer Ugandans.

# Ndoda Izapha

Sfundo Sosibo (MA candidate, University of KwaZulu Natal)

Ah, ancient smile gathered from the gallop of galaxies,  
Falling like feathers forming to flatter to fashion my  
Peacock-pride, umuhle. Sondela Sanusi sikaFaru and let's  
Build pyramids as isiGodlò, to let the sweet moans of  
Amun-Ra create ingunaphakade once more. Phuma langa.sikothe,  
Reveal thy fair face, a sun in search of the knowing gaze of  
A poet. Ndoni yamazi, let me pick the stars of your night-skin  
And adorn my dreams with your gleams. Uluthando,  
Androgynous spirit - citing whispers of manhood with your  
Adoring thrust, swaying the secrets of womanhood  
With your hungry hips, yiza ngikugone. Ndoda izapha  
Siphahle embhedeni, sigide isicathamiya semfihlakalo -

Giving, taking, healing, breaking.

Certain as gravity, magic as duality, hlala phansi ngikukame,  
Your afro is godly, and my hands are eager to worship.  
IKhehla lami is in love with uGogo wakho; uMkhulu  
Wakho is at home with iSalikazi sami, come closer my  
Beauty, I wish to look on you till eternity sleeps.  
Hold my hand and let us pray in sheets fold,  
Sharing verses, the testaments new and old.  
Give me your gods, your friends, your kin,  
And fly us beyond the rainbow, into the promise of usiko.  
Light iMphepo and let us fuck, while iziNyanya zethu smoke kush.

Ndoda izapha and let us tame fate  
Ngoba icilongo lovuthondaba solishaya late.

## On Becoming - Desire Marea's "On the Romance of Being"

Melusi Mntungwa (Lecturer, University of South Africa)

Desire Marea's second studio record, titled "*On the Romance of Being*", released at the beginning of April, 2023 is a lyrical and sonic treat which showcases his talent and prowess as a creative artist. Through this offering, Desire romantically weaves lyrics, acoustics and sonic arrangement to exhibit his ability to give voice to the experience of being in the world at this moment with all its complexities and despondencies. He takes the listener through a journey of self-actualisation, capturing the complex and intricate journey of becoming. Drawing on the themes of rebirth, temporality, freedom, connectedness, memory, and spirituality, he underscores the predicament of coming into and being in the world in the current age. In this profoundly spiritual and self-reflexive record, Desire departs from the themes of his debut, offering Desire towards a more decadent self-exploratory and imaginative offering grounded in self-actualisation, acceptance, joy, and the challenges of being in and experiencing the world from their positionality. The underlying message is reminiscent of Ntozake Shange's poem "I Used To Live In World" from her seminal choreopoem "*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When The Rainbow Is Enuf*" (Shange, 1997). In this record, Desire makes us aware of the ebbs and flows of life that have characterised our experiences of the world across temporalities as we journey in search of ourselves and confront our truths.

It is also wonderful to see Desire singing most of the record in isiZulu, his home language. This adds more nuance, feeling and expression to the delivery offered by the richness of indigenous language. He opens the record with the words "I want to see you levitate" from the song Ezulwini, a conjuring call to elevate to the most incredible heights, signalling the work that he asks the listener to do in this record, to transcend and be suspended in heights that they have not imagined. Ezulwini is the perfect opening to the record as it directs you to Be Free, where you contend with the idea of freedom and the search for freedom in its multiple manifestations. Be Free also warns against taking freedom for granted and wasting it. *Makhukhu* draws attention to the process of becoming, at times,

a treacherous process that peels away at the layers of what we knew to reveal that which we may not be prepared to acknowledge while calling us to sit with the intensity of that experience as we journey towards becoming where we view becoming not as a place but rather as a continuous journey. He also speaks about heartache and rebuilding all that has been lost and the experience of being lost in translation fuelled by miscommunication in love relationships promoted by a lack of understanding of our different love languages. This creates a static space full of lost communication signals as expressions of love and affection are lost in attempts at meaning-making.

My firm favourite, *Rah*, the celebrated duet between him and Zoe Modiga, is a lamentation to the source of all creation about the current state of the world and its woundedness. *Rah* reminds us about being in the world while calling us to return to the centre, especially in these moments of discord. It acknowledges that though the world is wounded, its generative nature can change our story's trajectory. In *Skhathi*, Desire pays a heartfelt tribute to his mother while focusing on memory and the work of remembering across temporalities, and the human Desire makes time static so that we never forget. At the same time, it reminds us of the potentialities of memory and how it transcends different temporalities. Through this, we acknowledge life's continuous and evolving nature, not compounded by space and time and how spirit and memory transcend temporality. Desire closes the record with *Banzi*, a transposing call to the infinite and generative water of the ocean that connects us to the source and all living forms. This explosive closure to the record exhibits his vocal prowess as he skirts and creates acoustics with his voice arranged over the haunting and screeching wail of the saxophone, the base, and keys, presenting a moment of simultaneous discord and regeneration. *The Romance of Being* is a profoundly personal, inward-looking, and spiritual offering that forces the listener to go into the depths of their being and sit with the complexities of their being as they journey towards becoming.

<sup>1</sup> [https://youtu.be/cL00KDSgKk4?si=\\_AwjuGdh6h78WwFO](https://youtu.be/cL00KDSgKk4?si=_AwjuGdh6h78WwFO)

# “What is a man anyway?”

## Fashioning and Beautifying Masculinities in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Sipho Mckenzie (MA Candidate: University of Johannesburg)

I am a man who takes care of himself. They call me a nuisance. I call myself a disruptor. Traditional ideas that suppress men’s expression ought to be revised and rid of. A man taking care of himself and being concerned about how he looks is bizarre because the only description of what a man should look like is wearing rags, drinking beer, and playing rough. But the definition of a man is misunderstood in societies because how a man expresses himself does not equate to his weakness nor divert from his manhood. A man is not defined by what he wears, how he expresses himself or whether he is image conscious, but by what he does as one in society and in his family.

Fashion can also be one of the biggest tools of assigning gender and its expression. The image of men is held highly because it ‘portrays’ and ‘preserves’ their manhood, for instance they are told not to cry or express their emotions because that deems them weak. ‘Indoda ayikhali iyaqinisela’ is a commonly used phrased within and outside masculinities insinuating that crying is only for ‘girls which has become a naturalized form of how gender and masculinities are constructed. How a man also chooses to dress, as another form of self-expression, is ironically monitored culturally, religiously, and societally because of the ‘protector’ and ‘provider’ binary roles they must play. These roles mean they ought to display a strength-based masculine norm to maintain their male identity or manhood.

Men like me who wear skirts disrupt this ‘binary’ and deterministic conception of gender that limits expression to maintain gender roles insinuating that they are more pertinent than one’s self-expression.



The concept behind Fashioning Masculinities and putting myself in skirts is to not only disrupt gender constructions which are limiting but to assert that if you can allow men to wear them, you can normalize their self-expression and this means allowing them to cry, show emotions, or display vulnerability. Currently, men would rather drown themselves in substance abuse as a coping mechanism or hold on to their depression than show their emotions to a loved one.

It is not just me. Places like Braamfontein, Melville and The Maboneng Precinct in Johannesburg offer an insight of men who freely express themselves through fashion and accessories. Most of them like to accessorize themselves when they are wearing a nice outfit. They wear earrings pairing them with their cropped tops, paint their nails, pierce their noses and ears and they walk with confidence.

In a general sense of gender where women are told not to wear pants in the church, the above image disrupts this restrictive self-expression notions of gender. By putting men in skirts and women in pants we challenge these basic notions of gender that do not pay attention to and instead separate expression from gender.

# Thinking while Playing

During the Queer Masculinities Summer School we spent time with a group of students from Ruhr University Bochum in Germany thinking about how everyday ways of being and objects are important visual texts that create useful /and or damaging narratives. Our prompt was to think about the objects that were in front of us to comment on queer masculinities. Here are some of the blurbs that we drew from the exercise.



"In one tube - seemingly straight - we find a lot of different and very colourful entities. Some are damaged, from their intense interaction with each other, some are not. So from the outside it seems as if there is a possibility to frame all different forms of being masculine under one umbrella term - but maybe it is a lie."

**Tabea Speder (MA Candidate, Ruhr University Bochum)**

"Well, people say that most books were written by men. Which does not seem like a good plan at all. I've been told that planning is a very masculine thing to achieve. Which seems really far-fetched. I have been told that our calendar was invented by a male society. And let's not even get started with the color blue. So how do we use a blue book-calendar titled "A Good Plan" in a way beyond gender, in a masculine way beyond gender, or not in a masculine way at all?"

**Paulena Müller (PhD candidate, Research Training Group Documentary Practices at Ruhr University Bochum)**



What the hell is supposed to be masculine about the pencil? could the green colour be a hint that it's not particularly feminine in a world that even genders colour? is its form part of phallic symbolism? or does it simply show the absurdity of trying to squish everything in categories of male and female? even though the pencil is necessary for my academic work, these lines are definitely not academic.

**Leah Gerfelmeyer (Ruhr-University Bochum)**



# KwaKwize – A CALL

**Bongani Malinga (MA Candidate University of kwaZulu Natal)**

## 'Experience as is felt' - boring still...

As a performer trained in physical theatre, my work, naturally, tends to be informed by an 'affective perspective' which pertains to the emotions that are involved when we deal with analysis of one's surroundings. This way of working has served me in a plethora of ways such that I can generally discern what is mine and what is not: by this I refer to the way(s) in which I am received in different environments as a queer person insofar as knowing that I should not necessarily feel as though there is something wrong about me even when my mere presence elicits a negative reception because it has nothing to do with me but a lot to do with those that deem me unfit to exist. This is the by-and large premise of my way into any type of academic research/writing. Goffman (1959) & Butler (1988) write on social performances and performativity, respectively. According to these concepts - though they cannot necessarily be mistaken to be saying the same things - the former speaks of how we have been socialized to formulate ourselves in ways that fit into social constructs and the latter extends to this by specifically landing on gender and sexuality,

specifically arguing that we are socialized to perform our genders and sexualities in congruence to what we are given at birth. A biological male is discouraged from performing their innate feminine traits for instance. These theorists have demonstrably introduced aspects of life that society had never considered prior and it is their work and those of numerous others, which continually inspires my thinking in ways that cause me to stretch myself.

Concluding his 2022 inaugural lecture titled "*The making and unmaking of social order*", professor Karl Von Holdt says "as activists and as citizens, how do we make our own contributions to producing the alternative futures that may sustain and liberate us?" This struck me dearly as someone who had been taught by him the year before in that lecture. I was reminded of what I took from his course as a queer student who is constantly in search of alternative ways of conceiving of myself and those who form part of my community - a community of othered individuals who have no other ways of constituting ourselves except for within frameworks put in place to make sense of us and, of course, limit or banish us to perpetual obscurity. Anna Stielau's (2015) article, "*Towards a Queer Futurity: The Utopian impulse in the work of Athi-Patra Ruga and Milumbe Haimbe*" exemplifies my

previously mentioned intellectual wonderings where I sought or at least, attempted to imagine, myself outside of the discomfort with how we have been placed into a pigeonhole of not being able to write our way out of the limits of daily struggles. This is not in any way, to downplay the importance of highlighting and bringing to the foreground the pernicious and usually explicitly clear result of queerphobia. Rather, I am merely thinking out-loud, what it does to one's psyche to see oneself as not having the mental wherewithal to free oneself or the self-liberation that Von Holdt inserts. Stielau gives the better phrasing by citing Alexander Doty's (1993:14) argument that "Queer positions, queer readings, and queer pleasures are part of a reception space that stands simultaneously *besides and within* that created by heterosexual and straight positions" (2015:131). Let's take Immanuel Kant's notion of noumenon which largely speaks to the idea of being without having to apply categories in order that the being makes sense. I argue that one of the ways we can attempt to reach a sustained sense of liberation can come from the intellectual act of tearing out from the cognitive dissonance that comes from when you try to make sense of yourself within a cloud that lacks greyness. Or even better, a cloud that cannot imagine endowing itself with pinkness or some hint of fabulosity

# Queen Personality of the month

## : MTHUNZIKAZI MBUNGWANA

**PS:** Tell me about yourself, but I want to put it across as let me into Mthunzi, let me know you. Let's start from there, of course personal is subjective and you know where to draw the boundary but yeah, I just want to know you as a person.

**MM:** So, as a person I have a curious mind and I am always asking myself, what's next, I love reading. I have also never felt like I belong so I'm always trying to find out where I belong, who my tribe is and how do I contribute to that community. My father was a Preacher at the Methodist Church and my mother used to sell stuff around and at some point and she received a spiritual calling, I'm not sure if she followed it up. So, there were always people around at home and we were always helping, always extra people around and just never the three of us. We always had sisters, cousins, neighbours that came to eat and stay with us. So you were never given attention, these other people that needed attention that were more vulnerable or sick, hungrier and needed more attention. We

then had to be resourceful. I have always been curious. I thought first it was church and then I think at 14 I was like no there's no chance, I'm not a church person and then it became poetry for a very long time, and now at the age of 43 it's no longer just poetry but life. It's about how do we contribute and how do we name certain things. I'm obsessed- I know we were saying the other time, that naming is taming us. We have to discuss this because I also feel like sometimes, when you don't name things, they just get lost in the wind. It's easier for other people to have names for everything. I like challenging roles and stereotypes, I think that's what I'm trying to do at home, because that's where I grew up and that's where I still go with dozens of cousins, uncles and it's nice to define rules and defy rules when you're there. In most cases they're like ohh you're supposed to do this you're supposed to do that, and I've always been different. I played soccer at some point; I cooked well and so I've always been whatever that I wanted to be at that particular moment. But also, that landed some curiosity in me to find out MORE about me and people that I thought looked like me.

*Continued on next page...*



**PS:** I think you have said a lot of interesting things and I'm figuring which of the points I should pursue. Maybe the part where you say, "many people that look like you" what does that mean- look like what?

**MM:** I've been reflecting on my journey with my identity, particularly in relation to the term "lesbian." It's been a process for me, especially as I've been careful about the words I use. Last year, I was in discussions with the SGQ group about this paper. I've realized that while "lesbian" might fit the dictionary definition - women attracted to other women - there's more to it. I'm still questioning if it fully encapsulates my experiences. Attraction isn't just about sexual desire; it's also about connection and admiration for someone's personality or intellect. I've considered using "queer," but it feels like it's too broad and may not fully capture what I'm trying to express. In reflecting on my journey, I've grappled with the term "lesbian" because it doesn't quite fit me. As a masculine-presenting woman, I often find myself questioned about my identity. One misconception I encounter is the assumption that because I don't identify as a lesbian, I don't belong to the LGBTQ community. However, it's not about belonging; rather, it's about not fully aligning with the cultures and norms within that community. That is the thing, the trappings of English and American culture which is LGBTQ you see I'm already missing misspelling the alphabets alright LGBTQ. I think it's fine now that we use *Nongayindoda* but we need to find another name so that there is no point where we fall back and we're comfortable with just lesbian.

**PS:** Now I want us to quickly get into your work which touches around the subject of language and the queer being.

**MM:** So my work is an intersection of language and queer studies, a language, the one that I know really well - Isixhosa. There are two things that brought me to language and queer studies. I think we are still relying a lot on Global North terms, we need to figure out what a queer person was called in our society. Being queer is not new it is as old as trees and rivers. So I am reading a lot of work from various places like Ghana to see

what queer people were called. What I have found out so far is that the element of erasure is also in some of the vernacular terms. The available terms are a bit inadequate because it seems the terms suggest that women were just friends who were holding space for each other. They do not talk about how women were having sex with each other. It is not just about sex but this has to be said. It is our job is to explore this further. So I am analysing 10 texts by black women who identify as queer or lesbian and their characterisation. I am looking at exploring what their characters are dealing with or saying and I draw from queer studies to say then how do we define this. Ultimately what we want is to define. Everything does not need to have a name but it can be explored. I do not know if I am making sense?

**PS:** Yes yes it is quite clear. Ok so this is part of your PhD project. Let's also talk about your two published books.

**MM:** My first published book was in 2015. I was not new in creative writing but when you start you just want to talk about everything. I spent a lot of time in church because my father used to go to church every Sunday and we were very close so for 16/27 years I was going to church but you wouldn't find people that looked like me. I think they suppressed that. Actually in my second book I refer to a story I once heard where two women were found kissing by the river, and people said balaloya, these ones are witches. My stories are mostly set in rural areas and my first book was expressing, or giving the poet a voice, provide a mirror to society, reflecting its flaws and challenges, such as broken homes, corruption, and substance abuse. I felt like I just wanted to speak about everything that was wrong. The second project now *Unami wena* was part of my Masters project. For the first time I felt like..I have always been a woman who is attracted to other women...but I was more bold in 2021. So I write about secrecy and shame that Matebeni also talks about around women that like other women. I had not seen poetry that is overt about queer lives in isiXhosa and that was my contribution. Because usually we just say there is a book that we suspect is queer for example uPhumeza by Dikana. I do take into consideration that it was written in 1975 so there were certain limitations around that time because of colonialism and

all sorts of things. It was even banned in school because the subject matter made people uncomfortable. In 2021 I was free to write that is where I have poems like nongayindoda and imilebe where two women are giving each other love and sharing not necessarily one person dominating the other.

**PS:** Ok that is quite interesting because it reimagines the script in the context of female queer love. You kind of deconstruct ideas around how we love and do love. But you also tease a lot on female queer masculinities and I would love to hear your thoughts around that in the context of queer love

**MM:** I hope one day I will be more articulate and I really want to be but I am struggling. All of these things we have learnt them from somewhere. We live in a deeply patriarchal society.. Even though I was raised by my grandmother, sisters and aunts there are trends and feels of patriarchy.

**PS:** Of course, bell hooks says patriarchy has no gender. We enact it in so many ways

**MM:** For me I struggled in the beginning. As a masculine presenting woman people just assume you are the one who is going to be driving the car, fix broken things and provide. In one of the texts I am looking at, there is a masculine presenting character and they are portrayed as violent. Matebeni explores it in her thesis that some women prefer 50/50 and have argued that we are not reconstructing heteronormativity, we are both women even when I am masculine presenting. I might look physically tougher but it does not make me less of a woman. A good friend of mine who is a sculptor, uPhila and are playing with this concept of nongayindoda. Yes we are masculine presenting but we like nice and things and we like to be pampered. It has never been about replacing men, it is about sharing unconditional love. And I always say that women love thoroughly.

**PS:** Detailed love. I call it detailed love.

**MM:** Of course same sex violence exists in our relationships but more generally women love and are nurturers and when its two women loving each other, the nurturing and caring is quite prominent. I think we need to unlearn the idea that being masculine presenting is about replacing men. I was born like this I am not trying to be a man, or replacing a man, this is me. I might prefer to wear my pants a little bit low, and it's just fashion preference. There are too many stereotypes that we need to undo from our thinking.

**PS:** Just to close it off, what do you do to relax, recalibrate when you are not doing PhD. Who inspires you?

**MM:** Uhm, I love cooking. I can't bake though because I feel it is too rigid. I also love running and finding sleep as a way to say to my body I care. For a very long time I used to feel bad for sleeping because there is a lot to do. But now I can take nice premium sleep and not feel guilty. I am also learning to take less things and not be everywhere. I know I might be speaking from a place of privilege because as black children, we have to work everywhere in Africa we to have to work. But I think people who care for you are able to wait. In terms of inspiration, I love music, I am inspired by Mam Sibongile Khumalo because of her discipline. I am inspired by Makhosazana Qawe, I am inspired by Prof zethu Matebeni. There is that deep respect for her and her work. I am inspired by you Princess. Let me give you flowers while we are alive. You are a builder. Also you an artist, you bring some craziness balanced with a hardworking ethic. I come to the academy very late therefore I doubt myself a lot and your voice is important because you keep on reminding me that I can and my voice matters. You are generous and special.

**PS:** It is amazing that you think of me in that way. Thank you very much. This has been a lovely conversation and we will definitely pursue this conversation on a public forum. I really enjoyed it. Until then

The Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS), DSI-NRF SARCHI Chair in African Feminist Imagination, and SARCHI Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies present:

## TRANSITIONS:

### A CONVERSATION ON QUEER POLITICS, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND APARTHEID LEGACIES 30 YEARS ON WITH JABU PEREIRA AND ZETHU MATEBENI

Friday, 28 June

14h00 - 16h00

Council chambers,  
South Campus, Gqeberha



Prof zethu Matebeni

**zethu Matebeni** is the South Africa Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies at the University of Fort Hare. zethu has published various key essays, articles, poetry, films and 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'*. zethu has been Visiting Professor at the Marie Jahoda Centre for International Gender Studies at Ruhr University Bochum, and at the Women's Gender and Sexualities Studies (WGSS) Department at Yale University, and at the Centre for Women and Gender Studies at Nelson Mandela University. Trained in Sociology, zethu has been instrumental in the development of African queer theory and queering decolonisation efforts in higher education.

Photo credit: Saskia Uppenkamp



Zoom  
meeting link



Jabu Pereira

Jabu is South African, he was born in 1971 at peak of Apartheid and state oppression against black south Africans. Jabu proudly identifies as an African trans man. In 2012 he founded an organization called Iranti. Iranti is a Yoruba word which means memory. Iranti is a trans, LBO and intersex rights organisation that uses strategies such as advocacy, public awareness and storytelling as a way to changing laws, policies and hearts and minds. In the belief that organizations should have a healthy life with its own transitions, Jabu stepped down in 2022 as founding director. Jabu holds a masters degree in the arts from New York University.

Currently he is developing a wellness retreat space in Rosendal in the Free State of South Africa, with a focus on finding innovative ways on how we can sustain ourselves as activists while fighting and eradicating stigma and discrimination. He is also the senior program officer at AJWS managing a global program on support Trans and Intersex mid size organizations.

Enquiries: wendy.adams@mandela.ac.za



Nelson Mandela University and the University of Fort Hare

# BLACK FEMINIST WORK(S):

CALL FOR STUDENTS AND ARTISTS TO SUBMIT CREATIVE WORKS AND ESSAYS

The Dr Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabele Public Lecture Organising Committee is inviting students, independent artists, and creatives across the Eastern Cape to enter a competition in honour of Dr Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabele's legacies.

The competition is a part of a prestigious public lecture co-hosted by Nelson Mandela University (represented by the Centre for Women and Gender Studies and the DSI-NRF SARCHI Chair in African Feminist Imagination) and the University of Fort Hare (represented by the SARCHI Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Queer Studies). This competition is designed to encourage students, artists, and creatives in the Eastern Cape to enter, stimulate debates, and create works that demonstrate Black feminist intellectual contributions in celebration of Dr Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabele's works.

The 2024 theme, "Black Feminist Work(s)", draws inspiration from the life and work of Dr Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabele who, despite living in different periods and working in various parts of the world, have greatly contributed to the liberation of women, those living with HIV, the LGBTQ community, and other marginalised communities. The term 'work(s)' connotes the intellectual/creative/artistic contributions of Black feminists and the ongoing labour of Black feminists in their addressing multiple crises of the world today. We hope this work will spotlight intersectional approaches that centre Africa and Black diasporic voices in articulating new possibilities towards a better and just world. **CLICK TO VIEW FULL CALL** An emancipatory project allows us to embrace the concept of communal celebrations. Thus, we open this competition to those who want to honour Black Feminist Work(s) and honour Dr Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabele through academic essays, reflection pieces, or artistic meditations of various kinds such as poetry and digital performances.

#### CRITERIA FOR ENTRY:

**Category 1:** Registered Students in the Eastern Cape.

**Category 2:** Creatives, community members and independent Artists in the Eastern Cape.

- Category 1 is open to registered students ONLY within institutions of higher learning in the Eastern Cape.
- Entries must speak to the correlating theme of Black Feminist Work(s).
- Written works in the forms of essays or short stories should not exceed 5 000 words.
- Visual works should be provided in a high-resolution image or pdf.
- All other creative works (e.g. audio or video performances) should be submitted via an active link, and not exceed 5 minutes.
- You may only submit one entry for the competition.
- Contributors must provide full details of their affiliation (names, institution, department, and university).
- For category 2: community entries, independent artists, activists, or creatives, please provide us with full names, address, and relevant information to facilitate the process.



# BLACK FEMINIST WORK(S):

THE INSTITUTIONAL JOINT PUBLIC LECTURE IN HONOUR OF DR PHYLLIS NTANTALA AND PRUDENCE MABELE

By Nelson Mandela University and the University of Fort Hare

25 JULY 2024 | 16:00 - 18:00

Ocean Sciences Campus, B-Block Conference Hall

Enquiries: [wendy.adams@mandela.ac.za](mailto:wendy.adams@mandela.ac.za)



NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH

Photo credit: Nana Kofi Acquah



KOKETSO MOETI

Photo credit: Koketso Moeti



ZOOM meeting link

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY



University of Fort Hare  
Together in Excellence

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, Prof Matebeni works collaboratively with activists, scholars and artists and creates interdisciplinary scholarly work. Prof Matebeni has been visiting professor at various universities, including Humboldt University (Germany), Yale University (USA), Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany), and Nelson Mandela University (SA). Prof Matebeni has published various key volumes on African sexualities and gender diversity including: *Reclaiming African: queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* (2014); co-edited *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship and Activism* (2018); and *Beyond the Mountain: queer life in 'Africa's gay capital'* (2020).



Dr Bellita Banda Chitsamatanga (Miss B) is a Researcher at 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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## TARGET

N	S	L
C	A	M
I	U	E

Let's see how many words of four letters or more can you make. Let's also see who gets the 9 letter word!