

THE HUMANITIES
SHAPE OUR WORLD

RESEARCH.
TEACH.
TRANSFORM.

BLACK WOMEN
LEADING IN



The Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of the Free State, University of Zululand and National University of Lesotho present the *2nd Women Researchers in Humanities and Social Sciences Conference.*

21-23 September 2026

Theme: Critical lactation politics - Re phahamisa ba bang re ntse re nyoloha (Lifting as we climb)

Focal Areas

Lactation Politics | Feminism | Womanism | African Feminist Thought | Identity Politics | Culture | Resistance | Mentorship | Ethics | Toxic masculinity | History | Gender Equality | Women's Rights | Access | Capacity | Laws | Women | Language | Philosophy | Gender Based Violence

This conference follows the 2024 University of Zululand Women Researchers in Humanities and Social Sciences (WoRiHSS) inaugural conference. The conference theme was 'Lactation Politics in Higher Education - Sithini Thina?' As women in the Humanities and Social Science space. The central theme in both conferences centres around 'lactation' politics as a critique of the lack of representation of women in different academic spaces. The lack of representation of women is both physical and abstract, tangible and intangible.

The WoRiHSS conference held at UNIZULU approached this discussion through the conceptualisation of 'sithini thina' /'what do we say?' This second conference hosted by WoRiTH (UFS) continues on this concept through solidarity and the importance of feminist/womanist mentorship. 'Re phahamisa ba bang re ntse re nyoloha' (Lifting as we climb) is a slogan that originates from women's suffragette leader, author and educator Mary Church Terrell for American Black women and women of colour struggling to shake the colonial and patriarchal legacies that still left them marginalised even as the world was evolving.

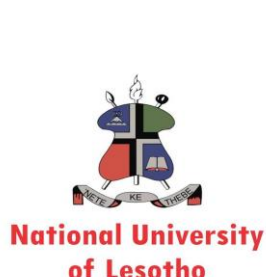
Historically, Black women's personhood has been marginalised politically and socially.

They struggled to find adequate work. It was more challenging to occupy positions of leadership, and they were overly sexualised. A lot of this is still true even today. To counter these negative continuities, Black women came up with the strong Black woman narrative, which came from Black resistance. Terrell came up with the slogan "lifting as we climb" to inspire Black women to reach for greatness while supporting each other and to present Black women to others as more than just slaves. The theme was also adopted as a motto by the National Association of Coloured Women (NACW) in the late 19th century.

In South Africa (SA) during apartheid, women organised themselves around social issues, with many community-based organisations emerging, including the Alexandra Women's Council (AWC) and Bantu Women's League (BWL). Founded in 1913, BWL was led by revolutionary Charlotte Maxeke; she and other BWL members demanded recognition and to be heard during a time when women were not allowed full membership in the African National Congress and other important political spaces.

In 1947 AWC successfully resisted forced removals when the Native Affairs Commission was sent to Alexandra Township to move shack dwellers. These women refused to participate in a job market where Black women could only be in service of white people.

Inspiring excellence, transforming lives through quality, impact, and care.



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA

They were self-reliant and made money through mainly traditional beer brewing. Slogans like “Wathinta abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo!” (You strike a woman, you strike a rock) were popularised in SA and perpetuated the notion that Black women are strong and can handle anything. Akin to Re phahamisa ba bang re ntse re nyoloha, invoking imbokodo is a call for solidarity and shows the innate strength women have.

While the strong Black woman stereotype was created by Black women, it is sometimes misused to justify their oppression and abuse instead of celebrating their strengths as was intended. Past generations of women carried the weight of the world while still portraying very strong personas, never showing any weakness. The expectation is that the new generation does the same in the workplace, in relationships, in homes and in communities. It doesn’t matter if this comes at the expense of their mental health, financial stability and energy because women are seen as strong; they should be able to take it. The women that came before us almost single-handedly raised strong families and skilfully stretched the little money they had to address all the family’s needs, and they did it with love. Our mothers and grandmothers did all of this while navigating the worst institutionalised racism and gender oppression; while leading or inspiring revolutions and providing a safe space for Black men whose bodies, masculinity and sense of self were constantly under attack.

We encourage the submissions of papers that explore all the complex paradoxes of Re phahamisa ba bang re ntse re nyoloha. This conference intends to create a platform for the rigorous festival of scholarly ideas, discussions, and analyses on women’s trajectories and obstacles in the global context, including the whole spectrum of Higher Education.

Sub-Themes

1. Breaking barriers of belonging and navigating imposter syndrome
2. Reframing voluntarism as strength
3. Encouraging collaboration, especially feminist/womanist partnerships and mentoring
4. Exploring important historical and contemporary women leadership that offers alternatives to the patriarchal status quo
5. Resilience strategies
6. Overcoming institutional and social isolation
7. Mentorship: good, constructive and well-aligned support strategies

Requirements for submission of Abstracts

- Title of paper
- Name(s) of author(s)
- Institutional Affiliation
- E-mail address
- Abstract 300 words (max) and include: the purpose of the paper; the central argument and indication of methodology, results, and/or conclusions
- 3-5 keywords
- Final submissions should be in Arial, font size 12, 1.5 spacing on A4 portrait
- Full Research Papers to include a separate title page with names of authors and a separate manuscript

Length

- Final Full Research Papers: 5000-8000 words
- Final Poster Papers: max. 2000 words

Registration

- Registration fee for Conference (to include meals during the conference):
- Staff members: R4000
- Students: R500

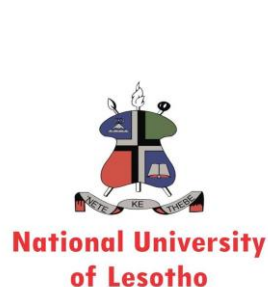
Submission dates

- Abstracts to be submitted by 30 June 2026
- Notification of acceptance: 18 July 2026
- Registration opens on 20 July 2026
- Submission of full papers: 31 August 2026

Contact

All written submissions and enquiries should be emailed to WoRiTHConference@ufs.ac.za.

Inspiring excellence, transforming lives through quality, impact, and care.



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA