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## Dr. Gcobani Qambela and the Study of Gender in South Africa

Erin Long

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, elong001@csbsju.edu*

Will Nelson

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, WNELSON001@csbsju.edu*

Nolan Prokott

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, NPROKOTT001@sbsju.edu*

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# Dr. Gcobani Qambela and the Study of Gender in South Africa

Erin Long, Will Nelson, Nolan Prokott

Faculty Advisor: Mary Block  
Sociology Department

## Introduction

We chose to study Dr. Gcobani Qambela, an anthropologist who works at the University of Johannesburg as an anthropology lecturer. His research focuses on gender, sexual health, and adolescence. He has taught at a variety of international and local universities and has worked at the graduate and post-graduate level. As of now, he is currently preparing two monographs and working on various writing projects. We were interested in him because we were really struck by his research and the topics he studies. We were also drawn to him because he is an African anthropologist who actively studies Africa, and we think that his publications will provide a significant resource in our understanding of Africa. Due to growing up in post-apartheid times and experiencing gender-based discrimination as a young boy, Dr. Gcobani Qambela utilizes anthropology to understand gender issues and Xhosa masculinity in South Africa.

## African History/Context

South Africa, where he grew up, has a clear history of colonialism and racial apartheid. South Africa was colonized for over 300 years and experienced apartheid for over 40 years. Although he grew up in post-colonized and post-apartheid South Africa, the effects were still obvious throughout his childhood and influenced his understanding of gender identities. The African National Congress, which is the governing body of South Africa supports the traditional views of masculinity and manhood, which has been detrimental for women and the society overall with the prevalence of sexual violence. Today, South Africa suffers from high reports of sexual and gender-based violence. Even though the country has legalized gay marriage, it's not a sanctuary for gay people.

## Personal History/Context

Qambela was born in a rural village called Bangindlala in Lady Frere in 1988. Growing up in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, he spoke isiXhosa as his first language. He often was alone at home with his mother as his father worked in the mines and could only return once or twice a year. Even so, his parents were and are still married. While he was young, South Africa opened education to non-whites, so he was able to go to a white school and learn English. However, he became aware of the standards of masculinity at a young age. While walking home one night, he was threatened with rape for having a more feminine sounding voice. He was 12 or 13 at the time and never told anyone about the incident, fearing he would be victimized or rejected. In recent years, he has helped research for Centre for AIDS Development Research and Evaluation and was honored as one of the Top 200 Young South Africans in 2013 by Mail & Guardian.



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Gcobani Qambela



Map of South Africa, with provinces, neighbouring countries and oceans labelled in English by Htonl, available under a Creative-Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_South\\_Africa\\_with\\_English\\_labels.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_South_Africa_with_English_labels.svg)

## Scholarship

Through Dr. Gcobani Qambela's articles and research, he argues that gay men and boys have experienced rape and hate crimes for not fitting into the mold of the masculine culture. He describes rape as a punishment for a person's gender and sexual identity and explains that the masculine culture uses fear as a tool to silence both females and feminine men. He writes about the struggles that gay and transgender people experience in higher education systems and tries to give a voice to the voiceless of the post-apartheid era. Qambela also focuses his work on the Xhosa. He specifically investigates male initiation and works to understand what it means to be the New South African man. In other work, he notes that we should approach indigenous cultures differently and must not expect them to completely embrace modern Western techniques, whether it be medicine or our understood standards. This year, he wrote a collaborative article regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and the balance of respecting the traditional medicine of tribes while providing them with care. Some of his work studies the kinship networks and identities of rural black lesbians, and in various opinion pieces, he speaks up against the white gaze and the prominence of the heterosexual male lens.

## Conclusion

Dr. Gcobani Qambela is a young, bright scholar with decades of future research ahead. His writings on gender and queerness within African culture are hugely important for the analysis and study of different settings. He is very progressive and open with his research, and sheds light upon often overlooked issues.

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