

NYASHA KARIMAKWENDA, PHD

Wellesley Centers for Women
Wellesley College
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481

Associate Research Scientist
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FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION & RESEARCH INTERESTS

Gender-based violence with an emphasis on violence against women and girls, and sexual orientation and gender identity minorities; African customary marriage practices, including the intersection between marriage practices and sexual violence; power dynamics within families; histories of racial and gender exclusion; women's experiences of help-seeking through formal and informal institutions; and feminist community activism.

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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| University of Cape Town
<i>Post-Doctoral Fellow, Faculty of Law</i> | 2019-2020 |
| University of Cape Town
<i>PhD in Public Law, Advisor: Dee Smythe</i>
Dissertation title: <i>Where Rape Does Not Exist: Tracing the Unsettled Position of Marital Rape in South Africa Through Women's Recourse Seeking Journeys</i> | 2019 |
| Yale University
<i>Master of Arts in African Studies, Concentration in History</i>
Dissertation title: <i>Terrains of Struggle: Black Women's Bodies as Sites of Violence During Apartheid</i> | 2012 |
| Northeastern University School of Law
<i>Juris Doctor, Admitted to New York State Bar</i> | 2006 |
| Wellesley College
<i>Bachelor of Arts in Africana Studies and Peace and Justice Studies</i> | 2003 |

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA** Jan 2025-Present
Associate Research Scientist; Justice and Gender-Based Violence Research Initiative (JGBVRI)
- Conceptualizes and seeks funding for Africa-focused research projects exploring intimate partner violence, cultural frameworks, customary marriage practices, and violence against sexual orientation and gender identity minorities.
 - Co-leads projects in development under the JGBVRI.
 - Engages in network building with Africa-oriented feminist scholars and activists.

- Publishes work in diverse and impactful outlets to increase awareness of gender-based violence and ongoing research findings.

Current Main Project in Development:

- Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program: Co-lead with Linda Williams for Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program proposed project: *Partnering to Address Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence: Developing Interventions for Mastercard Foundation Scholars and Institutions*.
- Responsibilities include coordinating Africa-based NGO partner contributions, guiding project implementation design, liaising with Mastercard Foundation personnel and technical partners, and co-authoring submissions to the Foundation.
- Award Amount: \$221,215 for a six-month Project Planning Phase, launched in August 2024. A five-month no-cost extension granted by the Foundation to cover activities through mid-2025.

Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, Remote 2024
Consultant

- Completed a final evaluation of the decade-long Mastercard Foundation Scholarship Program at Wellesley College to assess African students’ experiences and program outcomes.
- Supported the Planning Phase for anticipated anti-SGBV project with Mastercard Foundation, including site visits to Ghana and Kenya and reflection report writing.

The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa, Remote 2021-2024
Consultant

- Developed pivotal outputs to support the organization’s mission of developing feminist jurisprudence on violence against women.
- Created interdisciplinary research and teaching portfolios on violence against women human rights violations in Africa and across the globe in support of litigation and lawyer trainings.
- Wrote feminist and international law-oriented materials for high-impact litigation.

Gender, Health & Justice Research Unit, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2020-2021
Researcher

- Provided leadership and key research contributions for research unit working at the intersection of academia, the non-profit sector, and policy on issues concerning violence against marginalized populations within South Africa and on the African continent.
- Led research on the Domestic Violence Act in collaboration with non-profit organization MOSAIC; undertook research for the National Prosecuting Authority on victim-centered prosecution; and developed recommendations for the Victim Support Services Bill.

Democratic Governance & Rights Unit, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2020-2021
Gender Consultant

- Provided ongoing gender expertise for research unit engaging in long-term State of the Judiciary study in Malawi, Namibia and South Africa.
- Developed quantitative and qualitative gender indicators to measure gender mainstreaming in the judiciaries as well as women’s access to justice; undertook desktop research and report-writing for study’s gender indicators; and liaised with country experts.

Centre for Law & Society, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2019
Project Manager & Research Lead

- Oversaw the successful conceptualization and completion of empirical research project assessing rural community-based organizations’ engagement with gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, and LGBTIQ-related violence.

- Supervised research team; provided inputs on research design; organized and implemented data collection in the field; conducted data analysis; and authored final report.

University of Cape Town; South Africa Sexual Offences Commentary, Cape Town 2018
Consulting Project Manager

- In collaboration with Professor Dee Smythe coordinated and implemented the substantive updating of the official *Sexual Offences Commentary* publication.
- Liaised with National Prosecuting Authority officials and scholars to facilitate their peer review of and additions to the resource.

Land & Accountability Research Centre, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2016-2019
Research Administrator

- Fulfilled various responsibilities for research and advocacy unit that promotes the rights of rural populations in respect of traditional governance, land and mining.
- Work included: Project-managing the country-wide monitoring of legislative reform public consultations, performing interdisciplinary research, and tracking legislative developments,

The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa, Johannesburg/Washington, DC 2015
Research Consultant

- Supervised researchers and authored varied written outputs for African feminist organization advancing human rights jurisprudence.
- Performed domestic, comparative and international legal research on LGBTIQ rights and women's rights; lent expertise at consultative meetings; and wrote reports outlining strategic findings from the meetings to inform the NGO's future work.

Ministry of Social Development, Government of Grenada, Grenada, West Indies 2013-2014
Gender Consultant for Division of Gender and Family Affairs

- Conducted comparative research on sexual discrimination legislative models and administered interviews with a broad-cross section of individuals and civil society organizations to identify best precedents for law reform.
- Created recommendations and authored report outlining the substantive focus and structure of future Grenadian sexual harassment policy and legislation.

Centre for Law and Society, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2012-2013
Fox Fellow - Recipient of Yale University Fox Fellowship

- Examined the historical and contemporary manifestations of ukuthwala (abduction of girls/women for marriage).
- Conducted library, archival and field research; and wrote memoranda and papers detailing historical patterns and characteristics of gender violence.
- Provided policy recommendations to the South Africa Law Reform Commission.

TEACHING, SUPERVISION & ACADEMIC SERVICE

2021. External Assessor for Gender, Family and the Workplace course, Sociology Department, University of Johannesburg.

Fourth Quarter, 2021, Supervision of Honours (4th year) sociology student thesis examining responses to female genital mutilation in Tanzania, University of Cape Town.

Second Quarter, 2021. Adjunct Lecturer. Course: Gender, Families and the State. Sociology Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town.

First Quarter, 2020. Adjunct Lecturer. Course: Culture and Society in the 21st Century, Module: *Culture, Families and Power*. Sociology Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town.

Spring semester 2012. Teaching Fellow. Course: From West Africa to the Black Americas: The Black Atlantic Visual Tradition. Professor Robert Farris Thompson, Department of the History of Art, Yale University.

Fall semester 2011. Teaching Fellow. Course: Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade. Professor Robert Harms, Department of History, Yale University.

By Invitation

March 2021. Guest Lecture: *Gender-Based Violence: Ukuthwala, Violence and Marriage*. Course: Law and Society in Africa. Professor Dee Smythe, University of Turin, Italy.

April 2019. Guest lectures: *Deconstructing 'Customary Law' and Dissecting Debates on Customary Marriage and Sexual Violence Against Women*. Course: Gender, Sexuality, Politics: Debates in Contemporary African Contexts. Dr Zamambo Mkhize, School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town.

April 2019. Guest lecture: *Contestations of Customary law, and Ukuthwala*. Course: Gender, Families and the State. Professor Elena Moore, Faculty of Sociology, University of Cape Town.

March 2019. Session lecture: *Marital Rape and Ukuthwala*. Course: Law and Society in Africa. Professor Dee Smythe, Law Faculty, University of Cape Town.

April 2018. Guest lecture: *The History of Marital Rape and Problematic Contemporary Jurisprudence*. Course: Women and the Law. Nolundi Luwaya, Faculty of Law, University of Cape Town.

March 2013. Guest lecture: *The Intersection Between Cultural Definitions of Consent and Gender-Based Violence*. Course: Sexual Offences and the Law. Professor Dee Smythe, Faculty of Law, University of Cape Town.

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PARTICIPATION, WORKSHOPS & EXPERT INPUTS

The Public Reading of African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls, South Africa Aug 2025

- Strategy session organized by Fòs Feminista, The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa, and Akina Mama wa Afrika.
- Panelist (online): Reflecting on the silences in the Convention.

Acquaintance Rape and Intimate Partner Violence Webinar, The Initiative For Strategic Litigation in Africa, South Africa Feb 2024

- Presenter (online): Discussed problematic and hopeful aspects of emerging jurisprudence in South Africa and Kenya.

- South Africa Human Rights Commission, South Africa** Feb 2024
- Provided consultative guidance on community-based research approaches to South Africa Human Rights Commission officials embarking on a program to address forced marriage (*ukuthwala/funelani nganeno*) in Mpumalanga Province.
- Customary Law and Social Justice Conference, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch** Aug 2021
- Panelist (online) for session: Human Rights Dimensions of *Ukuthwala* and Other Girls' Rights Including Finding Spaces to Move the Needle on GBV and Other Gender Challenges in Traditional Communities.
 - Presentation title: Problematizing Policy and Formal Legal Perceptions of Ukuthwala and Violence Through Women's Voices.
- Seminar Series, Sociology Department, University of Cape Town, Cape Town** Aug 2021
- Presentation title: Exposing the Outsider's Gaze in Customary Law Through the Phenomenon of Ukuthwala.
- International Women's Day Webinar, International Association of Women Judges, South Africa Chapter** Feb 2021
- Co-Presenter (online): Research on Gender and Access to Justice in South Africa During Covid-19.
- Dean of Humanities & Humanities Postgraduate Student Council, University of Cape Town, Cape Town** Oct 2019
- Series: *Citizenship and violence through the prism of resilient colonialism, xenophobia, and femicide.*
 - Panelist for session: 'Citizenship, Femicide and Sexual Violence.' Presented on marital rape survivors and the failures of the law.
- Consultative meeting on Violence Against Women and Girls, Ford Foundation, Johannesburg** Aug 2019
- Experts invited to give inputs on future funding directions for the Foundation.
- Seminar Series, Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town, Cape Town** Oct 2018
- Presentation title: How the Prevailing Discourses on Ukuthwala Mask the Linkages Between Marriage and Rape.
- Thought Leader Encounter Series, Centre for Law and Society, University of Cape Town, Cape Town** Oct 2018
- *Thought Leader Encounter Series:* Gave lecture titled Invisibilising Violence: Deconstructing Problematic Discourses of Ukuthwala and Marital Rape in South Africa.
- Dreaming Feminist Futures Symposium, University of Cape Town, Cape Town** Mar 2018
- Panelist for session on Gender and the Politics of Violence; Paper presented: *The Erasure of Older Women's Narratives of Sexual Violence in Mainstream Ukuthwala Discourse.*
- Socio-legal Studies Early Career Workshop, Law Faculty, University of Cape Town, Cape Town** Apr 2017
- Paper submitted: *A Feminist Critique of Contemporary Policy and Legal Responses to Marital Rape in South Africa.*

African Languages in the Disciplines Conference, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA Apr 2011
▪ Co-Panelist: “‘Other’ Views of South African Nation-Building: A Comparison of Zulu & Cape Afrikaans News in 1909.”

African Studies Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC Nov 2011
▪ Panelist and Chair for Panel on Gender and Citizenship in the Quest for Liberation; Paper presented: *Gender Dimensions of the Struggle Against Apartheid: An Examination of South African Women’s Experiences of Violence in Townships*.

Council for Zimbabwe: Building Borderless Partnerships for Development in Zimbabwe July 2010
Harare, Zimbabwe

- Discussant for session on Education in Zimbabwe.

Africa Action: Dare to Shape the Future – Conference on Zimbabwe, Washington, DC Apr 2010

- Discussant for the working group on diaspora initiatives to support sustainable development in Zimbabwe.

PEER REVIEW & EXTERNAL EXAMINATION

Journal Peer Review: Anthropology Southern Africa; Stellenbosch Law Review; Acta Criminologica; Africa Development (COEDSRIA); Fundamina – A Journal of Legal History, Social Politics; Social and Health Sciences; Violence Against Women, Social Sciences and Humanities Open.

External Examination: MPhil thesis specialising in justice and inequality, University of Cape Town, 2021

PUBLICATIONS

Peer Reviewed and Academic

‘I Was Really Afraid of My Father’: Women’s Historical Recollections of Familial Power, Ukuthwala Marriage and Sexual Violence, in *Generation, Custom and Power in Families*, Elena Moore (ed). Routledge 2021.

Deconstructing Characterizations of Rape, Marriage, and Custom in South Africa: Revisiting the Multi-Sectoral Campaign Against Ukuthwala. *African Studies Review* 2020, 1-19.

The Language of Erasure: Neutralization Techniques in Contemporary South African Marital Rape Judgments. *Violence Against Women* 2020, 1-21.

Safe to Violate: Exploring the Role of Gender in the Necklacing of Women During the South African People’s War (1985-1990). *Journal of Southern African Studies* 2019, 45:3, 559-574.

‘Today it Would be Called Rape’: A Historical and Contextual Examination of Forced Marriage and Violence in the Eastern Cape. *Acta Juridica: Marriage, Land and Custom*, 2013.

Thematic Prosecution of International Sex Crimes - A Review. *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, October 16, 2013.

Public Engagement Pieces

Rape Within Marriage is Still Silenced in South Africa – Why Women are Being Failed. *The Conversation, Africa*, 14 October 2025

Overturing of ‘Foreplay’ Verdict Critically Overturns Widely Held Myths on Intimate Partner Rape. *The Daily Maverick*, 29 April 2024.

Amanda du-Pont is Courageous to Have Spoken out and Filed Rape Charges Despite Misogynist Backlash. *The Daily Maverick*, 8 August 2023.

Rethinking Ukuthwala, The South African ‘Bride Abduction’ Custom. *The Conversation, Africa*, 12 September 2021.

Co-author: Ayesha Motala. Latest Traditional Courts Bill Draft Flouts Constitutional Rights Even More Disturbingly. *The Daily Maverick*, 13 September 2018.

Co-author: Philile Ntuli. Will the New TCB Live up to Its Promises? *The Daily Maverick*, 25 July 2017.

The Special Hell of Marikana’s Mining Women. *Sunday Times*, South Africa, 21 August 2016.

Jezile Ukuthwala Judgment Signals Progress and Continuing Challenges. *Custom Contested*, 29 April 2015.

Difficult Questions about Ukuthwala and Violence. *The Daily Dispatch*, 26 November 2014.

Violent Forms of Ukuthwala Reveal Longstanding Brutality Against women. *Custom Contested*, 27 February 2014.

PUBLIC IMPACT & MEDIA APPEARANCES

Radio interview about marital rape in South Africa, ‘The Honest Truth’ Program, Smile FM (Cape Town), February 2026.

Research on ukuthwala cited in *The First South African National Gender-Based Violence Study: A Baseline Survey on Victimisation and Perpetration, 2022, 2024*, by the Human Sciences Research Council.

Radio interview about my research on ukuthwala in South Africa, ‘Point of View’ Program, Kaya 959 FM (Johannesburg), September 2021.

Quoted in: Nontobeko Mlambo, “Africa: What Ending Gender-Based Violence Means for Sustainable Development in Africa,” *All Africa*, 31 October 2019.

Research referenced in the notable *Jezile v. the State and Others (A 127/2014) 2015 ZAWCHC* case, addressing contestations over the customary marriage practice of ukuthwala, March 2015.

AWARDS

2019: Post-Doctoral Fellowship under the South Africa National Research Foundation, South African Research Chairs Initiative Chair in Security and Justice.

2018: South Africa National Research Foundation funding for doctoral research, 2018 (through advisor Professor Dee Smythe).

2011: Yale University Lindsay Fellowship for Research in Africa, South Africa, summer 2011.

2011: Yale University MacMillan Center Pre-Dissertation Fellowship for Research, South Africa, summer 2011.

2010-2012: Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship for Academic Year 2010-2012 for isiZulu language study, Yale University