

FNF S4 Ep 2 Transcript

[00:00:00] **News Clip:** Now elites in the African continent, which include political, religious, and community leaders often claim that homosexual practices are an imported Western evil. So many cases are triggering heated debates around gay rights on the African continent where homosexuality has become a decisive issue. So why is Africa such a difficult place for the LGBTQ plus community? Scholars say there are many reasons which include colonial laws and religious morality.

[00:00:29] **News Clip:** Uganda's Parliament has passed a bill which would criminalize people who identify as LGBTQ with those found guilty facing up to 10 years in prison. Under the proposed legislation, friends, family, and members of the community would have a duty to report individuals in same sex relationships to the authorities.

[00:00:58] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** It's another warm welcome back to episode 2 season 4 of the Let's Talk Human Rights podcast. I am your host, Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka and I am excited that you are listening in again. Today, we touch base, once again, in South Africa as well as East Africa - to Kenya. In 2019, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, FNF, launched a campaign titled "An African Thing".

[00:01:27] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** The significance of this campaign was to empirically document how many instances in various African cultures and societies where homosexuality could be found prior to colonization. Evidence of this is found in many of the artworks in different parts of Africa such as Ghana and Burkina Faso in the 18th and 19th centuries.

[00:01:51] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** For more on this, please see the show notes for the "An African Thing" campaign. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual Rights, also known as LGBTQIA+ Rights, have been and continue to be a highly debated and controversial topic among many African societies both religiously and culturally.

[00:02:23] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** In the majority of African countries, same-sex relationships or acts of homosexuality are punishable by law. This includes public condemnation, incarceration, and in extreme cases also serving the death penalty such as the recent case with the bill in the Ugandan Parliament to exercise the maximum penalty in the form of the death sentence. This is with regard for any support, acts, or defending LGBTQIA+ Rights.

[00:02:46] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** To date, countries like Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria still uphold laws that criminalize homosexuality. There have

been notable changes in recent years in Mozambique, Seychelles, Angola, and Botswana which have amended their laws not to criminalize LGBTQIA+ Rights. But is it enough?

[00:03:16] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Sometimes, the phobia transcends the spheres of governments and lawmakers who enforce these laws. Even with an active and engaged civil society, many are still divided on the priority of protection and recognition of LGBTQIA+ communities. When dislike or differing opinion graduates beyond intolerance and leans towards hatred and acts of violence- this alone makes it criminal.

[00:03:47] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** The prevalence of Gender Based Violence towards members of the LGBTQIA+ community is a phenomenon that goes mostly ignored and often not taken seriously. Similarly, stereotyped mindsets towards members of the LGBTQIA+ community are those that some people see as giving them license to commit atrocities and condone behaviours to diminish the existence of others.

[00:04:19] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** In this episode journey, I am joined by Hijabi and Aquiline Isabelle Mkhosie to allow us to share in their life experiences. Hijabi is the pseudonym for our Kenyan Guest for her protection. Hijabi is a Queer disabled feminist and a human rights activist. She is an intersectional feminist and continuously creates spaces for women with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ community. Hajibi's work is centered on sexuality, religion, and disability justice.

[00:04:50] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Hijabi is the founder of Henna Space; an organisation for Queer Muslim Women and Queer Disabled folks creating visibility and advocacy. Focusing on the intersectionality of sexuality, religion, and disability. Hijabi's work on disability justice is centered on bodily autonomy and integrity; and that disabled people are diverse, living and affected by different forms of marginalization.

[00:05:25] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** She is also an advocate for inclusive and affirming faith spaces. Isabelle is 32 years old, and a proud mother of 3. Born and raised in the rural areas of Binga in Zimbabwe, she later moved to Johannesburg South Africa, where she currently lives. Isabelle is a scriptwriter, director, and producer. She defines herself as an entrepreneur, lesbian, and filmmaker.

[00:05:51] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Through her film work, she tells the stories of the African LGBTQIA+ community to the world. Her first body of work was through her first film titled *Messed Up*, which is based on cyberbullying and GBV against a gay boy child. Her goal is to educate through scripting for societies at

large, in the hope that the world understands that all lives matter, straight or gay... Love is love... Isabelle joins me here in studio today. Welcome, Isabel. Thank you for being here.

[00:06:33] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Thank you for having us Masechaba

[00:06:35] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** And Hijabi joins us virtually from Kenya. Um, and you will hear some delightful playing of children in the background, which I think adds to a very beautiful and relaxed ambience. Hijabi, welcome and thank you for joining us this afternoon.

[00:06:49] **Hijabi:** Thank you, Masechaba. Hi Isabelle. It's really nice to see you.

Isabelle Mkhosie: Nice to meet you too. You look great.

[00:06:56] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Now to the two of you, before we begin all protocol observed, [00:07:00] I have to ask, please let me know which pronouns you prefer to go by.

Isabelle Mkhosie: Her.

[00:07:07] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** You will go by 'her'. And Hijabi?

Hijabi: She/her.

Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka: She. Alright. So, with that said, because it, it is important and it, it, it's really good to set the tone in this regard, um, because it's one of the identifiers, um, of people coming from the LGBTQIA+ community and it's one really that, um, should, should be taken into consideration respectfully.

[00:07:33] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Hijabi you identify as queer. For our listeners who may not be familiar with the definitions and differences, please briefly elaborate on this for us. Against the other identifiers from the community.

[00:07:47] **Hijabi:** Um, I identify as queer, a lesbian as well. Um, and this is a political identity for me. In the sense of not the norm [00:08:00] of cis-heteronormative activity, but also within what the society defines as what is acceptable and what is not.

[00:08:09] **Hijabi:** If you're looking at aspects around what a woman should and should not be, but also what bodies should and should not be, because I am also a

disabled person, and so like this is important to me because it means 'queering', um, whatever identity it is that I am.

[00:08:27] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Now you mentioned that, um, you were born with a disability. It's one of the identifiers as we are speaking about identifiers. Being Muslim, identifying as queer and lesbian, and then of course, um, having the disability. How would you say these labels, um, have impacted you growing up, especially as you came into your own Sexual orientation? And further to that, how was your relationship with your family since being vocal about being queer and lesbian?

[00:08:59] **Hijabi:** Yeah, so as I mentioned, [00:09:00] like I grew up with the disability, I identify as a disabled person. And um, I also spent a lot of my time in boarding school, which, um, I think it's also like something a bit triggering because it's a lot of conversation around institutionalization of disabled people.

[00:09:20] **Hijabi:** And, um, so I think like this gave me an opportunity to start being myself, and I think being disabled already is means that I do not conform to what society expects me to be. It means that I am not, you know, like the ideal Muslim woman, right? And so in a way, this allowed me to come into myself as a queer person, but also like gave me an opportunity to as well, um, relook at my faith.

[00:09:56] **Hijabi:** And, what, you know, like sort of queering Islam for me and [00:10:00] seeing, trying to see myself as a disabled person in Islam, um, but also as a queer person. And, um, as I grew up and this became more and more alive to me and a time when I felt like I needed to come out, um, much later after school. It was having to choose between family and myself and family in the sense of religion and what they understood Islam to be and where I was coming from because I needed to be myself. I needed to choose myself. But then, um, unfortunately, I had to leave home to just allow me to be me.

[00:10:43] **Hijabi:** And yeah, that was a terrible, depressing time because it meant that I had to leave a part of me that was there for a long time since I was growing up, but also battling with for how long do I remain in a cave, and not just with my [00:11:00] sexuality, but also just around my thoughts on certain things around like religion?

[00:11:03] **Hijabi:** And I think a lot of times also it's the conversation on, um, disabled people being, um, fantasized, right? So like you expected to be a child for, for your, the rest of your life as a disabled person. But also for me it was choosing myself and being independent as a disabled person.

[00:11:26] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Thank you for sharing that. Um, Hijabi, because you know, one of the things that we really wanna highlight with this particular conversation is a conversation around stereotypes. You're mentioning now, um, the challenges, you know, the hardest challenges you had to face, uh, from growing up, especially in relation to your family.

[00:11:45] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** I would like to ask you, please, also, what you would also have defined as the biggest challenge also, um, in terms of being part of the community in Kenya, being a Kenya National, and how [00:12:00] people and society also, um, in their own ways, um, view, uh, people coming from the LGBTIA+ community, specifically being queer and lesbian in your instance.

[00:12:10] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** I refer specifically now to a headliner story in 2022, where, uh, allegedly a gay man was found murdered and put in a metal container on the side of the road. And, you know, have more examples like these happened in recent days and maybe even prior to the story breaking?

[00:12:34] **Hijabi:** Um, yeah, I think, um, Kenya as a com, as a society is very mixed on in, in terms of issues around morality or culture because like we all agree, there's no one Kenyan culture and it's unfortunate of what happened to, um, to Chiloba who was murdered.

[00:12:56] **Hijabi:** Um, and I think even [00:13:00] recently in 2023, we are seeing people coming out to, against, um, I mean like to criticize the LGBT persons, um, against LGBT people's rights and really like, this is a reflection of what people have been experiencing in their private and even in public spaces because, um, you find that, for example, In spaces of worship where queer people are being ostracized, or even in schools when accessing healthcare and accessing other services, even in family, in, you know, like finding your space within society, within family, um, is quite challenging.

[00:13:38] **Hijabi:** And this is like a case that has been highlighted, but of course there's many more. There was Sheila who was murdered as well. Um, raped and murdered, and so you find that these things have been happening, but very little has been done to visualize this, um, experiences and cases.

[00:14:01] **Hijabi:** And also on the other hand, is where we have Kenya that is perceived or is progressive in the Constitution, we have, I think, one of the most progressive constitutions but then the situation in reality is, is different. And this is not to say that all things are bad, like it's all bad things, but there's the good things where we've gained, you know, like.

[00:14:21] **Hijabi:** For example, the courts have allowed, um, the registration of LGBT organizations, um, under the freedom of assembly and association Right and of course, like we've had to, we've been able to engage in conversations and dialogues with within community and I think that's a big step towards, um, inclusion and affirming of LGBT people and their rights.

[00:14:48] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Yeah, it's really great, um, that you've touched on this because, um, the fact that there is a progressive, uh, cultural mindset in terms of accommodating, [00:15:00] tolerating, um, and actually not making this an issue because I suppose for any heterosexual situation, it's not one that has to be debated.

[00:15:10] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** So, I actually would like to come in and ask, um, I mean, you speak about this progressive nature of the constitution and people sort of, you know, being more open-minded to the idea. Um, have you ever felt unsafe or felt as though, um, your life was being put at risk? I ask specifically now because we are actually using, um, we have a level of anonymity with you being a guest, um, for this particular conversation.

[00:15:42] **Hijabi:** Yes, because as I mentioned earlier, like the context in which I come from is very restrictive and, um, What I would say was sometime back when I left home is the time when I felt extremely unsafe because [00:16:00] then it was people looking for me. It was, I wasn't sure of who I'm engaging with. I wasn't sure of my life safety, but I think, um, so like that's coming like from the people.

[00:16:15] **Hijabi:** I relate with, but generally in the public, I think I have a bit of past like what? Like what we say in the community, the past whereby someone looks at me and they would be like, oh, this is a very cute Muslim girl. They don't think of me as a disabled girl as well. So like they don't think of me as queer, and that kind of allows me to.

[00:16:44] **Hijabi:** Be sort of safe, but then the moment someone like just types my name or like gets to know the work I do, it's a whole different situation. And of course like my safety is not just for me, it's also like for the people I love, it's for my friends, it's for my [00:17:00] community, it's for also the work that I do. It means like me going into certain spaces or certain countries, it's explain what you're doing, the work you're doing.

[00:17:09] **Hijabi:** And if it's like, oh, I'm doing this work with LGBT people, then it's a risk to myself and to the people around me.

[00:17:16] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Thank you for sharing this, um, Hijabi and I think it's, it's definitely a conversation that needs to be continued and as we

think about personal narration of, you know, where our stories come from and sort of the landmark moments that really shape our thinking and towards personal activism.

[00:17:36] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Isabelle, I'd like to, um, bring you into the conversation at this point. Um, when you and I were introduced, I remember, uh, one of the things that really resonated with me was the story, um, of your very good friend, um, which you narrated through the film, 'Messed Up'. Um, can you please briefly just take our listeners through the storyline, um, where it [00:18:00] emanated from and, um, what really inspired you to, to, to write the story?

[00:18:06] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So the story of 'Messed Up' came about with, um, a friend of mine, Tawanda, actually, I don't know if I should put it like as a friend of mine or sort of like, he was like a student of mine cause he was, uh, 17, if I'm not mistaken. Okay, so Tawanda came here in SA with, to live with his uncle. So, and he's from Zimbabwe.

[00:18:31] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** And we both now, uh, coming from Zim and having to stay beside and having to stay with the uncle who is like a hardcore Catholic and whom we believe that he wouldn't do anything to harm Tawanda, or if even if he found out about Tawanda's sexuality, we would think he would be somebody that can.

[00:18:53] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Protect but in this case, he wasn't protected. He was 17. He, he, it [00:19:00] was during Covid 19, so he had to move out from his house because when his uncle found out that he was gay, he started actually, uh, raping him. Instead of protecting him, he started sleeping with him. In his words, uh, he would tell him that he's doing that so that Tawanda can understand or feel that whatever he's doing, it's not right..

[00:19:21] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So the pain in which he inflicted on him was so that he will, he could understand that being gay is not even the way. Which now left me with the question, um, who exactly is gay and hiding? Was it Tawanda or was it the uncle who was actually gay and hiding?

[00:19:45] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Because if the uncle wasn't gay, I believe that he would've just maybe chased him away like the rest do. They would just chase you away. But in his own, he didn't even, on top of chasing him away, he would rape him and chase him [00:20:00] away. Goes back to apologize. He accepts him and pretend to have forgave him.

[00:20:04] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Then he ends up again, uh, at night going after him. So for me, I took that as a gender-based violence and for Tawanda, he couldn't even say it out loud because he wasn't really a feminine gay guy. You know, there's a

feminine gay person whereby you can tell when the person is walking that okay, this person is gay.

[00:20:26] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** But with Tawanda, he was a boy, boy, boy like you would think he's a man or a straight man. So it was hard for him to actually go to anyone and say, guys, I'm being abused at home. What should I do? Cuz now you being a boy and being raised in an African home and telling, saying you are being raped by a man, no one, seriously, no one, um, takes you seriously.

[00:20:47] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** You can just tell your friends, they'll laugh at you. You can tell somebody, they'll think you're lying.

[00:20:52] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Isabelle, I'd actually like you to actually also just go into how the story of Tawanda ended, [00:21:00] because I think this speaks very deeply and very seriously to a situation which has felt, um, probably by many people living in the community who have not exercised their rights as it were to come out.

[00:21:14] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Um, what did happen to Tawanda and of course this is also an opportunity for our listeners also to, to look up the film and, and get the bigger and fuller story there. Yeah.

[00:21:24] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Okay. Firstly, I would like to say in real life, Tawanda passed away. He died, but in the film I didn't, uh, kill Tawanda cause I wanted to have a sequel to explain why.

[00:21:35] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Cause Tawanda was now involved in both gender based violence and cyberbullying whereby he dated this guy and now the family of the guy also blackmailed him into doing the wrong things. Probably, uh, some wanting to sleep with him, some wanting to do this, and everyone just saw. I don't know how I can put it, uh, for you to sound proper, but I'll just say he was just being [00:22:00] used and being blackmailed into sleeping with the brother into doing this thing because he was trying, by his own means that the word gay doesn't reach his uncle.

[00:22:09] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** But at the end of the day, ended up reaching his uncle. So he was going through all of that and him having to be chased away out of the house. Going on streets, trying to find a way to survive. Is anybody else there? Cause I've seen a lot of, um, boys on streets and some of them, they're not there just because they started smoking the wrong things or whatever, but they, they, they smoked those things because some, they had no, no way out or they didn't have any option out of it.

[00:22:38] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** If you get to, to speak to them and understand why they ended up being there and to the story, Tawanda almost, um, ended up like the guys we see on street with. So I don't know how should I put it.

[00:22:53] **Masechaba Masebola wa-Mdaka:** Just for context for our listeners, nyaope is a drug, uh, drug concoction, uh, specifically very [00:23:00] popular to South African societies. Um, it's a very addictive drug, uh, one that is, uh, I believe mixed even with ARVs and a concoction of other drugs. On that note, um, I would like to move on, um, to your personal journey. Isabelle, you were in a heterosexual relationship. Um, you are a mother of three as already put in the introduction. Can you take us through your journey of realization, um, and your awakening around your own sexual orientation?

[00:23:31] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** I would say that I grew up in Zim. As growing up I was always different cause my mother, she never taught me to do things like what girls other girls do. So I grew up different. I grew up even, I remember when I was. In grade six I, my, I was uncomfortable wearing skirts. Not that at that point, I didn't even know why I wasn't so uncomfortable wearing skirts.

[00:23:57] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Then when I was doing grade seven, I had [00:24:00] stopped wearing skirts, so my mother would just take a skirts and saw it into a trouser so that I can wait and be comfortable. Cause I used to just herd cows and do mostly what boys do at home. So my mother was training me in a way of a boy or a man, if I can put it like that.

[00:24:17] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So I never really got the chance or the opportunity, opportunity to be trained as a girl, even though I was a girl. So when I was in grade seven, I used to do sports, I attend everything. So we had to travel in for school. We had to travel outside the, outside our school to another school. So there we had, we had sports.

[00:24:39] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So when we got there, the sports, everything went well. Then after sports, cause I used to stay with my teacher at school because of the lack of finance, my mother. So I had to stay with my teacher and help here and there so I could help to pay, uh, school fees. The situation back at home, it's not really as easy as, um, We can [00:25:00] see.

[00:25:00] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So my teacher, she had gone to Spar to buy some stuff, so she just left me in the house. So being a real girl and you know, was still young, there was TV and everything else. So I was just excited about everything and just of being overwhelmed and everything. So, my teacher who used to teach us drama, who was the younger brother to my teacher, uh, he just walked in, um, out of the blue and he started asking me about having a boyfriend.

[00:25:23] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** He asked, started asking me, why do I dress up like a boy? He started, um, asking me a lot of which, a lot of questions, which at that point I didn't even have answers to cause I myself, I didn't even know that I was a lesbian or whatever. For me, I was just a girl who liked playing, uh, boy soccer, who loved, uh, just doing sports like that.

[00:25:40] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So yeah, he just walked in and conversation took to another level. He just raped me on that day, so he raped me. I tried to cry for help, but he was too strong for me cause it seemed like the more I say, please stop your hurting me, it was more he wanted to do whatever he was doing even more.

[00:25:58] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** How old were you, Isabelle, when this [00:26:00] happened?

[00:25:59] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** I was 18. So when it happened, apparently, uh, they said I passed out. Then I woke up in the hospital where I stayed for two weeks, there in the hospital cause according to my mother, I had some stitches that had happened and I had only one month seeing my period?

[00:26:21] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So I woke up in the hospital and then my mother came. Two weeks later I was discharged. Then we went back to the village. Uh, from the village everything was fine, according to me. Then I could see that we could be going to the hospital like every month. So when I ask my mother, like, why do we always have to go back to Wange?

[00:26:38] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Okay. Um, the place where we used to go would like take a bus and then go to town. So I'll ask you why do we have to go back to Wange? And then she'll be like, no, remember that thing that happened? We just have to go there so that we check that nothing bad happened. Then I'll ask then what happened to my periods?

[00:26:52] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Cause I only saw my periods once and now then she'll respond and say, um, no, that was their, that was a sign [00:27:00] that should become like, I'm sorry guys. I'm kind of bringing back, uh, the bad memories.

[00:27:05] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** We hear you, Isabelle.

[00:27:06] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Yeah, sorry.

[00:27:08] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** This is difficult and I acknowledge sitting with you here right now in this moment in the room that the recollection alone is hard.

[00:27:18] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So, yeah, that was, um, the situation. So I wasn't aware that I was even pregnant, um, until the pregnancy was sort of like nine months. I remember it was in January, no, it was towards January. It was on Christmas. My mother was not feeling well, so she, she used to have this bag of hers that she can use as handbag, so she just sent me like a run, and the stomach at my surprise didn't even come out.

[00:27:47] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** I just became more shorter and just, I didn't even know, to be honest, um, that I was pregnant, not, not even a single person in my family ever mentioned or even said that I [00:28:00] was pregnant. So I went to the, uh, to the room to get the tablets. So inside that bag, I found the card. That card is the card which identifies a pregnant woman that my, my mother used to take with me when we go to the hospital where she told me that we are just going there just for checkup of whatever had happened.

[00:28:22] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** So when I found out, um, I could read, I could see everything that is mentioned, my age and everything else was there. So that was when I found out that I was pregnant. So I didn't even ask what was happening or anything. I, we used to like farm cotton in my family, so there was this medicine they call Roca, I don't know how they call it in other countries, but I just took it and drank it on that day.

[00:28:47] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Then for them to reach, um, the doctor, the village doctor. It was, I don't know how that happened, but then, I [00:29:00] remember me losing my breath, having to drive to the hospital, to the clinic, the clinic that rejected me. They said they were not gonna take the case, and then, um, we had to go to the bigger hospital.

[00:29:10] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Then by the time we got there, I don't even know how or what happened. Apparently I survived. I'm here. Um, yes. So yeah. Until I gave birth. Then it was actually my, uh, the sister to my teacher who had raped me, who actually decided to go against a family and file for a case to get his brother arrested. Um, then his, his brother got arrested, the court and everything else started, and I gave birth on the 8th of January to twins.

[00:29:48] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Um, my children. And then after that, when I gave birth to the children, uh, I think it was anger. I couldn't want to, I didn't want to touch the kids. I didn't want to talk to my [00:30:00] mother. I just didn't want to talk to anyone. So when I go, when we got home, they would just tie my hands, tie my feet so that I could breastfeed the kids.

[00:30:09] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Then two weeks later, I run away from home. Then I started trying to find myself now running away from home at that early age cause I

was only doing grade seven. I was in grade seven when all those things were were happening. I had to find myself, so I had to run to the big city and work as a house girl now working as a house girl, as a tomboy.

[00:30:32] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** People would just mock me and be like, yeah, this will pass you are just in a phase. Yeah, it's, it was a journey.

[00:30:42] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Isabelle, you've shared a very, very sensitive and delicate part of where your journey came from. From childhood to what transpired, and the events that followed, which have also shaped, um, your thinking and how [00:31:00] you have also had to journey through discovery, realization, and just being who you are and finding yourself.

[00:31:08] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** With gender-based violence and with regard to speaking to the issue of, um, homosexuality, people from the community, you know, violence against women is a very big problem, not just in South Africa, in Southern Africa, spreading throughout East Africa as well. Have you reported any of this to the authorities?

[00:31:29] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** I know we did speak about it, but I wish for you to also use this platform to speak about, you know, where we spoke about labels, where we spoke about perspective and how people take things just because it may not be perceived as what they regard as normal. What is the level of seriousness that you are taken with your partner when you have reported, and this is not just homophobic, it's criminal.

[00:31:53] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** I'll say, maybe it'll just start from my experience of what I went through and having me to write, 'Messed [00:32:00] Up' and explaining the story of Tawanda, who also went to the same similar situation, and now having to find myself in a relationship that threatens my life.

[00:32:10] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Or just because I'm a lesbian and I'm dating a woman who has been married to a man before. So this is kind of threatening both myself and my partner of somebody threatening to kill, threatening to rape, threatening I'll never, ever lose my partner because of a woman. There's no way. I'll rather just kill, I'd rather just do this.

[00:32:36] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** And now, because of the society we live in, to be honest, if that man were to do this, there will be certain people who actually support him in as much as we at that particular time or this moment, we would like to shout out as much as we can and say, Hey guys, this is happening. We are facing this situation.

[00:32:55] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Many people will, um, come into this story and many will support and [00:33:00] some will even find a way to harm us even further. Not only myself and my partner, but as I appear, I'm a tomboy. I'm comfortable wearing like a guy. So to some guys or to some people out there, when they see me wearing like a guy, they say, okay, you are a man, or you want to be a man.

[00:33:18] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** As he said, the guy when he was in, um, threatening that I want, I would like you to show me your private part, which is that of a man. Because now you are, if you are taking my girlfriend, that means you have that part which all men uses to get the girlfriend. So I would like you to show me that until you don't show me that, we will make sure that we would rape you and we will kill you.

[00:33:42] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** And it is unfortunate. You know, this is, this is something which is a continuum and it is so unfortunate that we still find ourselves here in 2023 where we have to still openly speak so, In a way that, almost [00:34:00] feels like we never went anywhere.

[00:34:01] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** As you say, it feels like a lot of people are saying a lot of things, but nothing actually is moving ahead. I would at this point, um, want us to go into playing an audio clip from a campaign, um, which the Friedrich Nauman Foundation ran in 2019. The short documentary was called My Home, my Body, my Dreams, reflections by African Lgbtqia Plus Refugees Living in South Africa.

[00:34:31] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** This was an initiative and a collaboration by FNF and the people against suffering, suppression, oppression, and poverty, also known as PASSOP. Please take a listen.

Clip: Uh, the first challenge I get in my country, I was in the jail, the second one. Uh, the guy shoot me, I have a damage here in my [00:35:00] Being gay is like an abomination. Gay people are worse than pigs or dogs or cats. It was the same statement. I think that constantly brings you a fear. So that's why I decided, actually, let me run away. More than 30 African countries have anti-gay laws with some countries going as far as posing the death penalty for same sex relationships.

[00:35:29] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Homosexuality is found throughout Africa, however, with the law, social norms and intolerance from the community and family, many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Africans end up fleeing their home countries to seek refuge in countries that protect gay rights. To lose a mother's life, that is the most painful thing in life.

[00:35:55] I went to Joburg first. I was in Joburg for a month and so forth, uh, [00:36:00] sleeping by the train stations and until I actually take a train, they went to

Cape Town. That's how I get to get to Cape Town. Most of the people who are coming to South Africa from other African countries, most of them are, I should say a good percentage of them, they're coming because of their sexual orientation, and they look at us African constitutions, African law accommodates from sexuality. Some of the issues are, uh, the fact That LGBTQI+ persons who come from outside of South Africa, into South Africa are often in the closet. And this, they're in the closet for very specific reasons in their country.

[00:36:42] The way in which the law enables persons to gain access into the countries that you must declare your status, if that's one of the ways in which you want to be identified as somebody seeking refuge in South Africa. The challenges faced by the African Igbtqi Plus Community Seeking Refuge in South Africa, sadly do not end when they get to South Africa.

[00:37:07] Many people who come into the country in that way haven't processed, uh, some of those issues in their own bodies and in their own uh, spaces yet. And when they arrive in the country, they're thrust into that identity and may feel vulnerable, may feel even more vulnerable when they're arrive in South Africa.

[00:37:30] The South African communities that people end up staying in are not necessarily very, uh, comforting, very inclusive. In particular, there's a very high level of xenophobia. We know that from 2008, some of the events that happened there. Even here in Cape Town, I'm not safe, a hundred percent safe.

[00:38:00] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Listening to this clip, again, for me personally, took me on a journey back to the stories we as FNF have been part of narrating to Ghana discourse around this very important issue of preserving the human rights of all individuals.

[00:38:13] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** The hope that a lot of refugees from the community carry when they arrive in South Africa, of course, are shattered once they get here because they face similarly maybe to not so much of a large extent the sort of intolerance that they were hoping to, to, to get themselves away from. Hijabi, having listened to this audio, um, let's speak to your work in the activism space, collectively, of course, not only women, but men also bear the brunt of abuse and condemnation from society at large.

[00:38:50] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** What is topical in your activism space? To build the connections and foster support for fighting for the safety and the right
[00:39:00] to be, uh, in the community, um, for Igbtqi+ plus rights in Kenya, if this is even possible.

[00:39:09] **Hijabi:** Um, so listening to the clip, I think for me it's like how similar things are, and we say of course, um, in the clip and even Masechaba, you said that homosexuality is African.

[00:39:27] **Hijabi:** It's, we are Africans and we are here. And it's what, it's how homophobia has been put in Africa, that it's very similar, the things that some of the people are sharing about perceptions of LGBTQ people, which is very similar to what some Kenyans would say about LGBTQ people and um, also around the issues of refugees as well.

[00:39:53] **Hijabi:** Um, it's, it's a very pertinent issue because you [00:40:00] find like, unfortunately people have to leave their countries, their homes to seek refuge in other countries and this is not a pleasant issue because obviously like you want to stay in a home, in a country that affirms you in a country that sees you as who you are as a citizen, but then you find like people have to leave as an option, right?

[00:40:22] **Hijabi:** People have to leave. Sometimes they don't have option, but to leave for their safety and I can't imagine what that feels for someone to leave their families sometimes to leave their loved ones and seek refuge in another country. And even being in that country, sometimes they face racism. Uh, sometimes it's homophobia, sometimes it's transphobia, it's Islamophobia.

[00:40:46] **Hijabi:** And so like, um, yeah, this is like also very alive in Kenya, and especially at this moment where, um, we have the, um, introduction of the [00:41:00] Protection Family Protection Act, which has not yet been passed. But of course there has also been conversations around, um, banning people who come to Kenya to seek refuge based on sexual orientation, gender identities and expression.

[00:41:15] **Hijabi:** And so that means, If this is implemented, LGBTQ plus people, um, asylum seekers would not be able to come to Kenya. And we know, like Kenya has a very big, um, number of LGBT refugees, but also generally refugees. Um, there's also like, of course, the issue around violence that LGBTQ people now have to Um, endure and live with, right?

[00:41:38] **Hijabi:** So like, um, people are experiencing physical violence, they're being evicted from their homes. Um, their house landlords and land ladies are having to like chase them away from their homes. The families are now also like, coming up, [00:42:00] we've had like demonstrations by Muslim religious leaders of the coast, um, where they're calling for criminalization and even like very cruel actions against queer people.

[00:42:12] **Hijabi:** And this is something that I think Um, obviously like has mental health impact on people and um, so like, yeah, the issue of mental health is also like

a big concern for people because when you're not feeling safe, and of course like there are people who have lost their jobs as well. Um, even like people being in spaces has become a challenge because if you are, um, trans Muslim woman who has been.

[00:42:44] **Hijabi:** Going to a certain mall for a long time. But now with this negative visibility, with this call for mass action against the queer community in Kenya, you find that someone cannot even go to the spaces which felt safe for them. The spaces which they would [00:43:00] access to find community or even to, you know, like to.

[00:43:06] **Hijabi:** To like, just feed their spiritual, um, needs. Um, there's also like the issue around, um, constant threats and violence against whether it's women or like, whether it's gay men or trans people. And this is unfortunately, sometimes it's, um, committed by people close to them. And like now, whom do you trust right?

[00:43:33] **Hijabi:** It's a place where even organizing is becoming challenging, where, um, some political leaders or some leaders in the country are threatening to close down LGBT organizations, and we find that, of course, LGBT organizations are working to do the work that the government should be doing in the first place to protect the rights of everyone.

[00:43:55] **Hijabi:** But when, um, the organizations are being threatened, we [00:44:00] don't know what that would mean. So like people are currently living in a lot of uncertainty and not knowing what next, what would that be. Um, people have never had to leave their countries to seek refuge in other countries, but now that's something that people may be thinking about.

[00:44:18] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** In conclusion, um, to both of you, um, hijabi and Isabelle, I'll start with you. Hijabi, having walked the path you've endured, um, even in the now, what is your wish for freedom of self and right to be realized? And freedom from persecution in the literal and figurative sense?

[00:44:41] **Hijabi:** Hmm, that's a beautiful question. Um, for me, it's for the universe or everyone really to accommodate and understand that we are all, um, seeking freedom. We are all seeking happiness and I think the moment we are able to create space for each other to be exactly who they are, that would be like an, like a very peaceful place and a place of freedom for me and also to acknowledge that, um, we are an expression of something bigger than us. We are part of this universe, and that means diversity.

[00:45:30] **Hijabi:** And the moment we are want to curtail that diversity, the moment we want to put that diversity in a box, then we, it means we're like, no one is going to be free.

[00:45:40] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Thank you. Hijabi, Isabelle?

[00:45:45] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** I think I'll mostly just agree with Hijabi on this one. To be honest, all we are asking for is to be accepted.

[00:45:53] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Or maybe even if, okay, in my way of storytelling, if I'm telling a story of the LGBTQ [00:46:00] community, I expect out of my story that at least I get five people. I'm not even asking for more than that, at least to understand or to have their answers. Some of them answered. Cause in today's generation, you'll still meet somebody who will say, You know what?

[00:46:15] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** I still don't understand. Can you maybe explain what's happening? Some will want you to explain in a good way, because they want you to understand. Some will want you to explain because they just want to mock you. So if you find somebody who is actually willingly wanting to understand, okay, so I've met people I've seen.

[00:46:34] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** Somebody like this, but I really don't understand. You understand? So for me, as a storyteller, I'll write and ask and, and give you a question as to you. You ask yourself, why are you gay? Is the questions which we are getting today? Why are you gay? Why are you a lesbian? And I would like to add up on that by saying, you know, it's like, It's not every lesbian woman that has been raped that turned out to be a lesbian.

[00:46:59] **Isabelle Mkhosie:** It's not every [00:47:00] woman and being a lesbian woman, it does not mean I hate man. It does not mean that, uh, I have anything against men. It just means I'm a woman who is in love with another woman or I'm a woman who finds love in another woman, and I'm comfortable with that.

[00:47:18] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** What a powerful ending to a very, um, deep conversation that we've had. Um, thank you Isabelle. Thank you so much, Hijabi. Um, I think there's no better way of just simply putting it, it is that simple. It's really, it doesn't progress further than that. I'd love to thank both of you so much for making the time to really tap into parts of your life which maybe ordinarily you, you would not speak about in open platforms.

[00:47:53] **Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** Thank you for allowing us into your space, um, and into your past and your experiences. [00:48:00] What a thought-provoking conversation. And I am so grateful to our guests for sharing their personal experiences. Some of the things that stood out for me in this conversation were the immense personal pain and suffering that both guests have endured over a number of years, and the very real cost they've paid to live their realities and find their voice to eventually speak up for themselves and others.

[00:48:31] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** It seems impossible that we still need to say these things, but the danger of stereotyping breeds toxicity in the narrative and can literally be life-threatening, causing deep, emotional and indelible pain. We all have a responsibility to learn more about these issues and be better informed, to be better people to each other.[00:49:00]

[00:49:00] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** My right. You are right. Our right. Humanity should and continues to be for us all. This has been the second episode, Season 4 of "Let's Talk Human Rights – the FNF Africa podcast exploring various human rights issues". We trust you have been informed, and enlightened by it.

[00:49:29] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** The Friedrich Naumann Foundation sub-Saharan Africa (FNF) is an independent German organisation that is committed to promoting liberal ideals and politics in Africa such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, innovation, digitization and free trade. By conducting campaigns, media events, seminars, workshops, study tours, cultural happenings and training courses

[00:49:52] **Masehaba Masemola wa-Mdaka:** the foundation promotes human rights including freedom of expression, freedom of the press, children's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights and engages against violence targeting women and capital punishment. If you are interested in our activities, follow us on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Simply check for "Friedrich Naumann Foundation Africa", the links are in the show notes.