



**ASSAf Distinguished Visiting Scholar (DVS)  
2023/24  
Prof Loretta Baldassar**

***Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning  
over a century of Australian migration***



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### **Partners:**

The DVS Programme was conducted in partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), University of Limpopo (UL), University of the Free State (UFS), Rhodes University (RU), Stellenbosch University (SU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT).

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The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) was inaugurated in May 1996. It was formed in response to the need for an academy of science consonant with the dawn of democracy in South Africa: activist in its mission of using science and scholarship for the benefit of society, with a mandate encompassing all scholarly disciplines that use an open-minded and evidence-based approach to build knowledge. ASSAf, thus, adopted in its name the term 'science' in the singular as reflecting a common way of enquiring rather than an aggregation of different disciplines. Its Members are elected based on a combination of two principal criteria, academic excellence and significant contributions to society. The Parliament of South Africa passed the Academy of Science of South Africa Act (No 67 of 2001), which came into force on 15 May 2002. This made ASSAf the only academy of science in South Africa officially recognised by government and representing the country in the international community of science academies and elsewhere.

This report reflects the report of The ASSA Distinguished Visiting Scholar (DVS) Programme 2023/24. The views expressed are those of the individual participants and not necessarily those of the Academy, nor are they a consensus view of the Academy based on an in-depth evidence-based study.



## Overview: ASSAf Distinguished Visiting Scholar (DVS) Programme

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) annually invites one or more distinguished scholars from abroad to present lectures at various higher education institutions around the country. The scholars are internationally prominent academics who are inspirational speakers and usually with an ability to bridge the divides between disciplines. The purpose of the Distinguished Visiting Scholars' Programme is to fulfil one of the Academy's strategic goals, viz. the promotion of innovation and scholarly activity. Through interaction with distinguished individual scholars from around the world, ASSAf aims to enrich and stimulate research endeavours at South African higher education and research institutions. Scholars from the humanities disciplines are invited in alternate years.

### ASSAf Distinguished Visiting Scholar (DVS) Programme 2023/24: Prof Loretta Baldassar

The Academy hosted Prof Loretta Baldassar on 12 - 27 March 2024 for the 2023/24 DVS Programme. She delivered a series of lectures under the theme "**Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning over a century of Australian migration**" at various institutions across five Provinces: the universities of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Limpopo (UL), Free State (UFS), Rhodes, Stellenbosch and University of Cape Town (UCT). Prof Leslie Swartz from Stellenbosch University and Prof Maria Marchetti-Mercer from Wits hosted Prof Baldassar during her visit.

Prof Baldassar is Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Vice Chancellor's Professorial Research Fellow, and Director of the Social Ageing (SAGE) Futures Lab at Edith Cowan University (ECU). Baldassar was recently named Australian Research Field Leader in Migration Studies and in Ethnic and Cultural Studies. She is lead Chief Investigator on a Medical Research Future Fund Dementia and Migrant Communities project; social support stream lead on the National Frailty Kit project, and Co-Chief Investigator of the Youth Mobilities project. Her work is widely acknowledged as foundational to the field of Transnational Family Studies, including *Transnational Families in Africa* (Marchetti-Mercer, Swartz, Baldassar, 2023).

Her research team is leading innovation in social care across the life-course, contributing social science perspectives and methodologies to the creative and caring professions. Her career has been devoted to better understanding the impact of migration on families and communities, with a focus on the role of social support networks, intergenerational relations, and the social uses of new technologies. She has a particular interest in, and commitment to, the research capacity development of early career scholars, hence **her visit included engagements with emerging academics**. During these engagements, Prof Baldassar discussed career trajectories, drawing on the tools and insights of social network analysis (SNA) and research. The participants openly shared their challenges and aspirations as emerging academics. The itinerary of her visit is provided in Table 1 and also as captured in **Appendix A** and on her [LinkedIn profile](#). A number of participants from the institutions identified themselves as part of transnational families, with various experiences of trans-local family relationships. There was great interest expressed across all institutions for collaborations in this space.

Prof Baldassar was presented with a certificate of participation at the conclusion of the program in Stellenbosch by Prof Himla Soodyall on behalf of the Academy, in recognition of her contribution. The ASSAf DVS Programme is hosted under the Science Advisory and Strategic Partnerships Programme managed by Dr Melusi Thwala and supported by Dr Tebogo Mabothe and Ms Marvin Mandiwana. Special thanks to the teams involved at various institutions and the ASSAf Team for their support.

**TABLE 1: Prof Loretta Baldassar's itinerary for the DVS Programme 2023/24**

INSTITUTION & HOST	DATE	ACTIVITIES	ASSAf SUPPORT
University of the Witwatersrand  Prof Maria <b>Marchetti-Mercer</b> , Assistant Dean: Research (Faculty of Humanities)	12 March 2024	<b>DVS lecture:</b> Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning over a century of Australian migration. Attendance: 36 participants  <b>Dinner:</b> Hosted by Prof Lynn Morris, DVC: Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation	Ms Susan Veldsman Mr Aluwani Ramulifho Dr Tozama Qwebani Ms Raj Mahabeer Ms Henriette Wegener
	13 March 2024	<b>Book launch:</b> Transnational Families in Africa, edited by Prof Maria Marchetti-Mercer, Prof Leslie Swartz and Prof Loretta Baldassar, published by WitsPress	
	14 March 2024	<b>Masterclass Workshop with Early career researchers and postgraduates:</b> hosted at the Humanities Research Centre. Attendance: 31 participants	Ms Raj Mahabeer
University of Limpopo  Prof Tholene <b>Sodi</b> , ASSAf Member, SAMRC-DSI/NRF-UL SARChI Research Chair in Mental Health and Society	15 March 2024	<b>Meeting:</b> Prof Jesika Singh, DVC: Research, Innovation & Partnerships, Prof Satsope Maoto, Dean of Humanities, Prof Lefose Makgahlela, Senior Lecturer and Prof Tholene Sodi.  <b>DVS lecture:</b> Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning over a century of Australian migration. Prof Mpsanyana Makgahlela facilitated the program. Attendance: 41 participants.  <b>Workshop with Early career researchers and postgraduates:</b> The workshop was facilitated by Prof Mpsanyana Makgahlela. Virtual participants. Formed part of the workshop. Physical attendance: 33 participants.	Ms Marvin Mandiwana Mr Kholani Mbhiza
University of the Free State  Prof Stephanie <b>Cawood</b> , Director, Centre for Gender and Africa Studies	18 March 2024	<b>DVS lecture:</b> Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning over a century of Australian migration. Welcome remarks by Dean of Humanities, Prof Mogomme Alpheus Masoga. Prof Vasu Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, Research and Internationalisation chaired the session. The lecture was streamed live on Microsoft Teams to accommodate attendees from Qwaqwa campus. Attendance: over 25 participants  <b>Workshop:</b> The workshop was chaired by Dr Henriette van den Bergh, Manager of the	Dr Tozama Qwebani



		Transformation of the Professoriate Mentoring Programme. The participants were emerging scholars who are part of the Professoriate Mentoring Programme. Attendance: 15 participants.	
Rhodes University Prof Sioux <b>McKenna</b> , Director, Centre for Postgraduate Studies	19 March 2024	<b>DVS lecture:</b> Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning over a century of Australian migration. The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela gave welcoming remarks. In attendance were Dr Kwezi Mzilikazi, DVC: Research, Innovation & Strategic Partnerships, ASSAf Acting President, Prof Stephanie Burton and ASSAf EO, Prof Himla Soodyall. Attendance: 25 participants.	Dr Tebogo Mabotha Dr Melusi Thwala
	20 March 2024	<b>Workshop with Early career researchers and postgraduates:</b> The workshop was chaired by Prof Sioux McKenna. Attendance: 29 participants.	
Stellenbosch University Prof Leslie <b>Swartz</b> , ASSAf Member, Editor-in-Chief: South African Journal of Science (SAJS)	25 March 2024	<b>DVS lecture:</b> Transnational Family Care: from social death to digital kinning over a century of Australian migration. The lecture was hosted at STIAS and it was streamed live to the public. Prof Sibusiso Moyo, DVC: Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies gave welcoming remarks. Prof Soodyall presented Prof Baldassar with a certificate from the Academy. Attendance: 36 participants  <b>Dinner:</b> Hosted by Prof Moyo, DVCR	Dr Tebogo Mabotha Dr Khutso Phalane- Legole
	26 March 2024	<b>Workshop with Early career researchers and postgraduates:</b> Attendance: 35 participants	
	27 March 2024	<b>Workshop:</b> The workshop was hosted at the University of Cape Town by Prof Elena Moore, Professor of Sociology and Principal Investigator for the Family Caregiving programme. The programme is dedicated to understanding family care of older persons in the Southern African region. Several postgraduate students from the Families and Societies Working Group on their research. Attendance: 12 participants	

## APPENDIX A

### **Brief Report on Workshops: Prof Loretta Baldassar**

**14 March, 2024, University of Witwatersrand Humanities Research Centre**

Hosted by the Graduate Studies Centre in the Faculty of Humanities in their beautiful meeting room, I was delighted to work with an audience of about 30 people, comprising HDR students, Early and Mid-career staff and also a few senior staff.

The aim of the workshop was to support participants to explore their academic career aspirations and challenges, drawing on drama work methodology. The session commenced with an introductory segment where participants were invited to introduce themselves and, if willing, share a 'group/community identity category' they identified within the academy. A long list of over a dozen diverse identity categories emerged, and participants were invited to form small working groups and select the category/community that most represented them. This reduced the total number of main groups to include "born free", "early career young women", "black queer", "young black women", and "the academic dinosaurs".

Each group worked together to develop a character that represented their 'community'. They were invited to create a visual poster on which they drew the character and listed the challenges and opportunities faced. Subsequently, each group presented their respective character to the larger group, with members sharing their personal reflections. This resulted in some very rich descriptions of the issues faced by each character/community.

After each group presented their story, the audience members were invited to assume a role in the character's life, walk up to the presenters and share their thoughts. This involved heart-felt responses from all involved, which included words of encouragement, acknowledgement, affirmation, and hopefulness.

The session concluded with a collective poem writing activity to draw the workshop to a close. Following the presentations and audience responses, each group was divided in three sub groups (depending on the size of the group, subgroups ranged from 1-3 people). The individual members of the three subgroups were asked to write down one sentence to be included in the collective poem on one of three themes: (1) looking back on the past; (2) contemplating the present; (3) expectations for the future. Once everyone had penned their sentence, group members were invited to read them out in turn to deliver the poem. Most people were delighted with the results, as many of the poems captured the key themes that emerged for each group.

#### **Born Free**

Characteristics: digital personality; multi-lingual; Tinswalo; Identity forming in process; gender fluid; HDR student trying to complete PhD; diversity of experience/access/identities within the group; committed; love South Africa.

Challenges: first in family; crossroads in career/life; pressure from older generation to succeed; independent and need to be self-reliant; competitive academic environment; has to negotiate multiple side-hustles; cost of varsity; escape racial segregation; find work

Opportunities: Government support in education and health; escape segregation; formation of new South African identities.

POEM: To be born free, your past was once a present; I w... is years old in... in smoke, smoke or fire that infect my mouth and penetrating my rains; overwhelmed by the entanglements of to-do lists and dreams; Lost in translation, the career trajectory might change but the future looks bright; To build a new world without borders; To build one South Africa for all.

### **Young Black women**

Characteristics: young; black; diverse experiences; different languages; multilingual; diverse class backgrounds; forging own path.

Challenges: non-white access; being heard; being seen; limited networks; struggle to access information; hidden agendas disguised as opportunities; social class determines funding and career options; barriers at every turn; lack guidance; temptation of alternative pathways.

Opportunities: passion; determination; want to kick the door open; need mentoring.

POEM: It was all worth it; I believed that opportunity was for me; Life is a beautiful journey; Uncertainty meets excitement, both pulling and pushing in equal measure; The tenacity of a hungry lion; I am tired, but I will continue!; You are swimming, not drowning - you will not die in the water; Academic Achievement; Wildest dream coming to life; Sister walk and fight further.

### **Black Queer Academic Scholar**

Characteristics: "Fabulous, queer identity"; personal struggle of putting on a 'fabulous' public face that often hides feelings of not belonging and exclusion

Challenges: limited number of field specialists in the department; dominance of global north theory and methodology; not enough journals interested in publishing queer narratives.

Possibilities: Broadening of expertise only possible through queer reading groups with people from other disciplines; new emerging field – trans/inter disciplinary; groundbreaking work on global south perspectives; importance of reaching out to international networks, including possibility of external supervision to fill gaps in local supervision available.

Poem: members had to leave before this section of the workshop

### **Mid-Career academic**

Characteristics: "Simon, 37 years old, non-binary"; determination; passion; need to be resilient; strong commitment; hard work; aiming high

Challenges: juggling professional and personal responsibilities; time management; work expectations; imposter syndrome

Possibilities: transitioning academic identity full of possibilities; excited about both teaching and research development; mentorship; excited about legacy; networking to create increased support



POEM: Your journey so far has been wild; Heavy, but definitely worth it; I feel hopeful although this journey feels scary; Nobel Laureate; most cited scholar; don't chop wood for practice

### **Dinosaurs**

Characteristics: transitioning (to retirement); lived experience; career knowledge,

Challenges: remaining relevant; economic sustainability of retirement; isolation and losing social networks; being long-winded

Possibilities: provide direction and mentoring from experience and wisdom, intergenerational reflection, collaboration ideas; international networks; good listening skills;

### **15 March, 2024 University of Limpopo Workshop**

This workshop was attended by approximately 35 Early Career and Mid-Career staff, including about 10 online.

As we had limited time, I did not invite audience members to introduce themselves. Instead, I asked for volunteers to share what they considered their biggest challenge to their academic pathway. As this discussion ensued, the room continued to fill with more participants, including some senior colleagues. The Chair then kindly interrupted to explain to me that several senior colleagues had arrived.

I then invited these senior staff to introduce themselves and share one recommendation or "tip" for their junior colleagues about achieving their academic career goals. After this introductory discussion, I invited the senior staff to leave in the hope that participants might feel more at ease about sharing their challenges openly. Senior staff were obliging, and their tips were excellent.

Given the time constraints, I decided to move straight into the social network mapping activity. The workshop concluded with some brainstorming of 3, 5, and 10 year career planning, including the value of having a plan to help manage multiple roles and expectations.

Key themes that emerged in the discussion included the very limited engagement by participants with broader national and international networks. The challenges of navigating personal support networks that were ambivalent about academic pathways and how gendered this is. The challenge of trying to complete PhDs while also managing high teaching loads

### **17 March, 2024 UFS**

The workshop at UFS was a small group in comparison with the other universities, with approximately 10 Early Career staff in attendance. This led to a very open and intimate discussion about the challenges of academic pathways. The attendance of Dr Henriette van den Bergh, Manager of the Transformation of the Professoriate Mentoring Programme was especially helpful, as we discussed the support offered by the Program, including the unintended consequence of causing negative feeling from staff not in the program. A key theme to emerge from this discussion was the significant pressure participants felt to "put their lives on hold", delaying having romantic relationships, getting married and having children because of the pressures of the job. Many staff were trying to complete PhDs

while also managing high teaching loads. There was a very strong sense of commitment and passion for their work, but also signs of burn-out and real concern about the personal cost of academic pathways.

### **19 March, 2024 Rhodes University Workshop and 26 March, 2024 Stellenbosch University Workshop**

The workshops at Rhodes and at Stellenbosch Universities were both attended by approximately 40 Early and Mid Career staff. We began by standing in a circle and participants were invited to introduce themselves, their role/discipline and to identify a major challenge they were experiencing in their academic journey. This resulted in a long list and participants commented on how helpful it was to meet others on the journey and to hear that their challenges were shared. We then conducted the social network analysis activity. The session ended with brainstorming 3, 5, and 10 year plans and their value. Key themes and issues included work-life balance (time-management, saying no); leveraging funding; and uncertainty about the future, and whether choosing a career in academia was the right choice given this uncertainty.

#### **Overview Social Network Mapping Activity**

The aim of the workshop was to support participants to explore their academic career aspirations and challenges, drawing on social network analysis and methodology.

Participants were invited to draw a standard network map of three nested concentric circles with a line through the middle of the set. In the inner circle, they were asked to list the initials of the professional and personal supports who they met daily or weekly. In the second circle the supports they met monthly, In the third circle, supports they had contact with once a year or less. A series of reflective questions followed, where participants were invited to reflect on the density and type of supports in their networks, including by geographic location, discipline, gender, and so on. Key findings from social network analysis were shared including:

- The difference between strong and weak ties, personal and professional ties, and the specific challenges and strengths of each type;
- The critical importance of having at least three positive personal support ties (which led to a discussion of the importance of self-care, sleep, exercise and nutrition);
- The fact that one negative node can have a more deleterious impact on health and wellbeing than too few positive nodes;
- The importance of weak ties to accessing opportunities and new networks, which led to reflection on the role of international ties and ties beyond your discipline;
- How the quality of support network ties can change over time and the challenges of being collaborators in a competitive environment;

Key themes that emerged in the discussion included:

- “Should I stay or go?” Concern about securing permanent positions in academia and managing ongoing job insecurity and precarity. How to plan and set goals when future pathways are unclear;
- “Putting life on hold” for the job and its repercussions, delayed transitions to establishing a family, and personal sacrifice. NB: this is beyond career/life balance, this is not having a ‘life’;
- High teaching loads and high admin loads
- Juggling completion of PhD with high teaching loads and high admin loads;

- Difficulty saying “no” to requests that are meant to be ‘opportunities’ but result in more work and less time to write for publication or PhD progress.
- Limited engagement with broader national and international networks, tendency to small, local networks;
- Navigating personal support networks that are ambivalent about academic pathways and how gendered this is;
- Imposter syndrome, feeling not good enough, self-doubt;
- Need for guidance and mentoring from experienced colleagues who have no conflict of interest;
- Creating an area of expertise versus demands to be in multiple projects and pressure to specialise;
- Finding funding, having to follow the funding, not enough funding;
- Student assessment of teaching a flawed process that needs to be improved – can lead to unfair assessments;
- Attracting postgrads;
- How to plan and set goals when University vision is unclear;

### **27 March, 2024 Cape Town University Workshop**

Hosted by Elena Moore, Professor of Sociology and her team of outstanding scholars. Prof Leslie Swartz, Dr Tebogo Mabotha, Dr Khutso Phalane and I were treated to four HDR thesis presentations from the Families and Societies Working Group. Vayda Megannon presented on the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant; Charis Sass examined the care challenges of transitions into full-time care for older people; Tendai Mutembedza discussed men’s experiences in early marriages and Jill Samukimba explored *inhlawulo* and fathering practices among unmarried fathers. A short discussion followed about challenges to academic career pathways and key themes to emerge included student wellbeing, food scarcity, student debt, student housing, student poverty. Students were clearly highly motivated to complete their PhDs and their work was of a very high standard. However, the challenges they face did make them question the value of pursuing an academic career. Enormous kudos to Professor Moore for the outstanding supportive academic environment she is providing these students, giving them the best chance of success.

### **Visit overview: Pictorial Format**

Special thanks to all my hosts, in particular ASSAf Executive Officer, Prof Himla Soodyall, and her team, Dr Tebogo Mabotha, Dr Melusi Thwala, Ms Raj Mahabeer, Ms Henriette Wagener, Ms Marvin Mandiwana, Dr Tozama Qwebani, Mr Kholani Mbhiza, Mr Aluwani Ramulifho and Dr Khutso Phalane, for the obvious care and planning that went into the visit. Special thanks also to Prof Leslie Swartz, Stellenbosch University, and Prof Maria Marchetti-Mercer, University of the Witwatersrand, for nominating me and being my main support for the entire trip.

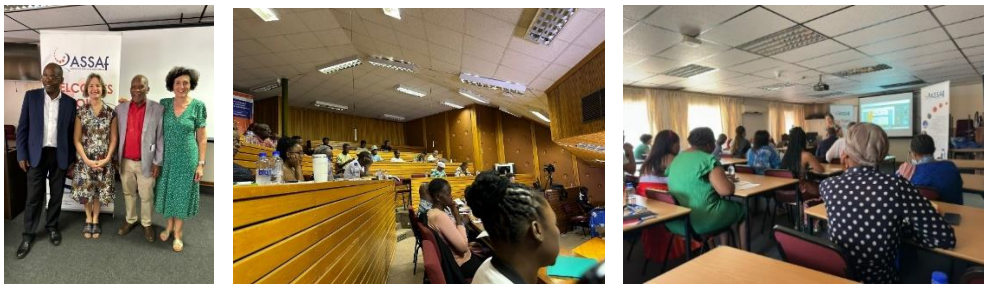




### University of the Witwatersrand



### University of Limpopo



### University of the Free State



### Rhodes University



### Stellenbosch University

