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**Mediated representations of violence against women (VAW) in the South African public broadcasting service: A study of cognitive effects of gendered communication**

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May the brilliance I endeavour towards relieve my ancestors of the psychic burden and shame of all they were denied being in this lifetime.

Because their blood runs through my veins, so much will come of me; so much will come my way.

I am the gateway for a new story.

May the collaboration between my God and my ancestors ringfence the highest expression of what I have I'm called to bring forth in this world.

With audacity; with pride.

“No one warned you that the women whose feet you cut from running would give birth to daughters with wings.”

~ Ijeoma Umebinyo

Dedicated to: Bohlokwa (my daughter), Kgaladi (my mother), Mahlako a Molo (my grandmother), Tlalatshe (my great grandmother).

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## **Abstract**

This research seeks to investigate, in an explanatory nature, how South Africa's broadcast media represents the narrative of gender equality amid the culture of violence against women (VAW) within this society. Feminist scholars have over the years seen the emergence of work concerned with the representation of gender with specific focus on women. The crucial argument is that gender politics are central to the project of representation. In a way representations of women, mostly negative, such as domesticated roles, submissiveness and powerlessness have encouraged this inquiry. The South African Broadcasting Service (SABC), owing to its wide audience reach, has been a key catalyst for the progression and limitations regarding the representation of women. The South African society has been deeply and consistently exposed to the public broadcaster as it has entrenched itself in the living rooms of the nation and created an intimate resonance through daily soap operas that seek to illuminate the populace's lived experiences. However, dramas and soap operas have not been a passive agent of entertainment. It is either they are a direct expression of social reality or an actual distortion of that reality. They have psychological and social weavings that inform how we attach meaning to the world, each other, and our own selfhood. Thus, in a country spotlighted for Violence Against Women (VAW) and femicide, this study, using four soap operas and three tv dramas investigates how the SABC represents women in its programming content. This qualitative study employs the critical political economy of the media (CPEM) as its theoretical framework to explore gendered dimensions of texts in television representation. Further, an inquisition of gendered production is drawn from Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model as the interpretive framework that unpacks the process of representation both at the production/encoding of texts by producers and decoding/consumption by the audiences to map out the true effects

**KEY TERMS:** public broadcast media, democracy, soap operas, dramas, gender, critical political economy, violence against women, gender representation, commissioning editors, content creation, ownership and control, textual ideology, authorial ideology



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## **Key Abbreviation**

VAW - Violence Against Women

GBV - Gender Based Violence

SABC - South African Broadcast Commission

ICASA - Independent Communications Association of South Africa

CPEM - Critical Political Economy of the Media

BCCSA- Broadcast Complaints Commission of South Africa

DStv - Digital Satellite Television

FPB - Films and Publications board



## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

This study seeks, in an exploratory nature, to understand the processes and policies carried out by the public broadcaster in curating content that speaks to gender representations and roles in society. Using fictional genres of four popular soap operas and three popular dramas as units of observation and the SABC as the unit of analysis, the study interrogates how closely these policies are integrated within both the commissioning and meaning-making processes. It is the intention of the study to also understand how these gendered othering frames are used in the power margins in dialogue with the policies. Specifically, the study explores how this dual relation, between content and the commissioning processes shape or misshapes the representations of women by the SABC.

Consequently, the study recognises the importance of examining the connections between unequal power relations in society, media content (fictional genres) and institutional values and mandates. The SABC serves a public service media role of informing, educating, and entertaining the public. Anchored on this mandate, it seeks to reflect the society it serves and plays a pivotal nation building role (MDDA Act No. 14 of 2002). For the purposes of this study, a gendered lens will be held over violence against women and how this culture of violence may be fuelled by misrepresentations of women depicted on popular soap operas aired on the SABC. Within media content and across a variety of media genres, audiences are presented with a range of representations about gender. Media content plays a hugely significant role in shaping audience's perceptions of what it is to be male or female. It also carries a set of hegemonic assumptions about human sexuality (Devereux, 2003:130). Research on media representations of gender has focused on how women are objectified and exploited in a media context and on the gap between social reality and media constructions of femininity and masculinity (Butler, 2009). Feminist perspectives have been to the fore in critiquing mainstream media content in terms of how it both represents and under-represents women (Rakow, 1990). While there is always a gap between representation





and reality; media content can reflect changes or conformities to dominant discourses in society.

In recent years, the South African society has seen an upsurge in VAW. This upsurge has been generally captured in various media, both reported and portrayed. Furthermore, public broadcast media which is an important source of news dissemination and entertainment has been pointed out as playing a leading role in creating and sustaining stereotypes that uphold gendered positions of power by civil society, activists, scholars and other groups. This study starts from the position that despite many media laws, globally and locally, protecting women from violence such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations in 1979, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), 1995, that calls for legislation against pornography, violence against women and children, violence in reality and the media has continued to rise.

In acknowledgement of the bane of VAW, in 2020 the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa signed laws extending the protection of women in social and online media (Ndenze, 2020). As a result, this study suggests that women are not only subjected to physical violence but to the violence of representation where they are deliberately left out of depictions that should also position them as not only independent but equal to men. Consequently, the question of VAW calls for deeper inquiry in a country like South Africa that has been labelled the rape capital of the world with high rates of femicide (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). VAW is symptomatic of a deeper problem and the public broadcaster's role can either be that of a conduit to this problem; by recreating it under the guise of reflecting "society's stories" or as an agent that interrogates, challenges and crafts a new narrative where women have space under the spotlight in their varied abilities and nuanced humanity. Framing of broadcast content refers to much more than the bias of a single story. This speaks to an overhaul of (re)constructing a social reality and forming a new status quo that does not adequately represent everyone (Dimaggio, 1980). This study is therefore a result of the complexity emerging out of the role of the public broadcaster in the representation of women.

## **1.2 Chapter overview**



This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 seeks to legitimise this research endeavour by looking at the background and context of this subject and its relevance today using compelling research questions to probe. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review and the theoretical framework. This chapter reviews some critical works on the SABC and soap operas found in scholarly writings in South Africa and internationally. The literature demonstrates how television, as an element of the media shapes the attitudes and behaviours of its viewers. The literature also gives working definitions of key concepts in this study. It further discusses the critical political economy of the media as its theoretical lens supported by the liberal pluralist frameworks to present a more nuanced argument. In chapter 3 the focus shifts to research methodology and methods of the study. This chapter defines and justifies the qualitative research methodology used to answer the research questions. The chapter substantiates the use of qualitative research methods to collect data from participants and the reasons for sampling in terms of selecting participants. Population size, as well as the sampling methods, are also discussed in this chapter. It further demonstrates how data was collected and analysed. The presentation of findings is in chapter 4. In this chapter, themes that came out from data collection are presented. Five key intersecting themes frame the key findings and contours of considerations, namely; historical legacies, monologism/life mediated through men, institutional culture and rigidity of organisational media routines and practices as well as the essentialisation of identities. Chapter 5 is the data analysis chapter where the the interpretation of data is gathered using analytical and logical reasoning to determine patterns, relationships and trends. It focuses on the interpretation of the responses gathered from the respondents and document analysis. Chapter 6, the final chapter, concludes with a summary of the argument and suggests recommendations for further study.

### **1.3 The SABC: Its mandate and its society**

The SABC, despite the advent of disruptive technologies like social media and streaming television channels, remains a major channel of information dissemination and mass-mediated messages. The SABC has the largest audience reach in South Africa, pegged at over 30 million and is arguably regarded as a more credible disseminator of information. For example, according to the SABC Annual report, the



public broadcaster contributes 80% of the top ten news broadcasts (SABC Annual Report, 2021). It is therefore important to study the SABC, not only because of its wide reach, but because it has so much potential and responsibility in shaping public discourse, values and contributing to both democratic processes and solidifying the positive moral fibre that reflects dignity towards children, men, and women.

This is an inquiry that interrogates the correlation between gender-based violence and the decoding by audiences of biased and stereotypical content in soap operas and dramas aired by the SABC. Out of the seven productions, the study uses two from Mzansi magic which is a private broadcaster. The analysis of the two productions is not used comparatively with the SABC productions. Instead, the productions are explored with the intention to gauge where the SABC is at when it comes to representation of women. Employing the encoding/decoding framework by Hall (1978), offers a dual understanding of how content creators rationalise their production choices and the consequent impact that has on audiences in terms of meaning-making.

VAW on television is presented in many different forms and settings. In some cases, heroes may be rewarded for acting violently while in other cases violent characters may go unpunished. This traces back to the social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1977) which posits that new patterns of behaviour can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behaviour of others. This maximises the learning potential that soap operas present based on how they tackle contentious societal issues like VAW. Contemporary society is navigating the complex reality of gender inequality with the rise in conversations about patriarchy and the empowerment of women taking center stage (Tasker, Elizabeth & Holt-Underwood, 2008). These navigations are not only limited to VAW but gendered interactions in the workplace too. Socioeconomic development and the process of modernization have brought a profound transformation in the lives of women and men (Gerald, 2007). For example, the twentieth century has seen the erosion of traditional and segregated gender roles as women made considerable gains within the paid labour force, in educational opportunities, and public life (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). However, in the workplace, women are still considered to have a “glass ceiling” which is to say, despite making great strides in leadership, women are still underrepresented in the decision-making levels of organisations (Baretto, Ryan & Schmitt, 2009).



The underrepresentation of women in powerful spaces is not a direct correlation of any one single factor. It is a systematic and societal tuning down of women's voices and creating a culture of submission in places where the validity of women's voices is required (Butler, 2009). One such place is the public broadcast media which is an important source of news dissemination and entertainment consumption but also, as pointed out, a leading player in creating and sustaining stereotypes and upholding positions of power. The inquiry suggests that not only are women deliberately left out of the spotlights that contribute to their sense of autonomy but they are also subjected to various forms of violence to not realise it. While VAW predates and cannot only be attributed to media representations, it cannot be ignored that ideologically, institutional frameworks and processes such as the media may shape in a significant way, the attitudes towards women.

The study also seeks to delve into conversations around masculinity as it relates to women. An example of this is identification, learning through modelling, with violent television characters who present with attributes that audiences (mainly men) have an admiration and affinity towards. Thus, they resonate with the values and messaging embodied by those characters. This is how television representations may contribute to socially learned behaviour that was articulated by Bandura in 1977. This theory supports the stance of how the public broadcast media is a tacit but powerful influence on interpersonal relations surrounding women's lived experiences and how the perception of victimhood and vulnerability that culture has placed on women permeates in contemporary storytelling. The violence that is perpetuated through unfair media representation is insidious and manifests through discrimination, bullying and usurping power from women. It describes this violence as robbing women of autonomy in instances where they should have it and thus creates the psycho-graphic of a woman who is more vulnerable to a plethora of abuse tactics because their agency is only validated by a patriarchal and economic status quo which is rarely challenged.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

##### Key Research Question

1.4.1 How does the public service broadcaster mediate gendered representations in its programming content?

1.4.2 Do mediated gendered representations have any pedagogical value in navigating VAW?

1.4.3 What methods, actions and technologies are used to depict VAW in the media?

## **1.5 Research Aim**

The purpose of this study is to explore how the public broadcaster influences unequal gendered roles in its representation of women in South Africa through most-watched soap operas and dramas.

### **1.5.1 Objectives:**

- To explore the relationship between public broadcast media programming content and the societal expectations of gender roles.
- To analyse VAW in media representations and the gender binary
- To investigate the structure and corporate culture of the SABC and how this influences the commissioning of content
- To explore how editorial and media policies and regulations curate gender in storytelling.

## **1.6 Justification of research study**

During the COVID-19 lockdowns imposed by the state in South Africa, some homes across the nation became enclaves of cruelty, rape and violence for women and girls trapped with abusive family members (Muchena 2021). Muchena (2021) points out that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted an escalation in gender-based violence against women and girls in South Africa. Various media sources recorded a spike in incidences within weeks of the country being on lockdown as violence against women increased sharply across the country (Dlamini, 2021). In the first week of the lockdown, the South African Police Service (SAPS) reported receiving 2,300 calls for help related to gender-based violence (Ellis, 2020). By mid-June 2020, 21 women and children had been killed by intimate partners in the country (Crabtree, 2020).

The media has become a crucial location for defining symbols of sexual conduct and can also be a site within popular culture that can assume the role of countering gender imbalances (Strinatti, 1995). For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in television viewership because of the entertainment stimulation that audiences sought during lockdown (Ferreira, 2020). The onset of the pandemic led to major economic pressures in low-income homes as minimum wage jobs were reduced in demand with high retrenchment numbers. This led to many people being confined to their homes with little opportunities for work thus consuming soap operas more frequently. Hard lockdowns saw a significant increase in overall audiences especially during prime-time viewership hours. The number of times viewers spent watching television between 6:00p.m. and 9:00 p.m. increased by 66 percent (Ferreira, 2022). All the soap operas in this study air within this time slot. Traditional gender roles and women stereotyping are very popular in soap opera portrayals, and this might unintentionally encourage the viewers to follow similar behaviours. As the media platform airing soap operas, the SABC must be accountable to the public it claims to serve specifically in ascertaining whether they are living up to their public service mandate to provide a broadcasting service that upholds gender equality and does not promote violence in any form (Broadcasting Act, 2002). The issue of gender stereotyping and misrepresentation in the media warrants attention because people tend to imitate what they see in the media without questioning it and this reinforces stereotypes, especially related to gender. These are made more concrete by the diverse array of programming on the public service broadcaster. For the purposes of this study seven popular soap operas and dramas were selected for inquiry:

- *Uzalo (2015- )*

This soap opera began in February 2015 and quickly escalated to popularity holding the title for the most watched soapie on South African television today. With over 9 million viewers daily, *Uzalo (2015-)* is a provocative, bold and authentic narrative that tells the story of two-family dynasties, the Mdletshes and the Xulus, and the two young men who carry their hopes and legacies. The two families are immersed in contradictory worlds of church and crime respectively (<https://www.sabc1.co.za/sabc1/tv-shows>). The soap opera also presents the issues of family ties and loyalties against personal ambition into sharp focus – from loving patriarchs who exert unwelcome influence on their ambitious, young sons to the tension created amongst family members when one of



them decides to pursue their own career goals and reject the family business. *Uzalo* (2015- ) delves into what makes these ambitious and successful, yet troubled families tick (<https://www.sabc1.co.za/sabc1/tv-shows> sabc1.co.za). The fundamental storyline investigates the complexity of forging masculinities with the pervasive pressure sources of religion, peers, and patriarchs.

- *Skeem Saam* (2011- )

This soapie series was initially aired weekly and following its success; it was promoted into a daily soapie that airs on SABC 1 Monday to Friday at 6:30 p.m. with over 8 million viewers daily. *Skeem Saam* (2011- ) is geographically based in the thriving community of Turfloop in Limpopo and starts off following the lives of teenage boys and girls negotiating many adolescent issues that force them into adulthood challenges. The socioeconomic status of Turfloop is a working-class community that is wrestling poverty with one influential family that is economically above the rest. The third and current season of *Skeem Saam* (2011- ) evolves into a blend of stories about the journey into manhood. It examines how these boys deal with issues of masculinity, gender relations, relationships, and self-esteem. The by-product of this storyline is the interpersonal relationships these young men have with women, their mothers and how their semi-urban context treats women in their journey of becoming.

- *Generations* (1993-2014)

*Generations* is one of South Africa's first soap opera that premiered on SABC 1 in 1993. It aired on weekdays at 8:00 p.m. which was an ideal primetime slot that earned it overwhelmingly positive reviews and positioned it as the most-watched local soap opera for years to come. It is set against the backdrop of the advertising industry. This soapie celebrates the hopes and dreams of South Africans who aspire to a better future in a post-apartheid society. The storyline mainly revolved around rivalry, treachery and blackmail among family, foes, and friends alike. It is also dominated by romantic relationships and issues of power and hierarchy.

- *Muvhango* (1997- )

*Muvhango* (1997- ) follows a similar trajectory to *Skeem Saam* (2011-) as its popularity heightened from weekly viewing to three times a week and ultimately became a daily soap opera on SABC 2. It was piloted in April 1997 and the Tshivenda soap opera has

entertained audiences with storylines that speak directly to the African experience for over two decades and has therefore grown in numbers and influence boasting a 5.5 million viewership airing daily at 9:00 p.m. This series is centered around the lives of the royal Mukwevho family led by the family patriarch and village chief Azwindini Mukwevho. The series is set in the rural village of Thathe as well as the metropolis of Johannesburg. The stark differences in the setting juxtapose traditional beliefs of patriarchy and power with the new challenges of modern life in the city.

- *The Queen (2016-)*

*The Queen (2016)* is a South African soapie that premiered on Mzansi Magic, a paid television channel on the DStv bouquet, on August 1, 2016. The soapie is centered on the Khoza family, drug lords who hide their dealings behind their logistics company. They continually face many enemies who attempt to dethrone them as drug kingpins and among them is the Tembisa Police Service led by Jerry Maake whose son died of drugs dealt by the Khoza family. At the helm of this business is a matriarch named Harriet who inherited this business from her late husband. This soap opera, like many, is also set across two economic settings; one is a wealthy family primed in a world of access and crime the other family is working-class and self-righteous. These two worlds are consistently at odds in the name of justice and fairness.

- *Isibaya (2013)*

*Isibaya* is set on the backdrop of the taxi industry, with two young lovers who are torn apart by a century-old feud between two powerful families ([mzansimagic.dstv.com](http://mzansimagic.dstv.com)). The soap opera revolved around two powerful taxi business families in Bhubesini: the Zungus, led by Mpiyakhe Zungu and the Ndlovu family, led by Samson Ndlovu, and their conflicts, rivalries, their daily lives and the issues around them. They are united by the marriage of their two children. It is largely patriarchal, highlighting the polygamous family of Mpiyakhe and the kingdom lead by a lineage of men and eventually a woman in what was a difficult and undermined reign.

- *Yizo Yizo (1999-2004)*

*Yizo Yizo (1999-2004)* was a South African television drama that aired on SABC 1 from 1999 to 2004 and expanded into 8 seasons. Set in a fictitious township school, Supatsela High, the story charts the progress, demise and resurgence of the school's





youth and teachers as they grapple with the violence unleashed by a school drop-out Chester, their sponsor Bra Gibb and school-going friend Papa Action (Modisane, 2010). It tracks the violence of rape, extortion, drug abuse, anarchy, and emotional harassment. The story follows the imposition of autocratic order under the leadership of its principal, Mr. Mthembu. It was a multimedia educational project of the Department of Education, with a mandate to stimulate debate about the conditions of education in South African township. Consequently, *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) highlighted a range of social, moral, economic and professional problems as invariably linked to township schools, the teachers, learners and their parents. It treated the problem of violence in the townships in an overt and gritty manner, a strategy projected towards drawing attention to educational problems, and stimulating debates on them (Modisane, 2010).

The table below presents the viewership and ratings of the five SABC soap operas that are subject of this study and those of the two Mzansi Magic soap operas that will be referred to in a brief comparative analysis in chapter 5 which is the data analysis chapter.

Table 1. Programme Channel Genre Viewers as at September 2019 ([www.tvsa.co.za](http://www.tvsa.co.za))

Soapie	Channel	Viewers	Ratings
Uzalo	SABC 1	9 289 705	-
Skeem Sam	SABC 1	7,662,464	25.9
Generation: The legacy	SABC 1	9,094,691	-
Muvhango	SABC 2	5,280,617	15.1
The Queen	Mzansi Magic	1,747,973	8.5
Isibaya	Mzansi Magic	1,104,264	5.6
Yizo Yizo	SABC 1	3 000 000	



The common thread running through these high-ranking soap operas is that they have male dominance at the center and lean into the most predictable and negative portrayals of women in the peripheries. There is growing interrogation in civil society challenging matters of gender equality, patriarchal strongholds and the debated independence of women highlighting the reality that fair representation in powerful spaces such as the public broadcast media have not contributed to elevating the perception of women as equals. In a country like South Africa, with arguably the highest rape statistics in the world, there is glaring responsibility placed on broadcast television to highlight societal ills and create content to challenge these ills. However, this is not simple because how content is produced and disseminated is complex and informed by micro and macro-factors such family and societal ideologies, political and economic structures and human interior experiences. This will be explored in the next chapter through the critical political economy of the media and the encoding/decoding model that accounts for the production and consumption dynamic. These theoretical and interpretive frameworks will serve as a vehicle to delve into the overarching theme of the SABC's content as it relates to violence against women in South Africa. Here the research draws on soap operas from the paid TV channel of Mzansi Magic to illustrate this. It will consider the practices in delivering content, the overt policies and processes, the sensitivities contemplated in content production and the by-products of this in South Africa's violent society as it relates to the portrayal of women.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter will outline the importance of SABC programming content, and demonstrate how media structures can be mobilized to manage the experience of the South African national audience when it comes to attitudes towards VAW. Using television soap operas and dramas, the study suggests that the two are a source for ideas that straddle gender identification discourses and may constitute and guide the status quo within social relationships. There are media opportunities for insightful and critical representations which may open new possibilities for the way the South African public thinks about violence against women. The chapter has given a contextual background and justification for the study. It has also presented seven popular soap



operas and dramas to be studied. The next chapter presents the key themes in the literature and the theoretical framework that the study uses.

## **CHAPTER 2: Literature review and theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

At the core of this literature review chapter are two critical issues that overlap each other. First, the chapter discusses themes that emanate from the claim that television is an important resource for the construction of identities, particularly gendered identities, and how these are represented and presented by the media. The themes drawn from various literature aid the study in exploring the kinds of representations and how they are constitutive of false dichotomies when it comes to gendered representations and the structured inequalities, thereof. These themes help us to understand how social power constructs stereotypes such as that of innate and benign womanhood. The themes that may, at times be viewed as mutually exclusive standpoints, when interrogated; they let meanings that illuminate understandings of gender representations emerge. The five theory-driven themes that emerge are representation, gender, essentialization, framing and power.

The second critical issue is focused on the critical political economy of the media (CPEM) as the illuminating theoretical lens that is substantiated by liberal pluralist theories of social learning and the encoding/decoding model. The CPEM is understood as the strand of political economy that is concerned with how the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations (Golding & Murdock, 2000:18). This theoretical framework deepens inquiry because it explores how particular micro-contexts are shaped by wider economic and social structures (Dahlgren, 1995). Deploying this theoretical lens and the two critical issues lend strength to inquiry, principally in understanding how texts construct subject positions in media representations. This theory lends to unity of and in meaning that critically cross-examines the authority and truth of texts and in particular focus, the seven chosen visual texts which are the study's units of analysis.

While CPEM is theoretically sound in addressing gendered representations, it is insufficient in unpacking the meaning-making required in this inquiry as it relates to



production and consumption. Therefore, close attention is given to the interpretive frameworks of social learning theories and the encoding/decoding model owed to Albert Bandura and Stuart Hall respectively to add density to this body of work and interrogate the life cycle of content production and the reception thereof. This addresses how messages are produced and disseminated with specific reference to television and the consequent behaviours and perceptions that emanate from this viewing (Hall, 1977).

## **2.2 The Media and representation**

Stuart Hall, in his work, 'Our Mongrel Selves', explores the power of representation in shaping society's worldview (1992). In this article Hall examines the connection between capitalism, ethnicity, and identity (Hall, 1992). His lens intensifies investigation into understanding complexities that characterize the representation of those deemed to be outsiders by religion, class, or identity. Gender as an identity is also a subject to this inquiry. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the focus of coverage saw women depicted as sub-servient to men (Britten & Heath, 1983). Hall suggests a four-stage theory of communication in television: production, circulation, use and reproduction. This means that the coding of a message does in fact control its reception even when it's implicit such as the belief above stated that women are inferior to man (Hall, 1992). Encoding refers to the information disseminator transforming the conveyed message, meaning, intention or viewpoint, through verbal or non-verbal forms, into a symbolic code or information form that has specific rules and is easy to understand and translate. Like any other form of communication or language, the encoding process is organized through the operation of codes within the semantic chain of a discourse (Hall, 1973; Zhao, 2014). Decoding meant the process that the recipient of the information interprets the code, and/or recreates the conveyed ideology. The decoding or interpretation activities of the decoders reflects the complexity of the communication process and the diversity of society as well as their interior world (Ibid). Soap operas, in their pursuit to reflect a microcosm of gendered representation, are subject to Hall's model in how encoding often leans into stereotypes and propaganda which is the uniform code. It's further subject to variables within social learning theories such as framing, identification and interpellation which is how audiences make meaning and internalize gendered representations.



This essentialization of gender roles in texts (encoding) permeates societal conversations across the world (decoding). In democratic dispensations, media roles, mandates and expectations are largely built on a liberal pluralist position that upholds the idea of the media as functions of checks and balances that are representative of democratic structures and processes (Allan, 2004:47). Under this spectrum, the vital task is to safeguard the goal of drawing upon a marketplace of ideas that eschews any form of prejudice and inequality. In addition, the media is expected to create interpretations that claim to be objective reflections of reality. However, these goals leave many grey areas unchecked. For example, some media conventions and routines may naturalise social inequalities or gendered stereotypes and, in the process, ignoring concealed power. It is an instructive fact that many debates on the media have this liberal pluralist position as the beginning point. However, there is antagonism to this position, particularly by various strands of political economy. To political economists all leading ideas are representations of a dominant ideology. This claim is buttressed by the famed Marx and Engels quote that, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas”, (Marx & Engels 1970(1845);64-65). Decolonial critical discourse scholars have also pointed the ruling class as white and male (Torres, 2007, Mignolo 2003, Grosfoguel 2013). It is this angle that steers the study into choosing the critical political economy supported by social learning theory and the encoding/decoding model over any other feminist theory because it gives a holistic approach to interrogations of power. Various political economists point out that media institutions reproduce ruling ideas that lend justification to class, racial and gendered inequalities.

Conversations of power that play out in the media are a product of power relations in society. Edward Said (1995) points out that, the development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another different competing alter ego. In many cases, those who are in power tend to define those who they deem their own subjects. This interplay of power plays out in sites of representation particularly the media.

According to the propaganda model, media organisations have been considered propaganda machines since inception argued Chomsky (1988). This is inferred in how they implicitly plant ideas and germinate them in airplay through a process called framing (Simon & Xenos, 2000). D’Angelo (2017:02) defines a media frame as “a



written, spoken, graphical, or visual message modality that a communicator uses to contextualize a topic, such as a person, event, episode, or issue, within a text transmitted to receivers by means of mediation”, From this quote, it is clear that framing is synonymous with the encoding/decoding model posited by Hall to account for the subliminal psychological and societal impact of gendered representations. Furthermore, framing occurs when ideological viewpoints and narratives in mass media, especially public broadcast, are presented as reality. Framing of news and content refers to much more than the simple bias of a single story. This speaks to an overhaul of (re)constructing social reality and forming a new status quo that does not adequately represent everyone (Dimaggio, 1980). The sub tool of that propaganda is repetition which inevitably influences how people view important issues. This repetition and ritualisation may lead to essentialisation of roles characterized by simple-minded dichotomies of strong and powerful men and weak and subordinate women. “Framing and propaganda may work in tandem since propaganda is the spread of any facts, ideas or concepts designed to further one cause or discredit another” (Dimaggio, 1980).

From this position, this study will seek to explore the assumption that most narratives portraying women in South Africa are reductive and do not explore the full view of their humanity to the extent that they can be economically, autonomously, and psychologically equal to men. According to experimental studies and analysis of media use among adolescents, exposure to sexualized media leads young men and women to endorse a view of “women as sex objects,” as well as stereotypical views regarding gender roles (Bernard, Legrand & Klein, 2016). And these may be cultivated by the media. To conclude this section, Stuart Allan emphasizes that far from simply reflecting reality, the media actually works to construct a codified definition of what should count as the reality of the event (Allan, 2004). It can be argued therefore, that visual texts are arranged according to a set of established conventions. Hall chimes with Allan, as he points out that social identification and classification and frames of reference are the fundamental processes by which the media make the world they report on intelligible to readers and viewers and it is a product of a social process constituted by a number of specific journalistic practices (Hall et al 1978). Consequently, one should expect that since identity is not an essence but a continually shifting position, media production practices should capture the shifts. However, the opposite seemingly appears to persist.





### 2.2.1 Understanding Gender within Culture Studies

Gender is defined as the “patterned, socially produced distinctions of female and male, feminine and masculine,” (Acker, 1992). A further consummation of this idea is that “Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal overtime to produce the substance of a ‘natural kind of being’” (Cameron, 1997). Societies and the cultures that influence gender understandings are varied across the world. However, there is a clear consistency in every society about the ideologies that dictate how men and women are supposed to act, behave and the kind of behaviours that garner value (Cameron, 1997).

This would ordinarily play out through language and symbolism entrenched in culture and socialisations. Kenneth Womack, cited in Heilbronner (2020) contributes to the definition of cultural studies outlining that;

Cultural studies manifests itself in a wide array of interpretative dimensions, including such intersecting fields of inquiry as gender studies, post colonialism, race and ethnic studies, pedagogy, eco criticism, the politics of nationalism, popular culture, postmodernism and historical criticism, among a variety of topics. Concerned with the exploration of a given culture’s artistic achievements, institutional structures, belief systems and linguistic practices, cultural studies highlights the interrelationships and tensions that exists between cultures and their effects upon not only the literary works that we consume, but also the authentic texts of our lives.

There is a strong synergy between society and language and how one produces the other. It is conserved by the society with deep sentimentality as it used to pass down and preserve culture and tradition. Language is an effective weapon of the society which comes from the dealings of the individual. Christopher Caudwell candidly says: “Language is a social product”. This means that language is an offspring of the society through which society is interconnected like blood relations (Fulzele, 2016). It has been pointed out that: “Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. As such production practices adopt various language constructs and meanings and knit it within representations of gender to maintain that hegemony”. Language is a system of signs having itself a cultural value.



Butler (1990) introduced the idea of performativity, in which humans enact gender through activity rather than simply reiterating something previously given. Gender performance is to say the appearance of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth which is prompted by obligatory norms (Butler, 1990). The reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways (Butler, 2009). This has given rise to gender binaries that govern the universal understanding of males and females.

Phenomenological theories of human embodiment have also been concerned with distinguishing between the various physiological and biological causalities that structure bodily existence and the meanings that embodied existence assumes in the context of lived experience (Butler, 1988). De Beauvoir's, cited in (Butler, 2009), famous quote that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" is instructive of how gender is a social learning construct adopted from cultural and traditional standards. Beauvoir claims that 'woman' is a historical idea and not a natural fact. Here, she underscores the distinction between sex, as a biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or significance of that facticity (Beauvoir, 1972). This binary that predicates behaviour as belonging to a specific gender finds its roots in a patriarchal hierarchy where there has been extensive research supporting the empirical evidence that the lives of men are weighed with greater substance than women. The role of women has historically been in subservience to the male figures in their lives in overt and tacit ways (Haraway, 1991). Feminist political economists have investigated how gender and notions of normative gender are commodified and "sold" in the marketplace, the corporate interests that are masked through capitalist processes, and the underlying power relations perpetuated and disguised through female participation (Meehan & Riordan, 2002). This is even more transparent in the media and how they depict women in soap operas. Their perceived lack of autonomy illustrates that their self-determination is usually centered around a man and homemaking tasks even in instances where they possess the skill, intelligence, and merit. Ultimately, feminist political economy interrogates the gendered structure of capitalism, how capitalism intersects with patriarchy, and how the female gender operates within such systems (Meehan & Riordan, 2002). This approach ultimately challenges how social and power relations lock women within mediated texts and gives men the agency to be whomever they





chose to be. The role of broadcast media has not been radical enough in challenging this norm, often glorifying the autonomous woman as an outlier trailblazing against the gradient instead of inherently worthy to possess the spaces she chooses.

From this reasoning, it can be believed that the more enforced, uniform and repeated one narrative is told, the faster it is misconstrued as a fact and easily accepted as truth. Further on, Bernard et al. (2016) said that viewing women depicted as sex objects in magazines, music video clips, videogames, and movies promote higher acceptance of rape myths, interpersonal violence, adversarial sexual beliefs, gender role stereotyping, and benevolent sexism created a lower acceptance of feminism. This study endeavours to understand and interrogate, through qualitative methods, the processes and policies carried out by public broadcasting media organizations in curating content that speaks to gender representation and role-playing in society.

### **2.3 The Critical Political Economy of the Media**

The second core issue, the CPEM theoretical framework holds a lens over the SABC's organisational, commercial, production and journalistic outputs. This framework delves into literary analysis in investigating the pervasive nature of how power dialectics weave themselves into the social through media production and narratives. Undoubtedly, this epistemic lens adds to serious questions to the theme of power as a tool that intersects every level of media production. By weaponising the economic structure of media institutions for their sheer sustenance, there is an undue influence in editorial output that shapes society's narrative over time (Garnham 1990, McQuail, 2000, Curran, 2002). The SABC, like many other public service news broadcasters around the world, is owned by the state. As a mass information tool, it is rightly consumed by all citizens across various economic statuses. While serving as the mouthpiece of the nation, it is also subject to complex commercial means of profit and in some instances furthering propaganda agendas. However, Anthony Giddens (1991), in his work, *Modernity and Self-Identity* argues that people do not change because of structural forces working upon them, instead institutions should be understood as both reproducing and produced by society. This position dovetails with the observation that, "structure derives from routines and patterned social practices, which become regularized in institutions"



(Tucker, 1988:60) Here too, it is evident that power is an ever-present currency in how accurate and holistic representations of women are constantly being negotiated.

As pointed out in the preceding sections, this study deploys the critical political economy of the media framework in its inquiry. The CPEM is a neo-Marxian lens that delves into the issues of power. Marxists and social feminists give elasticity to the theory by pointing out that mistreatment of women cannot only be ascribed to men but to capitalism as both the source and beneficiary to the oppression of women (Van Zoonen 1991, Stacey 1994). Feminist scholars also relate women's oppression to the production of wealth and in the end these power relations obscure the interests of the powerful whose ideology is particularly patriarchal and works in the interests of men and is against the interests of women (Stacey 1994, Butler 2018, Spivak 2019). These dynamics play out in media representations especially in the commercial sphere where women are not only oppressed but objectified as commodities.

For example, the popular term: "sex sells" and that the commodification of the female body leads to higher ratings and a better engagement with advertising material and television content. Critical interrogation is therefore necessary to understand not only how audiences are invited to watch female commodification, but also how identifying with participants simultaneously invites females to actively participate in their objectification. Cox (2001) cited in Meehan and Riordan (2002:49) says as a theoretical lens, "feminist political economy deviates from political economy's focus of 'only looking at labor or class relations,' to examining how media structures produce and reproduce gendered capitalism that is detrimental to, and reproduced by, females. Feminist political economy examines how political-economic concerns intersect with gender, contending that gender acts as a variable worthy of analysis in its own right (Tong 1989). Feminist political economists are therefore concerned with how gender and the conventions of normative gender structure are commodified and "sold" in the marketplace, the corporate interests that are masked through capitalist processes, and the underlying power relations perpetuated and disguised through female participation (Cox, 2001). At the essence of this framework is the interrogation of the gendered structure of capitalism to see how it intersects with patriarchy, and how the female gender fights for its voice in this system (Meehan and Riordan, 2002). This approach ultimately challenges how social and power relations constrain women through and within mediated texts. This understanding best relates to what this study seeks to



interrogate and how the nuances of both these theoretical frameworks intersect in the public broadcast media programming content.

Gallagher (2001) cites a MediaWatch research from 1995 which was the first extensive cross-national quantitative study of women's portrayal in the media – spanning newspaper, radio, television and covering over seventy-one countries – found that only 17 percent of the world's news subject's (newsmakers and interviewees) were women. According to Gallagher (2001) the proportion of female news subjects was the lowest in Asia at 14 percent and highest in North America at 27 percent. Women were least likely to be news subjects in the fields of politics and governments (7 percent) and economy or business (9 percent). They were most likely to make the news in terms of health and social issues (33 percent) and were relatively well presented in arts and entertainment news (31 percent). From Gallagher's analysis, it can be inferred that initiating a change in media portrayal is particularly difficult to chart, given the almost complete lack of longitudinal quantitative research in any country, including South Africa which is further marred by the stigma of violence against women. However, a comparison of national studies that have reviewed research into television advertisement in Africa, Australia, Europe, Latin America and North America, found a clear pattern of gender stereotyping across all regions (Gallagher, 2001). The backseat that women have been relegated to is the least impactful place to make decisions. Women emerging into the driver's seats, with considerable control and decision-making power, is the only way to achieve equilibrium.

Studies have supported local research in determining how the misrepresentation of women in media spaces is a by-product of patriarchy. This is relevant to the study as both these themes do not exist in isolation where there's an interrogation of fairness. Wood (1994) identified that a primary way in which media distorts reality is in underrepresenting women. Whether it is prime-time television, in which there are three times as many white men as women or children's programs, in which males outnumber females by two to one, or newscasts, in which women make up 16% of newscasters and in which stories about men are included 10 times more often than ones about women, media misrepresents actual proportions of men and women in the population (Rasky, 1989). This persistent distortion gives the impression that there are more men than women and, further, that men are the cultural standard. Therefore, not only is



patriarchy a crafty social and cultural standard, but it has also effectively drowned the voices of women.

One way of thinking about empowerment for women is in the ability to make choices. Furthermore, “to be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which disadvantaged groups, such as women, who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” (Kabeer, 2005). Patriarchy has been defined as a system that serves male authority and oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions (Asiyanbola, 2005). This is recognized as a major feature of traditional and religious societies that have a set of social relations with a material base that enables men to dominate women (Stacey 1993, Kramarae 1992, Lerner 1986, Humm 1989 & Aina 1998). With this understanding, a correlation is unveiled to see the power patriarchy wields in the subjugation of women and how this is translated in public broadcast media material. The representation of women across all sectors of society is important in elevating the agency of women and the truth of their lived experiences. According to Kabeer (2005) “Agency concerning women empowerment, therefore, implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations such as patriarchy.”

The stereotypical portrayals of women are often images of women that depart significantly from reality. “Women are portrayed as significantly younger and thinner than women in the population, and most are depicted as passive, dependent on men, and enmeshed in relationships or housework. The requirements of youth and beauty in women even influence news shows, where female newscasters are expected to be younger, more physically attractive, and less outspoken than males,” (Wood, 1994). However, it is important to note that the media tends to use two images of women to suit its purposes: the good women and the bad ones. These opposites are often juxtaposed against each other to dramatise differences in the consequences that befall good and bad women. Good women are pretty, deferential, and focused on home, family and caring for others (Cerrato, 2018). The other image of women that the media offers us is the evil sister, witch, bitch, whore, or nonwoman, who is represented as hard, cold, aggressive - all the things a good woman is not supposed to be (Wood, 1994). Violent behaviour and dialogue are common content plots on television, and most aggressors are typically male. Research shows that heavy consumers of televised



violence have a greater likelihood to approve of violence to solve conflicts and are more prone to behave aggressively (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). A quantitative study using questionnaires to illustrate this fact has found evidence that the psychological effect of identifying with aggressors increases the adverse effects of viewed violence (Alho, 2015). As quoted in (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) Adams-Price and Greene (1990) found that “adolescent boys identified more strongly with celebrities whom they perceived as more aggressive.” Hoffner and Buchanan’s (2005) literature findings revealed no previous studies with adults that explicitly examined how an individual’s character attributes are related to identification with media characters. The psycho-analytic understanding of identification with media characters is only one outcome of television viewing that is believed to mediate audience responses. In addition, “Identification is a psychological process whereby the individual assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed wholly or partially by the model that other provides” (Corradi, 2011). It is through using a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified. The roots of the concept can be found in Sigmund Freud’s writings. “The three most prominent concepts of identification as described by Freud are primary identification, narcissistic (secondary) identification and partial (secondary) identification” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

However, the concept of identification has been defined in many ways. Psychology theorists as diverse as Sigmund Freud, Kenneth Burke, and Herbert Kelman as pointed out by Hoffer and Buchanaan (2005) have used identification in their work. “Each of these theorists applied the concept in different contexts, but their definitions share common elements. All the definitions involve a “bond or connection between an individual and another person (or entity), such that the individual adopts traits, attitudes, or behaviours of the other person, or incorporates the other characteristics into his or her sense of self” (Basil, 1996; Wright, 1994; Zillmann, 1994). In his Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura (1986, 2001) similarly described a “psychological matching processes,” this occurs when an observer changes his or her thought patterns, emotional responses, and/or behaviours to match those of another person and therefore aim to assimilate both characters. From this literary context, an overexposure to public broadcast content that glorifies a patriarchal narrative and is layered with violence is poorly contributing to the United Nations goals of gender equality that South Africa has set out.



According to Gallagher (2001), we are living in a world in which the media increasingly provides the “common ground” for information, symbols, and ideas for most social groups. Thus Gerbner’s (1972) concept of “symbolic annihilation” became an influential metaphor to describe how media rendered women invisible. “This structural invisibility was developed and perpetuated by ways in which women’s points of view were not represented. When women were given the space of representation, it only served to fuel biases and assumptions of those who define the public and media agenda” (Gallagher, 2001). Despite a widespread mission to redress gender equality on a global scale, the power to define public and media agendas is still primarily a male privilege (Gallagher, 2001). The United Nations International Decade for Women that ran from 1975 to 1985 was a catalyst for activism and research (Ghodsee, 2019). The body of this work revolved around the critique of how media content depicts women as objects rather than active projects. There was an analysis of the institutional and social structures of power through which women are marginalised within media organisations. The limitations in the range of media content have been attributed to women’s under-representation in the media industry and the lack of decision-making presence in media organisations (Gallagher, 2001).

The emergence of the public broadcast media in living rooms has carried the country’s shared narratives and mirrored the societal realities in homes and communities. This means families have, to a considerable degree, been raised by the public broadcast media they continue to consume today. The public broadcaster is an institution that has been a component of the South African lived experience. This has formed a psychological fabric through which audiences perceive themselves and relate to each other. According to Villani (2001) the three primary effects of viewing television violence are: i) learning of abusive behaviour and attitudes, ii) desensitisation to violence and iii) fear of being victimized by violence. Singer et al. (1995) cited in Villani (2001) examined viewing preferences, symptoms of psychological trauma, and violent behaviors among children who watch television. The data from their survey of 2,245 students, grades 3 through to 8, showed that children who watched more than 6 hours of television per day reported more trauma symptoms and more violent behaviors.

The compound effects of a post-traumatic society, the spiking statistics on violence against women and the consumption of public broadcast media where women are not fairly depicted in varied forms seem to have a clear coding and correlation to the unfair





representation of women in the public broadcaster. Women's identity development is shaped through life's 'hidden curriculum' that teaches girls and women subordination to the dominant patriarchal system of power. Lessons learned from exposure to the 'curriculum' include gender roles, a devaluing of women, silence and invisibility, submission to male power, and acceptance of role contradictions" (Bierema, 2002). This supports the idea that this "curriculum" mentioned by Bierema permeates into public broadcasting material through content production and fuels the status quo drawn from society.

Cultural Studies recognise the energising potential of multifaceted forms of social agency, each of which brings with it dimensions of subjectivity and consciousness that are vital to meaning-making. Often this has been displayed through research that focuses on media consumption, but cultural studies conceptions of power tend to be rooted in individual subjectivities, their identities and collective action rather than as political economy would have it, structured in the institutions of society (Strinatti, 1995; Curran & Morley, 2006).

As such, the CPEM theoretical framework unpacks the presence of power dynamics and how they manifest in media representations. The way the media operates is shaped by its owners, the market environment and the financial support they receive. In this environment, the media manufactures cultural content that sustains the system of 'capitalism' (Chomsky, 2003). According to Hardy's (2014) definition, the CPEM also describes a tradition of analysis that is concerned with how communication arrangements relate to goals of social justice and emancipation. Hardy and Chomsky's definitions are both valid yet void of considering each other's perspectives to consummate an inclusive definition of CPEM that incorporates the social and economic premise of this framework.

### **2.3.1 Critical Political Economy: Broadcasting and Journalistic Principles**

In liberal theory public service broadcast media and the journalistic principles that govern it should adhere to the principles of neutrality, balance, and objectivity. According to the SABC's editorial policies the core values of the organisation are equality; the SABC provides programmes for everyone, in all the official languages, and

promotes universal access to its services. Editorial Independence: The SABC is governed by the Charter of the Corporation, which enshrines the journalistic, creative, and programming independence of the staff of the corporation, and their constitutionally protected freedom of expression. Nation Building ([www.sabc.co.za/editorialpolicies](http://www.sabc.co.za/editorialpolicies));

- The SABC celebrates South Africa's national identity, culture and provides its citizens with the information they need to participate in building our democracy Diversity.
- The SABC reflects South Africa's diverse languages, cultures, provinces, and people in its programmes.
- The SABC respects the inherent dignity of all South Africans, reflects them in all their diversity, and does not use language or images that convey stereotypical or prejudiced notions of South Africa's races, cultures and sexes ([www.sabc.co.za/editorialpolicies](http://www.sabc.co.za/editorialpolicies)).

These values can only be manifested through editorial integration. It is noteworthy that the core values governing the SABC editorial policy mirror subsections of the South African Constitution like the equality clause (section 9) and the human dignity clause (section 10). The values and policies are intended to help the editorial staff negotiate difficult editorial issues and decisions so that distinctive, compelling, and sometimes controversial programmes can be made while maintaining the highest ethical and editorial standards.

Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has encouraged broadcasters to develop their own internal guidelines on dealing with discrimination. Against the backdrop of a difficult past and the mandate of the public broadcaster to heal divisions, the SABC needs to shy away from programming that promotes discrimination and stereotyping on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. As it relates to the question posed by this research paper, the SABC's policy is to treat every part of society with respect. To use non-sexist language to avoid giving offence or creating the impression, through repetition, that certain activities are associated with only one sex. Since humour could also create and reinforce stereotypes, the policy is to avoid humour that is excessively exploitative,





uncalled for, cruel, or designed to prejudice a person or group (Anon., n.d.). The SABC editorial policy (2020) further specifically addresses gender through the following excerpt:

“The SABC undertakes to strive to ensure that its programming, when judged within context, does not:

- promote violence against women
- depict women as passive victims of violence and abuse
- degrade women and undermine their role and position in society
- promote sexism and gender inequality
- reinforce gender oppression and stereotypes.”

Furthermore, the SABC is committed to reflecting and portraying women in their positive societal roles as independent, intellectual beings; as leaders, decision-makers, academics, agents for change, etc. and to avoid representation of men in roles that bolster gender ascendancy and stereotypes. Gender balance should be sought, positively and actively, in programmes, such as those requiring a range of opinions on issues of public importance.

### **2.3.2 The corporate character of CPE of the Media**

This framework is held at the helm by social and economic structures that influence cultural status quos that are sometimes prejudicial. This implies that there is a clear social agenda and business objective in how the media operates. Ogenga (2010) explained that from a Karl Marx perspective: the 1970s concept of mass, a culture of consumption, was capitalised in terms of advertising content, circulation, and sales. The media played a big role in popularising certain capitalistic needs based on commodities, assets, and the means to satisfy those needs through creating demand. The media influence was insidious in entrenching capitalism and ostracising those who lacked means. Thus, when compounded by a society that already ranked human lives based on levels of economic class, there was an unfair attribution to those who had better economic means and their ability to participate in an aspirational lifestyle.



“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force (Marx & Engels, 1845). The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, thereby the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (Marx & Engels in Mark 2019). Murdoch and Golding (2005) as cited in Hardy (2014) brought to the fore pillars of political economy approaches and their links to corporate character. These were identified in four main ways: Firstly, they are holistic, seeing the economy of the media as interrelated with political, social, and cultural life rather than as a separate domain. Secondly, they are historical, paying close attention to long-term changes in the role of the state, corporations, and media in society. Thirdly, they are “centrally concerned with the balance between private enterprise and public intervention, between the private and public provision of services” (Ibid). Finally, “and perhaps most importantly of all, they go beyond technical issues of efficiency (in terms of market transactions between producers and consumers) to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good” (Hardy, 2014). What cannot be ignored is how the media produces news, information, ideas, and entertainment and by whom it is controlled since the formulation and implementation of the policies that lead the media to cultural, social, political, and economic consequences. In reference to this study, it’s clear that soap operas produced by the public broadcaster have the same make-up in plot development. This supports the socio-economic history of the country where previously marginalized groups, in this instance women, lack diversity and elevation in how they are represented. In a post globalized world, media conglomerates deliberately create a situation where the media are being left with no choice but to follow the norms and codes created by the supra financial authority. In this manner, media certainly takes the route of enslavement to the huge capital offered by corporates as a means to secure their survival and longevity.

Drawing from the Marxist theory, it is fair to extrapolate that there is no homogenous form of entertainment that does not contain representations, often extremely prejudicial, in class, gender, race, sexuality, and a myriad of social categories and groupings (Durham & Kellner, 2006). The way we view televised content is a combination of artefacts ranging from newspapers, television programs, popular music and movies. Culture is produced and consumed within social life. Media magnate Rupert Murdoch



owning more than 40% of global media shares easily frames and modulates public opinion in a way the global media conglomerate motivates for (Hart, 2008). The participation of companies like General Electricals in the media business have made it evident that the media's main objective is not about serving people but rather putting its entire effort to cover up and suppress the news of socio-political and socio-cultural exploitation. Therefore, cultural artefacts and practices must be considered within the social relations of media production and reception in which culture is produced, distributed, and consumed to be properly understood and interpreted.

Broadcast television falls squarely within the ambit of mirroring culture and creating it. It has become a medium to contextualize cultural forms and audiences in historically specific situations and gender roles to help illuminate how cultural artefacts reflect or reproduce concrete social relations and conditions. Its responsibility in content production is not only reflective but serves to create aspiration. The dynamic of power and social relations in CPE of the media is to strive to "examine how making and taking of meaning are shaped at every level by the structured institutions in social relations", (McChesney, 1998:73). The structured institutions range from the political and economic institutions including advertisers and proprietors as well as audiences and policymakers or entities with powerful social interests including traditional authorities, religious leaders and other organized groups.

From the literature analysis surrounding CPE, a key focus for CPE is to examine how media and communications serve to sustain the interests of the wealthy and powerful. The media objective is to uphold the many ways in which power is sustained through meanings and perceptions contained in language. There are frustrations on how lopsided content generation is regarding the analysis of ideologies that serve to sustain relations of dominance. So, when the public broadcaster has a high circulation of soap operas that have an imbalance of power discriminating against women or illustrating them in one-dimensionality, the argument is that it is upholding the version patriarchy favours. "Cultural values are determined by the nature of economic structures" (Williams, 2003:38)

The nature of CPEM theory as it pertains to the media, requires organisations to be run as profit-generating companies and therefore need to meet laws and regulations that



ensure bottom-line objectives are met. However, these capitalist laws and regulations do not investigate the purpose and modus operandi of why media organisations exist. The SABC is the leading public broadcaster in South Africa and is upheld by journalistic ethics as well as laws and regulations set by ICASA. It has stated that its purpose regarding the public broadcaster is to:

...develop, regulate and promote national and provincial identity, culture and character. In achieving this, these regulations will seek to promote programming which: (a) is produced under South Africa control; (b) is identifiably South African and recognises the diversity of all cultural backgrounds in South African society; (c) will develop a television industry which is owned and controlled by South Africans and (d) will establish a vibrant, dynamic, creative and economically productive film industry in South Africa. ([www.icasa.org.za/pages/notices](http://www.icasa.org.za/pages/notices)).

What comes through clearly in the above stipulation is for the identity of public broadcast content to be reflective of the South African population in its narrative, creativity, and ownership. As part of diversity viewing, ICASA stipulates that 35% of the SABC's soapie programming must be South African thus the soap operas in focus for this research are all locally produced. This is a moderate percentage in comparison to the required 80% of South African current affairs, 50% of South African documentary programming and 55% of South African children's programming. However, it is the soap opera programming that generates the greatest viewership and ranks the most expensive advertising slots. Therefore, it is in this genre that mindfulness in creating reflective and aspirational storylines is seen to be most required. An important consideration is how the SABC has created editorial policies and practices in content production and viewing. The SABC's powers and functions, as well as its rights and obligations, are derived from several sources such as legislation, the Charter, the licence conditions of each SABC station and channel, and regulations issued by ICASA, including the code of conduct for broadcasters set by The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA). This helps the SABC function as a revenue-driven media business alongside its responsibility of being the mouthpiece of the nation.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how the critical political economy of the media alongside the liberal pluralist school of thought can be used as an explanatory framework to



understand how power plays a key role in gendered representations. Content production does not exist exclusively as creative output. It is often subject to the political, economic, and social landscape and seeks to protect the status quo and maintain homogeneity and predictability. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model gave this theoretical framework an illuminating lens of how pervasive the dynamics of power are within television production. Gendered representation is seeded in the consciousness of audiences and they performatively recreate that influence in many unconscious ways. This feeds into the social learning model that suggests how uniformity and framing of important issues in a single lens, like gender, is achieved in society to make meaning and deepen stereotypes. The chapter further suggested that gender as a form of identity is not essentialist nor should it be subordinated to naturalized patriarchal forms of representations. Instead, identities shift and they are unstable constructions. The chapter further suggested that television remains a site of struggle where negative stereotypes of women can be naturalised, reinforced, and circulated. Therefore, media representation is influenced by these power related factors and is an active agent in reproducing them. The next chapter focuses on methods deployed in data collection.



## **CHAPTER 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives a framework of the research methods adopted by this study. The chapter details steps implemented in the adoption of the methods for data collection and analysis. The validity and reliability issues of qualitative research will be discussed in this chapter to justify the efficacy and ethics of this study. The adopted research approach used in this study is the qualitative research design.

### **3.2 Qualitative methods**

Stake (1995:78) points out;

Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking. Good thinking means looking for and find patterns in the data. Good thinking means to transcend the localness of a particular case to find its generalisability and transferability to other subjects

Furthermore, in buttressing the above point, Hammerberg, Kirkman & Lacey, (2016) state that;

Qualitative methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant. These data sets are usually not amenable to counting or measuring. Qualitative research techniques include 'small-group discussions' for investigating beliefs, attitudes and concepts of normative behaviour; 'semi-structured interviews', to seek views on a focused topic or, with key informants, for background information or an institutional perspective; 'in-depth interviews' to understand a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective; and analysis of texts and documents, such as government reports, media articles, websites or diaries, to learn about distributed or private knowledge.

The two instructive quotes guide this study. Qualitative methodology was selected for this study, as it allowed for the researchers to make in-depth inquiries into human complexities, such as personal feelings and attitudes as described by Patton (2002:63).

In addition, compared to quantitative data, qualitative data are usually seen as richer, more vital and having greater depth and as more likely to present a true picture of a way of life, of people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs, (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004:871). The study set out to illustrate the encoding/decoding model by interpreting how the SABC processes programming content and how the impact permeates society (Hall, 1978). The study also set out to interrogate how the encoding and decoding of production may be influenced by societal values of patriarchy that may also be institutional. It is for this reason that a qualitative approach to this research was adopted because it delves into production methods that interplay with personal biases by content creators. The CPEM was adopted as the theoretical framework. The broadness of the CPEM enabled the study to broaden its study as it also covers feminist critical political economy.

### **3.2. Research Methods**

This research was both descriptive and explanatory in nature with a specific focus on observations of existing practices. This was achieved by delving into the social environments and relationships of the on-screen television content held in comparative light to the interpersonal relationships of the people who consume it. Deducting from the above quotation by Hammerberg, Kirkman & Lacey, (2016) the information gathering for this research was feasible because the industry bodies have made their policies and legislation available to the public domain. The design of this research, focused on the public broadcast media houses.

This data collection instruments also included in-depth interviews with industry bodies, creative writers and directors for soap operas involved in the life cycle of content production, which Hall (1977) would define as encoding. Over 10 interviews with industry professionals in the abovementioned roles were conducted. There was further analysis of four soap operas and three dramas on the SABC that are popular for high ratings and high advertising revenue. These soap operas and dramas *Skeem Saam* (2011-), *Uzalo* (2015-) and *Muvhango* (1997-), *Yizo-Yizo* (1998), *Isibaya* (2013), *The Queen* (2016) and *Generations* (1993) were used as case studies through theory driven approaches found in the text and production to derive the meanings associated with gendered representation in a country facing an upsurge of violence against women.





This research paper further made use of quantitative data from media monitoring organisations to support, complement and substantiate the observations made.

### **3.2.1 In-depth Interviews**

As an information-gathering tool, interviews appear clear and simple and free from being misconstrued because they investigate information that is often subjective. However, interviews with authority figures that hold intellectual capital on a subject matter are seen to be objective from a thought leadership perspective as they hold a deeper understanding from a policy standpoint. They are often able to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the how and why (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The structure and coordination of this exercise is to pose questions that elicit an understanding, explanation, or justification to the research question of this paper through qualitative validity (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In-depth interviews offer a window into the interior experiences of others. Respondents are given considerable liberty in their responses and in discussing areas not raised by the researcher. In-depth interviews enable researchers to gather detailed attitudinal and experiential information from respondents, and this information is prompted by supplementing the broad, open-ended, exploratory questions with pertinent, gently probing sub-questions (Powell & Single, 1996).

We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affect their thoughts and feelings. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves. We can learn about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human condition (Gubrium & Holstein, 2017).

Diving into the interior spaces of the subjects enables the study to have a nuanced understanding of how producers cultivate and achieve certain behaviours that they embed in the encoding process. The ability to establish causality in forming patterns is often a great way to establish new points of interests for future studies.





### 3.2.2 Programming content

The programming content of the seven different programmes was analysed using six different categories between essentialised and de-essentialised representation of women in the soap operas. These categories emanated from scenes within the productions. Closed representation of women means the negative portrayal was defended or viewed as natural, yet open representations of women refer to portrayals that moved away or challenged subordinated positions of women. The table below will be further unpacked in the findings and analysis chapters respectively to detail prevalent themes supported by episodic evidence that highlight these themes. The numbers below represent the total number of scenes in all productions, for example there was a total of 67 scenes that depicted women as inferior and 14 scenes that only depicted women as different but not only inferior.

Table 2: Identified open and closed representations of women in soap operas

<b>Distinctions</b>	<b>Closed representations of women</b>	<b>Open representations of women</b>
Inferior/different	67	14
Manipulative/sincere	33	30
Weak/Strong	53	14
Enemy/partner	19	38
Women position natural/problematic	12	5

### 3.2.3. Document Analysis

Document analysis is a systematic way of reviewing or evaluating documents --both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is often used in combination with other

qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation which is “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Flick, 1992). By examining information collected through different documents ranging from policy documents, legislation, contracts, media clippings and annual reports. The researcher can corroborate findings across data sources and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study. According to Patton (1990), triangulation helps the researcher guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias.

The main documents included:

- The Independent Communications Act of South Africa Act No 13 of 2000,
- Media Development and Diversity Agency Draft Position Paper, November 2000,
- The SABC Editorial Policy
- The SABC Annual Report 2019 and 2020
- The Broadcasting Act (BA) Act of 1999 (as amended)
- The Independent Broadcasting (IBA) Act of 1993

### **3.2.4 Data collection techniques**

- Interviews were conducted in a formal and structured manner. The questions were focused, clear and encouraged open-ended responses.
- Documents and records of policies and processes that consist of existing data in the form of reports and databases were collected from media houses and industry bodies.
- Observations and evaluating the dynamics of a situation and the target behaviours as indicated by the needs of my research.
- Soap operas were analysed using the six categories in the preceding section.

## **3.3 The population and sampling methods**

### **3.3.1 Target Population**

The target population was all the SABC staff and freelancers involved in the production of programming content. They formed the study’s target population because this is the



group used for the illustrative purpose of observing the gendered routines and effects of gendered representations.

### **3.3.2 Accessible Population**

All the human resource of this research paper was readily available and accessible. However, carrying out this research may not have access to a big sample of the population, and it may be too complicated to condense information from various sources in this regard. This study made use of purposeful sampling and further used a type of purposeful sampling called quota sampling that is a pre-set criterion before sampling. This included characteristics such as gender, age, varying socio-economic class and different levels of authority involved in the life cycle of creating content and generating airplay.

### **3.3.3 Unit of analysis**

The research focused on the SABC as the leading public broadcaster and assessing the content they produce and give airplay. The analysis of this covered the bulk of the research and further moved into the effects that this has on the secondary unit of analysis which is the soap operas aired.

### **3.3.4 Population parameters, sample method and ethical issues**

Two research sites were chosen after the selection of popular soap operas and dramas. One was the SABC in Auckland Park and the other one was a private location for DStv respondents. The SABC was the primary research location, and its data was used in a comparative manner to assess the second location of private broadcasting. The study has argued that there are no major differences from data drawn from both locations. Twenty-three different men and women across all races were interviewed with sixteen coming from the SABC which had more soap operas selected. The people selected were primarily commissioning editors and staff involved in production. The respondents were allowed to opt for anonymity and were given names like respondent 1, 2 and so forth. Eight respondents did not mind having their names published. The respondents were selected in several ways. First of all, the commissioning editors of the selected



productions were listed and targeted for interviews. The information was gathered from the SABC research department after a consent letter for the study and ethical clearance certificate was produced. The samples were also enhanced by snow-ball sampling.

Since all the respondents were adults who could give full consent there was no need to create indemnity forms. The participants consented to the use of their comments and feedback as part of the qualitative research study to adequately interpret their contribution. This consent was kept on record in instances where the SABC and the private broadcasters may need to assess if this is in alignment with their ethics and that the nature of the research did not pose any real risk to their staff.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the data collection instruments and the ethical considerations that accompany this qualitative study. The instruments placed emphasis on mainly the texts themselves and the respondents involved in production. To gain rich data the interviews were characterized by a relatively informal approach that allowed the respondents to even narrate their own personal views and experiences in relation to the topic. The next chapter presents the findings.



## **CHAPTER 4. Findings: The flawed themes in the representation of women in the public broadcast media**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This inquiry set out to interrogate how the South African public service broadcaster mediates gendered representations in its programming content. Using seven popular soap operas and dramas, the study explored how gendered othering frames are used in the power margins in dialogue and as an offshoot of broadcasting policy and its ensuing gaps. The epistemological position of this inquiry is that the media performs a crucial part in the construction of reality. Consequently, the study sought to systematically explore these seven media texts in the contexts of their production and content with less emphasis on reception. Methodically, the investigation was therefore two-pronged. First, it was pitched at the organizational level where the context of production was crucial for data collection. Second, the analysis was at the content level.

In this chapter the study presents the findings on gendered representations gathered from the highest rating soap operas across the SABC bouquet. Seven key intersecting themes which are categorized into two interlinked overarching themes are drawn from the seven programmes to frame the key findings. These programmes and their production contexts reveal how patterns of discrimination operating against women are essentialised. The findings in this chapter shed light on how this discrimination is part of a patriarchal ideological apparatus structurally locked and constrained by economic and political factors (Franklin, 1997:34). For the purposes of this study, the first theme is called the 'authorial ideological context'. This theme focuses the sub-themes that point the study's attention to the author as a site of knowledge production, particularly how the production and control levels may collude to establish and sustain patriarchal relations of domination. Subsequently the 'authors' social position becomes an avenue into unearthing the production and specific intents of a text. This allows the study to find

anchoring within the encoding/decoding model as it seeks to legitimise the coding of messages within the realm of production. The sub-themes are: understanding the creative process, the pitch process and organizational culture influences. The second over-arching theme is the 'textual ideology'. This over-arching theme unlike the 'authorial ideological context' theme focuses not on the production context but the textual content itself. The emerging themes under textual ideology shed light on the inscriptions of otherness that women are subjected to and how those othering frames are reaffirmed and reinforced within texts, in this case the seven popular dramas and soap operas. The texts in a way appear to be a mechanism that structures both assumptions and expectations of roles in particular genres. Under this theme are four sub-themes; Dependence depictions, intellectual inferiority, domesticated and weak and sexual commodities. These two over-arching themes and the seven sub-themes open a canvas to conversations surrounding the production of knowledge/texts in terms of both content and institutional discourse and context.

#### **4.1.1 Authorial ideological context**

- Understanding the creative process. All characters begin in ideation, and it is necessary to understand how writers and executive producers conceptualise characters.
- The pitch processes. The public broadcaster has commissioning editors who curate and gatekeep the content that is aired on television. This is governed by editorial considerations.
- Organisational culture influences. This refers to established routines and rituals that have been naturalised.

#### **4.1.2 Textual ideology**

- Dependence depictions. Women are largely portrayed as people who depend on their husbands for livelihood, this theme explores how this perception might impact on respectability politics and their personhood.
- Intellectual inferiority. Women are depicted as helpers to men and conforming to their ideas as overarching and anchoring versus their own.

- Domesticated and weak. Traditional women's roles are not given respect as opposed to women with careers.
- Women as sexual commodities to be used and dispensed.

Furthermore, as an attempt to establish some pragmatic referents for gender representations, the study traces these intersecting themes. Subsequently, the following is an effort at presenting integrated findings on these representations.

## **4.2 A discussion of authorial ideological context themes**

The authorial ideological context theme, as pointed out in the preceding section, is generally concerned with the institutional constraints of professional routines, rituals, ideologies, and work practices in the production of texts that (mis)represents women. This also leads to discussions of structure and agency giving legitimacy to the CPEM theoretical framework in earlier chapters and its supporting interpretive lens of the encoding/decoding model.

### **4.2.1 Understanding the creative process**

The key data collection instruments for this study included in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were the preferred research method, together with analysis of content for this qualitative research. As such, the respondents pool was wide ranging. Commissioning editors involved in the broadcasting creative process for SABC were part of the pool. The objective was to unpack how they navigate the ideation, story development, pitching and flighting of soap operas in the encoding process. Unpacking these phases strengthened the exploration of how and why representation bias exists within the production level of texts. An interview was held with Phathutshedzo Makwarela who has worked at the public broadcaster for over a decade as head writer and producer for leading soap operas. Among the productions he has worked on are *Skeem Saam* (2011-) and *Muvhango* (1997-) that both earned one of the highest audience ratings on South African TV through his executive direction. Makwarela has also worked for paid television Mzansi Magic, which is a paid television channel, as head writer for *The*





*Queen* (2016), *The River* (2019) and other seasonal soap operas. He won the Golden Horn Award for Best Achievement in Scriptwriting and is considered a “rising brilliant mind” in the industry. As co-founder of Tshedza Films, he has been involved in multiple pitch processes at the SABC and describes the writing process as collaborative within his team through successive brainstorming sessions for story-building and development. According to Makwarela, this is a rigorous process that can take anywhere between a few weeks to a few months. Once the production team can ascertain that the idea meets the requirements stipulated by the SABC, they submit it to the public broadcaster where the commissioning editors will decide whether to commission it into full production or not.

The public broadcaster has one single mandate in serving the public, which is to “Inform, Entertain and Educate” ([www.sabc.co.za](http://www.sabc.co.za)). It is this manifesto that curates and holds accountable the content pillars of any soap opera in its character-building and plot reconciliation process. Makwarela highlighted that.

The public broadcaster is not prescriptive on how “women” or “men” characters are written and represented; only that whatever stories are told be built on the foundation of their mandate that honours who the public broadcaster is as an entity and what it stands for in society. “Because they have such stringent guidelines, you are forced to be cognisant of the fact that your stories must have a resolution. For example, if you portray a woman as an alcoholic, they [the public broadcaster] will want you to tell the resolution of how she fights the alcoholism. If your storyline is one of domestic violence, you further need to solve the dilemma in how that woman gets help or the man is held accountable.

Therefore, as a writer, Makwarela’s creative process requires him to conceptualise a soap opera always holding in parallel the social, psychological, and economic considerations of society as well as the briefing expectations of the SABC. In other words, film production can be viewed as a practice with an inefacable social function and as a result, meaning is a product of and an extension of society and its structures. The output must therefore satisfy what is missing in that genre landscape and consider what new angles can be infused to better tell that narrative but as a societal product and function.

#### **4.2.2 Pitch Process: How the SABC commissions new soap operas**



This study sought to understand the internal process of the SABC to ascertain whether their efforts are genuinely in line with the prescriptive editorial policies they are governed by. It became increasingly important to understand the criteria points that are used by the public broadcaster when they commission new soap operas. Reatlegile Mampa is a Commissioning Editor of Drama at the SABC and in a shared interview with Jacqui Swart, Head of Genre: Drama, they outlined the considerations that are made in airing a new soapie. They firstly highlighted the importance of understanding the foundation and objective of every channel in the public broadcaster's bouquet and the content required for each channel on its seasonal calendar. Mampa detailed that there is usually a formal brief prepared by commissioning editors that goes out to the public to collate proposals from production companies. However, they also welcome "unsolicited briefs" where people can, at any time, pitch any idea to the SABC. A prescriptive brief usually includes high-level information of the brand and positioning of the channel, the open time slot, the demographic it targets and the genre and headline language. Upon receiving the proposals responding to this brief, the commissioning editors use an evaluation document to score the idea proposal based on the following considerations: script format; dialogue; characters; structure; entertainment value and the possibility of revenue streams through marketability of advertising spots and visual appeal. Following the first scoring and shortlisting, favourable story proposals that measure strongly against the criteria move onto the next phase of pitch presentations. This is where the commissioning editorial team seeks to mediate the written story idea with the creative delivery and execution of the story idea because it is common that an idea that is good on paper fails the pitch process test. "The pitch process is to make me see what you are seeing because often in proposals information is left out because they don't realise that is information I need to make my decision," she said. Mampa mentioned an interesting trend of shows that start as telenovela's (which are characterised by a shorter run length than soapie, on a limited production rotation and a contained storyline) that later turn into daily soap operas. "Because of the nature of the business - when a show does well, and people love and gravitate towards it, and it brings in the revenue for the corporation then there is a push to keep it on for longer." According to the commissioning editors of the different soap operas and drama, there are more values to be considered before considerations of women representations are prioritized or any other gendered representations.



On the question of discerning which soap operas are likely to make the cut in the briefing and pitch process, the first consideration is the ability to hook the story to a specific channel's need. "When I look at the script it's about the emotional engagement; is it interesting? Is it funny? Is there something unique about it that has appeal to a wide audience?" Respondent 8 emphasised on how she interrogates the pitches. Swart reinforced the same sentiments by pointing out that it is always about the quality of the storytelling, "I am always looking for a strong premise, three dimensional, multi-layered characters where there are high stakes." Swart revealed a different approach to representation to women by stating that it is the public broadcaster's responsibility to make sure that black female characters are written with complexity and nuance. There is the conflict of making provocative content that matches the broadcaster's mandate because currently women are represented as antagonists of one another. She shared that in her current projects, the writing team is mainly composed of black women because "you can only know the struggles of a black woman if you are one. Women make up the majority of television viewing." Swart reflects that in story development, the character must be rooted in a reality that all people know and can resonate with for better or worse, even if it means compromising an idealistic representation. She conceded that this may lead to women characters having depictions that are stereotypical and fail to elevate their entire humanity.

All commissioning editors are different, and they have different tastes however they are guided by the mandate of the SABC and what the viewers ultimately need. Mampa unpacked that the journalistic tension of objectivity can be hard to navigate against the influence of personal lived experiences. "Stories are all about representation. I, coming from a village, always ask the question that for someone coming from Limpopo, Sepedi-speaking, what are they going to take out of it? Is it relevant for them and does it make sense for them?" she shared. In a soapie she often wants to see a "Reatlegile comes to Johannesburg" story because she believes for people to care, they must feel seen and represented. Therefore, there is an inference of her own subjectivity in the editorial process. Her experience of the SABC editorial policies is that they are simply a guide to ensure there is less sensationalism, more respect for diverse cultures, considerations of gender, abuse, and education. She said as a commissioning editor it is typical that writers bringing forth proposals feel that their creativity is often "stifled or squashed" by the editorial policies. Therefore, they apply these policies moderately.

### 4.3 Textual ideologies

Textual ideologies are primarily concerned with understanding an analysis of the texts, particularly their content. The production of text is not entirely divorced from the authorial ideological context themes because the text itself is an extension of factors outside of itself.

#### 4.3.1 Dependence Depictions

In the interview, the SABC commissioning editors described their representation of black women as “not where they are supposed to be” referring to ambiguity in how they are portrayed. Most soap operas that are on SABC’s prime time illustrated these forms of dependence depictions:

- Women who found economic security within their marriages and were, therefore, free to pursue less stressful ventures.
- Women who pursued men whom they believed could give them opportunities and are often sexualised to bait the attention of their male counterparts.
- Clear juxtapositions between women in urban lifestyles who were freer to pursue opportunities in industry and women in underdeveloped or rural areas whose economic emancipation depended more on community support.
- In instances where women were portrayed as powerful and commanded authority; they had strong male alliances that supported their rise to the top or curated their space to exist in places of influence.

The common thread in these depictions where, despite having the aptitude, proximity to men and their co-sign have regulated and made easier the economic lives of women. Some examples to illustrate dependency depictions from the soap operas reviewed for this study confirmed this. In *Muvhango* (1997), Chief Azwindini has been in a long-running polygamous marriage and every new wife that is introduced into the marriage often gives up their career, at some point, in favour of homestead duties. His wives have respectively given up careers in professional nursing, psychology, and beauty industries in exchange for ad-hoc community projects. In successive storylines, the chief has divorced other Tshivenda women who, upon closer inspection, were not bred



in the village and were educated and considered worldly and independent by the standards of a rural community. The initial charm, beauty, and intelligence he was attracted to in them became the very thing he sought to subdue in them because it challenged his authority. In earlier storylines, the chief's strongest business alliance was his sister-in-law who held the reins of the family business as a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Her success depended on his validation and business steer. Whenever she assumed autonomy that contradicted his recommendations, she would be ostracised from the family and her position in the business would be threatened.

In another soapie, *Generations: The Legacy* (2014-) centred around the advertising industry, various storylines throughout the years have depicted business networking that extended to sexual relationships as a means of bartering for business deals. Often, it is the women who are in a position of less power and therefore resort to using their feminine wiles to get ahead. The plots usually show how when these women reach a status of relative power, they are less likely to depend on their proximity to men. However, they wield that proximity as a social ladder to establish themselves in the beginning.

A scene in *Uzalo* is another good example of the objectification of women and how masculine and feminine are constructed within texts. This scene involves a polygamist (Nkunzi) who puts pressure on his wives (Lindiwe and Hlengiwe) to get pregnant because he wants an heir. Lindiwe, the first wife is forced to lie about the pregnancy and Nkunzi is happy that he will finally have an heir. Seeing how excited Nkunzi is about the pregnancy, Lindiwe feels guilty for faking the pregnancy and she visits a church to confess. This scene highlights the issues of unhealthy relationships that lead to emotional abuse which is a form of VAW.

VAW is a deep and widespread problem in South Africa with an impact on every aspect of life. Women, girls, and children are mostly affected. Gendered power inequalities are entrenched in our society and despite the arsenal of progressive policies and laws in place, women are still disproportionately affected. The above scene is classified as perpetuating subtle stereotypes because it reinforces the reproductive roles of women – that women are supposed to get pregnant, even if they are not ready, just to please their husbands. The female characters in this story line are valued according to their fertility and are put under immense pressure to provide an heir. VAW is implicit in the

storyline as Nkunzi is controlling to the point where his wife feels as though she must lie to maintain their relationship and turn to prayer to alleviate her guilt. Emotional abuse is often normalized and mostly left unreported as women find their own ways of recovery instead of seeking professional help. In seeking ways of recovery, religious institutions become the first place where most women go for help. Women should be able to make their own reproductive decisions without facing any pressure from their partners. This scene takes an unfair judgement whereby a woman is portrayed as someone who is desperate to get pregnant whilst the man is the one who desperately needs a child but is impatient to wait for the right time which leads a woman to fake the pregnancy just to please her husband. The scene does not challenge the stereotypes that women are only seen as child bearers and the scene also does not support the reproductive rights of women. Traditional gender roles put pressure on women when it comes to reproduction where a woman's role is only to give birth and take care of children. This scene fails to challenge Nkunzi's emotional abuse and normalises it. The use of texts as tools to re-affirm the subordination of women and to a large extent dehumanising them remains an important but dangerous ideological apparatus. As argued in the preceding sections, it is impractical to detach the text from the broader social and economic arrangements hence the gender relations in society permeate into dramas and soap operas.

Some of the examples that highlight these gendered representations include *Isibaya* (2013), as stated earlier *Isibaya* (2013) airs on the DSTV's channel MzansiMagic. There is a key male character in the drama by the name Zungu. He is a staunch patriarch who is in a polygamous marriage to three wives who all depend on him financially while he runs a taxi fleet business. He has relative control over all of them and they respect his word. In SABC's highest-ranking soapie *Uzalo* (2015), Sibusiso's girlfriend has a habit of asking him to take care of all her needs because she believes that a man is her gateway to economic freedom. The common thread was that a lack of economic independence rendered women smaller and less visible in power because their means of livelihood depended on a man.

#### **4.3.2 Gendered intellectual inferiority**



Dependence depictions are often not just economic, although that is the biggest stronghold. The soap operas reviewed for this research paint a world more receptive to the ideas of men thus positioning them as intellectually superior. *Uzalo* (2015-) is based on a historical conflict between two families, both are leaders in the community for different reasons. The Mdletshe family leads the community through church and Christianity and the Xulu family runs a car theft syndicate. In both the families, there is a strong patriarchal figure who sets the agenda for the family. The women standing alongside these men are portrayed as “helpers” subjugated to the mission of the household even when they have their reservations about it. There is an acceptance of “soft power” which suggests these women can entrench change only through persuasion and negotiating carefully with male power to plant their ideas and perspectives which will later be owned by the men as their original thought. This representation prevails in many societies across the globe where religion and/or capitalism rule the social landscape. It is the belief that men, as heads of household appointed by God and providers to the family’s livelihood, are the standard of humanity. This sentiment unpacking the by-product of patriarchy on humanity was detailed in the first chapter where this study outlined each of these soap operas and the running thread of male superiority through all of them.

As part of his internal conscience when creating a character like Mma Kunutu from *Skeem Saam* (2011-), Makwarela believes that it is important to find the truth of the character and that goes beyond gender. Makwarela instructs that “when crafting a black television character as a black writer, you need to care about their journey.” While a character like Mma Kunutu is in lower socioeconomic status, she is not stupid or lacking in the capacity to thrive. The essence of Mma Kunutu’s character is that she dropped out of school, married young and became a widow when her husband died leaving her with children and in-laws who wanted to rob her of his entire estate. Her character serves to reflect the demographic of women like her in South Africa with limited education, limited access to the justice system, limited access to healthcare. The objective is to portray how a woman like this character must negotiate standing up for herself and to convey an education on what steps to take if a woman like her is in a similar predicament.





Despite the multiplicity of scenes that depict male domination and female subordination through the means objectification, submission, hierarchy which tends to lead to violence there are a number of scenes that depict women as intellectually competent. For example, in *Uzalo*, Nosipho a young woman, pursues her dream of obtaining the family land from a white farmer with the help of her uncle Mkhonto. She invites a lawyer to discuss the issue of land compensation. However, both seem to not understand how difficult the process would be. The scene highlights the issue of land in South Africa where there are few female voices in discussions concerning women's rights in, access to, and control over land and property. Women and female headed households disproportionately lack security in the properties they live in because of cultural and customary practices and these practices often exist in parallel with statutory laws. The policies that support women's rights to land, property and housing are there in paper are often not a reality and not represented in media. This scene attempts to bring a female voice into the land discussion. This scene is gender aware because a woman participates in the land discussion where culturally, religiously and customarily women are often excluded from this space. The title is related to this scene as a woman drives the issue of land compensation and the family is determined to assist her to get their ancestral land back. This scene does not have a GBV focus but speaks to the issues of discrimination against women in accessing land, housing and property which is a determining factor in women's living conditions especially in rural communities. Both women and men speak in this scene, and the woman's viewpoints are solution-oriented. This scene does not include any sexist language or reference to VAW. A woman's participation in the land discussion challenges a common stereotype that women are not involved in discussions concerning land ownership nor do they have the intellectual capacity to handle such matters.

#### **4.3.3 Domesticated and weak**

The common traditional roles attributed to women are centered on the health, cleanliness, and wellness of the family structure. As such, tasks like cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, supporting the family in its endeavours and maintaining an environment conducive to thrive are still associated with women. In male-centered societies, this stereotyping and conflation of gender and sex exposes women to oppressive gender roles. Women who show this kind of industriousness in the afore-



mentioned roles are labelled as 'marriage material', since marriage is the defined apex of aspiration for women in male centered societies. Whilst women who can manage the duality of demanding careers whilst taking care of the household are revered as alpha females and attributed adjectives such as 'strong', 'focused' and 'multitasker'. In all of the soap operas that were reviewed by the public broadcaster, both these types of women exist, and this illustrates a variety of the faces women wear. However, in the soap opera world and society, both these women do not generate the same reverence and respect for the everyday roles they play. The women who are 'marriage material' are a family resource because they do not add a financial contribution to the family's lifestyle. The roles attributed to these women are old and historical and therefore have a lack of acknowledgment on how physically and emotionally taxing they are. Domestication and taking care of the family's homestead is seen as the bare minimum for women, and everything beyond that role is validated as worthy of acknowledgment. While this is an unfair representation, it permeates widely across soap operas in paid television and the public broadcaster. This has been adopted from how society believes qualities associated with men are the standard of efficacy and contribution. Qualities like physical strength, critical thinking, assertiveness, strategy, leadership and providing for the family are not mutually exclusive to men, however, when a woman embodies this, she is markedly different.

Makwarela who has accumulated experience creating stories for the public broadcaster has since moved onto paid television where he is the executive writer for *The Queen* (2016-) and *The River* (2019) presents some interesting perspectives. In one of his productions, *The Queen*, he features a dominant matriarch who leads her family business as a drug lord distributing cocaine. This is an immediate stark difference from the women characters that Makwarela has written for the two SABC channels. The women reviewed in *Muvhango* and *Skeem Saam* have nuance in their identity however they are mainly cultured in patriarchy and submission. While these women are strong and resilient, they exhibit these characteristics towards matters of primary needs like food security, safety, and belonging to the community. This does not translate to moving against the grain and having a strong sense of agency. This juxtaposition in the variety of faces Makwarela's women wear surfaced in the interview. He shared that *Skeem Saam* (2011-) was developed by the public broadcaster to be an educational property. Zooming in on the character of Mma Kunutu, Makwarela explained that: "The core



audience is the uneducated, unemployed, disenfranchised women. So, when you make content like that, because you are educating in that community, there is no Harriet [matriarch from *The Queen* (2016-)]. In the community of your core audience, there is Mma Kunutu. Because the purpose is to educate, you need to reflect the reality of the lived character,” he said in justifying the difference. Likewise, this research recognises that *Muvhango* (1999-) also has women characters closely linked to the psychographics of the women in *Skeem Saam* (2011-). *Muvhango* (1999-) replicates a specific community where patriarchy and culture are the status quo of the household. Makwarela notes that, “...when you reflect that kind of world and universe, you need to be true to that universe, not be driven by the idea of what you think women need to be interpreted as. Because your audience will feel the disconnection and that will be a missed opportunity for resonance because you are not meeting them where they are, you are meeting them where you think they need to be.”

Comparatively looking at the women characters that Makwarela writes for the public broadcaster versus paid television, Harriet on *The Queen* (2016-) is more assertive however, she is also a criminal. Makwarela challenged the research question and posed an exploration of whether that makes her a “strong-willed, morally-driven” woman? He highlighted that when a Harriet character is interrogated in true form, we remember that she killed her husband to gain her wealth. The concession was made that while Harriet is not a model human being, the deviant character traits she exhibits are frowned upon harshly in a woman, however, society is more accepting of those same traits when they are exhibited in a man. Makwarela further shared that the reason why they can “colour outside the lines” with Harriet’s character is because paid television is a business enterprise and its primary mandate is to generate profit. It is not a business of educating; it is one of entertaining. Harriet is unapologetic about the power she dominates because she is an entertaining character every time she comes on screen, not a reality-reflected woman. The study observes that, in compensation for the weak and dependent woman producers fall into the trap of creating the stereotype of a ‘strong’ woman whose validation is to be extreme in violence or any other endeavor they embark on which is a double-bind.

#### **4.3.4 Women as sexualized commodities**



One of the most prevalent themes is that of pushing women from the human realm via means of commodification and objectification. Women are portrayed as commodities and this dovetails with the objectification theory which postulates that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Reducing women into an object of men's desires dehumanises them and reinforces the idea that they can be dispensed of after use even through violence. It is in this area where feminist perspective has been to the fore in critiquing mainstream media content (Rakow 1990). Consequently, men hold the worldview that women are their commodities and have a sense of entitlement over them. There are many scenes like these all the chosen dramas and soap operas, however, the scenario is well illustrated in a scene in *Skeem Saam*.

Sphola and his girlfriend Mapitsi are separated and the scene follows Sphola as he finds it difficult to let go of the relationship. He feels he is entitled to Mapitsi and cannot let her go without making her pay. The scene explores issues on both physical and emotional abuse and the concept of ownership. Sphola claims that Mapitsi is spreading lies about him. As Sphola finds it difficult to let go of a relationship, his actions become worrisome to Mapitsi and she feels her life is in danger. Episodes show Sphola taking responsibility and letting her go. This scene explores the widely held belief that women are merely sexual objects in relationships and they are obliged to have sex with their partners. This storyline however, shows a man speaking sense to another man about relationships. Katlego a male friend to Sphola tells Sphola that Mapitsi does not owe him anything and he should move on. This scene could have addressed the problematic ideas about gender roles in relationships and power dynamics in a more direct way. Although Katlego says that Mapitsi does not owe Sphola anything, he could have explained why. The writers of the show missed an opportunity for Katlego to explain to Sphola that women do not exist in relationships purely as sexual objects. Women don't owe men anything and the idea that they do contributes to the idea that men have ownership and therefore power, over women's bodies. This feeds into the norms and values that contribute to gender-based violence as, traditionally, a man would beat a woman who opposes him and have her stay in the relationship forcefully. To address this stereotype, the scene uses another man, Katlego, to speak sense to his friend. Man to man, the bitter lover is told that a woman has a right to break up with him and that he should not feel that she owes him anything.



There is also a historical dimension to the violent patriarchal nature of South Africa that is captured in literature. Various feminists have extensively written on the South African violent legacy that can be traced back to colonialism, slavery, and apartheid. According to Brown (2011), the colonial project depended heavily on sexual violence to establish and cement various hierarchies of power. The perpetrator knew that the conduct was part of or intended the conduct to be part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population (Brown, 2011). To be a white man in a slave society was to routinely violate black people in general but also rape black women which did two things: it brutalised them and it reinforced what race was. “The various disciplines in the academy that rescue race from an idea and elevate it to a valid ordering and meaning-making system rely on sexual violence, sexual cataloguing and measuring the bodies of the enslaved and colonised” (Gqola, 2015). What this achieved in terms of binaries is that the more a black woman was brutalised and violated and treated like the lowest kind of object, the binary of that is exalting the white woman and making her pure and pristine. As white men were violating black women to usurp power and demean black men’s ability to take care of their families, the very same fears of black men doing the same thing to them compounded.

Rape is an extremely effective wartime weapon that is strategically used to shame, demoralize, and humiliate the enemy. By systematically raping women and girls, armed groups assert power and domination over not only the women but their men as well (Brown, 2011). Gqola (2015) recounts the colonial history of rape as a weapon of warfare by the British as they moved into parts of the Eastern Cape, she cites Robert Edgerton's book *Africa Armies: from honour to infamy*. “The Xhosa military would always attack at times when women and children would be least affected. The Xhosa were known to have killed only one white woman and perhaps by mistake. They never killed or raped any white children. Their logic of war avoided catching women and children in the crossfire”. However, the raping of black women has always been part of the military action of the white men resulting in the springing up of mixed-race children who were borne of black women who would be considered slaves as well (Gqola, 2015). The acceptance of this violence was so widespread, it was not considered to be a crime and rendered black women “unrapable”. Gqola cites an incident where a man convicted of raping a woman had the sentence reversed when the judge realised the woman had not been a white woman. This then created categories of a “perfect victim”



with the conditions being her race, her reaction to the rape and having gone above and beyond to prove that rape. Perhaps this was to be expected in a criminal justice system in South Africa that was based on the Roman-Dutch Law which actively deprioritised black women on a social hierarchy. The representations of black women in an apartheid society painted them as stoic and built for resilience on hardships that they did not have to endure. While the collective struggle of women in every demographic was being subjugated to patriarchy and the lack of agency, black women had a unique struggle where the justice system was rigged against protecting their mere humanity. This is a situation in which there would have been deviances if the victim was not black.

This history leads to the consideration of how black men could have, across the years and generations, internalised the usurping of power and protection over women and children and turned that violence inwards and externally against the same black women in similar acts of sexual violence. Gqola (2015) raises an ironic example of this in the essays collected in *Frank Talk 10*. Andile Mngxitama and Athi Jojo, both politicians, argued that black men cannot inflict violence on black women because when a black man rapes a black woman, it cannot lead to the kinds of trauma that sexual violence produces. In much the same way as colonial legislators, they considered black women impossible to rape. What is clear is that a patriarchal structure, which is a significant by-product of the Critical Political Economy framework, has always existed in African cultures and black men have, as well, been violating black women at their own discretion. The root comes down to masculinity which was defined by the entrance of capitalism and measuring people's worth according to who makes more money. The inferiority of not being able to afford a lot of things in black communities led to crime, and much like the white colonialists in warfare, it led to rape and gender-based violence to assert power and create shame.

#### **4.5 The role of media monitors**

William Bird, founder of Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), defined its role as a research-based organisation that monitors and analyses media. Although there is a keen focus for news, this organisation has done extensive content analysis on programming media with emphasis on the SABC as the national broadcaster and mouthpiece of the country. They look at how matters of social interest transpire on digital platforms as well as





policy submissions and advocating for media-rooted issues that require justice system intervention through strategic litigation. MMA began looking at gender representation in the public broadcaster in the wake of democracy and elevated their expertise to issues like gender-based violence in television content and the nature of its portrayal. Weekly, MMA sits down and analyses media to find examples where media has represented women and children well and examples where they have reported on them poorly.

The findings of representation in a post-apartheid country showed that soap operas did not have a resolute narrative or a strong educational focus which we now recognise as the SABC's mandate. Bird (2018) said in the late 90s there was a concerted effort to address questions on rape culture and gender stereotypes in society leading to the development of programming classification that included ratings of 'prejudice' and 'gender-based violence' by the Films and Publications Board (FPB). At the time, the classifications only served as an awareness flag for the audience on the nature of the content that is anticipated. This protected their right to choose to view. However, classifications were not in themselves a mechanism to interrogate the existence of stereotypes and skewed representations nor correct them, especially that of minority groups and women. The FPB board has since elevated its mission to "ensure efficient and effective consumer protection through regulation of television content while empowering the public, especially children, through robust information sharing" (fpb.org.za).

South Africa's population is characterized by a wide diversity in race, culture, language, and religion. The different groups are at very different levels of development. Race and class tend to coincide, with the whites monopolizing political, economic, and military power. The media monitoring of mass media across public and paid broadcasting inevitably reflects the existing power structure and seeks to reconcile it (Geston, 2006). As the country was emerging as a democracy with a constitution that promised equality, fairness and dignity as its bedrock, the post-apartheid stronghold still controlled the status quo in newsrooms and broadcasting stations. This jarring dissonance led to the SABC's progressive editorial policies under the consultation of MMA.

The policies that were developed aspired to dismantle stereotypes and uphold more nuanced storytelling. The regulations sought to encourage storytelling that both mirrors





the reality in society and inspires the mandatory conversations to mend its ills. The objective was to protect the ideal of fair representation against false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented, and promoted to intentionally cause harm. These are the negative consequences of the critical political economy of the media when it is infused with propaganda and not sanctioned by sound policies. This editorial policy marked the turning point where television content on the public broadcaster began pushing the boundaries and dealing with issues in ways that were quite radical at the time through programmes like *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) and *Soul City* (1994) that dealt with rape, sex, gender-based violence and various socio-economic issues.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This findings chapter has presented two over-arching themes and the seven sub-themes that open a canvas to conversations surrounding the production of knowledge/texts in terms of both content and institutional discourse and context. The understanding of these configurations lays a foundation to interpreting how the oppression of women is not so much the result of intentional actions of individuals but as the product of political, social and economic structures which may include the media in the form of broadcasters. The themes presented demonstrate the lifecycle of content production as carried out by the mainstream broadcasters. The SABC is mindful about content that is resonant and reflective of society and thus strives for relevance in this regard. While the effort is admirable, there is a danger of armchair reasoning in how they commission new television soap operas. Editorial policies are treated as a guideline and not as an appendix to the commissioning of new television content. There is an obvious need for women characters with a wider interior experience to have more airplay. Women characters whose lives are not easily condensed in societal labels. The identified themes show that decisions made at the ideation phase have the power and influence in moulding how the audience receiving this content mediates and validates their own lived experiences.



## **CHAPTER 5: Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The analysis of the data suggests that understandings of media representations and its inference on violence against women (VAW) can be explored through several themes. The study has identified five key theoretical themes that shape these contours of considerations. These are: historical legacies, monologism/life mediated through men, institutional culture and rigidity of organisational media routines and practices and the essentialisation of identities. The key argument in this chapter is that these dichotomous representations in texts and the processes of production are learned and inherited through configurations of power which are owed to the discordant and racialised history of South Africa that remains gendered. As a result, the media has continued to be a vital cog to the forms of discrimination against women in South African society.

The critical political economy of the media lends vital tools of analysis to understanding the role of the media in the reproduction of ideology and maintenance of power (Williams, 2013:57). Unlike the traditional political economy epistemic lens which restricts analysis to class, the CPEM further deepens inquiry by presenting a more complex analysis of the 'structure and process of representation, the apparatus and economic structures which support these, the social relations that reproduce patriarchal ideology or discourse and women's place in culture', (Gallagher 1992:2). Consequently, the enduring systematic representation of women and their objectification instead of active subjects is interrogated and laid bare. Through the findings in chapter four, it became clear that Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model gives texture to understanding the creative and commissioning process that is subject to political, economic, and interpersonal variables outlined in the CPEM. While this study does not delve deeply into the world of consumption/reception of messaging which Hall defines as decoding,



the satellite view of our society, as it relates to gendered representation, is indicative that there is an implicit influence that is internalized.

What came up in the findings were several categories. The aim is not to elucidate on those categories but to trace how they are produced and their cognitive moorings. For example, findings within the essentialisation of identities indicate that women are presented as inferior, weak, emotional, sexual commodities amongst other essentialisations. The study relied on in-depth interviews, analysis of dramas/soap operas, document analysis and critiquing relevant broadcast material. Of course, as mentioned in the preceding sentences six essentialisations were extracted to trace the lifecycle of how women are depicted in the public broadcast media from content ideation right up to the content consumption and the subsequent perceptions. This chapter seeks to thread the effects of misrepresentation and stereotypes as it relates to the portrayal of women by bringing in the scope of the study in how the public broadcaster and private broadcasters challenge or reinforce political representations of women in a country facing an upsurge in VAW. It further juxtaposes the historical and lived experience of women, particularly black women, in this society and how certain television depictions have been inherited from the historical contexts of the country.

## **5.2 Legacies of history and binary representations**

The history of South Africa is marred with violence, both ideological and physical. Fundamental to this history is slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. The colonial project depended heavily on reinforcing gendered binaries. For example, Fulcher and Scott (1999) point out that, “patriarchy works through the representation of the gender role as being natural... and men are portrayed as economic providers and women as the emotional providers”. During apartheid, this state of affairs was naturalized where men had to work in the cities and mines and women remained home as care-providers. Sexual violence was also meted out to establish and cement various hierarchies of power. As pointed out in the literature and findings chapter, this dehumanization of women made them not only dispensable but to exist at the benevolence of men. The vestiges of these unequal subject and object relations endure on media representations. It is clear that they are both historical and by extension racial. For example, in all the seven popular dramas and soap operas who have multi-racial casts all rape scenes are against black women.



Referring back to the literature and findings chapter where Pumla Gqola (2015) points out that;

To be a white man in a slave society was to routinely violate black people in general but also rape black women.....the various disciplines in the academy that rescue race from an idea and elevate it to a valid ordering and meaning-making system rely on sexual violence, sexual cataloguing and measuring the bodies of the enslaved and colonized...what this achieved in terms of binaries is that the more a black woman was brutalised and violated and treated like the lowest kind of object, the binary of that is exalting the white woman and making her pure and pristine. As white men were violating black women as a means to usurp power and demean black men's ability to take care of their families, the very same fears of black men doing the same thing to them compounded.

Within this thinking what Gqola shares is an understanding of how the racial and gendered violence shapes South African society today together with its representations which are not divorced from the social realities and relations. To sketch very briefly, one may revert to the rape scene in *Yizo Yizo*. The hideous spectacle of rape is seen as validating masculinity. It is purposefully used to assert dominance over the victim and serve as a stark reminder of the gendered power relations. This echoes Brown's (2011) claim that by systematically raping women and girls, armed groups assert power and domination over not only the women but their men as well. The argument in this section has been that the violence of gendered power relations and the media representations that ensue are inextricably linked to history and are artifacts of the dominant social relations where men have across generations internalised the seizing of power and protection over women and children and turned that violence inwards and externally against the same black women in similar acts of sexual violence.

A great body of critical literature as espoused by Tuchman (1978) calls for the interrogation of the 'symbolic annihilation' of women since there are strong claims that strong mental universal structures are shaped by what people view and adopt through social learning. For example, in a country with such a checkered history of violence, young men may be very conscious and invested in what their peers and other men think of them, and they consume this through encoding messages in the media and their own communities. One good role model and the influence of that personal relationship can create a different outcome because of how that decoding of that influence interplays with their own self-determination. Popular television productions may also have characters who turn out to be the role models. Consequently, authorship is a critical



starting point in relation to television productions and women. Authors who have an understanding that the assumption of men as normal and women as a deviation have negative consequences on societal relations. Of course, there is a consideration that it's possible to have two young men growing up in the same circumstances - violent societies that are subject to domestic violence and consuming the same television content that constantly casts a cloak of victimhood on black women - can turn out differently. One subscribing to the same behaviour of violence and absorbing the perception of black women's portrayal on television and the other questioning that same content.

However, it still remains that masculinity has been turned into a very violent phenomenon in society and the sort of masculinity that violates, and exploits has largely been valorised and finds resonance with the history of gendered violence in South Africa. Lebohang Masango, a PHD anthropology candidate, asserted that "in many things you see on television that kind of masculinity gets the job done, it gets the girl, it gets the money. The more you exploit and violate, you're untouchable,". Violence has been glamourised in a variety of masking manoeuvres that have seduced spectators into mythologizing violence. Gqola (2015) said while watching violence, we imagine we are watching something else: humour, freedom, play and healthy assertions of self. There is an obvious toxic concoction of representation and masculinity that is being fed to young boys and it necessitates that there be strong figures in their own lives to intervene and show them there are better ways to be. Other times, it takes a tough journey of first being destroyed by this toxic masculinity for them to seek a new way. Gqola (2015) reinforced this and said part of violent gender power is in celebrating attributes associated with the masculine and ordering the world in terms of opposites or binaries. If masculinity is celebrated, then femininity as its opposite must be debased. This means that those who are marked as feminine are also debased in relation to those marked as masculine. Consequently, women spend energy fixing themselves since the full human is masculine (Gqola, 2015). Not all claims to masculinity are a heightened claim to aggression, strength, and sexuality that would not fairly satisfy reality. Gqola (2015) lamented that individuals and groups of men can lay claim to masculine identities without being hyper-masculine.

The glaring effects of the traditional representation of women in the media and cultivating perspectives are that they look at media output as too homogenous, the



cultural influences as too negative and the recipients as too passive (Fourie, 2004). When children grow up in environments where they are humiliated, excessively criticised and punished then the scene is set for them to acquire aggressive and manipulative ways of handling their internal conflicts. They become particularly susceptible to being influenced by television violence and patterns because it fits into their existing frame of reference. According to Huesmann (1988), the social behaviour young adults acquire is to a great extent controlled by cognitive scripts, strategies, and schemes of what they observe, and these are stored in memories. When we must solve problems, we tap into memories. While there is no causal relationship between intelligence and aggression caused by television viewing, the failure to develop intellectual skills stimulates aggression and aggressive behaviour. Heavy television viewers also watch violent programmes and are regularly exposed to television characters who solve interpersonal problems in aggressive ways. It can be inferred that in the reality of poor family relations and lack of positive role models; television violence may have a reassuring function that deviant behaviour is acceptable. This may even teach viewers new techniques which they may use in their interactions with others.

The patriarchal and VAW inclinations in South Africa have been challenged to take on a brand-new narrative that places the onus of interrogation on the perpetrator instead of the victim. However, even in the turn of this tide, many perpetrators have not internalised the harmful consequences of this violation because the communication has been sporadic, lacking in targeting and consistency. In the SABC 1 primetime soap opera, *Generations: The legacy* (2019 episode 27) Lesedi wakes up one morning on a school trip with her shirt unbuttoned and pants unzipped. The pain experienced in her body indicated that a sexual violation had occurred. The only person who could have done this to her was her teacher, Mr. Carlson who walked her to her dorm room after she felt ill during outdoor activities. He gave her some pills he claimed would make her feel better, but she passed out moments later. Mr. Carlson didn't return to the group while Lesedi was out cold. Lesedi believes the teacher drugged her to take advantage of her. This storyline was aired in 2019 and was very closely followed by another rape incident on *Generations: The Legacy* (2019) where the character of Ayanda was sexually assaulted by a high-net-worth client to whom she had been sent to deliver a package. She keeps this a secret because she did not think anyone would believe her and to avoid the implications of losing the business account. The common thread in





these storylines is the pervasive power dynamics between these men and their victims. In both instances, superiority and undue influence is forcing the victims to retreat into silence enduring grave psychological consequences. These representations renounced women yet again to sexual exploitation, shame, lacking agency, and stripped them of power. While *Generations: The Legacy* (2019) was responding to the conversations on rape culture that were trending on social media at the time, they still used a poor representation of women to carry the awareness across to audiences thus triggering many victims. There is a sense that they did not dig deep enough to corner this angle in a more redemptive way that puts the spotlight on the perpetrator but instead focused on the emotional consequences endured by the women.

When a society is facing a crisis, it needs to receive the kind of attention where it is treated as a crisis. “We need billboards and signposts that say: ‘Don’t take your penis out of your pants’ or ‘If she doesn’t say hello back to you, leave her alone’ because it’s a small action between having done nothing and having raped or assaulted” as pointed out by respondent 2. The media must intervene at that moment of decision-making. “Men must look around and feel like ‘Okay we get it!’ because they don’t understand.” Broadcasting content in a country battling VAW requires a higher level of commitment to mitigation against gendered representations. The sentiment is that the SABC produces relevant, thought-provoking content in a panic to respond to a societal epidemic and is often too late for the people they are hoping to influence. “When they had the chance to intervene at *Takalani Sesame* level to talk about issues of consent, they weren’t doing that. When they could intervene in life orientation classes through television content and unpack masturbation, sexual practices and representing women in full autonomy, those critical stages were not used effectively,” said Respondent two. While our society and our media are not revering black women’s full humanity and potential, this research paper has made a fair observation that black women are making and finding joy regardless by constantly superseding expectations. The country and its criminal justice system are still desensitised to black women’s pain, it is still based on Roman-Dutch law and when people who have traditionally been considered slaves form part of conservative law, it is still difficult to associate them with the dignity they deserve. There are blind spots the law has for the suffering and injustice of black women compounded by patriarchy in the courtroom and further into broadcast media spaces. The next





section explores the locus of enunciation of the representations where stories of women are largely told from the position of men.

### **5.3 Monologism: Life mediated through men**

The argument in this section is that production of these media texts effectively remains masculine. Furthermore, the question to be asked is why does this persist in a supposedly democratic post-1994 South Africa? For example, this endurance is two-fold, that is physically and ideologically. Out of the twenty-three respondents in key production roles over half were male. Ideologically, some of the women respondents did not reflect any intention to change the status quo in their productions even though all of them recognized the subordination of women in their texts. In effect, all the respondents acknowledged the (mis)representations of women and the need to present gender identities as only provisional than natural.

As a result of their position, the tension between structure and agency poses more questions. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway posits that all knowledges are situated (1988). What then could be the position of women producers in these male inclined productions? It follows logic that women may change the narratives by locating their productions' meaning in their lived experiences, an approach which subsequently counters the male voice. This is very important because women in South Africa tend to experience different sets of social relations which are largely violent and de-humanising in essence. Their viewpoints are therefore important. Sandra Harding (1986) argues that "the viewpoints of the marginalized are more important and significant than those who are in power and that these marginal or subjugated perspectives are worth paying attention to when considering how knowledge is produced". If this is important why then do male voices endure? Decolonial scholar Ramon Grosfoguel (2007:13) posits that hegemonic worldviews tend to succeed in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side to think epistemically like the ones located on the dominant side. Grosfoguel's claim is instructive in explaining not only the enduring monological masculine voice but the fractured locus of enunciation of female producers also. In other words, it is not all about the gender of the people involved but the epistemic location of the narratives.



The argument in this section has been that due to hegemonic male voices, media contexts in South Africa construct monologues which are male-voiced statements that require reciprocity and replication. Instead of a dialogue in representations “in all areas of life and ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people’s words”, (Bakhtin, 1981a:293). Monologism in this study is about both silencing and erasure of women voices be it in production on texts, in a ‘repeat after me’ trajectory that invisibilises women.

Monologism comes in many forms. One of its dimensions is rooted in the questioning of the structures by the marginalized and in feigning care ‘monologism’ responds through what could be a neutral or compensating framework, which is actually a dismissal or erasure. For example, as pointed out by Tomlinson and Millie (2017:4), “the erasure is prospective, it anticipates criticism and rules it out by responding to a future voice”. In the production, *The Queen* (2015-) this is made implicit, that is, in response to already existing dissenting voices about woman subordination in film roles and in anticipation of more nonconformist voices, the producer features a dominant matriarch who leads her family business as a drug lord distributing cocaine. On the surface, this is a move away from the normative model of a woman however deeper analysis reveals how femininity is represented only in relation to masculinity, particularly the extreme and toxic kind of masculinity. This in a way, is a form of erasure, if women are not inhabiting subordinate positions, they occupy extreme masculine positions which in a way solidifies the myth of Jezebels. Monologism in character deployment forces women to occupy these contradictory subject positions where they forced to inhabit subordinate positions or be extremely violent and lose being a woman by being a man in the process seeking validation through exhibiting male characteristic. It is also the argument of this study that there is a need for more representations of women that do not need validation from men. Some of the ways these may be represented is through plots edifying economic ownership through entrepreneurial activities or leadership roles. Women with complex and nuanced characters that are neither good or bad, just simply realistic and textured with circumstances. Women with supportive spouses and illustrating the balance of household management. Equally important in life mediated by men, women should be liberated from notions of domestication which confine women to subjugated roles. These roles reduce women into collective subjects defined by passivity.



This pervasive masculine monologism that effectively excludes, silences and erases women voices can be explained through the critical political economy of the media epistemic lens supported by the encoding/decoding model of television product and the consequent social learning that permeates through theoretical texts. This explanatory framework is concerned with how the making and taking of meaning are shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations and how particular macro and micro contexts are shaped by the general economic dynamics and the wider structures they sustain (Golding and Murdock, 2000). The CPEM deepens and echoes the Gramscian explanation of hegemony. Despite Gramsci's opposition to strict economic determinism as an explanatory framework he does not rule out power as deterministic. Gramsci appears to suggest that power by dominant groups tends to make subordinate groups consent or collude with dominant ideas when he claims.

The fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is exercised, and that certain compromise equilibrium should be formed, in other words that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity (Gramsci, 1971:161).

This informative quote powerfully sheds light on the possibilities fashioned by power in its pursuit of cognitive control and possible control of human subjects, particularly women in film, both as producers and actors and how these relations translate or are integrated into social, subjective life and public discourse. In a way hegemony deepens the CPEM by displaying how hegemony describes the restoration of the political, economic, and cultural dominance of the most powerful groups as a reaction to popular aspirations in order to secure the consent of subordinate groups (Strinatti, 1995:169). In South Africa, power is both racialized and gendered, hence the representations in these six texts are subject to the production, reproduction and transformation of hegemony through broadcast media and its institutions (Strinatti, 1995:168). These institutions operate ideologically and culturally and the struggle for hegemony plays out in the institutional cultures, structures and creative processes.

#### **5.4 Institutional cultures, structural constraints and the creative process**



Inferring from the interview with Makwarela, production companies understand the content that appeals to the SABC channels, and they are prudent in their conformity to it. They move with the broadcaster as it develops its bravery to approaching society and telling its stories. There are a few soap operas that were ahead of their time and in their pioneering steam forced the public broadcaster to evolve into its mandate of informing, educating and entertaining. However, there are instances where this has been met with contention and public attack because South Africa is still defined as a conservative nation. One such example was the airing of sexual abuse and prison rape on *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) in the early 2000s. The graphic rape portrayal was the most talked-about scene and caused such an uproar that some parents petitioned to have *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) removed from the SABC1 menu while other parents felt it was high time that parents, and the country, understood what was going on in the school system. To produce this series, a survey was conducted to determine what is going on in South African township schools. The research outcome painted a scenario of schools in the grip of criminality: boys carry guns and knives to school, they rape schoolgirls at gunpoint, abuse alcohol and drugs and hijacking motor vehicles for money. Other issues identified by the survey were teenage pregnancy, schoolgirls who sleep with taxi drivers for free transport rides, lack of role models because teachers set a poor example by arriving at school late, abusing alcohol on school premises and after hours, suffering from hangovers and sitting in the staffroom all day drinking tea instead of attending to their classrooms (Fourie, 2004). The results of the survey were used to produce the SABC's chilling soap operas. The intensive research that went into creating this soap operas series illustrates how the creative process requires time, research, investigation, and the fusion of interconnected issues. Creativity in broadcast is much more than the manifestation of imagination and gripping plots, if the storytelling is to be authentic, representative, and resonant then the stories need to be heard from the horse's mouth. Drawing from this example, the creative process is not free from being met with apprehension even when it is an honest depiction. Often society is uncomfortable dealing with the reflection of their reality in the absence of actionable solutions and redemptive angles. *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) achieved the incitement of difficult conversations in households, while some were revolted by it, others saw it as educational and necessary. This turbulent zone of women subordination in representations is further cemented by the rise of commercialization which has seen the



practice of power entrenched in institutional practices and in a way buttressing the symbolic annihilation of women.

The insights derived from the interviews held with commissioning editors of the SABC made it clear how the interplay of economic power is evident in broadcasting media. It is pervasive not only in how the public broadcaster conducts itself as a revenue-generating business but further in how they decide which soap operas are commissioned, the timeslots they occupy and the nature of the content to culminate into a profitable bottom line. According to document analysis the following characteristics define the public broadcaster as a business. First, it is a hybrid business and within the SABC there are different kinds of media producing different kinds of products for different markets in different ways. This can be seen through the SABC's bouquet of channels and its segmentation for different audiences. SABC1 is geared toward the mass market and primarily the youth with vibrant shows that drive the entertainment mandate. SABC2 caters to a more indigenous audience giving special attention to vernacular languages that are underrepresented. This drives the education lever of the mandate. SABC3 focuses on a more aspirational lifestyle featuring soap operas and shows for an affluent economic class. Secondly, it depends on fixed costs: There are licence fees, office and production facilities, and the salaries of skilled workers, production costs which can involve expensive technology, computer hardware and software, broadcasting technology and distribution costs in the driving of the business. Thirdly, the media business involves creativity and uncertainty: Media content is a product for the human mind (for the readers, listeners and viewers who may differ in tastes, needs, culture and education). Therefore, the business has a lot of uncertainty despite sophisticated market research because it is difficult to predict the popularity of a soap opera or series. The commissioning editors explained that a large part of their function is staying close to trends, social media topics, the reverberating conversations in society, and political climates. This informs which pitches will respond to the current market need and match the pulse of the audience. They cannot rely on the multiple and recycled use of their products: While the SABC does recycle material through omnibus runs and repeats, they do so at timeslots that do not garner a high audience rate. Their revenue is highly dependent on advertising sales and the highest advertising bids are slotted into prime-time television where there are over 10 million viewers at a time. Adversely, repeated slots have much cheaper advertising rates which are less



profitable. The public broadcast media is dominated and owned by the SABC. The absence of competition on the same scale means they have the power to control the narrative for the majority of the South African population who cannot afford paid satellite television. Propaganda and bias are likely to permeate in the absence of fair competition. The success of the media depends on public interest: This explains why content relies on the imminent conversations in society to best align content creation to what audiences have a greater propensity to gravitate towards. This emphasises the need for audience research.

These are some of the characteristics that illustrate the presence of CPE economy of the media in the SABC. However, on a more blatant angle, media houses employ economic strategies for selling their products and gaining access to the largest possible audience (Fourie, 2004). There are economic strategies such as vertical integration that have been adopted by the SABC where they control the entire production process and distribution process. Big media organisations usually own their printing and distribution divisions, sometimes they have separate private companies affiliated to the same holding group (Fourie, 2004). The corporate character of the SABC is more evident in the vertical integration economic strategy than the alternative horizontal integration which favours multiple media use and distribution channels. By controlling the entire ecosystem of production as well as the lifecycle of content, it is easier to drive a strategy through various levels that uphold unfair representation.

## **5.5 Essentialisation of gendered roles**

How human beings imbue meaning is an intersection of signs, symbols, language, forms of dress and spaces they occupy and how these factors, in turn, imbue meaning unto them (Danesi, 1994). The CPE framework in earlier chapters delved into how this creates meaning-making and status quo in society. The public broadcaster and private broadcasters need to start thinking deeply about the communities that content is created for and centralise content beyond aesthetics as a measure of aspiration.

Women as depicted in the various high-ranking soap operas are still stagnant and often honour patriarchal standards at the demise of their autonomy. The question of how women are “spoken for” or “spoken about” is at the heart of the feminist critique of





media content and its implication in the construction of gender (Gallagher, 2003). “This tendency to ignore women or – at best – to speak about, rather than to or through women, demonstrates a very real and contemporary absence of women’s voices in the media, and the profound lack of attention paid by the media to the telling of women’s stories generally.” (Gallagher, 2003). While feminist media theory advocates for the material importance and accurate representation of all women, it is fair to examine that not all feminisms across race and culture dynamics are the same. Some women in these social categories are still much more disadvantaged in storytelling and the recognition of their humanity. Black feminist scholars have acknowledged the neglect which women of colour, specifically black women, have experienced through their selective inclusion in the writings of feminist cultural analysis (Hooks, 1990; Bobo & Seiter, 1991; Valdivia, 1995).

It is from this perspective that the discussion of black women's representation in the mainstream media which is often negative. Challenging media portrayals of black women as mummies, matriarchs, jezebels, welfare mothers, the tragedy at the center of their existence is a core theme in black feminist thought. Hooks (1992: 5) contends that black female representation in the media “determines how blackness and people are seen and how other groups will respond to us based on their relation to these constructed images”. Hudson (1998) and Collins (2000, 2004) both advance the notion that media images of black women result from dominant racial, gender, and class ideologies. Furthering Hooks’ discussion of representation, Hudson (1998) argues that “these stereotypes simultaneously reflect and distort both how black women view themselves (individually and collectively) and how they are viewed by others.” Male characters in these productions have predominantly been exhibiting positive characters.

The prevalent character traits in male actors that they idealise in such characters are confidence and influence. For example, in the character of Sbusiso in *Uzalo*, respondent 9 said “He gets a lot of respect... the way he speaks and that women like him”. An investigation into the soap operas that were in this scope of research all revealed lead male characters who had assumed dominance in some way. In *Muvhango* (1999-), was the traditional hierarchy of a kingdom by Chief Azwindini who lead his family and the village. In, *Uzalo* (2015-) the most popular soapie were two dominant males: one leading a church and the other leading a gang. In *Skeem Saam*



(2011-), the lead roles are taken by two young men, Kwaito and Those, who overcome teenage mistakes of crime and pregnancy to pursue a bigger life in Johannesburg as university students. *Isibaya* (2013) is built around the story of Mpiyakhe Zungu, a taxi boss, who triumphs over many of his enemies in the industry. The commonality in all these male lead roles is their access to respect, redemption, and power in the form of social and economic capital. This creates feelings of reverence within the TV world and the viewers looking into that world.

Their relationship with girls is seen mainly as transactional. In the soapie of *Isibaya* (2013), Zungu's polygamous marriage is enabled by his ability to adequately provide for his wives. They, too, have chosen to participate in this marriage structure motivated by his large livestock, his taxi fleet business monopolising many routes and his business savviness in various other industries. The stability and security upon which his masculinity is built offer an evolutionary perspective in the different kinds of women Zungu has had access to; the homemakers in the village, the gold-diggers in the city and even the independent cop in industry. They have all gravitated to his patriarchal definition of masculinity and resigned their femininity to the same patriarchy to enable this transaction which is both financial and emotional. There is a good understanding of emotional and physical abuse as a method to wield power. In psychology scholarship, emotional abuse is defined as: "A way to control another person by using emotions to criticize, embarrass, shame, blame or otherwise manipulate another person. In general, a relationship is emotionally abusive when there is a consistent pattern of abusive words, withdrawal or bullying behaviour that wears down a person's self-esteem and undermines their mental health." ([www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com)). In the popular youth show of *Skeem Saam* (2011), the character of Nimza shows a sexual interest in Pretty who was overtly rejecting his advances. Despite the lack of reciprocity, he continued to touch, grope, and make sexual remarks that violated Pretty's sense of safety. His refusal to listen to her illustrated that he was not bothered by his abusive behaviour. Home environments still encourage such patriarchal roles and make people susceptible to similar behaviours in society.

## 5.6 Conclusion



This chapter began by looking at the historical roots of colonial South Africa and how it bred rape as a power tool to subjugate the black family structure. Violence against women was so prevalent in apartheid South Africa as part of race, class, and patriarchal dynamics. This has not changed and has birthed what we now understand as VAW which this study unpacked in the scope of how women are represented in broadcast media. By using the four television soap operas aired from the public broadcaster and two soap operas from DSTv the research assessed the deviances and similarities in the respective storytelling as it relates to the representation of women. Television viewing and the meaning-making derived from it is but one socialising agent in the intricate interaction between various developmental, psychological, social and contextual factors that play a role in aggressive behaviour towards women and the perception of their inferiority. The chapter explored five key themes that shape these contours of considerations, namely; historical legacies, monologism/life mediated through men, institutional culture and rigidity of organisational media routines and practices and the essentialisation of identities. The key argument of the chapter has been that these dichotomous representations in texts and the processes of production are learned and inherited through configurations of power which owing to the discordant and racialised history of South Africa remain gendered. As a result, the media has continued to be a vital cog to the forms of discrimination against women in South African society.



## **CHAPTER 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

In what can be called, the production research approach, this study has examined the initial making of media texts and the internal and external forces that shape the production of gendered texts. It has encouraged inquiry to go behind the scenes in order to understand the tension between structure and agency evident in the creation of media texts such as the seven productions interrogated. Using the critical political economy of the media lens the study has been two-pronged in method. First, it has been concerned with textual production with an in-depth analysis of seven popular drama and soapie productions by both the public service broadcaster and private broadcasters. The second dimension explored external factors and the impact of organizational routines in the reinforcement of stereotyped gendered representations.

This concluding chapter reflects on the structure of this study, outlines the conclusions, lays out the study's limitations, offers suggestions for future research and offers recommendations. This study set out to answer the overarching question;

*'How does broadcast media produce and influence unequal gendered roles in its representation of women in South Africa?'*

The aim was to establish the correlation between gender-based violence and the consumption of biased and stereotypical content in high-ranking soap operas aired by the SABC and private broadcasters. The study was motivated by an escalation in gender-based violence against women and girls in South Africa in the year 2020. It was also motivated by the need to demonstrate that the SABC and other broadcast media has a large role to play on interpersonal relations surrounding women's lived experiences and how the perception of victimhood and vulnerability that culture has



placed on women permeates in contemporary storytelling. The study also argued that soap opera's legitimate source of political knowledge for young adolescent males as they learn how to treat women in real life from the soap opera they view from the public broadcaster. Popular TV productions have the potential to influence society as they identify with some characters on screen and learn how to treat women from viewing soap operas. As Hooks (1977) pointed out, since television watching involves the observation of others' conduct, it is regarded as a major medium through which youngsters learn about suitable behaviours, appropriate conduct and the relative appeal of performing such conducts.

Chapter two explored different seminal scholars' postulations and the critical political economy of the media in understandings of gendered representations. The critical political economy of the media was employed and gave perspective on the extrinsic forces built by socioeconomic dynamics that exert pressure and uniformity in broadcast content. While the critical political economy focused on issues of control of the media text by the SABC literature on representation explored how power influences the depictions. This gave light to a relevant model by Stuart Hall called encoding/decoding that encapsulate how messages are planted in the production phase and the dominant influences of that. This study was certainly concerned with the production phase of gendered representation and the ideologies surrounding that more than the latter part of decoding. Chapter two also provided working definitions to key concepts and terms employed in this study. It also explored South literature on different aspects of the SABC and on soap operas. Among the literature studied are (Van der Merwe, 2005, Heintz-Knowles, 1996, Motsaathebe 2009, Tager, 2010, Moorosi 2002, Thabethe, 2008, Sehlabi, 2012, Pitout 1998). The main aim was to capture arguments in other related topics and bridge the academic gaps left by these studies.

Chapter three explored the qualitative methodology, which was selected for this study, as it allowed for the researchers to make in-depth inquiries into media professionals constraints. Organizational practices and rituals, professional ideologies, document analysis, in-depth analysis of media texts and so forth. The research gathered information using in-depth interviews with industry bodies, creative writers, directors for soap operas. In investigating the soap operas in question, it was established that it's a combination of socioeconomic and psychosocial factors that intersect to create the meaning-making of representations. The study understood three things in addressing



the research question: Ascertaining the impact of how women are misrepresented could only be measured by the societal behaviour and perceptions held towards them. This study evidenced that bold, nuanced, representative storytelling that explores women's full humanity is often a symptom of society and how it values women. As the world opens up to the diversity of womanhood and the different roles and spaces it can take up, broadcasting content postures itself to reflect that advancement.

The research question included women of every race and class in its inquisition to assess prejudicial misrepresentations. While all women are subject to a patriarchal definition of femininity that often limits their agency and expression, this study found that women of colour are depicted the most unfairly. There are social, economic and aspirational limitations in whom they can become. Not only do they battle misrepresentation enforced by the interplay of power, they further endure racial and economic prejudice which is also a by-product of this framework. This calls for deeper inquiry and could become an area for research to explore how race is an important lever for gendered representations. The similarities between all soap operas viewed in the scope of this research are dominated by black actors. Therefore, race as a compounding element cannot be ignored as it skews the audience towards one kind of woman. The exposure to white women in public broadcast is seen in action movies, comedies, romantic soap operas, and documentaries which is often different from the storyline framing of soap operas that looks at everyday life.

It then appears as though white women are reserved a better depiction and saved from the granularity of everyday life that is amplified in the genre of soap operas. Instead, they are illustrated in a vacuum of experiences that are often elevated through the storylines prevalent in action and romantic comedies, which are softer, lighter, and less abrasive. Therefore, these misrepresentations, that women are domesticated and weak, intellectually inferior, lacking agency, dependent and weaponising sexuality, have a face in society and that is a black woman's face. A further consequence of an economically driven society is the prevalence of two economic settings in every soapie that was in the scope of this research. This permeated across content in the public broadcaster and paid television channel. South Africa is the most unequal society in the world with a Gini Coefficient estimated between 0.63 to 0.7 and this is reflected in all soap opera broadcast content where there is a class and economic differences illustrated through different location settings as well as rich and poor families. These economic disparities



influence the kind of stories that are told, and the kind of depiction women are assigned to based on their geographical setting.

This research answered the questions that were framed in the first chapter in building its argument. Gender representations pursuant to social, political and economic determinants as illustrated by the CPEM which is insidious across different levels of society. It further uses the most influential determinants of culture, like the media, to establish hierarchy through gender, class, race and ultimate importance. Understanding this dynamic forced this study to consider the “conscience” of the public broadcaster and where they draw the line when portraying women. They are held by a robust editorial policy with a section dedicated to gender representations and the caution of perpetuating stereotypes. Nevertheless, in as much as editorial policies are mere guidance and provide range; they are not prescriptive. The commissioning editors were very considerate of how women are depicted, being women themselves. However, their main motivation was mirroring society as it is even if it meant the perpetuation of patriarchal stereotypes and maintaining the status quo.

In still exploring the “conscience” of the South African broadcasters, the study interrogated. Firstly, the extent to which the SABC’s takes accountability for the effects of broadcast content. VAW is also promulgated by media depictions. Secondly, the broadcaster, aware of its influence, cannot separate itself from accountability, mandating this role to have a regular audit function of broadcast content and invest in audience research as it relates to gender equality. This ensures that quality assurance, review, and feedback are consistent factors in how the SABC delivers content.

## **6.1 Concluding remarks, limitations and suggestions for further research**

This study suggests that there is still a need for further research with specific attention given to the methodological and theoretical level. On the methodological level the study has focused on only two of the three strands of production research namely textual orientation and organizational/external factors. The study proposes that there is a need to focus on reception with emphasis on how these productions are received and interpreted. This would elevate how Stuart Hall’s model shows up consummately because decoding becomes a major source of analysis and interpretation to bridge the





gap of audience reception and how they outwardly perform this encoding. It will be important to look at different age and racial groups to determine the decoding of several gendered misrepresentations. A study that looks at young men who watch these productions will go a long way in understanding the impact of these productions and the internal world of young men in South Africa. However, in unpacking this research, the strongest determinant of correcting misrepresentation seen on broadcast media is to have a lived experience that challenges that and reinforces positive representations. Consequently, a psychoanalytic method could open some avenues for new insights. Within these insights would be to thoroughly explore Bandura's social learning theory and the psychological variables that inform how audiences assimilate to certain behaviours.

Another methodological constraint due to feasibility issues limited the study to only seven top productions and twenty-three people involved in the production of these texts. The sample size could therefore be broadened for further insights. It is proposed that future studies on these issues should have greater sample sizes and span across more than broadcast media but print media too. Gender-based violence does not only affect black South African communities the seven dramas in this study was composed mainly of black casts and productions. This study recommends that future studies investigating similar subjects be held across all races to examine if they share the same attitudes as the participants of the study.

Four key perspectives have dominated inquiry where it pertains to gender relations and representation. These are namely; feminist theories, critical Marxist theories, popular culture and liberal pluralism. The critical political economy of the media emphasizes how media productions are constrained by powerful, historical, political and economic forces. An illuminating study could apply a psychoanalytic perspective especially where it pertains a method that explores the reception of media texts. Such theoretical underpinnings may also shed light on new constraints such as disruptive technological innovations that characterize social media.



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## APPENDIX 1

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured in-depth-interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname:

Participant Signature.....Date : March 2022

Researcher's Name & Surname: Thabile Keletso Manala



Researcher's signature:

Date: 16/03/2022

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Request Letter for Access to the Study Site**

#### **Request for permission to conduct research at South African Broadcast Corporation**

Title: "Mediated representations of violence against women(VAW) in the South African public broadcasting service: A study of cognitive effects of gendered communication"

11 September 2021

#### **Reatlegile Mampa**

**SABC Head Office, Media Park, 7<sup>th</sup> floor**

Commissioning Editor: Drama

Dear Reatlegile Mampa

I, Thabile Keletso Manala, am doing research with Dr Blessed Ngwenya, a professor in the Department of Communication Science towards a Master's degree in Communication Science at the University of South Africa. This research is self-funded. We are inviting you to participate



in a study entitled: Mediated representations of violence against women (VAW) in the South African public broadcasting service: A study of cognitive effects of gendered communication”

The aim of the study is to question how the public broadcast represents women in popular drama and series aired on the SABC and how the Critical Political Economy of the media framework influences the lifecycle of content production.

Your public broadcaster has been selected as the biggest media outlet in South Africa serving all demographics and further positioned as the mouthpiece of the nation in the dissemination of information. The SABC is also home to the highest viewership of soap operas and dramas that represent our society. As a public service media, the SABC is expected to cover and represent all social issues that interest the public as well as trustworthy news stories.

The study will entail qualitative critical political economy analysis that entails data collection from the participants using in-depth interviews, the qualitative content analysis of documents and the content review of the featured dramas to deduct themes in representation.

The benefits of this study are obtaining the understanding of how social, political and economic power influences the nature of storytelling. This framework further influences gendered roles on dramas and how these representations serve a bigger patriarchal construct that limits the autonomy of women. To challenge these misrepresentations, it is important to interrogate the processes through which content is commissioned and the effects it has in society. The benefits the SABC will reap from its contribution to this research is understanding the influence they have on people and their subsequent power to tell stories that challenge misrepresentations in creating a more equitable society. This calls for a stronger adherence to the editorial policy subsections that cover gender representation as well as surveying the social landscape of the country in determining how to tell stories and the proverbial “why” of the stories that are told. This will enable the agency of the public broadcaster to drive important conversations in society in light of current femicide and rape statistics that plague the women of this country. There is no payment for you for participating in this study and you will not be paid any monetary compensation for participating.

Potential risks are when you expose sensitive information about your organisation that will have negative impact on its business reputation. In this case, there is a review of media regulations



and editorial policies as it relates to implementation of these guidelines. There may be disparities in the adherence to these policies. You have the right to remain anonymous. In case such harm or injury has happened upon you, the occurrence of injury shall be immediately reported to University ERC for immediate investigation and action which may include the need to refer the participant for counselling. In case of harm, the participant should be entitled to claim compensation regardless of whether there was negligence. Feedback procedure will entail in case potential risk has happened.

Yours sincerely

Thabile Keletso Manala

Student Researcher

### **APPENDIX 3**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

18 August 2021

**Title:** Mediated representations of violence against women (VAW) in the South African public broadcasting service: A study of cognitive effects of gendered communication

### **Dear Prospective Participant**

My name is Thabile Keletso Manala and I am doing research with Dr Blessed Ngwenya, a professor in the Department of Communication Science towards a MA degree Communication Science at the University of South Africa. I am a self-funded student working towards a Master's degree. My research dissertation is to investigate, in an exploratory nature, how popular drama and soap operas on the public broadcaster influences misrepresentations of gendered roles. I will be using the Critical Political Economy of the media framework to unpack the various power dynamics that exist in media and how this shapes content production. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: *Mediated representations of violence against women (VAW) in the South African public broadcasting service: A study of cognitive effects of gendered communication*

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**



The global society is navigating the complex reality of gender inequality with the rise in conversations about patriarchy and the empowerment of women taking centre stage in the last few years. The underrepresentation women in powerful spaces is not a direct correlation of any one single factor. It is a systematic and societal tuning down of women's voice and creating a culture of submission in places where the validity of women's voice is required. One such place is the public broadcast media which is an important source of news dissemination and entertainment consumption but also the main protagonist in creating and sustaining stereotypes that uphold positions of power. The purpose of this study is to investigate the content production and how the SABC commissions dramas and series in line with media regulations and editorial policies when it comes to misrepresentation and under-representation of woman, particularly VAW.

### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

I have chosen you to participate in this study because you are a Commissioning editor for Drama genre/ executive producer and writer/ media monitoring agency/ PHD scholar in Sociology. This makes you an integral part of the content life cycle. This infers that you have an understanding of the SABC's criteria in commissioning new dramas and the wider effects of its broadcast content.

I have obtained your contact details from the SABC website.

The purpose of this research seeks to investigate how South Africa's public broadcast media represents the narrative of gender equality amid the culture of rape within this society. It is an inquiry to explore a correlation between gender-based violence and the consumption of biased and stereotypical content in soapies aired by the South African Broadcast Commission (SABC). Gender-based violence on television is presented in many different forms and settings. This study will further investigate how these representations of women influence how women's oppression is culturally embedded in the processes of representation. South Africa is a country battling various forms of violence against women and this study is an attempt to understand how broadcast content that is watched daily may be part of the problem.

### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**



The study involves face-to-face semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The interview will be held at your production offices in Randburg. I am open to alternative places and times the participants are interested for editors and writers from SABC. For participants from the SABC, the interview will be at the and Auckland Park, SABC Media Park with possible alternative places they want to be interviewed. The remaining participants will also be interviewed at their offices or their places of preferences. The participants are expected to explain how their contribution to the lifecycle of content production of the dramas and soapies aired on the public broadcaster plays a part in influencing misrepresentations and how they view the effects of this influence. The participants should also explain the contributions and benefits of their work in elevating society or distorting representations occurs in the interests of telling a more engaging narrative. They should highlight the advantages and disadvantages of these narratives and whether they have the responsibility of creating more equitable content that highlights the agency and full humanity of women. The interviewee should explain the psycho-social, political, and economic outcomes of misrepresentation pertaining to the South African context and how television broadcast can exacerbate or mitigate rape culture. Further, they should explain their understanding of the media regulations and editorial policies and marry this knowledge with their function in content production

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

The participation is completely voluntary, even if you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without any justification. You are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity that this research will only be used for the purposes of academia. There is no penalty or loss of benefit for not participating and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

The benefits of this study are obtaining the understanding of how social, political, and economic power influences the nature of storytelling. This framework further influences gendered roles on dramas and how these representations serve a bigger patriarchal construct that limits the autonomy of women. To challenge these misrepresentations, it is important to interrogate the processes through which content is commissioned and the effects it has in society. The benefits the SABC will reap from its contribution to this research is understanding the influence they have on people and their subsequent power to tell stories that challenge misrepresentations in





creating a more equitable society. This calls for a stronger adherence to the editorial policy subsections that cover gender representation as well as surveying the social landscape of the country in determining how to tell stories and the proverbial “why” of the stories that are told. This will enable the agency of the public broadcaster to drive important conversations in society in light of current femicide and rape statistics that plague the women of this country. This study wants to create accountability from the SABC and provide a holistic view of how broadcast shapes society.

### **ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

Potential risks are when you expose sensitive information about your organisation that will have negative impact on its business reputation. In this case, there is a review of media regulations and editorial policies as it relates to implementation of these guidelines. There may be disparities in the adherence to these policies. You have the right to remain anonymous. In case such harm or injury has happened upon you, the occurrence of injury shall be immediately reported to University ERC for immediate investigation and action which may include the need to refer the participant for counselling.

### **WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

The data gathered during the interview will be used only for academic reasons. The researcher shall keep the interview video transcriptions, transcribed notes, and any other identifiable participant information in a secure place. All materials will not be used further beyond the purposes of this research study. You have the right to request that your name not be recorded anywhere and that no one knows about your participation in this research save the researcher and recognized members of the research team, or that your identity not be recorded anywhere and no one be able to connect you to the answers you provide. Your responses will be assigned a code number or a pseudonym should you wish for your real name not to be used.

The responses of the respondents may be reviewed by responsible individuals in order to ensure that the study is properly conducted. These people may include transcribers, coders, and members of the Research Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to



see the records. Unless you grant permission for other individuals to examine the information, records that identify you will be available exclusively to persons working on the project.

The information gathered from participants who requested anonymity may be utilised for other reasons, such as a research report, journal publications, and/or conference proceedings. If a research report is submitted for publication, no individual participants will be identified in the report in order to safeguard the privacy of the participants.

### **HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies of your responses will be kept by the researcher in a secured cupboard/ filing cabinet in my study room for prospective studies or scholarly purposes for a term of five years, and electronic data will be kept on a password-protected server. The future use of the data will be subject to a Research Ethics Review and, if necessary, permission. The paper copies will be shredded, and the electronic copies will be permanently erased from the computer's hard drive using appropriate software.

### **WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

This is no money or prize incentive for your participation in this research study.

### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Thabile Manala:

Telephone: (+27) 0676406243

E-mail: [Thabilemanalagmail.com](mailto:Thabilemanalagmail.com)

The findings are accessible from March 2022.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Blessed Ngwenya at 012 429 8893 or email : [Ngwenyab@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Ngwenyab@unisa.ac.za). Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the <insert name of the committee, the name of the research ethics chairperson and contact details here, including email, internal phone number and fax number>



Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Thabile Keletso Manala

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured in-depth-interview.



I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname:

Participant Signature.....Date :

Researcher's Name & Surname: Thabile Keletso Manala

Researcher's signature:

Date: 16/03/2022

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **Data collection tools**

In this qualitative study, conventional case study, in-depth interviews, content analysis and document analysis will be used as data collection methods and procedures. These data collection methods will be used in qualitative research design and they will be used to collect the data needed for the study.

### **Conventional Case Study**

This method allows the researcher to gain an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context, the central tenet is the need to explore an event or phenomenon in depth and in its natural context, (Cresswell, 2011). This method is sometimes called the 'naturalistic design'. In this case, the case study is the SABC. The advantage of case study method is that the researcher gains a deep insight into the problem under investigation, which makes the technique more suitable for this study. Of



course the method has the disadvantage of over-attention to observable interactions and processes and to the accounts of the participants.

### **In-depth interviews**

Interviews are often able to provide context to other data (such as outcome data) by offering a more complete picture of what happened and why (Boyce & Neale,2006:12). The structure and coordination of this methods is to pose questions that illicit an understanding, an explanation or justification to the research question of this paper through qualitative validity. In-depth interviews offer a window into the interior experiences of others. Respondents are given considerable liberty in their responses and in discussing areas not raised by the researcher. As is the case with the semi-structured focus group, the in-depth interview enables researchers to gather detailed attitudinal and experiential information from respondents, and this information is prompted by supplementing the broad, open-ended, exploratory questions with pertinent, gently probing sub-questions (Powell &Single,1996:47) In this study, face-to-face interviews will be conducted with writers and SABC commissioning editors to understand the creative process. This is helpful in ascertaining the processes that dramas and soapies undergo before they are made available for public consumption. It also assists to gain an understanding of the communication process from the participant's viewpoint, to develop a relationship between the researcher and the participant and to allow the researcher to verify data obtained from other sources (Keyton 2011:284).

It is also important that interview participants are selected according to their specialised knowledge in the topic being investigated (Keyton 2011:287). In this study the participants are selected from between the production companies and the public broadcaster. It is because these selected participants have extensive knowledge of this genre of storytelling. Notes and recordings of the answers to the researcher's interview questions with the participants from each interview in the lifecycle of production will prove invaluable to this study

## **Content analysis**

Content analysis focuses on, and explains, what the material that is being studied contains, without exploring how it affects people exposed to it (Berger, 2016). It is used to analyse physical and digital units. More specifically, content analysis will be used to analyse the six selected soaps and programmes and how women are cast. This will help with counting the number and kind of representations women have so as to give a qualitative interpretation of women's roles and susceptibility to violence. Below are the 5 provisional categories from literature with many more expected to be derived from the data.

- The bitch: manipulative, cheat and sneak
- The decoy: helpless
- The victim: passive, weak
- The imp: rebellious, tomboy
- The harpy: aggressive and single

## **Document analysis**

In addition to gathering interviews data, I will consult various document and archival data related to the research question and philosophical inquiry. Document analysis will be an important instrument for data collection in many ways. For example, archived information can shed light on changes over the years on representation of women policy-wise. It is defined as a procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both electronic and printed, and like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). For this study, I will look at policy documents, Annual Reports, minutes of meetings, letters and memoranda amongst other documents.





The interviews will focus on the participant’s professional experience, professional issues related to the lifecycle of generating soapie content, broadcasting content, work routines of the writers, commissioning editors, media monitoring company and academic scholars to weigh in using their various expertise. The interviews are voluntary, and the participant has the right to opt out at any time without even giving justification.

**Appendix 5 (a): Interview Guide for the executive producers and writers for popular soapies**

Below are interview questions for reporters that will be asked during the interview:

Focus area	Questions and probes
<b>Introduction,</b> Position, years of experience, previous work, education, training/courses,	1. Tell me a little about yourself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your current position in the organisation?</li> <li>• How many years of experience do you have as an executive producer?</li> <li>• What qualifications do you hold?</li> <li>• How long have you been working as a writer or producer?</li> </ul>
<b>Professional</b>	2. How would you describe your creative process to developing a show? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some of the notable soapies that you have created for the SABC?</li> <li>• What are the guidelines that the SABC gives you in the commissioning of new soapies?</li> </ul>
<b>Broadcasting Content</b>	3. What are the main differences in how women are represented on paid versus public broadcast?



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you think there is a responsibility to portray women in aspirational settings or do you prefer to mirror their current role in society?</li><li>• Is there more creative license in paid television versus the public broadcaster?</li><li>• Have you written for DStv paid channel as well as SABC?</li><li>• What influences the differences in representation of women characters on the different channels if you have worked for both?</li><li>• What are some of the characteristics and traits you seek to emulate in women characters?</li><li>• Do you think story characters can influence viewers and their behaviours?</li></ul>
<b>Work routines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is your process of brainstorming in the creative process?</li><li>• Describe a day in the life of an executive producer?</li><li>• What is your writing and idea generating process?</li><li>• Is there any formal or informal research that goes into how you create characters?</li><li>• How often do you brainstorm the storyline continuity with your team?</li><li>• How many soapies do you produce at a time?</li><li>• What kind of sources do you usually use (primary or secondary)?</li><li>• Do you lean more on imagination or lived experience when you brainstorm television characters?</li></ul>



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*Thank you very much for your time and participation. I'm very grateful to you.*

**Appendix 5 (b): Interview Guide to be Responded by SABC Commissioning Editors in the Drama Genre**

<b>Focus area</b>	<b>Questions and probes</b>
<b>Introduction,</b> Position, years of experience, previous work, education, training/courses	<p>1. Tell me a little about yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your current position in the organisation?</li> <li>• How many years of experience do you have as a commissioning editor?</li> <li>• What qualifications do you hold?</li> <li>• What major trainings/courses related to your work have you been attended? If any.</li> <li>• How long have you been working as an editor?</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Issues</b>	<p>2. Please outline what goes into the briefing process to production companies in the development of new soapies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who compiles the briefing criteria?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the brief process solicited or can it also be unsolicited?</li><li>• What elements must be present in the proposal to stand out?</li><li>• Can you unpack how the SABC's mandate of inform, educate, entertain influences the kind of stories that are commissioned?</li><li>• What is the representation of black women in your writing teams?</li></ul>
<b>Broadcasting Content</b>	<p>3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the considerations of how black women are represented on the public broadcaster?</li><li>• Are you by any chance in a position to unpack how writing teams were depicting women in soapies then versus how they are depicting them?</li><li>• What are the difference in composition of production teams then and today?</li><li>• Do you by any chance think the composition of teams in terms of gender can influence content?</li></ul>
<b>Work routines</b>	<p>4. How much independence do you have on finding ideas, shaping the story, and editing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have you ever experienced that a good idea that you had for a new soapie was scrapped? Have you ever abandoned or censored soapies related to gender equality? Why?</li><li>• Do you have experience of suspending soapies from being aired?</li><li>• What is the chain of sign off/ approval to commission a new soapie?</li></ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the difference between a brief and a pitch?</li> <li>• What criteria elements goes into your evaluation form?</li> </ul>
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*Thank you very much for your time and participation. I'm very grateful to you.*

### **Appendix 5 (C): Interview Guides for media monitoring company**

Below are questions for managers that will be asked during the interview:

<b>Focus area</b>	<b>Questions and probes</b>
<b>Introduction,</b> Position, years of experience, previous work, education, training/courses,	<p>5. Tell me a little about yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your current position in the organisation?</li> <li>• How many years of experience do you have as a journalist/reporter for media monitoring?</li> <li>• What qualifications do you hold?</li> <li>• What major trainings/courses related to your work have you been attended? If any.</li> <li>• How long have you been working as a media monitoring journalist?</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Issues</b>	<p>6. What is the mandate of media monitoring and what does it seek to achieve?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your areas or topics of expertise for media monitoring reporting?</li> <li>• Tell me about a story that you did that really satisfied you</li> </ul>



	<p>regarding the importance of media monitoring function?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How easily does broadcast content filter into society from your experience?</li><li>• In a country like South Africa battling VAW, do you think special consideration needs to be given to harmful television content?</li></ul>
<b>Work routines</b>	<p>7. What legislation and policies govern television broadcast content?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is your take on how the SABC adheres to the ICASA regulations and their own editorial policies?</li><li>• What is the influence of the political landscape on broadcasting content?</li><li>• Have you identified scenarios where the Critical Political Economy of the media framework was at play in the SABC?</li><li>• Tell me about a story you could not report on in your organization?</li><li>• What is the gender split and representation in media leadership and does that affect the creative output?</li><li>• Can you tell me more about the “Make Abuse Disappear” campaign that media monitoring worked on?</li><li>• Describe the process of how media monitoring has assisted the SABC in formulating their editorial policies?</li><li>• What role does social media play in informing broadcast storylines and elevating issues from the platform to mainstream television?</li></ul>



*Thank you very much for your time and participation. I'm very grateful to you.*