

**'Volksmoeder ordentlikheid': exploring hegemonic representations of Afrikaner
femininity in the Afrikaans language film *Stroomop* (2018)**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the representation of hegemonic Afrikaner femininity in the Afrikaans film *Stroomop*, employing the concept of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* as an analytical lens. Drawing on feminist discourse analysis and a Foucauldian notion of power, I examine how the women of *Stroomop* reinforce or challenge traditional expectations of Afrikaner womanhood. By positioning myself within the *volksmoeder* ideal, I further link the subjectifying power of social institutions, such as religion and family, with the representation of femininity in postfeminist media. The research considers the analysis within the broader historical and socio-political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa, ultimately, interrogating the ways in which Afrikaans cinema as a ‘safe space’ perpetuates a conservative nationalist Afrikaner ideology still embedded in white male supremacy and female subordination.

Key words: Volksmoeder, Ordentlikheid, Respectability, Afrikaner, Femininity, Heteronormativity, Representation, Power, Gender, Whiteness, Heterosexuality, Motherhood

ABSTRAK

Hierdie proefskrif bestudeer die voorstelling van hegemoniese Afrikanervroulikheid in die Afrikaanse film *Stroomop*. Volksmoeder ordentlikheid word as 'n analitiese lens in die proefskrif gebruik. Met die gebruik van feministiese diskoersanalise en 'n Foucauldiaanse begrip van mag, het ek ondersoek ingestel op hoe die vroue van *Stroomop* tradisionele verwagtinge van Afrikaner-vroulikheid versterk of uitdaag.

Deur myself binne die volksmoeder-ideaal te posisioneer, koppel ek verder die die mag van sosiale instellings, soos godsdiens en familie, aan die verteenwoordiging van subjektiewe vroulikheid in postfeministiese media. Die navorsing beskou die analise binne die breër historiese en sosio-politieke landskap van Suid-Afrika na apartheid. Dit bevraagteken die wyse waarop Afrikaanse rolprentkuns as 'n 'veilige ruimte' voortduur en hoe 'n konserwatiewe nasionalistiese Afrikaner-ideologie steeds diep in wit manlike oppergesag en vroulike ondergeskiktheid gewortel is.

Sleutelwoorde: Volksmoeder, Ordentlikheid, Respek, Afrikaner, Vroulikheid, Heteronormatiwiteit, Verteenwoordiging, Mag, Geslag, Witheid, Heteroseksualiteit, Moederskap

MANWELEDZO

Ngudo ya hei disithesheni ndi vhuimeleli ha vhurangaphanda nga maandasesa nga vhuthihi ha tshigwada tsha tshisadzini tsha Afrikaner kha filimu ya Afrikaans Stroomop, u nea mushumo mutalukanyo wa volksmoeder ordentlikheid sa u shumisa vhuvhambedzanyi u thathuvha na u talutshedza tshipida tsha manwalwa. U ola kha tshisadzini hu tshi shumiswa ngona ya ngudo ya u shumisa luambo nga ndila yo fhambanaho sa vhudavidzani na Foucauldian muhumbulo wa nyandiselo, ndo linga uri ndi ngani vhafumakadzi vha Stroomop vho khwathisa na ndavhalelo ya khaedu ya mvelele ya Afrikaner wa mufumakadzi. Nga u di vheekanya zwavhuḏi vhukati ha volksmoeder, ndi tshi fhirela phanda ndo tuma maanda a u tsikeledza mufumakadzi maanda kha zwiimiswa zwa matshilisano, sa vhurereleli na lushaka, na vhuḏiimeleli ha tshisadzini kha media ya u tikedza tshisadzini. Thodisiso yo sedzesa kha u thalutshedza divhazwakale yo tandavhuwaho na polotiki tshitshavhani na nzulele ya polotiki ya kale fhanu Afrika Tshipembe, mafheloni, vha vhudzisa ndila ye Afrikaans nduni ya filimu ndi fhethu ho tsireledzeaho ho tea u bvelaphanda mvelele u khethekanya Afrikaner lutendo lu kha divha ho tingeledzwa na u vhusiwa nga vhanna vha tshena na u tsikeledza vhafumakadzi.

Maipfi a ndeme: Voksmoeder, Ordentlikheid, Thonifho, Afrikanere, Tshisadzini, Heteronormativity, Vhuimeleli, Maanda, Mbeu, Vhutshena, Heterosexuality, Vhufumakadzi

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my younger self, and to all women and girls sculpted by forces, both unseen and seen, woven into the very fabric of family, culture and tradition. I dedicate this to the women whose personhood has been restrained, their inherent worth diminished in service of some greater ideal and their agency muted in the name of love and propriety. May we, like those who came before us, continue to light the torches of knowledge that illuminate our path toward liberation. May this work serve as a beacon of resistance, a testament to the power of finding our voices and telling the truth about the ideological forces that seek to control us. May we harness the power of language to define our own futures, reclaiming agency and forging a path of self-determination.

DECLARATION

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Exact wording of the title of the dissertation as appearing on the electronic copy submitted for examination:

'Volkmoeder ordentlikheid': Exploring hegemonic representations of Afrikaner femininity in the Afrikaans language film Stroomop (2018)

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



SIGNATURE

____13/04/2024_____
DATE

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GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
<i>ordentlik</i>	Respectable
<i>ordentlikheid</i>	Respectability
<i>Semi-Soet</i>	Film produced by Scramble Productions in 2012
<i>Stroomop</i>	Film produced by The Film Factory in 2018
<i>volk</i>	Nation
<i>volksmoeder</i>	Mother of the nation

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATING THE STUDY OF THE *VOLKSMOEDER* IDEAL AND AFRIKANER FEMININITY IN *STROOMOP*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the *volksmoeder* ideal is *ordentlikheid*; a dynamic phrase in the Afrikaans lexicon which functions as a culturally sanctioned script of identity that remains attached to white supremacy and compulsory heterosexuality (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). This dissertation will explore hegemonic representations of Afrikaner femininity in the Afrikaans language film *Stroomop* (2018) through the lens of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*.

In the mid-20th century, Afrikaner nationalist ideology gave rise to an identity that “drew on particular productions of race, gender, class and sexual hierarchies to entrench colonial exclusions and marginalising inclusions” (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:105). Reinforced by firmly entrenched religious ideologies that positioned white men in the image of a male Calvinist God, the Afrikaner identity was defined through and remains stubbornly attached to notions of white male supremacy, misogyny, and classism (Kgatla, 2019).

As Grosfoguel (2013:75) rightly argued, the basis on which any discussion of structures of knowledge in Westernized Universities must begin with the most famous Rene Descartes phrase, “I think, therefore I am”, this “constitutes a new foundation of knowledge that challenged Christendom’s authority of knowledge since the Roman Empire. The new foundation of knowledge produced by Cartesianism is not the Christian God but the new “I.”” This “I” constitutes an unconditioned particularity that makes a claim that it produces knowledge that is equivalent to the God-Eye view. It is my contention that a gendered God within the Calvinist theological doctrine that I grew up with, and that constitutes the “objectivity” of an understanding of the divine as constitutive as the masculine. It is within this context that the notion of “masculinity of the divine” is applied as well as critiqued. The

volksmoeder, a symbol of ideal Afrikaner femininity, was constructed by political powers to pressure Afrikaner women into the nationalist project. Cloete (1992:51) describes it as follows:

To emphasise her role as a servant to the *volk* (the Afrikaans nation), as nurturer, keeper of moral standards, educator, and promoter of the language. It served a specific political purpose and the Afrikaner woman's collaborative role in bringing this about, albeit not always from the public platform, should not be underestimated.

Afrikaner women were, and continue to be, constructed as the primary agents for the biological and cultural reproduction of the *volk*. They are the “keepers of *ordentlikheid*”, the upholders of traditional morality, strategically leveraged to reinforce and perpetuate a nationalist ideology (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:62). The primary function of hegemonic womanhood in the nationalist Afrikaner processes were biological reproduction, symbolic figuration of differences and boundaries, reproduction of the national culture, and participation as supporters and nurturers of men (Anthias & Yuval-Davies, 1989).

Thus, women occupied dual subject positions as both the oppressor and oppressed being privileged by their position within a nationalist and segregated apartheid-state and at the same time, fundamentally restricted by misogynist gender ideology (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:7). Bradford (1996:358) posits that the ‘sexual apartheid’ of the separation of women from powerful political domains of men and the dismissal of the family as “mere feminine spheres” not only misrepresented colonialism but also ignored “core sites of racialisation and class construction”. In post-apartheid South Africa, Afrikaner women do not wield political power in governing institutions. However, the personal domestic positions they occupy often reproduce a nationalist Afrikaner patriarchal ideology. This loyalty to whiteness is further reinforced and weaponised through displays of ‘white fragility’, silencing potential allies and deflecting attention from ongoing racial and class inequalities (DiAngelo, 2018).

It is important to note here that the term ‘Afrikaner’ has been and is used interchangeably with

‘Afrikaans-speaking people’ in general cultural discourse. By using the term ‘the Afrikaner’ in this study, I aim to capture the unique characteristics and complexities of this specific identity, rather than simply referring to the broader group of white Afrikaans-speaking individuals. While many Afrikaans-speaking individuals may identify as Afrikaners, in the context of this study 'Afrikaner' specifically refers to the cultural and political identity that emerged from the historical context of Afrikaner nationalism.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In 1994, South African lawmakers were pressurised to officially divest from 46 years of institutionalised segregation that advantaged white Afrikaners at the egregious expense of black, gender and sexually non-conforming South Africans (Teppo, 2015). On 27 April 1994, South Africa ushered in the end of apartheid with its first democratic elections (Thompson, 2014). White minority rule, enforced by a nationalist, militant and conservative Afrikaner agenda was rendered impotent, and the loss of power and status had a profound ripple effect on the greater Afrikaner society (Blignaut, 2013).

Subsequently, hegemonic Afrikaner identity was disarticulated from its position of moral superiority. The Afrikaners suffered two psychological disturbances: first, white Afrikanerness was marked as an inferior whiteness in relation to white Englishness. and second, on a global scale, the Afrikaners were deemed morally corrupt due to their culpability in enforcing, sanctioning, and tolerating a regime that oppressed, exploited, and excluded others through economic, psychological, and physically violent means (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Its close association to apartheid laid the Afrikaner identity to waste, and plummeted it into “troubled defensiveness”, giving rise to the post-apartheid Afrikaner identity that “seeks to recover moral viability and ethnicised respectability or *ordentlikheid*” (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:193). This struggle to recuperate respectability is an attempt to save face and to deflect blame from past atrocities committed in their name and to stabilise the Afrikaner identity once again (Van der

Westhuizen, 2017). Although the transition from apartheid to democracy had differing effects on men and women, femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality, and ethnic and racial identities (Gunkel, 2011), none are as vested in the project of *ordentlikheid* as Afrikaner women (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). In terms of Afrikaner womanhood, *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* functions as an umbrella term that covers all facets of hegemonic femininity: the promise of its accomplishment is through adherence to strict prescribed notions of white, middle-class heterosexual and maternal womanhood (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). In other words, *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* functions as a yardstick by which Afrikaner women surveil and self-regulate themselves, and others. It is a discursive practice which consigns women to the domestic sphere, subordinated and subjugated by their male counterparts, and coerces them to submit to patriarchal religious leadership.

Hall (2013:344) argues that cultural and ideological control (hegemony) is not static, but shaped by ongoing power struggles between ideological, social, and political forces. These power struggles and shifts play out in media representation, making it a key discursive battleground of knowledge production. Film plays an integral part of this discourse production, specifically functioning as a “mechanism of cultural storytelling that informs our sense of identity and what we should aspire to; it creates meaning and helps us make sense of our world” (Hall, 2013:250). A major site of Afrikaner cultural diffusion is the cinema. A rich body of work pertains to the role of film and its dissemination of heteronormative cultural beliefs, yet the representation of Afrikaner women in film receives little attention.

Representation on screen is a powerful indicator of the state of cultural values in that society, thus applying critical analysis to films is a necessary step in confronting and overcoming inequalities and prejudice ingrained in our culture. This necessitates an examination of Afrikaans films and their representation of hegemonic Afrikaner femininity as regulated by the script of the *volksmoeder* ideal (respectable and ethically viable, ideal heteronormative white

Afrikaner feminine identity). In short, through the frameworks of feminist discourse analysis and a Foucauldian notion of power, this research will reveal the extent to which idealised white Afrikaner heterofeminine identity is represented in the Afrikaans language film *Stroomop* (2018).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Scholars of gender representation and film analysis discourse have long highlighted that film undeniably influences identity formation (Hall, 2013; Byerly & Ross, 2006). Tomaselli (2006:96) noted in his study of Afrikaans language films that “audiences respond to certain images presented to them, and fashion their identities according to these discourses”. It is fair to say that Afrikaans films reinforce Afrikaner culture. If the *volksmoeder* ideal still remains stitched to notions of white supremacy and compulsory heterosexuality, then it is essential to acknowledge this and expose it. This study will ask to what extent the film *Stroomop* represents Afrikaner heteronormative femininity according to norms and values as encapsulated by the discursive elements of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*.

1.4 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Under apartheid rule, heavily censored and curated print media, radio, and visual media were considered essential in maintaining a nationalist patriotic ideology. This practice continues today in publications such as *Sarie* and film and television series such as *Boer Soek 'n Vrou* and *Pretville*, amongst others (Van der Westhuizen, 2017; Steenkamp, 2016). Afrikaner identity is heavily influenced by media that curates spaces for this enculturation to take place, as argued by Van der Westhuizen (2017:187):

Individuals become Afrikaners when they consume Afrikaner space and culture. White Afrikaans subjects retreat into their white Afrikaans world through a plethora of Afrikaans-language cultural products spawned by re-invented neo-liberal Afrikaner organisations, from the media to cultural industries to trade unions.

Afrikaans media offers a covert virtual white space, curated within idealised pastoral landscapes, patriarchal power relations, and traditional gender roles; encapsulated by a nostalgia that transports the naïve Afrikaner subject to a bygone era that only existed as a pre-apartheid ideological fantasy (Steenkamp, 2016). As benign as this sounds, Van der Westhuizen (2017:7) warns that the intersection of whiteness, Afrikaans-ness, middle-classness and heterosexuality breeds a “notably pernicious form of colonialism”.

The burden of serving and reproducing Afrikaner nationalist *volk* and culture, is still squarely placed on the shoulders of Afrikaner women. In this context, investigating and interrupting the ongoing portrayal of idealised Afrikaner womanhood in popular culture becomes crucial. Film, with its vast reach and influence on audience, plays a significant role in disseminating ideology to the masses. A critical analysis of film discourse is essential for fostering self-reflection and taking account of the values, beliefs, and future of the Afrikaner identity. Therefore, undertaking a project that dissects the gender discourse within Afrikaans film holds substantial value. While this study focuses on a single character within one film, it serves as a catalyst for further research. By highlighting the pervasiveness of these narratives, this study provides tangible conclusions that can guide future researchers in challenging gender representation within the South African film industry.

Ultimately, my aim is to spark a conversation, not just among Afrikaans filmmakers, but within the broader Afrikaner community. I hope it will prompt introspection and a critical examination of the values embedded in the Afrikaner identity and the media we consume. This study builds on my 2021 Honours Gender research project on hegemonic Afrikaner femininity in the Afrikaans film *Semi-Soet* (2012). That research fuelled my conviction that further exploration of Afrikaner respectability and its influence on female characterisation in Afrikaans film is essential.

1.5 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To explore hegemonic representations of Afrikaner femininity in the Afrikaans language film *Stroomop* (2018) through the lens of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*.

1.6 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Strengths:

- This case study provides an in-depth, nuanced analysis of the representation of Afrikaner feminine identity in film specifically.
- An ethnographic approach deepens interpretive analysis.
- Critical feminist discourse analysis allows examination of language, narrative, and implicit ideologies.
- Utilising a Foucauldian notion of power allows for a rich interpretation and creation of discourse in the context of Afrikaner identity construction in general, and respectable femininity specifically.
- Analysing geographic setting in the film broadens the discourse on technologies of power within specific spaces.
- An intersectional approach considers overlaps with race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Limitations:

- A single case study design limits the ability to generalise findings.
- The analysis is restricted to primarily focusing on a white, female protagonist, thereby excluding male and other racialised characters from analysis.
- The study is bound in time, which would suggest that contemporary evolutions in representations are not captured.
- The study does not incorporate production/reception perspectives through interviews with filmmakers or audiences.

- The representations are not analysed in comparison with real-world identities or with statistical data.
- Although a highly focused qualitative approach is a strength in providing profound interpretive depth, there are many approaches that would impact the limitations of this study.

A future full-scale study which incorporates multiple films across genres will go some way to mitigate limitations. Implementing data coding, including production or reception data, utilising mixed methods and content analysis, or conducting a comparative media study over a period may also offer substantial statistical data.

1.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This dissertation includes the following key objectives:

1. To explore the elements of idealised white Afrikaner hetero femininity (*volksmoeder ordentlikheid*) as characterised according to Afrikaner patriarchal norms and values.
2. To quantify discursive elements of the *volksmoeder* ideal as it relates to character analysis.
3. To describe the extent to which the Afrikaans film *Stroomop* (2018) reproduces *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the elements of idealised white Afrikaner heteronormative femininity (*volksmoeder ordentlikheid*) as characterised according to Afrikaner patriarchal norms and values?
2. What are the discursive elements of the *volksmoeder* ideal that can be interpreted within film character analysis?
3. What is the extent to which the Afrikaans film *Stroomop* (2018) reproduces *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*?

1.9 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study, I engage in what Wynter/Mignolo refer to as “epistemic disobedience”, a concept that challenges dominant forms of knowledge production rooted in Eurocentric, colonial frameworks. This notion calls for a rejection of the imposed limits on what counts as valid knowledge production, encouraging scholars to deviate from conventional epistemologies and embrace alternative ways of knowing and telling. By incorporating Van der Westhuizen’s conceptualization of *ordentlikheid* in the context of the Afrikaner identity and heteronormative femininity, in particular, into my methodological frameworks, I intentionally depart from traditional, objective, and quantifiable analyses. Instead, I foreground an interpretive, critical lens that centres the lived experiences and cultural narratives often excluded from mainstream academic discourse. This act of epistemic disobedience not only challenges dominant frameworks and academic meaning-making but also allows for a more nuanced and decolonial exploration of femininity in the film under study.

This study employs a qualitative research design, well suited for exploring subjective experiences and cultural phenomenon such as film (Cresswell, 2014). This approach allows for flexibility and an in-depth analysis of the film’s portrayal of Adrie, a central character. In this dissertation I employ two theoretical lenses: feminist discourse analysis, and a Foucauldian notion of power. Feminist discourse analysis allows for a critical examination of gender representation and the construction of femininity within postfeminist films, revealing how ideological assumptions are produced when language is interrelated within constructs such as gender, race, class, and religion. Incorporating a Foucauldian lens illuminates the regimes of truth and disciplinary mechanisms regulating the subject positions and the technologies of power at play within the film. Foucault’s (1978) notion of power emphasises how socio-cultural norms and institutions shape and regulate behaviour. By analysing the film through this lens, I explore how the *volksmoeder* ideal functions as a form of biopower, influencing and

controlling the actions and identities of female characters within the narrative. This integrated approach enables a holistic analysis of heteronormative white Afrikaner femininity.

By adopting an ethnographic lens and including my positionality as a white Afrikaans woman, I argue that my socialization within Afrikaner conservative, nationalist culture offers a unique perspective on the film's portrayal of respectable Afrikaner womanhood. The powerful influence of religion, family, and media in reinforcing heteronormative scripts has significantly shaped my understanding of both femininity and whiteness. Instead of attempting to distance myself from my subjectivity, I recognize that my social and epistemic location inevitably influences my interpretation of this identity and use this to my advantage in interpreting the subject. Drawing on my experiences and understanding, I seek to offer a deeply personal and nuanced exploration of Afrikaner womanhood.

1.10 DATA SELECTION

Stroomop, an Afrikaans language adventure/drama film produced by The Film Factory, was released in 2018 and directed by Ivan Botha (Bester, 2019). It was well received in South Africa, earning R7 434 677 at the local box office. It has won two SAFTA and Golden Horn awards and was nominated for best Screenplay. The synopsis of the film *Stroomop* introduces the viewer to five women, each grappling with significant personal struggles. Driven by circumstances, these women embark on a white-water rafting trip on the Orange River. However, their journey takes a dramatic turn when their raft capsizes, and their guide disappears. Faced with this unexpected adversity, they are forced to rely on their own resourcefulness to survive as they find their way back to civilisation (Bester, 2019).

Stroomop serves as an apt artifact for analysis of the representation of white hegemonic Afrikaner femininity. The central female characters (Vivian, Diona, Adrie, Nixie, and Lana) distinctly embody core tenets and the discursive elements of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*, as

posited by Van der Westhuizen (2017) in her research on Afrikaner women. Other characters include Guy, the tour-guide who functions as a representation of patriarchal gaze; Smiley, the single black male character; and Nixie, the only queer-identifying character, who reveals the rigid boundaries of acceptable gender identity within a neo-liberal Afrikaner world. Through its constrained symbolic order, *Stroomop* illuminates the suffocating normativity and brittleness which underpins contemporary visions of Afrikaner identity.

The unit of analysis is the character of Adrie. Data collection involves a close reading of the film, focusing on locations, scenes and dialogue that are relevant to the construction and reinforcement of heteronormativity. The data collection is an inductive process guided by the discursive strategies of the *volksmoeder* ideal as identified in Van der Westhuizen's (2017) research on print media. These discursive strategies are operationalised as a framework to identify key themes within the film's portrayal of Adrie.

1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Below is an outline of the six dissertation chapters and their contents.

In Chapter 1, I introduced and described the problem statement, setting out the aims and objectives of the study, including the motivation, limitations, and significance of the research to the discourse on Afrikaner identity.

In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical frameworks, feminist discourse analysis and Foucauldian notion of power utilised in the analysis of *Stroomop*. Feminist discourse analysis is implemented in decoding the narrative tropes and language in the film that reinforce heteronormativity and the *volksmoeder* ideal. I employ Foucault's notions of power, subjectivity, biopower and governmentality throughout the dissertation, as invaluable lenses with which I make sense of my positionality, the Afrikaner identity, idealised Afrikaner womanhood and the film analysis in Chapter 5. While acknowledging that these theories are

not universally applicable, I focused on how they reveal inherent power structures that undergird gender and race discourse.

In Chapter 3, I consider my positionality as a white Afrikaans woman. By applying an ethnographic awareness, I argue that my socialisation into Afrikaner conservative, nationalist identity, offers unique insights into the film's portrayal of respectable Afrikaner womanhood. I explore how religion, family and media influenced and enforced scripts of heteronormativity that shaped my understanding of femininity and whiteness. In discussing my social and epistemic locations, I aim to personalise my understanding of Afrikaner culture in post-apartheid South Africa.

In Chapter 4, I contextualise the Afrikaner identity through a Foucauldian notion of power, focusing on the pillars of this construct, which are masculinity, a 'common-sense' patriarchal wisdom, and the claim to power through divine right and racial destiny. I provide a review of the concept of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* as theorised by Van der Westhuizen (2017), including a discussion of the discursive strategies inherent in the subjectifying process of becoming *ordentlik*. I emphasise the relationship between the *volksmoeder* ideal and Westernised hegemonic femininity through its reliance on domesticity, heterosexuality, and body regulation. This exploration also reveals how hegemonic femininity, as represented in postfeminist media, reinforces male dominance and female subordination.

In Chapter 5, I present a thorough examination of the film settings as sites of struggle, followed by an in-depth analysis of Adrie, a character who embodies key discursive elements of hegemonic femininity. Through the theoretical lenses of feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power, I show the extent to which the *volksmoeder* ideal is reinforced and challenged in the film. With this chapter I highlight the discursive elements of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* and how they subjectify the Afrikaner women.

In Chapter 6, I provide a summary of the dissertation, findings and recommendations that would improve the limitations of the case study. Additionally, I discuss future research avenues that may add significant insight into the Afrikaner identity as portrayed in Afrikaans cinema.

1.12 CONCLUSION

For the study, *Stroomop* was selected as an emblematic post-apartheid Afrikaans film depicting contemporary manifestations of white Afrikaner femininity. An in-depth qualitative methodology enables decoding of gender ideology and technologies of power within the text. Detailed notes on characters' narrative arc, speech, emotions, actions, and relationships will interpret conformity and negotiations related to the *volksmoeder* ideal.

While a focused case study methodology has some limitations, it allows for profound interpretive analysis grounded in feminist scholarship. In conclusion, this multifaceted theoretical and analytical approach, with a focus on feminist discourse analysis and a Foucauldian notion of power, equips the study to meet its aims and objectives of exploring the representation of hegemonic Afrikaner femininity.

In the next chapter I elaborate on these theoretical approaches, explaining how feminist discourse analysis provides tools to decode language and narratives that reinforce gender hierarchies. I also discuss Foucault's insight into power as a complex web of control mechanisms, revealing how systems of surveillance and discipline shape subject positions and enforce social norms.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL APPROACHES/LENSES – FEMINIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND FOUCAULDIAN NOTION OF POWER

“The power to define the situation is the ultimate power.” Young (1988)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I focus on the theoretical approaches applied in this study: feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power. These theories are utilised interchangeably and as intersecting analytical tools throughout the study. Given the nuanced complexity of the Afrikaner identity, it becomes evident that these theories, in isolation, fall short in capturing its multifaceted nature. Scholars such as Rabaka (2003) and Mignolo (2007a) have argued that one should not universalise theories by viewing certain theories as super-theories. This view is also held by scholars such as Ake (2003) and Mentan (2015) in their critique of the imperialisation of social sciences. In other words, the exaltation of certain theories over other theories is what Ake (2003: xiii) refers to as “imperialism in the guise of scientific knowledge”. Thus, theories perform what Foucault refers to as knowledge/power through the universal dissemination of these theories, universalising certain knowledges over others. It is for this reason that Mignolo (2007a) argues that absolute truth is inaccessible. Consequently, no single entity, be it an individual, group, church, or government, across the political spectrum, can claim to possess a solution applicable to every single person. Rabaka (2009:21) asserts:

Theories emerging from traditional disciplines that claim to provide an eternal philosophical foundation or universal and neutral knowledge transcendent of historical horizon, cultural conditions and social struggles, or a metatheory that purports absolute truth that transcends the interests of specific theorists and their theories, have been and are being vigorously rejected by Africana studies.

The theories utilised in this study will function as hermeneutical lenses in exploring the technologies and the intersectionality of identity formation, gender construction, race, and religion through a filmic representation of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*: respectable white

hegemonic Afrikaner femininity. Furthermore, they will delineate how the power of film/media functions as a technology to invent, sustain, transform, and aggregate white Afrikaner women's bodies that have been produced within the white, patriarchal Afrikaner social order. I begin the chapter with a short overview of the research design, followed by a discussion of the frameworks that constitute the cornerstones of my research: feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

My chosen research design is qualitative and interpretive, utilising a Foucauldian theoretical framework and applying feminist discourse analysis to examine the film *Stroomop* and its various characters. The nature of this analysis is most suited to a framework that considers not only the broader system in which gender is constructed in relation to race, class, and other identities, but also the language and imagery that is used to reproduce and sustain it. Foucault's (1972) articulation of power as decentralised and generative, as opposed to exclusively punitive, corresponds with key issues raised in feminist discourse analysis regarding hegemony, gender construction and normative ideology. My standpoint as a white Afrikaans woman informs my perspective: having navigated expectations around *volksmoeder* ideals and *ordentlikheid* norms, I can parse nuances that an outsider might miss. Furthermore, I position my analysis through an explicitly female gaze perspective. Mulvey (1999) and Gamman and Marshment (1988) conceptualise the female gaze as a feminist perspective encompassing embodied and gendered ways of seeing that seek to disrupt male-dominated media narratives. They posit the female gaze as utilising strategies of subterfuge and inversion to counter dominant scopophilia that renders feminine bodies as passive objects for phallogocentric visual pleasure and consumption. The female gaze thus functions as an analytic technology and counter-hegemonic practice that challenges reductionist constructions of gender, problematises

the politics embedded in processes of looking, and contests the objectification of women under the masculine gaze. Kaplan (2000:3) argues that:

No reading is neutral or innocent, by becoming aware of the operation of our own gazes as historically and culturally specific, we begin to glimpse the possibilities for multiple gazes and readings.

Thus, there is a need for women to consciously read texts from a female perspective rather than a dominant male gaze, allowing for multiple, non-innocent readings that reveal underlying power dynamics. In the next section, I provide an overview of feminist discourse analysis, its roots in feminist theory, and key concepts that are vital for examining how heteronormativity is perpetuated through language, imagery and dominant ideologies embedded within texts such as film.

2.3 FEMINIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Emerging from second-wave feminism, the integration of feminist theory with discourse analysis challenged traditional communication tools that reinforced social realities and gendered inequalities (Baxter, 2003). A key concept intrinsic to this form of analysis/discourse is the concept of hegemony as borrowed from Gramsci. Feminist discourse analysis views the concept as an important lens in its analysis. The notion of hegemony is defined by Gramsci as the cultural and ideological control that a dominant group exerts over others by shaping discourse that promotes their worldview until it seems like “common sense” (Gramsci, 1971). The relationship between hegemony and discourse is crucial, as the dominant or hegemonic group’s interests typically dominate the social, political, and cultural narratives/discourses that dominate society, thereby maintaining hegemony. Films, as cultural discourses, wield significant influence in mirroring and reproducing hegemonic norms by functioning as narratives that portray logical but loaded gender hierarchies on screen (De Lauretis, 1987). Succinctly put, these forms of discourses function as cultural and masculine gazes over women’s bodies. De Lauretis (1987) argues that the representation of gender in Western art

and culture can be seen as a record of how our understanding of gender has been created and reinforced over time.

In other words, the technologies of gender produce it, control its meanings and significations ostensibly in the interests of the social order. Therefore, it is understandable that storytelling and symbolic texts engage viewers both intellectually and emotionally, prompting them to unconsciously question or absorb dominant ideologies (Wildfeuer, 2014). This brings to mind the concept of ideological interpellation, borrowed from Althusser (2008), which describes how prevailing social ideology becomes embedded in film narratives and characters that position audiences to tacitly adopt certain normalised ways of seeing and understanding gender. Whether reinforcing or challenging conventions, a character's behaviour, speech, and appearance cues viewers into meaning-making, instructing them in the hegemonic ideological order. In this sense, applying a feminist discourse analysis framework exposes how cinema interpolates audiences by subtly instructing them to identify with and absorb the dominant racial and gender order. This proves that feminist discourse analysis is an essential lens for interpreting the representation of the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* ideal and its most revered form of respectable femininity, *ordentlikheid*, in the film *Stroomop* (2018).

Considering the dominant and pervasive power of film as a cultural discourse, Metz (1974) urges that our contributions and understanding of film representation should be analysed continuously. As a technology of power, films function as a yardstick against which we can measure pervasive norms. They operate within a particular frame that entrenches hierarchies of power, operating as a form of manipulation undertaken in service of a patriarchal and cultural gaze. It is for that reason that hooks (1996:5) reminds us that;

Whether we like it or not, cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people. It may not be the intent of the filmmaker to teach the audiences anything, but that does not mean that lessons are not learnt.

From the observation above by hooks, and borrowing from Foucault and Miskowiec (1986), it can be argued that cinemas function as ‘other spaces’: a utopic yet heterotopic site where patriarchal, masculine, and cultural gazes converge. As a site of power, cinema performs a neutralising technology, inverting sets of relations that reflect or mirror the sites of power and hegemony. Films consciously or unconsciously transmit images of idealised femininity allocated within spatial boundaries that reflect dominant ideologies. In other words, the process of boundary-making through inclusion or exclusion of certain stories/identities/characters is reproduced and transmitted by filmmakers to audiences, intentional or unintentional, as an effect of cultural hegemony. So, while film’s ‘other space’ offers the possibility to challenge the status quo, it oftentimes recapitulates stereotypical feminine representations and masculine worldviews marked by ideological calculations of space and place. Foucault and Miskowiec (1986:24) and Rees (2022) state:

Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.

This illustrates how sites such as cinemas function as utopias for patriarchal gaze. Cinema as heterotopic ‘other space’ allows the pervasive patriarchal gaze to permeate the silver screen, actualising power through the very unreality of film. In these fictional spaces, cinema performs both pedagogical and andragogical functions, constructing model visions of gender and society that subject viewers to norms of femininity and masculinity within a patriarchal framework. Film creates a theatre of power and subjectification, a ‘perfect society’ that subtly instructs audiences, on the spatial and ideological boundaries that demarcate gender in the name of cultural ideals.

Subjugation, therefore, functions as a technology of inclusion and assimilation, by creating a utopia of integration within the disciplinary order. In other words, subjugation can mask as

belonging. The pressure to conform promises a level of social inclusion that isolation seems unbearable in comparison. Participation in this system creates the illusion that diverse roles are available. However, these roles shape identities to best fit the needs of the system, regardless of individual inclinations. Thus, the technology of subjugation is contingent on fostering dependencies and illusions of necessity among those subject to its demands, compelling them not to embody an identity that feels sincere, but rather to align themselves with the label that biopower awards them. The power of film to normalise gender ideology necessitates a critical feminist perspective. This lens is crucial when scrutinising modern representations that mask ongoing inequalities with ‘postfeminist’ assumptions of achieved equality and progress.

2.3.1 Feminist discourse and film analysis in the postfeminist era

In navigating the postfeminist media landscape, a paradoxical shift emerges in representations and perceptions of femininity within popular culture. Postfeminist discourse propagates narratives of empowerment and choice while recalibrating the meaning of ‘feminist’ gains. This postfeminist sensibility puts forth notions of feminist success, the “death” of feminism (Gill, 2017:627), and assumptions of achieved equality (Whelehan, 2000). Moreover, while shifting dynamics recasts feminine agency and choice, certain tropes reveal the remnants of the patriarchal gaze still subtly objectifying or circumscribing women. It requires deeper interrogation as a cultural phenomenon: while heralded by some as an indication of progress beyond gender constraints, it is critiqued by others as an overly optimistic adoption of the view that key feminist aims are already fully met and traditional gender boundaries dissolved. Specifically, scholars such as Angela McRobbie (2009:12) argue that postfeminist logics fuse female individualism with liberalisation discourses as grounds to formally reject feminism as no longer necessary in an “enlightened” era. Claims of equality mask the fact that there are still underlying, persistent inequalities. Critical analysis must discern whether popular postfeminist media representations merely repackage persistent gender stereotypes rather than transforming

structural inequities that subordinate women. Parsing debates about postfeminism cannot determine the truth of equality claims alone. Through tangible investigation, we must examine the narratives, characters, dialogues, and visuals that shape gender in media. Further to this end, an assessment of the portrayal of women in postfeminist film provides a focal point to evaluate lingering stereotypes hidden beneath the veneer of progress.

2.3.1.1 The portrayal of women in postfeminist media

In postfeminist media, the technology of pivoting female representation moved from the performance of objectification to subjectification, as maintained by Van der Westhuizen (2017:74). Whilst objectification reduces women to physical bodies or body parts devoid of subjectivity or humanity, subjectification is more subtle as women appear to be portrayed as whole human subjects, but oppressive power still operates by shaping feminine subjectivity itself to align with ideals that ultimately serve patriarchal interests. Put simply, female representation moved from objectification and reduction of women as sexual objects to the subjectification of their bodies. This shift did not eliminate sexualisation, but instead introduced new ways of objectifying the female body through analysis, evaluation, and measurement in a supposedly value-neutral, objective way. As Lemke (2012) elucidates, this governance entails calculated direction of conduct, not only through coercive strength over life but also indirect shaping of action. The body is the site where power is exercised through punishment, training, and confinement. All these strategies lead to forms of exploitation, coercion, and suppression, or, as “biopower” (Foucault, 1978:141).

Biopower refers to the way power operates by targeting life processes. It aims to control entire populations through techniques designed to regulate health, reproduction, and overall well-being (Foucault, 1978). Biopower involves the governance of bodies and populations at a broader level, beyond individual discipline. This form of power is concerned with regulating and shaping the very existence of life. According to Foucault (1978), biopower operates

through various mechanisms and technologies of governmentality that seek to shape and govern the behaviours, health, and productivity of populations.

Foucault (1982) understood governmentality as the practice of shaping the actions of individuals and groups. This form of government extends beyond political structures to influence the behaviours of children, religious followers, communities and even the sick. For Foucault, to govern is to manage and limit the range of choice and possibility available to all persons. Thus, biopower through governmentality is not solely about domination or punishment but also about fostering and enhancing life in ways that align with social norms and objectives.

Biopower and governmentality manifests clearly in the context of Afrikaner gender norms and Afrikaner film (discussed in depth in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) which developed intricate mechanisms for evaluating and directing the conduct of Afrikaner men and women in alignment with nationalist interests. As supposed guardians of ethnic purity and morality, respectable Afrikaner femininity became a key site on which discourses of racial supremacy are played out through and on women's bodies.

In this climate of normativity, women's choices, appearance, roles, and contributions are modified based on eugenic logics of biological essentialism and cultural superiority. Respectability, as a technology of gender, binds women to reproduction, functioning to measure and reshape them into vessels befitting the *volk*. Discipline and coercion intersect, from interpersonal relationships to institutional policy and modern media, to secure Afrikaner supremacy through control of its women's bodies and lives.

Van der Westhuizen (2017) found that Afrikaner women are explicitly co-opted by the same subjectifying forces prevalent in postfeminist media, as their very selfhood and subjectivity is constructed through expectations around individualism, buying into limiting mode of feminine

behaviour, beauty norms, consumerism, heterosexual relationships, and more. Schreiber (2014) contends that while postfeminist media, and more specifically film, offers surface-level empowerment for women by providing them with a space to explore their desires and emotions, they can also be damaging to women's self-esteem and sense of agency. Colaci (2019:131) argues:

These are quite literally places, spaces whose power, as observed by numerous scholars, is an oxymoron: they at once both confine and welcome, treat and subjugate, provide a space while relegating to a space. Power thus manages to intervene in the most personal aspects such as desires and beliefs, since, by means of its invisible hand, it brings the subject to the negation of itself.

Following the argument by Colaci and explored in depth in Chapter 5 as cartographies of struggle, it can be said that films operate as paradoxical spaces that both empower and subordinate womanhood simultaneously. Their role as cultural artefacts allows temporary liberation through exploring identity yet re-inscribes norms regulating femininity. The invisibility of this theatre of power allows it to work through various levels of being, granting life by the very act of foreclosing it.

This subjectification extends to race, as white femininity is upheld as the invisible norm, while women of colour remain exotic, stereotyped objects and narrative devices (Schreiber, 2014). This is discussed at length in Chapter 4, where I argue that film perpetuates longstanding associations of beauty, virtue, humanity, and power with whiteness itself. Films, therefore, function as what can be referred to as technologies of domination of the self and that of others, again linking back to Foucault's (1980) concept of governmentality. In light of this, the burden remains on marginalised subjects to conform to homogenised, Eurocentric standards of womanhood.

Narratives of empowerment and sexual liberation that dominate popular media, conceal the hidden stereotypical depictions of pervasive heteronormative femininity and behaviour.

McRobbie (2009) points out that feminist media products exemplify this clearly, often portraying women who are sexually liberated, yet their narratives still centre around the aspiration of heterosexual committed relationships to fulfil them. McRobbie (2009) further states that there is a complex dual nature to postfeminist media in that it appears progressive whilst perpetuating anti-feminist ideologies disguised by an illusion of choice.

A critical yet overlooked dimension of postfeminist media and culture is its affective resonance, and how it operates on and through emotions (explored in depth in Chapter 5 through the analysis of Adrie). Gill (2017:607) highlights that recognising the profound emotional entanglements within popular media discourses categorised as “postfeminist” remains vital, yet lacking, and calls for scholarship that strives to address both the cultural expressions of postfeminism and the emotional and psychological experiences it influences. In other words, it is important to delve deeper into the emotional undercurrents that drive the circulation of postfeminist tropes and ideologies. This requires going beyond surface-level textual analysis and exploring the textures of cruelty, rage, delight, and hope that fuel postfeminism. By dissecting the emotional architecture of postfeminist media, we gain critical insight into how audiences become ensnared. Examining structures of feeling reveals the affective registers that hook women across sensory, ideological, and political and economic dimensions. It is for these reasons that scholars such as Gill (2017) and Mendes (2015) call for more complex, diverse representations and a renewed analysis of postfeminist media.

Gill (2017) and Mendes (2015) further critique the dominant representation of white actors, heteronormative beauty standards and straight narratives as a form of intersectional oppression. Gill (2017:2) calls for layered analyses highlighting postfeminist media’s “contradictory nature” and capaciousness rather than seeing it as universally disempowering or negative. She argues that texts must be situated in their historical moment to parse which feminist/antifeminist strands are most salient. Mendes (2015) calls for nuanced race and class-

conscious critiques attuned to diverse readings, as opposed to static analyses of postfeminist media which fail to capture shifting consumerist expressions of identity, power, and feminism among non-white audiences. In response to these calls, the discourse has shifted towards deconstructing naturalised postfeminist media narratives with a goal to uncover the deeply ingrained sexist, racist, and heteropatriarchal assumptions that underpin these media narratives. In essence, feminist discourse analysis unveils how representations normalise the gendered status quo through narratives that appear progressive yet embed assumptions that serve heteropatriarchal interests and white privilege. But exposing underlying rhetoric is not enough. Interrogating how subjective identities become colonised necessitates adopting Foucault's conceptual toolkit linking truth, power, and governmentality. It is the diffuse, yet coordinated influence of knowledge regimes and biopolitical conditioning, and the informal discipline through medical, legal, political, and cultural institutions, which coerce subjects into conformity while masking the coercion itself. Tracing how contingent dominant ideology secures consent through technologies of gender reveals mechanisms of epistemic violence that undermine women's being in the world. It is with this in mind that I explore the productive nexus of power, truth, and subjectification through Foucault's notion of power.

2.4 FOUCAULDIAN NOTION OF POWER

The Foucauldian notion of power becomes essential in analysing the various layers of the performance of power within the *volksmoeder* ideal and Afrikaner hegemonic femininity. His analysis of power functions as a technique to excavate the crucial role that language plays in creating and perpetuating gendered identities and power imbalances. In Chapter 5, I apply this Foucauldian analytic lens specifically to deconstruct representations of Afrikaner femininity and hierarchical dynamics embedded within the film *Stroomop* (2018). Close textual analysis reveals how setting, dialogue, emotion, and relational patterns serve to reinforce conventions of the *volksmoeder* ideal and *ordentlikheid*. My analysis illuminates the layered mechanisms

through which language and imagery position viewers to identify with and absorb stereotypical archetypes that naturalise heteronormativity. In this sense, the movie operates akin to a 'trap' itself, ensnaring the audience through an appeal to 'common sense' that in fact recirculates oppressive norms back into the social constitution of reality.

In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (1982) explores the rationale behind the study of power and its role in subject formation. He identifies a triad of objectification processes through which individuals are made subjects: dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification. He argues that these three modes of objectification function as technologies of transforming human beings to subjects. The first mode divides practices that manifest both socially and spatially. Socially, individuals belonging to specific groups may experience differences that subject them to various forms of objectification, while spatial aspects involve physical exclusion as a consequence of perceived differences from the social group. By means of social objectification and categorisation, we are assigned identities that dictate our place in society and influence our sense of self. In other words, the dividing practices distinguish individuals from one another and from other concepts such as good/bad, sickness/health, sanity/insanity, wealth/poverty, and women/men. Foucault (1982) further observes that historical applications of medicine reinforced the classification of diseases as a dividing practice. Modern psychiatry practiced in medical institutions and penitentiaries, throughout most of history, further embedded the medicalisation, stigmatisation, and normalisation of fetishised sexuality in modern Europe, shaping contemporary forms of dividing practices. Cinematic texts that aim to construct gender roles and uphold these norms must be situated within this framework of objectification.

The second mode pertains to methods of inquiry or scientific classification. It is within this framework that these sciences turn us into objects of knowledge and subject the subjects of analysis to objectification (scientific gaze). Foucault (1982) argued that scientific

classification, akin to what Césaire (1955) termed “thingification”, serves as a technology for objectifying people. This objectification often occurs through the use of psychiatric diagnostic testing. Furthermore, throughout history, specific scientific pronouncements about human social life have been held as absolute truths and conferred a privileged status, even though these ‘universals’ may be culturally or historically specific. Certain regimes of truth, built on power imbalances and specific historical contexts, rely on designated experts to judge individuals against predetermined standards. This power to judge stems from the experts’ privileged access to knowledge and the contingent nature of that knowledge, meaning its validity is not absolute but depends on specific circumstances. The arbitrary social distinctions between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ behaviour fuelled the creation of systems that force subjects into narrow, predefined, and rigid archetypes of personhood. Naming arises as a fundamental method for categorising fluid subjectivities into fixed, pathologised identities. Terms such as “client”, “woman”, and “employee” also serve as static identities for an individual experience, such as “depressed client” or “anorexic woman” (Foucault, 1982:778). This cultural naming practice not only categorises but also marginalises and segregates groups by positioning them in opposition to a perceived ‘normative’ community marked by social privilege. This is evident in terms such as “single parent client”, “native woman”, “gay employee” and “black inner-city male”. The act of labeling itself becomes a means of inscribing a person’s body and identity with the hierarchical power embedded in the naming process. The seemingly objective language used can mask the subjective and socially constructed nature of these categories, further disadvantaging groups (Foucault, 1982:778). The analysis of the characters in the film in Chapter 5 will demonstrate this form of naming or fixed identities.

In contrast to the other two modes of objectification where individuals are largely passive, Foucault (1982) identifies a third mode, subjectification. This process focuses on how humans actively participate in shaping their own identities and subjectivities. Here, individuals are not

simply categorised by external forces, but rather actively engage in self-formation. Foucault's central concern is how individuals actively shape their identities. He argues that this "self-formation" is a complex historical process involving various practices that influence our bodies, thoughts, and behaviours (Foucault, 1982). These practices, often shaped by external cultural norms, lead to self-awareness through internalised dialogues (Foucault, 1982). In essence, Foucault suggests that we are always influenced by culture, unable to completely escape its influence in our actions.

It is within this context that I apply his analysis, cognisant of the fact that his analysis was performed within a Western context and informed by Western lenses. In other words, I am aware of Foucault's epistemic and social positioning within the Western context. Foucault's notion of power, governmentality, and biopower play a foundational role in shaping my analytical approach to power structures. I intend to capitalise on theoretical foundations that extensively scrutinise power/knowledge dynamics within Afrikaner hegemonic femininity in films such as *Stroomop* (2018). It is crucial to emphasise that this methodological orientation will later prove instrumental in dissecting my epistemic and social locations within the Afrikaner community (Chapter 3), as well as contextualising the Afrikaner identity within post-apartheid South Africa (Chapter 4). This approach serves as a bridge, connecting Western theoretical perspectives with the nuanced realities of the *volksmoeder* ideal in post-apartheid South Africa.

As shown above, cultural discourse plays a significant role in shaping our perceptions and understanding of reality. Turco (2020) argues that as individuals, we take on specific roles within language and communication. We are not just physical beings who express emotions, but complex subjects that can be analysed. Our actions and words contribute to the ongoing creation and dismantling of meaning. Expanding on this notion from Turco, it is important to recognise that our identities and interactions are not merely passive; rather, they are active

processes of meaning-making and negotiation. This understanding aligns with Foucault's (1982) perspective, where power manifests through a complex web of discourse and actions internalised within individuals, despite the potential for negative consequences such as denial or suppression. In other words, power shapes our very understanding of reality. When individuals participate in society's dominant discourses, certain 'truths' gain power, marginalising alternative perspectives and ways of knowing, reinforcing prevailing systems of power, making it harder to imagine or establish alternative 'truths'.

This dynamic clearly manifests in the context of the Afrikaner identity discussed in Chapter 3, and specifically in the context of the *volksmoeder* ideal, where the hegemonic construction of white femininity has largely crowded out alternative self-conceptions for women outside motherhood and domestic duty. As also examined in Chapter 4, the notion of being an obedient daughter, devoted wife, and nurturing mother becomes framed as almost 'common sense' truth structuring normalcy, thereby silencing, or making invisible any identities or life paths existing beyond those boundaries. Foucault's notion of power-through-knowledge is demonstrated by the privileging of white history, dominated by white perspectives, over the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples. Here, 'truth' is not a reflection of an objective reality, but rather a product of discursive power that determines which narratives society believes and share. These dominant narratives establish norms and criteria, shaping how individuals understand and navigate their world.

The Foucauldian (1972) notion of power provides unique perspectives on discourse, proposing that it is not just a tool for communication but a practice that systematically forms the objects it speaks of. Foucault understood power in terms of hierarchies and inequalities, often reflected and reinforced through language (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Parker (1989) further argues that the primary subjugating effects of the power/truth relationship, is individuality as a vehicle for power. In other words, cultural discourse that frame knowledge as truth set the standards by

which in an individual is specified, and by which the individual shapes themselves (Foucault, 1972). For instance, a socially constructed ideal female body weight has significantly influenced the historical construction of female beauty standards in Western culture, dividing female bodies into categories of desirability and undesirability. Consequently, numerous women engage in activities such as exercise, dieting, purging, and starvation, driven by a fixation and pressure to conform to these body standards. This manifestation of power underscores the role of regimes of truth in prescribing a normative ideal for the appearance of the female body.

Additionally, Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge theory holds that power and knowledge are deeply tied to subjectivity. Foucault (1980) challenges the notion that power is solely suppressive. He argues that culturally constructed power does not directly silence alternative knowledges but marginalises them. This marginalisation shapes individuals into "docile bodies" which are not passive, but rather unwittingly complicit in performing and perpetuating the meanings and practices associated with the dominant power (Foucault, 1980). In other words, the concept of "subjectification", which is the process by which power produces knowledge, giving rise to categories, norms, and expectations that mould our identities and behaviours, ultimately creates us as "docile bodies". Foucault (1980:94) argues that "we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertaking, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power".

Yet, there is potential for subjects to assert their own agency. As knowledge creates power, it also creates powerlessness, and in that liminal area, opportunities arrive to exercise agency. Rather than being purely dominated, subjects have agency in negotiating and resisting power, with power and freedom existing in a reciprocal relationship (Foucault, 1977).

The Foucauldian notion of power becomes one of the key lenses/theories that are essential in my examination of the Afrikaner identity and its construction over time in Chapters 3 and 4. I make use of concepts such as “utopia/heterotopias” and “governmentality” which I argue are vital in deciphering white patriarchal spaces, and conditioned femininities (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986). For instance, within the ‘utopian’ idealised patriarchal middle-class home, the expectation of strict feminine respectability may momentarily yield to more unrestrained expressions of femininity, reflecting the heterotopian nature of such spaces according to Foucault. However, the heterotopian home exists under a penalising gaze, compelling both women and men to adjust and conform to prescribed gender roles and decorum.

The concept of an ever-present, internalised observer or ‘panopticon’, compelling self-discipline and surveillance reflects Foucault’s theory of governmentality; the conditioned impulse to reconcile deviations from prescribed social norms associated with ideal femininity and masculinity (Foucault, 1979; Redfield, 2005). In the context of Afrikaner identity, these power dynamics are particularly salient. As I elaborate in Chapters 3 and 4, the establishment of alternative truths reinforces dominant narratives, relegating those who deviate from respectable femininity or challenge whiteness to a position of subjugation. This underscores the epistemic violence that occurs within communities, where the privilege of white men further marginalises and silences dissenting voices.

Thus, while alternative spaces may create the illusion of liberation, subjects remain tethered to regimes of control, facing immense pressure to conform to social hierarchies. Through governmentality, external domination transitions seamlessly into self-regulation as subjects unconsciously absorb and replicate the norms that uphold their oppression. Further to this, Foucault (1982) views our interpersonal discourse as self-regulating mechanism shaped by social standards, maintaining that we constantly monitor and modify our behaviour in an attempt to align with our understanding of cultural norms. This cultural gaze, embedded within

power structures, influences the practices we deem desirable, leading to internalisation of its standards as normative (Foucault, 1979).

Building on these ideas around systemic power and internalised oppression, hooks (1984:102) offers a profound critique of the power dynamics that shape the construction of femininity. hooks (1984:102) argues that much of feminist thought has been shaped by an uncritical acceptance of the patriarchal definition of femaleness which often “portrays women as passive and unassertive”. This acceptance reinforces rather than challenges hegemonic femininity.

Foucault’s concept of subjectivity resonates with hooks’ (1984:8) discussion of the margin and centre in which she describes her experience of living on the margin of society, which provided her with a unique perspective and subjectivity. hooks (1984:8) explains that living on the edge allowed her to see both from the outside in and from the inside out, focusing on both the centre and the margin and arguing that this dual perspective is crucial for understanding the whole universe, which is made up of both margin and centre. hooks (1984:8) argues that those living on the margins have a unique, active role in shaping their understanding of the world. Ligaga (2020) offers a further assessment, particularly of African women’s agency that recognises acts of resilience, resistance, and negotiation that may appear small in scope but allow women to craft space for themselves within constraining environments.

This speaks to the self-actualising possibilities in a social structure where conformity may be synonymous with survival; even within a space where one is forced to the outside because of race, class, gender, ethnicity, or sexuality, an opportunity presents itself to lean into agency. Living within the margins can be both oppressive and liberatory, allowing some opportunities to subvert those norms and values held in esteem by hegemonic ideology. This perspective challenges traditional power dynamics and offers a more nuanced understanding of

subjectivity, the malleability of these subjects and acknowledging the importance of both the margin and the centre in shaping individual and collective identities.

Thus, I argue that Foucault's insights are essential in an examination of heteronormative femininity, the subjectification of the Afrikaner woman's body, and the *volksmoeder* ideal, as constructions entangled with their historical struggles for power, subjectivity, and in relation to other social productions. There is no single, universal essence of womanhood that exists outside of social and cultural constructs of race and class (Manicom, 1992).

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and methodological frameworks that will guide the analysis of the representation of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* in the Afrikaans film *Stroomop* (2018). Feminist discourse analysis and Foucault's notion of power provide complementary perspectives for examining how identities converge and discourses operate in cultural texts such as film. Feminist discourse analysis, rooted in critiques of gender power, offers essential tools for decoding language, symbols and narratives encoding the film's characters, while integrating Foucault's philosophy around knowledge and power provides additional dimensions. His concepts of subjectification and governmentality reveal how surveillance and discipline serve systems of control. Together, these approaches enable robust examination of the discursive positions, power relations and social institutions within which the film's subjects are embedded and through which Afrikaner *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* ideals endure.

In the following chapter, I situate my social and epistemic location as a white Afrikaner woman, arguing that an autoethnographic awareness allows for deeper interpretation when analysing cultural artefacts such as film. Additionally, I examine closely the religious, domestic and media discourses that influenced my subjectification into Afrikaner womanhood, shedding

light on the hidden and diffuse mechanisms and technologies that reproduce and maintain systems of gender and racial domination in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER 3: MY POSITIONALITY

“To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.” bell hooks (2004)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The frameworks I will be utilising for my analysis of the representation of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* in the Afrikaans film *Stroomop* (2018) were introduced in Chapter 2. I combine feminist discourse analysis, which critiques gender power coded in language and narratives, with Foucault’s notions of power, surveillance, and discipline. These complementary perspectives provide insights into how identities converge, and how discourses operate in cultural texts such as film. Within this chapter I discuss my positionality within the context of this study, my social and epistemic location, and I argue that an ethnographic awareness will allow for a deeper understanding and interpretation of Afrikaner respectability.

3.2 EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE, WHITENESS AND GENDER: INTERSECTING EPISTEMIC PERSPECTIVES IN ANALYSING AFRIKANER IDENTITY

Within the context of ethnographic methodology, researchers tactically position themselves within the narrative to establish a strong connection with their readers (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). Foucault’s notions of power/knowledge, governmentality and subjectification discussed in Chapter 2, illustrate how knowledge production cannot be detached from power relations and one’s positionality. He noted that truth does not exist outside the realm of power and thus perspectives claim no neutral objectivity (Foucault, 1980). Consequently, deliberately centring personal connections and reflections serves a vital purpose. Such transparency around “the author and their own desires” is what Foucault (1969:13) called the “author function”: a mechanism to enhance ethnographic credibility. It permits deeper consideration of how normative discourses profoundly shape subjective interpretations and reactions. Rather than

seeking externally validated truth, the researcher acts as a specific intellectual focused on context-specific problems from their embodied reality (Parker, 1989). Bochner and Ellis (1996) agreed that the deliberate use of personal experience and reflection allows for a deeper understanding and analysis of the cultural phenomena being studied, enhancing credibility, and promoting a more engaging and relatable reading experience. Bochner and Ellis (1996:20) stated that when ethnographers create text, “we invent and construct the cultures we write about”.

Foucault (1980) questioned whose narratives matter and to what ends? What constitutes credible, meaningful knowledge? My answer to those questions is that I am the target demographic of the film, and I am also those women represented in the film: I know them well. I understand the *volksmoeder* ideal and its inherent rules of *ordentlikheid* inscribed in the characters and how to interpret those rules. More importantly, I have experienced the constant and consistent ways in which patriarchy strips away agency and provokes profound psychological anxieties. In this sense, I aim to do what Foucault alludes to in centring the power of “subjugated knowledge” from marginalised standpoints such as my own in contesting dominant (and in this case, male-centric) constructions of reality. I attempt to explain what I ‘see’, not only through the theoretical lens of the *volksmoeder* ideal but how I ‘see’ through my whiteness and my gender, a perspective rooted in my geo- and body-politics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007a). Collins (2015), Mignolo (2007a) and Hartsock (1983) argue that researchers must be aware of how their social and epistemic location impacts what they see and how they see, as their social positions and identities shape the questions they ask and how they interpret results. To this end, my analysis of the representation of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* embodied by the characters in the film *Stroomop* (2018) is informed by my social and epistemic location positioned in post-apartheid South Africa.

The post-apartheid narrative of South Africa promotes ideas of racial reconciliation, social progress, and equality under the law. Despite the rhetoric of advancement, a logic of colonialism persists, similar to what Mignolo (2007b:23) refers to as a “darker side of modernity”. While legal apartheid may have ended, the underlying colonial matrix of power, including the appropriation of land and exploitation of labour, remains intact. As a white South African, I remain embedded within these enduring racist power structures and epistemologies that continue to privilege whites economically and socially.

According to Wilderson (2008) whiteness isn't simply about skin colour, but a complex position of privilege within a racialised society. Whiteness also grants individuals a specific perspective, a way of “seeing the world whitely” (Wilderson, 2008:96). Eddo-Lodge (2017) maintains that white privilege doesn't speak to a life lived without pain, suffering, or having to overcome obstacles; but rather an acceptance and passive complicitness in the current state of inequality. In my case, this means acknowledging the benefits I gained from both apartheid and the preceding colonial system. It also recognises that my perspective is inherently shaped by my position and cannot be entirely objective or universally applicable. Vice (2010) argues that the system of white privilege subtly conditions the behaviour and thought patterns of white people, regardless of their personal morality, ultimately causing harm.

Similar to Vice, I recognise the urgent need to confront the inherent privileges and injustices associated with my white identity. This necessitates dismantling the shield of colour-blindness, a concept that prevents us from fully understanding the profound significance of race and the advantages bestowed by white skin. In addition to this and accounting for the increase in white nationalism and subsequent racist policies unfolding on a global scale, doing anti-racist work on an internal level is not enough. White people must translate this internal work into outward action by engaging socially, politically, and radically to dismantle systemic racism. Upheaving the status quo will not happen through passive bystanderism. White people must be active allies

as Bonilla-Silva (2022) argues, leveraging our privilege to advocate for, centre and uplift marginalised voices by joining and supporting purposeful social movements.

To reiterate, although policies and discourse have progressed in South Africa, inequalities along racial lines persist, obscured by proclamations of a multiracial democracy and growing equality. Attending to my location in this system is key for enacting the “decolonial shift” that Mignolo describes as necessary for exposing hidden realities and histories (Mignolo, 2007b:453). White feminism perpetuates the myth of colour-blindness, often cloaking whiteness in ‘objectivity’ as a powerful control mechanism within feminism. While class also plays a role, white feminism’s dominance presents itself as the universal feminist experience. Consequently, those who challenge it are labelled as troublemakers (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). This silencing and marginalisation within white feminism reflects the broader power structures that privilege whiteness.

As Dyer (2008) suggests, race and gender are deeply interconnected as heterosexuality plays a central role in both, shaping our understanding of gender and reinforcing racial hierarchies. Although my standpoint as a white person may place limitations on my understanding, my gender provides an insider perspective and experiences that offer benefits. Gender hierarchies and patriarchal norms are inextricably linked to the colonial underpinnings of South African society, as control of gender and sexuality is one of the key domains of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007a). To this end, Wynter (2003) notes that the colonial matrix of power that arose from military and political conquest was and remains entirely structured around masculine modes of authority, control, and violence. This has led to the systematic erasure of gender as a parallel axis of oppression and dehumanisation within colonial regimes and re-inscribes a masculine bias.

Due to this gender bias, an analysis of Afrikaner identity and the representation of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* that focuses solely on whiteness, ignores how patriarchy and the control of female sexuality, family structure, and women's bodies are foundational to the colonial matrix of power. Stoler (2010) argues that gender operates differently within structures of colonial domination. White masculinity is constructed in terms of entitled supremacy, whereas white femininity enables this supremacy while facing oppression (Stoler, 2010). Furthermore, white women have historically played an archetypal role of fostering individualism and power for white men while denying agency to themselves (Stoler, 2010). The intersecting dimensions of power and knowledge that construct colonialism necessitates that I account for my race and my gender in recognising the interdependent and intersectional nature of racial and gender-based oppressions if I am to challenge the colonial matrix of domination comprehensively and do due justice to the work at hand. As a white Afrikaner woman, I hold a duty of reflexivity regarding my position within this matrix of privilege and normalisation. It is with this in mind that I expand on my social and epistemic locations through a Foucauldian lens. I examine how the realm of religion and the suburban home deeply impacted my sense of self through consistent and diffuse iterations of white heteronormativity and I demonstrate how media influenced my perception of femininity.

3.2.1 Panopticon of the Self: The Politics of Personal and Epistemic Spaces

In the primary spheres of my socialisation, namely religion, home, and media, the patriarchal order was not compartmentalised, but rather a diffuse force shaping every aspect of my identity. These spaces, akin to a theatre of power, were not only patriarchal but also racialised and hierarchical; echoing Foucault's (1977) exploration of the panopticon, where power operates ubiquitously and pervasively, influencing and structuring the entire social landscape. The panopticon's primary effect is to create a state of constant, perceived surveillance within the inmate. This perception is so powerful that it ensures the automatic functioning of power, even

without the actual, constant presence of guards, ultimately leading individuals to learn to guard themselves (Foucault, 1979). In the context of my childhood, the institutions of home, church, school, and family operated as panopticons that induced a state of conscious visibility and encouraged internalised self-surveillance through the pervasive presence of patriarchal norms and a risk of judgement.

Thus, my femininity was governed by complex power dynamics that operated at social and individual levels to shape my subjectivity. Foucault (1979) argued that constant surveillance negates individual autonomy, sparking mental and physical distress. Echoing Foucault, Manne's (2017:1) concept of "patriarchy post-traumatic stress disorder" accurately captures the physiological distress caused by normalised misogyny and the erosion of personal identity under the influence of cis-heteropatriarchal structures. Within the theatre of patriarchal power, navigating gender under hostile governance, on a daily basis, requires significant effort. The looming threat of judgement compels compulsory performances of gender and defers the opportunity for backstage resistance. Reclaiming and negotiating small measures of agency becomes a mode of survival.

Utopian visions constructed around ideals of racial purity and supremacy, heteronormativity and class status also bear witness to spaces of otherness and deviation (heterotopias) that challenged these utopian logics of a supposed perfect gendered and racialised social order (Foucault, 1979). Despite witnessing my mother periodically pushing back against the restrictions and barriers to financial and employment equity, the patriarchal authority exerted by my father and perpetuated through both religious theology and Afrikaner lore proved too powerful to subvert.

This brings to mind Foucault's notion of heterotopia as ambiguous spaces that allow for the simultaneous construction and deconstruction of the normative order. These contradictory

spaces function as both reflections of the dominant social structures and sites of resistance where alternative realities can emerge.

As Mothoagae (2014) has rightly argued, that he locates himself first as a colonial subject and within decolonial thought. I also locate myself within the invitation by Gloria Anzaldúa that I should locate myself clearly in my thoughts, actions, knowledge accumulation and considerations.

It is within this context that my upbringing is located, within cartographies of struggle that function or are performed within spaces such as the home and church, and have operated as heterotopias, reinforcing patriarchal, racial, and heteronormative ideologies while also offering glimpses of subversion, such as moments when my mother pushed back against patriarchal authority.

It was within these spaces that I too, began the ongoing work of deconstructing my faith and subverting patriarchal norms, challenging the rigid expectations imposed on my identity, and gradually reclaiming agency over how I understood gender, race, power, and autonomy. While these institutions performed a technology of power, disciplined my body and beliefs, they were also sites of critical awareness where resistance flourished. Succinctly put, they functioned as cartographies of struggle. These spacial struggles, functioned as structural forms of power, a rubric and a criterion of normative expectations, that held the potential for the disruption of those same norms, illustrating the complex and dual function of heterotopias in shaping identity and power.

Furthermore, Icaza (2019) has rightly argued that the “underside of modernity constitutes an epistemic location from which reality is thought”. This is also observed by Morgensen (2010) who maintains that regulation of indigenous gender and sexuality is a project of colonialism has produced a settler sexuality. In other words, white national heteronormativity formed the pinnacle of sexual modernity.

The utopia of Afrikaner culture put forth ‘regimes of truth’ around racial, gender, sexual, and class hierarchies. These ‘truths’ became the technologies that governed Afrikaner identity and by extension, white hegemonic femininity (Foucault, 1977). Put differently, these norms dictated boundaries between blackness and whiteness, heterosexuality and queerness, masculinity, and femininity. These norms subjectified me as an agent of white Afrikaner patriarchal ideology in a disciplinary process which aligns with what Foucault (1977:138) describes as “entering a machinery of power” that shapes and controls the body. This resulted in my becoming a “docile body”, a subject who conforms to the expectations of this power structure. In my experience, no disciplinary apparatus proved more influential in fashioning ‘docile bodies’ and transmuting racialised and gendered doctrines than the church.

3.2.1.1 Church

My parents, both heavily influenced by American televangelists such as Kenneth Copeland, were ordained pastors of a neo-Pentecostal charismatic church. This meant that during my childhood and up until I left home, we were expected to attend church services multiple times during the week, and sometimes up to three times on Sundays. Despite the “happy clappy”¹ utopic nature of the church, beneath the veneer of jubilant expressions of faith, the church operated within a stringent system of control that relied on self-policing, and condemnation of what it deemed as fleshly desires². In this instance, the church leadership operated as what Foucault (1977:304) would describe as the “judge of normality”, in that beneath the guise of faith, systems of surveillance, judgement and condemnation regulated congregants’ actions based on internalised standards of piety. In other words, the church operated as a judge of

¹ “Happy Clappy” refers to the Evangelical nature of a church in which the congregation sings joyful songs and are permitted to clap and dance along should they choose to. It also refers to churches which practice *glossolalia* or “speaking in tongues” (in which a person might utter words and sounds with no known meaning) or being “slain by the spirit” (in which a person might fall to the ground or experience unrestricted body movements as a consequence of being touched by the “Holy Spirit”).

² What constitutes a “fleshly desire” is subjective to the person talking about it. It could be an aspiration toward wealth, sex, or envy.

deviance and a site of discipline, exercising biopower through moral governance regulating our devoutness, conformity, and redemption. Female congregants were disproportionately targeted, instilling, and reproducing heteronormative gender scripts that subordinated their roles and voices (Daly, 1993; Anderson, 1995). This assault on female autonomy and agency manifested through explicit exclusionary practices which barred women from holding clerical positions of power, a consequence of targeted and diffuse historical control of female sexuality.

O'Brien (1984) posits that controlling women's sexuality and reproductive labour has been a key aspect of male dominance throughout history and can be traced back to before the emergence of the Greek polis. Regardless of the historical tradition of patriarchal coercive control that predates religious practice, Christian theology privileged masculine perspectives and experiences as normative while rendering women secondary in the divine order. In support of this, Ruether (1982:58) argues that Christianity contains a "patriarchal symbolization of God" rooted in its doctrine that upholds structures of dominance that privilege masculinity.

In his exploration of sexuality, Foucault (2022) outlines how prominent theologians constructed marriage as a microcosm of Christ's relationship with the Church, mapping spiritual hierarchy onto gender relations. Here the husband emulates the saviour, commanding obedience as head of the union, while the wife enacts the Church, accepting his authoritarian direction; her flaws lovingly overlooked in the way Christ pardons sin. In exchange for his sacrifice in accepting her flawed being, wives are expected to replicate the Church's submissiveness, which positions husbands in a seat of divinely sanctioned power. This conceptualisation tethers marital obedience to ecclesiastic duty by yoking feminine submission to masculine authority, symbolically reconstituting the divine cosmic order within the home. As Foucault (2022:227) says, "The home is a little church". Through the lens of religious dogma, marital inequality was portrayed as a romantic fable, divinely joining spiritual

inequality to the physical realm, using gender and sexuality as channels for the diffusion of doctrine itself.

In our youth program, this narrative unfolded through sermons directed primarily at girls and young women, to prepare us for our roles as wives and, symbolically, as the ‘bride of Christ’. The underlying message being that virginity was our most sacrosanct possession, a prize to be conserved untouched for its future owners (the current overseer of our chastity being our fathers, or other male members of the family). We were to safeguard our virtue not for ourselves, but for the delights of future husbands and the Lord. Surrendering our ‘innocence’ was framed as wasting a ‘divine gift’. A common narrative device was likening female sexuality to chewed gum, which became worthless once used. In reality, purity was a commodity never our own. Beneath this supposed reverence for ‘unsullied’ feminine virtue lurked more sinister doctrines of ownership, suggesting that even our initial experiences of physical intimacy should rightfully belong to someone else. Though ostensibly spiritual guidance, these sermons amounted to a form of religious patriarchal indoctrination and policing of girls’ sexual agency from a very young age.

This attempted control of sexuality finds its roots in the theological narrative, where the sexual act is intricately linked to the first sin of Eve and Adam, procreation, and death (Foucault, 2022). He further argues that sexuality has intrinsic connections to fundamental aspects of human existence, deeply connected to procreation (as its purpose), mortality (as a reminder of human finiteness), and desire (the driving force that fuels the cycle of life and death) (Foucault, 2022). In other words, Christian teachings are rooted in the initial disobedience of Eve and Adam, and the consequences of that disobedience contribute to the control mechanisms imposed on female sexuality. The focus on procreation as both the end and the purpose of the sexual act reinforces the expectation for women to adhere to the role of childbearing within the confines of marital heterosexuality. Furthermore, the theological perspective introduced by

Foucault underscores that heterosexual sex, as an expression of desire for pleasure, distracts men from their contemplation of God. To guarantee that we understood the gravity of our celibacy, girls were encouraged to take a pledge of abstinence. Andersen (1995:93) describes it as follows:

The ‘purity pledge’ elevated girls and young women as moral guardians and put the responsibility for male morality at female feet as well. The price they pay is relinquishing control over their own sexuality by pledging to remain virgins.

Meanwhile, the boys and men in the congregation received distinctly different messaging: they saw versions of themselves reflected in God and biblical patriarchs and were taught to be ‘Godly men’ who wield moral and legal authority over the church, women, and children. Foucault (2022) suggests that it is man’s resemblance to God that God draws glory from. This likeness to God is portrayed as the foundation of masculinity, suggesting a profound tie between masculine identity and both moral and spiritual authority. Moreover, the cycle wherein women elevate men by following, imitating, and reproducing their ‘wisdom’ reinforces the belief in men’s divine authority (Foucault, 2022). Daly (1993:322) argues this doctrine establishes and perpetuates a “sexist ethics” that positions male superiority over women as the will of God, leaving no room in this masculine theological framing for female leadership, agency, or spiritual authority.

The consequence of this is that Christianity’s male-dominated ideology naturalises the subordination of girls and women, subjugating them within supporting roles in Christian worldviews and institutions despite their devotion and labour. Masculine dominance in the church, which is now framed as God-ordained, is naturalised in heterosexual relations, family structures and society at large. While appearing as divine truth, Christian doctrine actively reproduces gender inequalities and heteronormative roles that constrain female agency, identity, and embodiment (Andersen, 1995).

Just as masculinity is theologically positioned as the privileged image of God-ordained authority and leadership, whiteness is encoded as morally pure, virtuous, and a reflection of the image of God (Harvey, 2018). The supposed apolitical nature of our charismatic church ensured that whiteness would remain incognito. Harvey (2018:55) explains this:

Theology that shores up White innocence ... locating sin and evil outside of White communities. This insistent White innocence denies the power of dominant groups and seeks cover under the guise of color blindness or claims to be apolitical.

In other words, within our white-majority, theologically conservative church, whiteness remained unexamined, parading as the privileged racial identity embodying moral virtue, intellect, and favoured spiritual status. White cultural norms and embodiment were spiritually justified and centred as a reflection of God's design, while blackness was marginalised if not openly denigrated. Eurocentric depictions of Jesus as a white, blue-eyed man, reinforced this divine coding of whiteness. Just as patriarchy is repackaged as God's plan for gender, the blessings of whiteness compared to black deficiency was accepted as consequence of the divine order, rather than a racially unjust system enforced through political power.

Church leaders incentivised young and old church members to fund or embark on missionary trips into other African countries to further 'the spread of the Truth', aligning with what Mothogae referred to as the civilising mission of colonialism and Christianisation (Mothogae, 2022). These missionary efforts depicted African people, and by extension black South Africans, as intellectually inferior and morally bereft. As described by Mothogae (2022), the epistemic racism in biblical discourse justified colonial domination through the othering and denigration of black people. Consequently, the insidious ideologies underscoring these missionary efforts found troubling echoes within the very walls of our supposedly apolitical home, shaping our understanding of race and morality.

3.2.1.2 Home

Our family home, reflecting an enclave of Afrikaner neo-nationalism, mirrored the racial inequality and segregation prevailing in the greater South African landscape. As noted by Van der Westhuizen (2017:20), the heart of the enclave is the home, particularly one adhering to an ethnoracial and heteronormative domesticity. The concept of Afrikaner respectability, described by Van der Westhuizen (2017:45) as a “good white” mentality, was perpetuated in our home through the illusion of being apolitical and colour-blind regarding racial issues.

Yet this perspective fails to contend with what Yancy (2004:125) describes as the “embodied set of practices fuelled by a reactive value-creating power” that constitutes whiteness, or as Sullivan (2006:34) describes it, as an “unconscious racism of white privilege”. Our belief in our colour-blindness was itself an insidious lie masking systematic beliefs in white superiority and black inferiority that afforded us unearned privilege. In our home, as in many Afrikaner homes, we were living what Baldwin (1998:177) referred to as “the lie of whiteness”.

My family benefited from this value system that inspired notions of white respectability, morality and superior intellect while propagating destructive myths regarding the alleged inferiority of black South Africans across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Our ability to live comfortably within the “lie of whiteness”, pretending such racist myths did not influence our worldview, depended on collective commitment in upholding fictions regarding white enlightenment versus black deficiency. We affirmed our status as “good whites” by absorbing, without question, the pervasive socio-cultural messaging that encoded white superiority relative to other racialised groups. The racist myths of white virtue manifested daily through the dehumanising treatment of black workers in our home, reflecting the dulling of moral character necessary to maintain notions of racial superiority that Baldwin (1998) describes and illustrated the mechanism of biopower at play. As Foucault (1978) argues,

biopower involves the regulation and management of populations, often through practices that seek to control bodies and identities based on race.

The black employees who worked in our home and garden were expected to live in small, cold rooms, devoid of most comforts and hidden away from view; they were not allowed to have family or visitors and went for long stretches of time without seeing their loved ones; they were expected to work long hours with little pay, and the list goes on. The sharp contrast between their personal lives and ours, the ‘normal’ everyday way of things was never brought into question. The stark disparities in living conditions and treatment between ourselves and the black employees in our home exemplify the operation of governmentality, the ways in which norms and structures shape individual behaviour and perceptions. This unequal distribution of power and privilege reinforces the lie of whiteness, or the ideological construct of whiteness, perpetuating itself through both overt and covert deprecation and dehumanisation of black lives.

Foucault’s (1978) notion of biopower illuminates how racism became ingrained in everyday practices and perceptions through power relations that regulated different groups within the population into a hierarchical, racist system. The false promise of racial supremacy acted as a technology of governance – one that perpetuated harm not only through material marginalisation and violence, but also through an insidious corrosion of moral character itself. Internalising notions of racial superiority required me/us/Afrikaners to disconnect from fundamental human virtues of compassion, dignity, and equality. The lie of whiteness necessitated the slow dulling of our morality and paralysis of human empathy to persist (Baldwin, 1998).

Just as racial hierarchies were reinforced in our home life, so too were restrictive conventions about gender. To borrow a concept from the previous section, our home really functioned as

“a little church” (Foucault, 2022:260). The principles outlined by Foucault (2022) regarding the hierarchical structure and gendered division of roles within marriage find a striking resonance in the lived experiences within my family. My mother worked tirelessly at two jobs and bore the brunt of domestic and emotional labour at home. Meanwhile, my father asserted an untouchable sense of spiritual authority as patriarch, demanding we rally around his lofty pastoral aspirations that never led to a concrete career or consistent financial security. This dynamic was not merely a personal choice but was framed as a divine calling, compelling us not only to accommodate his dreams but also to revere them, despite the toll extracted from us all. Questioning was taboo – this was “God’s work” after all.

In line with Foucault’s (2022) analysis of power within the home and marriage system, my father’s role as the dominant patriarch manifested in his authoritarian behaviour and prioritisation of personal ambitions, a manifestation of the Christian doctrine that places man in a superior status with the right to command. Meanwhile, my mother embodied traditional feminine duties of domestic labour, childrearing, and supportive sacrifice, fitting the prescribed role of the submissive, respectable wife. Their repeated actions, as described by Butler (1988) in the context of gender as a performance, normalised, ritualised and essentialised the gender binary rooted in female submission and male domination.

Despite the grandiosity of my father’s Sunday sermons about faith, blessings and provision, the reality at home diverged significantly. His volatility and unpredictable mood swings violated the peace, fostering an atmosphere of fear that contradicted the ideals he preached. This incongruity starkly illustrates the frailty of the masculine construct and its reliance on violence, female submission, and validation to retain power. It also illustrates the performative nature of gender within the family, where the behaviour of the dominant patriarch and the submissive spouse perpetuate sociocultural expectations of gendered norms (Butler, 1988). This particular performance of Afrikaner masculinity and its regulation of Afrikaner

womanhood is discussed in depth in Chapter 4 where I examine the nature of the Afrikaner identity and the *volksmoeder* ideal. The heteronormative technologies of power in my family home mirrored the principles embedded in Christian doctrine, contributing to the reiteration and reinforcement of a gender binary that places men in positions of authority and women in roles of submission. Just as patriarchal family structures and religious ideology advanced the limitation of femininity, media discourses, as a technology of power, played an integral part in reproducing and reiterating the gender and racial binary system.

3.2.1.3 Media

As my research centres around the representation of respectable Afrikaner femininity in media, I deem it necessary to discuss the media influences that informed my ideas and beliefs about race, class, and femininity. As Foucault's (1978) analysis of diffuse social control contends, the very ubiquity of normalised tropes exerts a biopower that trains subjects into self-regulation in alignment with normative standards. Media governs the field of imagination through narratives that mirror a utopian version of social realities. My formative years were mostly influenced by American media versions of femininity represented to me as the aspirational ideal. Van der Westhuizen (2017) speaks of Afrikaner feminine identity being in a state of aspiration towards globalised Anglo hetero-feminine whiteness. Ceding cultural and intrapersonal space to English whiteness by fashioning one's behaviour and identity to it, meant moving closer to embodying respectability, intellect, and refinement. Locally produced shows such as *Egoli*, *7de Laan* and *Noot vir Noot* were watched alongside American shows such as *Days of Our Lives*, *Who's The Boss* and *Knight Rider*. These shows centred around male storylines, often stereotyping women within limited roles that sexually objectified them.

We watched these shows as a family, which to my mind, meant an implicit approval of the representations in them. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, popular media functions as a technology of gender, a conduit for narratives that coalesce into cultural 'truths' through sheer

repetition leading them to be seen as intrinsic common sense rather than constructs serving the dominant power structure. Again, leaning on Foucault's (1972) notion of truths and the diffusion of ideology, Dines and Humez (2011:2) articulate that, "Popular culture produces the narratives, symbols, images and representations that provide the glue that binds a society together". This metaphor also parallels Foucault's (1979) notion of governmentality, which is the coordinated conditioning that makes dominant ideologies feel intrinsically true and proper. Foucault (1978) argues that the genius of biopower lies in its outsourcing discipline on to the subjects themselves as they internalise and invest in their own subjectification. In other words, governmentality through biopower shuns overt domination in favour of encouraging subjects to position and self-regulate as ideal subjects within the framework of social norms and values. As an example of this, postfeminist media in particular projects female empowerment and choice, while obscuring and preserving patriarchal interests that function behind the scenes. Much like the panoptic gaze, these discourses permeate domestic spaces as 'common sense' norms, and so patriarchal principles come to feel like natural truths. Therefore, media serves governmentality by stimulating the desire to conform with ideals that perpetuate existing distributions of privilege tied to gender, race, and class.

As a result, my understanding of Afrikaner femininity was influenced by both traditional ethnic archetypes of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* and aspirational global gender norms disseminated through Westernised English media. My adolescent and adult gender identity thus comprised a hybrid of Afrikaner respectability and imported neo-liberal femininity. Though distinct cultural manifestations, both frameworks cooperated in inscribing the norms of hegemonic femininity through divergent, yet congruent, means.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Examining my social and epistemic locations within the context of religion, home, and media reveals the pervasive influence of hetero-patriarchal structures, shaping every facet of my

identity. These spaces, akin to Foucault's panopticon, were governed by rigid and divinely sanctioned control mechanisms, dictating strict gender roles that reinforced white male dominance and undermined female agency. This collective influence underscores the entrenchment of patriarchal ideologies within individual subjectivities and broader social structures. To comprehend the forces that shaped me within a broader cultural and historical context, unpacking the history and ideological rise of Afrikaners assumes central importance.

Thus, in Chapter 4 I contextualise the Afrikaner identity, which includes a short historical overview of its nationalist and religious roots, followed by a discussion of the subjectification of Afrikaner women and the development of the most revered form of respectable Afrikaner feminine identity, the *volksmoeder*. In my exploration of respectable Afrikaner womanhood, I elaborate on the elements that constitute hegemonic femininity, such as the beauty ideal, whiteness, middle-classness, compulsory heterosexuality, and motherhood, and their crossover with the *volksmoeder* ideal. I also demonstrate how media functions as a technology of gaze over white Afrikaner women, race relations and the maintenance of whiteness with a discussion of the characteristics of hegemonic femininity as represented in postfeminist mainstream cinema, which are aligned with the elements of the *volksmoeder* ideal, such as subordination, maternalism, and objectification.

CHAPTER 4: THE PILLARS OF AFRIKANER IDENTITY: MASCULINITY, COMMON-SENSE WISDOM, AND CLAIMS TO POWER

“What it is to be human is to be caught in complex systems of power that produce all sorts of injustice. Our shared humanity emerges not in spite of these differences but through engaging with them.” Martha Nussbaum (1992)

4.1 INTRODUCTION: CLAIM TO POWER AND THE CONSTRUCT OF AFRIKANER IDENTITY

An Afrikaner origin narrative that emerged after the South African War from 1898 to 1902, portrayed them as a people favoured by God, chosen for a specific purpose, and empowered by the adversity they endured (Teppo, 2015). This narrative was continually enforced to cultivate a distinct Afrikaner identity tied to language, Christian faith, and customs, which were regarded as sacred. Threats to this identity, such as racial integration, were seen as a malevolent evil (Giliomee, 2003). As a result, Afrikaners developed a nationalist ideology, reinforced by religious beliefs, that opposed British imperialism and the egalitarian liberal values of capitalism. This functioned as a civil religion that unified Afrikaners around shared myths of origin, adversities overcome, and a divine ethnic purpose (Moodie, 1975).

The 1934 centenary commemoration of the *Groot Trek*³, the ceremonial spectacle intended to project authority and unite a diverse people under the banner of ‘Afrikaner’ that culminated in a cultural celebration at the Voortrekker Monument, is a prime example of what Cohen (1987) refers to as the “Theatre of Power” and Geertz (1973) argues is a cultural symbol system that gives meaning to social forms of power. Cohen (1987) argues that power relies as much on

³ The Groot Trek references the migration of Dutch-speaking settlers who travelled by wagon from the Cape colonies north into the interior of South Africa. Their journeys are mythologised as a testament to the inherent bravery, ruggedness, and resoluteness of the Afrikaner nation as a whole.

cultural authority and recognition as on coercion and that leaders perform cultural scenarios to project legitimate power to followers.

In the context of the *trek*, ceremonies and rituals played a crucial role in dramatising the moral propriety and honour associated with those in positions of power. This theatrical display not only served to emphasise the virtue of authority figures but also cultivated a sense of group solidarity and loyalty to the established social order. Spectacles provide leaders with a symbolic platform that legitimises their connection to a divine force (Cohen, 1987). The influence of architectural spaces should not be underestimated in projecting hierarchies and authority relations either. A striking example is found in the Voortrekker Monument, whose imposing granite architecture serves as a spatial emblem of Afrikaner might.

In addition to verbal expressions, various elements of the *trek* celebration, such as music, costumes, and collective song-and-dance contributed to the reinforcement of familial and community bonds. This carefully orchestrated re-enactment not only strengthened organisational alliances, but also served to revive Afrikaner nationalism. Symbolically, performing mythical history becomes a powerful tool in displaying moral propriety, projecting not just power, but a sense of legitimate and venerable authority.

Cohen (1987:107) believed that,

Through dramatic projection, an aura of factuality comes to envelop the meanings carried in the symbols of power which the audience observes. As a result, belief is bolted on to the observable, present fact of performance itself ... Theatrical display tends to be couched by organisers and observers alike in a rhetoric of actuality.

In essence, the meticulously choreographed Voortrekker celebration, through force of cultivated theatre and symbolic history re-telling, strengthened both allegiances between Afrikaner organisations and resuscitated convictions in the veracity and moral propriety of the

volk's nationalist mythology. At the heart of this Afrikaner theatre lay religious myths of a chosen divine duty to rule and a divinely sanctioned claim to power.

Afrikaners cast themselves as modern Abrahamic inheritors, the *trek* reenacting Exodus as God's selected tribe ordained to settle the promised land (Setiloane, 1986). They embraced a figural identity as "Bible-carrying 'Israelites' led by secular-political 'Moses' and 'Joshuas'... using biblical notions of being a chosen people to interpret and justify their own position and calling" (Setiloane, 1986:36). Du Toit (1983) supports this interpretation, claiming the Bible was a key building block of this emerging identity, used as an interpretative framework to present Afrikaners as a divinely chosen nation tasked to bring order and civilisation to South Africa. In fact, it was argued that separate development for races was necessary, because the white group had already progressed much further than others in 'civilisation', and that the other groups, left to themselves, would never be able to achieve such progress (Setiloane, 1986).

Davies (2009:31) argues that the Dutch Reformed Church "was the Afrikaner church par excellence, and its theology and practice were central to the development of Afrikaner nationalism". In the analysis of the religious narratives undergirding colonial racism and systems of control, Fanon (1961) critiques the Church's role in colonies as an extension of white supremacy, promoting the oppressor's values instead of spiritual liberation, suggesting that even salvation is denied to colonised native peoples. In other words, in the colonial context, Christianity was used to assimilate oppressed groups to the coloniser's beliefs and social order, rather than to liberate them. Furthermore, the religious rhetoric about being 'called to serve' and 'saved' masked systems of control (Fanon, 1961). In this sense, biblical metaphors of spiritual authority were intertwined with racial and political hierarchies, creating the ideal of the righteous white Christian patriarchal family, which mirrored the larger systems of separate racial groups in their designated homelands (Du Toit, 2003).

This links back to Wynter (2003), Mignolo (2007a) and Ruether's (1982) argument that Christianity embodies a patriarchal symbolisation of God rooted in its doctrine that upholds the structures of dominance privileging white masculinity. The Afrikaner lie of whiteness found continuity in the religious myths used to justify apartheid rule (Baldwin, 1998). By framing apartheid within a scriptural rationale as a civilising mission, its architects could disguise oppression as a form of protection. In essence, religious, and racial mythmaking collaborated to strengthen and legitimise domination.

The once official but now renovated Afrikaans anthem *Die Stem* (Lebaka, 2018) serves as a powerful discursive technology that reinforces the Afrikaner claim to power, connecting notions of divine authority, a sacred bond with the land, and the myth of the Afrikaner nation. The lyrics construct a utopian vision of South Africa belonging to the white Afrikaner, positioning them as the rightful custodians of the land.

The opening stanza evokes a sense of divine presence and providence, with references to the 'blue heavens' and 'deep seas' symbolising the divine blessings bestowed upon the land. Throughout the anthem, the Afrikaner's commitment to South Africa is portrayed as unwavering and unyielding. Lines such as 'At thy call we shall not falter' and 'Firm and steadfast we shall stand' underscore the Afrikaner's readiness to defend and preserve their beloved land at any cost. Moreover, the anthem celebrates the Afrikaner's resilience and endurance in the face of adversity, symbolised by references to the changing seasons and life's various challenges. Whether in times of joy or sorrow, the Afrikaner remains steadfast in their love and dedication to South Africa. Central to the anthem's narrative is the Afrikaner's trust in divine providence and guidance. References to God's power and the reliance on His protection reflect the deeply entrenched religious beliefs that underpin Afrikaner identity and justify their claim to authority over the land and its inhabitants. Overall, *Die Stem* operated as

a potent tool of ideological indoctrination, reinforcing the myth of Afrikaner supremacy and divine (male) entitlement.

According to Van der Westhuizen (2017) when apartheid ended, Afrikaners lost their claim to respectability, carrying shame for the atrocities conducted in their name. Yet the enduring resonance of cultural symbols such as *Die Stem* illustrate how Afrikaner identity remains beholden to powerful myths of divinity and white (male) supremacy that persist in shaping this identity. As Van der Westhuizen argues (2017), Afrikaner women bear the burden of realigning the Afrikaner identity with respectability. While the everyday religious practices of Afrikaners and their conceptions of moral, decent behaviour may shift with their locales, ultimately, they continue to uphold systems of white, male dominance (Teppo, 2015).

4.2 THE PILLARS OF AFRIKANER IDENTITY: MASCULINITY, COMMON-SENSE WISDOM, AND CLAIMS TO POWER

Applying Foucault's analytic toolkit for excavating diffuse operations of power and knowledge reveals the Afrikaner identity as a construct built on interlocking mythologies that underpin notions of racial and gender hierarchy that led to the system of apartheid. These discursive norms operate as truth regimes moulding subjects to internalise both superiority over racial others and gendered divisions of status and authority that preserve white male privilege. Masculinity, as one embodiment of such mythologies linked to adversity/exceptionalism narratives, operates as a key pillar requiring excavation (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Shefer and Ratele (2013:19) argued that a core principle of apartheid was to secure white masculine dominance through pervasive control of every aspect of life in South Africa. Speaking on the importance of unpacking Afrikaner manhood and its role in the subjectification of Afrikaner women, Van der Westhuizen (2017:151) contends that,

Masculinity is of interest because post-apartheid identity work reveals it to be indispensable to *ordentlikheid*. It would seem the symbolic

investment is such that the achievement of *ordentlikheid* hinges on the restoration of white Afrikaans manhood.

Thus, examining Afrikaner masculinity within a historical framework is crucial to comprehend modernised *volksmoeder* ideals. The post-apartheid efforts to revitalise this specific masculinity underscores its profound influence in shaping the identities of those identified as Afrikaners (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

Morrell (2001) argues that hegemonic masculinity does not depend solely on physical strength for its effectiveness: rather, it employs various mechanisms to establish a gender consensus that validates men's power. These mechanisms, or even technologies, exert power via coordinated influences of institutions, policies, rituals, and cultural heritage that become unquestioned knowledge, shaping subject aspirations and behaviours. In other words, Afrikaners have been governmentally conditioned towards self-regulation in alignment with these values exerted through these mechanisms. The following discussion illustrates how diffuse yet coordinated exercises of biopower shaped the Afrikaner population through three primary forces: Afrikaner heteromascularity, '*verstand*'⁴ or common-sense patriarchal wisdom, and claims to power through divine right and racial destiny.

Before I begin this discussion, I must clarify that Afrikaners have never lived an isolated life from other groups or ethnicities. As Teppo (2015) asserts that relationships between groups were multifaceted and interdependent. The Afrikaner moral compass was not created in isolation; it drew from ideas circulating among other local groups, adapted to fit their own perspectives. Furthermore, the concept of *ordentlikheid* has held historical purchase within diverse ethnicities and religious ideologies (Ross, 2015). Teppo (2015:315) also argues that the

⁴ Meaning common-sense.

boundaries of a social groups morality is often made visible through its religious and spiritual practices, which established and reinforced cultural norms and expectations.

Thus, examining the formative influence of race, masculinity, *verstand*, the concept of divine right, and the belief in racial destiny within the Afrikaner identity, provides a lucid understanding of the ideological framework that allowed systems of inequality and segregation to flourish. Paying attention to marginalised perspectives uncovers cracks within prevailing narratives, illustrating that Afrikaner identity is fragmented along lines of gender, class, and region, despite notions of a mythical unity.

4.2.1. Masculinity

In *Female Masculinities and the Gender Wars*, Mackay (2021) explores the association between masculinity and power. According to Mackay (2021), social norms often equate masculinity with traits such as power, control, and dominance, perpetuating a hierarchical structure where certain forms of masculinity are privileged. In other words, qualities coded as ‘masculine’ become tethered to authority within patriarchal systems that subjugate feminine agency. Furthermore, idealised narratives of masculinity uphold patriarchal systems of oppression across race, ethnicity, and class. As Van der Westhuizen (2017:150) contends, consolidation of Afrikaner masculinity has adhered to similar principles of idealised nationalist manhood and that Afrikaner masculinity as the ‘superior’ co-construction of the *volksmoeder* ideal is “a masculinity hooked into a signifying chain with father, protector, God, adviser, leader and ‘the one who knows’”.

By connecting masculine virtues to a symbolic chain of ‘father, protector, God’, a narrow set of qualities associated with dominance is established, securing political and social power and control while also defining leadership roles within Afrikaner society (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). This gender schema, which positions white men as superior, serves as a sociocultural

mechanism that supported apartheid governance and justified paternalism over the regulation of Afrikaner women. These narratives of ideal Afrikaner masculinity are further reinforced through a kind of pervasive gaze; embedded cues across social institutions that compel performances aligning with masculine tropes fused to leadership and power. As with the panopticon discussed earlier in Chapters 2 and 3, ensuring compliance relies less on overt shows of strength than implicit internal expectations. The rhetorical linkage of qualities such as ‘protector’ and ‘the one who knows’ to divine descriptors makes alternative embodiments appear almost nonsensical.

As much as the *volksmoeder* archetype compels and governs subjects to regulate feminine conduct from within, men too, navigate signals demanding enactments of authoritarian Afrikaner masculinity at church, home, or in political circles. Put differently, as cultural, historical, and religious cues coalesce around a single masculine-coded notion of power, these narrow boundaries become the standard, serving as the definitive benchmark for leadership, thereby rejecting diversity. Consequently, the pervasive gaze solidifies ideology into identity.

In this examination of Afrikaner masculinity, it is imperative to take cognisance of the link between Afrikaner masculinity and nationalism. Smith (1991:21) and Adele Jinadu (2002:4) identify six attributes shared by proponents of a nationalist ideology, such as Afrikaners: “a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific ‘homeland’, and a sense of solidarity”. Symbolically, ‘Man’ plays a pivotal role as the primary anchor for Afrikaner identity, which explains the extensive efforts undertaken to bolster this masculine identity after its fall from apartheid ‘grace’ (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:150). According to Nagel (1998) masculinity remains an integral characteristic of nationalism with nationalist politics defining masculinity by providing men with a blueprint of pre-defined roles, all within a system built by, and centred around men (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

The belief that Afrikaner nationalism was a natural outgrowth of struggle, remains a key aspect of a romanticised nationalistic world-view (Dubow, 1992). The nationalist Afrikaner identity was characterised with attributes such as determination, endurance, ruggedness, and forcefulness (Grundlingh, 1996:187). As Swart (1998:737) maintains (through analysis of the 1914 anti-British rebellion), marksmanship and military bearing remained enduring markers of republican manliness, framing “the upstanding patriarch as stalwart protector”.

Such narratives linking masculine identity with comprehensive authority, enshrined men as rightful commanders who wield power over women, industry, black and brown people, and any domain of their expanding empire. This myth established Afrikaner patriarchy as the ordained central command, bridging domestic life and national governance through a continuum of control (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Grundlingh (2020) argues that Afrikaner men saw themselves as the heads of nuclear households where they would rule over wives, children, and servants of colour in a microcosm of the wider social and racial order. Van der Westhuizen’s (2017:152) assertion that the “patriarchal family” was the social cornerstone of the Afrikaner nation underscores this.

Such patriarchy in the home modelled in microcosm the hierarchies of separation and subordination that apartheid would eventually systemise nationwide. Botha (2012) asserts that the ability of the Afrikaner patriarch to maintain his dominance as head of the family is seen as analogous to the perceived capacity of the apartheid state, with the nationalist government as its guiding light, to master those situated lower down in the racial hierarchy. The arrangement of control matrices, which categorise populations based on exploitation and obedience, reflects Foucault’s (1978) concept of biopower: the administration and governance of life processes according to schemas that determine which lives should be fostered, and which require containment, for the overall health of the social body.

Koenig-Visagie (2022:23) maintains that post-apartheid Afrikaner masculinity is being “reworked in contemporary times”. In the absence of mandatory military service, Afrikaner men and boys join “private military camps” and participate in activities such as “hunting”, to promote a culture of toughness and connect Afrikaner masculinity to “physical activity, adventurism and heroism” (Koenig-Visagie, 2022:23). Nationalism and the “fiction of the nation state” often employ the myth of the heroic man, who relies on his cunning and strength to succeed (Koenig-Visagie, 2022:7). In other words, with Afrikaner men no longer seeing themselves reflected in the halls of political and governmental power, the construction of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity now operates through peripheral quests to reconnect to legacies of strength, endurance, and self-reliance. Although Afrikaner male political power has all but dissipated, the technologies of gender that demand conformity to the codes of respectability, duty and obedience remain largely unchanged. Sonnekus (2013) sees the persistence of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity as driven by two factors: a nostalgia for past benefits of being a ‘white Afrikaner man’ and anxieties about racial and sexual ‘outsiders’. Consequently, the burden of upholding Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity has been disproportionately outsourced to Afrikaner women, with the aim to revive the image of the perfect Afrikaner man, mirroring the aspirations of the original Afrikaner nationalists (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

In a study of Afrikaner masculinity through a female Afrikaner gaze, Van der Westhuizen (2017:160) articulates four discourses of Afrikaner masculinity: the ‘noble patriarch’, ‘consuming Afrikaner’, ‘victim of democracy’, and ‘messiah’. The hegemonic ‘noble patriarch’ discourse positions men as knowing authorities who possess ‘the truth’, operating within a rigid framework of masculinity upheld by disciplinary technologies like theology, education, and biomedicine, in a process which perpetuates itself by demanding silence from others across hierarchies of age and gender (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:160). This knowing

also includes two disciplinary micro-powers: one that enshrines sexual licence for men as a counterpart “to the regime of sexual ignorance and lack of sexual agency for women” and another that relies on covert and overt violence and abuse, which is utilised as an “intra-family and intergenerational method of correction” (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:161,165).

The ‘consuming Afrikaner’ discourse relates to the gendered pursuit of “leisure through consumption, buoyed by the accelerated shift towards materialism” (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:166). White, middle-class Afrikaner women’s bodies are subjectified as tokens of hegemonic Afrikaner male success. In other words, white middle-class Afrikaner women are expected to maintain a particular lifestyle as a reflection of their husband’s status position within Afrikaner patriarchy through the employment of black women’s labour and wearing, buying, and consuming signifiers of middle-class wealth such as jewellery, cars, and vacations. These activities further entrench gendered and class divisions.

The ‘victim of democracy’ discourse stages the Afrikaner man as a “victim of democracy, humiliated, and broken” due to the loss of his political power (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:168). This discourse serves to mobilise and resuscitate Afrikaner *ordentlikheid* by reinstating Afrikaner men as blameless patriarchs, framing apartheid transgressions as ‘exaggerated’ and relying on ‘colonial equivalences’ that position whiteness as order and blackness as disorder (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:169). Van der Westhuizen (2017:170) argues that,

Dominant men tend to hold onto their position by claiming injury to *all* men, papering over inter-male differences and thus appealing to white male solidarity to reassert patriarchal authority and whiteness.

This reinforcement of white supremacy not only strains the binary Afrikaner gender power system but also claims that all Afrikaans men suffer under equality, which in turn, justifies the continued subjugation of Afrikaner women, effectively using them to rehabilitate a threatened

masculine identity. Thus, the deterioration of white Afrikaner male entitlement pushes back and against the empowerment and agency of Afrikaner and racialised women and others.

The final discourse, the ‘messiah’, emerges to conflate Afrikaner masculinity with godliness. In a post-apartheid renovation and a show of appropriation, Van der Westhuizen (2017:173) argues that “hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity is articulated with Madiba (Nelson Mandela) due to his ‘messianic status’ for his stance on reconciliation”. Masculinity as the divine order is examined more closely below as I argue it is one of three primary elements that constitute Afrikaner patriarchal masculinity. While the narratives of masculine virtue remain contested, the veneration of Afrikaner *verstand* or patriarchal ‘wisdom’ encoded as common sense continues to buttress Afrikaner identity.

4.2.2 Afrikaner *Verstand*/Common-Sense

Epistemic privilege plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing traditional notions of masculinity (Connell et al., 2005). Within the context of gender studies, epistemic privilege refers to the power and authority granted to certain knowledge systems and perspectives over others. In the study of men and masculinities, this concept manifests in the elevation of dominant, often Western, perspectives on masculinity as the norm or standard by which all other expressions of gender are judged. This privileging of specific forms of knowledge and experiences can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and inequalities, as it marginalises alternative masculinities that do not conform to the dominant narrative. Connell et al. (2005:4) maintain that,

On the one hand, the epistemic privilege of men is a key element in the reproduction of gender inequality. Men’s knowledge is taken to be universal, while women’s knowledge is seen as particular, limited, and subjective. This is a crucial aspect of the social construction of masculinity and femininity.

The veneration of Afrikaner *verstand* as common-sense wisdom rests upon and perpetuates epistemic privilege. This mythologised wisdom intertwines with constructions of masculinity and claims to divine authority in shaping Afrikaner identity. Dubow (1992:18) notes that Nationalists argued that ‘scientifically’ proven “innate and indisputable” biological disparities between white and black people was basis for their intellectual superiority. Thus, the notion of innate practical intelligence conferred both moral legitimacy and political authority onto exponents of Afrikaner nationalism. Fused with religious doctrine or “scriptural authority”, this concept validated a colonial patriarchal hierarchy ordained to govern justly over racial and gendered subordinates for their own good (Dubow, 1992:10).

Matias and Aldern (2020:330) argue that “whiteness, and thus white supremacy, is inextricably bound into that white sense making” and that “whiteness, as a racially hegemonic ideology, acts as if white racial domination is the normal, natural order of the world, as if it is common sense”. Apartheid leaders adopted a ‘common sense’ strategy to garner support from ordinary people, lending more credibility to populist ideas while criticising the viewpoints of the elite.

Furthermore, Afrikaner *verstand* is fundamentally tied to the nostalgic veneration of land, crystallised in the prevalent and enduring ‘*sout van die aarde*’ trope, a core self-belief of the Afrikaner identity reflecting a perspective on common sense and wisdom rooted in a nostalgic, mostly imagined connection to the land (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:5). Seidman (1999) notes that Afrikaner nationalists represented themselves as rooted in South African soil, with black Africans portrayed as temporary sojourners. This trope translates to ‘salt of the earth’ and has its origins in the New Testament, specifically in the Gospel of Matthew 5:13. The metaphor forms part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus emphasises the importance of the disciples to the world using the metaphor of salt.

The trope functions as a catch-all phrase that emphasises ethnic respectability or *ordentlikheid*, embodied in the values of hard work, family, and a strong connection to nature (Van der

Westhuizen, 2017). Furthermore, it portrays a sense of groundedness, resilience, and authenticity that persist in the collective consciousness of Afrikaners, but also in the media representations of them (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Fundamentally, the trope conceals the racial, class and gendered divisions embedded in the Afrikaner identity and its weaponisation of religious epistemology.

Building on the discussion of epistemic privilege and its role in shaping traditional notions of Afrikaner masculinity, the concept of divine authority becomes an essential element to this identity construction. Van der Westhuizen (2017:157) argues that Afrikaner masculinity holds a ‘divine charge’, modelled on Puritanical beliefs that ascribed God-like authority on men, especially within family structures. As Foucault (1980) observed, the effects of power often disguise the conditions enabling their transmission across social domains. Thus, religious language, symbolism and doctrine were steadily integrated into the apartheid state apparatus, not only sanctifying a masculine hierarchy, but simultaneously erecting barriers against intersectional ways of being that might compromise the status quo. When theology endorses prejudice without scrutiny, discrimination becomes an act of virtue, shielding its real-world effects behind an unimpeachable spiritual imperative that renders justice improbable and a challenge to the divine will of God. Teppo (2018:1) argues that although religious institutions such as the Dutch Reformed Church have lessened some control over members recently, conceptions about “lyne van *ordentlikheid*”⁵ are still there, though their boundaries may differ, they clearly demarcate ‘in-groups’ from ‘out-groups’ based on specific moral codes.

The notion of ‘whiteness as godliness’ was not extended to Afrikaner women. Instead, it was used to justify their subordination and position them as instruments fulfilling a sacred obligation in service of the *volk*. Below, I explore the *volksmoeder*⁶: a nationalist construct that

⁵ Rules that govern respectability.

⁶ The mother of the nation.

confined respectable Afrikaner womanhood within ideals of white, middle-class conformity and unwavering subservience to divine and familial patriarchal power.

4.3 NAVIGATING *ORDENTLIKHEID* AND THE LEGACY OF THE *VOLKSMOEDER* IDEAL

Respectability standards manifest uniquely across diverse communities, yet they uniformly place an expectation on all community members to adhere to particular behaviours. In this specific case, *ordentlikheid* (Afrikaner ethnic respectability) is bound to factors such as race and class, the thresholds of which are elevated and hard to attain (Teppo, 2015:316). The Afrikaner nationalist construction of ideal femininity as the *volksmoeder* ideal has had a profound and enduring impact on white, Afrikaans-speaking women. As Butler (1988) contends, gender operates as the effect of ritualised repetitive acts that construct the illusion of stable identity categories, which in turn regulate how society perceives masculinity and femininity. Technologies of gender such as the *volksmoeder* ideal operate by referencing discourse, imposing a particular framework to create cohesive subject identities. The *volksmoeder* ideal, which signifies the most revered form of *ordentlikheid*, is a patriarchal, prescriptive, strict set of cultural norms for performing normative, respectable white Afrikaner womanhood⁷. Historically, it functioned not only as a mechanism for controlling women's behaviour, maintaining Afrikaner hegemony, authority, and racial supremacy, but also as an aspiration toward English whiteness (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Beyond formal policies, *ordentlikheid* manifested through diffuse yet coordinated sociocultural cues that induced self-regulation: a kind of internalised surveillance that compelled conformity. An implicit realm of visibility was established, reinforced through a repertoire of gestures, speech, embodiment, and

⁷ "Heterosexual" is not mentioned here specifically as it is implied by its embeddedness in hegemonic femininity. By default, lesbian, queer, and trans Afrikaner woman are excluded from the *volksmoeder* ideal.

behaviours disseminated through various institutions, ranging from the church to parliament to the home.

Afrikaner women were subjectified and conscripted into the role of the *volksmoeder* in the late 19th and early 20th century. With rapid social change due to industrialisation, war, and Victorian influences, Afrikaner leaders promoted traditional gender roles as necessary for cultural preservation, and moral and racial purity (McClintock, 1993). The *volksmoeder* represented the ideal version of Afrikaner feminine respectability. Her duty was to serve the nation (and its political aspirations) without complaint, by producing white children, caring for the household and her husband, and upholding white, middle-class Afrikaner religious values (McClintock, 1993). The 1948 victory of the Afrikaner National Party further entrenched *ordentlikheid*, as moral legitimacy justified racial domination (Gaitskell & Unterhalter, 1989). Apartheid-era Afrikaner households constituted locales where beliefs about race, class and gender were produced to serve the interest of the white Afrikaner community. As McClintock (1993) argues, white Afrikaner womanhood is a significant component to white supremacy, which leverages the power of motherhood to justify and enforce white domination.

The Afrikaans word *ordentlikheid* loosely translates to respectability, propriety, and decency, but has deeper connotations of orderliness, cleanliness, and purity (McClintock, 1993). It encodes patriarchal assumptions that female bodies and sexuality are predisposed to disorder, promiscuity, and excess. This is further substrated within a religious-informed misogyny that frames femaleness and sexuality as sites of potential moral corruption that are to be controlled and limited to reproduction to avoid chaos and pollution (Gaitskell & Unterhalter, 1989). Simonstein (2022:2) argues that the “regulation of the womb throughout history has been a tool of power and control, shaping societal norms and influencing individual autonomy in matters of reproduction”. According to Baxter and Satz (2017), within Western societies, motherhood operates as an institution controlled by patriarchal systems that perpetuate female oppression.

Controlling Afrikaner female reproduction was essential in maintaining the fantasy of a unified *volk* and continuing the subjugation of woman and racialised others under the apartheid system.

4.3.1 Divine Patriarchal Control and Restriction

To further elaborate on the mechanisms of patriarchal control within Afrikaner society, it is essential to consider the Foucault's (1972) notions of governmentality and biopower I elaborated on in Chapter 2. For the agenda of the Afrikaner nationalist project to succeed in consolidating power and bringing Afrikaners under the umbrella of an imagined national identity, Afrikaner woman were pressured to serve the nation in their prescribed roles of "chaste mother figures", restricted in a "woman/wife-as-mother" pivotal role (Gouws, 2005:72). As Foucault (1972) observed, pastoral power governs at its best when internalised as a moral obligation rather than external discipline. Brink (1987) and Van der Watt (2007) argue that patriarchs used the religious institutions at their disposal to enforce a governance of bodies and behaviours to justify the subordinate position of women as God's will and female subordination and responsibility for moral guardianship as the purview of male dominance and leadership. Van der Westhuizen (2017:97) argues the following:

Afrikaner femininity was and still is yoked into a chain of meanings with dependence, weakness, suffering, emotionality, immaturity, and self-sacrifice ... while co-constructed masculinity is hooked into a signifying chain with father, protector, God, adviser, leader, and knower.

The Dutch Reformed Church, with its compelling influence on Afrikaner culture, contributed to the repression of female sexuality. Female bodily and reproductive autonomy was an "anathema" to the Church (Brink, 1987:45). Through religious teachings that justified subordination, the Church established a culture of misogyny and sexual repression, which were integrated into Afrikaner social values. A shame-based culture evolved in which female sexual activity or desire outside of heterosexual marriage and motherhood was framed as immoral and unacceptable, a stain on a family's respectability: a belief system that has hardly evolved over

time (Van der Westhuizen, 2017), as is evident in my own upbringing. The Church's rhetoric emphasised female duty and virtue in terms of serving the patriarchal family structure and the (white) *volk* as a whole (Brink, 1987). The role of the Afrikaner daughter and wife was to maintain domestic order through obedience, propriety, and submission to male authority (Van der Watt, 2007). These norms embodied the *volksmoeder* ideal.

Furthermore, the *volksmoeder* ideal restricted Afrikaner women's educational, professional, marital, and reproductive choices to maintain the patriarchal status quo. It imposed external judgment over their bodies, behaviour, and sexuality. The biopower centred on the womb demonstrated greater efficacy than explicit domination by blending notions of identity and social acceptance with eugenic principles aimed at preserving the *volk*. Additionally, women had to navigate norms policing dress, relationships, the household, child rearing and their movements in public space (McClintock, 1993). Transgression, such as premarital sex or joining the workforce, resulted in stigma. While *ordentlikheid* was presented as preserving Afrikaner identity from British colonialism, it severely limited Afrikaner women's agency and potential. Despite these limitations, Afrikaner women have actively challenged these constraints, seeking to reclaim agency and redefine their role within society.

4.3.2 Resistance and Reclaiming Agency

Ordentlikheid and the *volksmoeder* ideal severely restricted Afrikaner women's autonomy and full participation in social life for much of the 20th century in service of Afrikaner nationalism and patriarchal authority (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Yet, despite this history, for some women, the *volksmoeder* functions as a sign of both liberation and oppression which Van der Westhuizen (2017:199) argues makes it a possibility to imagine a host of *volksmoeders* created by dissident Afrikaner subjects. Her research shows that despite being aware of their subjectification, Afrikaner female subjects remain subjected to the Afrikaner power/knowledge

schema, grappling with the complexities of their identity within the confines of patriarchal and racial hierarchies (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

In this context, some dissident subjects have succeeded in exposing the intricacies of Afrikaner identity, revealing that while the exterior of Afrikaner whiteness may appear homogenous, it is, in fact, constructed through internal differentiations and hierarchies, often drawing upon colonial divisions. White Afrikaans women find themselves objectified and equated to the 'other', whether it be the black other or the animal other, with the threat of violence looming if they fail to conform to the demands of white Afrikaans men, who uphold normative or hegemonic masculinity (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

While global movements such as 'Me Too' have provided a platform for women worldwide to claim agency and challenge systemic oppression, such progress has been less successful in South Africa, particularly among white Afrikaans women. This lack of mobilisation is due to the technology of silencing and an immutable internal pervasive gaze, persistent and widely prevalent within white Afrikaans middle-class culture, serving as a primary support for hegemonic gender relations. Van der Westhuizen (2017:200) maintains the following:

Silencing enables the ethic of Afrikaans white women's service to both the family and the *volk* and of the heterosexual union as a service relationship. Men set the parameters of this service. Silence meets service meets sex in a gender division of power/knowledge-ignorance, which disallows the possibilities of pleasure for women and hides the realities of male violence.

Despite some resistance and liberal progress made post-apartheid, the *volksmoeder* legacy remains evident. Ongoing barriers that preclude Afrikaner woman from decolonising their modes of being include internalised norms associated with hegemonic gender ideals and sexuality, consumerism, racial and class divides between women, and the endurance of white supremacist notions embedded in an Afrikaner identity defined against non-white groups. The ideals of hegemonic femininity, consumerism and self-commodification have subsumed what

used to be blatant patriarchal control. The pressure to self-objectify under the pensive gaze of patriarchy now comes from global capitalism rather than nationalism (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

Afrikaner women's attempts to self-actualise continue to be shaped and constricted by race, class, and religious legacies. Due to apartheid's spatial segregation and ingrained racial inequalities, white supremacist notions remain firmly bound to Afrikanerness, and effectively most white Afrikaner women remain geographically and socially removed from black women. This hinders solidarity against gender oppression (Du Toit & Kotzé, 2011).

While overt racism may be less prevalent among white people, the legacy of systemic racism subtly shapes their perspectives and behaviour. Belonging to a racial in-group also prevents some from acknowledging the buffering effects their skin colour offers them and despite good intentions, it is difficult for white individuals to entirely escape the ingrained patterns of white privilege, which always carry the potential to perpetuate inequality and often conceal covert racism (Vice, 2010; DiAngelo, 2018; Eddo-Lodge, 2017).

Afrikaner religious institutions such as the Dutch Reformed Church and the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk remain the gatekeepers of moral influence, reinforcing heterosexuality and female responsibility for the *volk*, a tradition not easily resisted (Teppo, 2018). Although the enduring impact of the *volksmoeder* ideal and its associated limitations highlights the substantial transformation still needed, it is essential to meticulously demarcate the specifics of this dominant model and its intersections with notions of hegemonic femininity. This is crucial to understand how this hegemonic framework persists in culture, and especially media, despite potential moments of disruption.

4.4 INTERWEAVING KNOWLEDGE REGIMES AND DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTS OF VOLKSMOEDER AND HEGEMONIC FEMININITY

Within the framework of the *volksmoeder* ideal and hegemonic femininity, and to borrow from Foucault (1980), the prevailing power dynamics of knowledge regimes shape the establishment of truth. In this context, the foundational elements of the *volksmoeder* ideal and hegemonic femininity interconnect to become a common-sense script of being. Van der Westhuizen (2017) asserts that for white Afrikaner women to embody the *volksmoeder* ideal, they must strive toward *ordentlikheid*. The only pathway to achieve this is to abide by the directives of *ordentlikheid* which are the beauty standard, whiteness, middle-classness, compulsory heterosexuality, and maternalism. Subsequently, these are also the building blocks of Western heteronormative femininity and allow for an intersectional examination of Afrikaner womanhood (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). McCall (2005) and Crenshaw et al. (1995) iterate that this intersectional approach serves to deconstruct master categories of inequality, untangling the power clusters in certain categories and allowing for a deeper examination of their subordinating and privileging functions. Embodying the *volksmoeder* ideal relies upon successfully performing narrow roles defined by race, class status, sexuality, and duty to family and nation: the coordinates of an intersectional matrix of feminine subjectification. In order to grasp the technologies that undergird the regulation of femininity, I discuss its salient features, including the dynamics of subjectification and objectification, white virtue, class, compulsory heterosexuality, and the glorification of aspirational motherhood.

4.4.1 Subjectification and Objectification

The patriarchal system of power/knowledge creates women as subjects, which Foucault (1972) referred to as ‘docile bodies’. Bartky (1990) suggests that through various social norms and practices, women are encouraged to participate in their own subordination by internalising and performing a version of patriarchal normative femininity. These ‘knowledge norms’ promote

a narrow definition of femininity, which is typically rooted in whiteness, heterosexuality, and middle-classness, through practices that reinforce hegemonic femininity and reflect how power and knowledge create gendered subjectivities (McDonald & Crandall, 2015).

Bartky (1990) isolates three disciplinary practices that define the performance of heteronormative womanhood. These practices include those that directly control the body's shape and size (like strict dieting, exercise, or surgery), dictating how a woman carries and presents herself (posture, gestures, smiling), and treating the body as a decorative surface with the use of makeup, jewellery, clothing, skincare, and haircare routines. These practices are not solely about physical attractiveness, but also underscore the expectation for female obedience and submission (Wolf, 1991). Cloete (1992:54) describes this as "a relentless tyranny against the body", and a "presupposition of defect". These self-objectifying practices contribute to the formation of a self-perception of inferiority and inadequacy, which leads to a perpetual pursuit of self-improvement through restrictive measures, abstinence, or self-harm. This pursuit is perceived as an ongoing and rigorous endeavour, with no clear end in sight, leading to a sense of perpetual self-reproach (Bartky, 1990).

Objectification theory, as proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), suggests that women, while being subjects of their own experiences, are socialised to perceive themselves from an observer's perspective, leading to a phenomenon known as self-objectification. This process involves women internalising a pervasive patriarchal gaze, thus transforming themselves into objects for observation and evaluation and finding themselves in a constant state of self-surveillance, disciplining their bodies to fit within social standards. While this may masquerade as an act of personal agency, shame and low self-esteem are often the result as women perceive their own bodies as falling short of the required standard. This shame can manifest in various forms, including negative self-perception and restrictive eating behaviours (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The cognitive resources consumed by self-objectification can detract from

other important aspects of life, potentially diminishing mental performance and hindering women's full engagement in academic, professional, and personal pursuits.

Bartky (1990) describes this internalised pervasive male gaze as follows:

A panoptical male connoisseur that resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other.

When women successfully practice this regime, it does not necessarily result in gaining systemic power or respect. What they stand to gain is the approval and validation of the patriarchal overseer. The disciplinary power that shapes heteronormative femininity is ubiquitous and elusive, lacking a specific institutional base, thus giving the impression that femininity is natural and voluntary. However, these disciplinary forces can simultaneously be voluntary and involuntary, and women who refuse to comply to these patriarchal mores will face the most significant rejection of all; "the refusal of male patronage" (Bartky, 2020:113). Ultimately, women negotiate an oppressive misogynistic landscape that manipulates their self-perception to such lengths that their humanity becomes contingent on fulfilling unrealistic patriarchal standards (Bartky, 2020; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Frye (1983) argued that in a patriarchal society, men assume that they are the authors of perception, in that, they create and define reality as they see it and determine what is considered the correct and acceptable interpretation of it. In this sense, men wield the power to create 'real women' as subjects. This perception extends to perceived beauty norms and is filtered through the male gaze, as Mulvey (1999) described. Building on Frye's (1983) assertion regarding the patriarchal construction of perception, which grants men the authority to define reality and shape the narrative of womanhood, it becomes evident that the standards of beauty are not only about physical appearance but also serve as a means of conformity to white masculinity and patriarchal norms. This alignment of beauty standards with patriarchal expectations

underscores the pressure on women to conform to these ideals to validate their authenticity as ‘real women’, a claim supported by Wolf (1991) and Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). Consequently, this discourse intersects with the broader framework of hegemonic femininity, where women are objectified and evaluated based on their attractiveness to men, with race being a prominent element in this equation.

4.4.2 Whiteness and Class

The construction of white heteronormative femininity has been fundamentally linked to notions of race, with women’s adherence to beauty and behaviour ideals serving to uphold racial hierarchies (Bartky, 2020). Bartky (1990:132) argues that “the dominant standards of feminine allure are parasitic on the invention of race and reinforce the privilege of whiteness”. Banet-Weiser et al. (2020:61) note that popular media have historically positioned the ideal “pretty white girl” as the “foundation for heteronormative femininity”, equating whiteness with desirability, purity, and superiority. The embodiment of proper white womanhood through enacted beauty rituals and presentations of self remains central to heteronormative feminine performativity, reinforcing whiteness as requisite for meeting gendered expectations (Bartky, 2020; Banet-Weiser et al., 2020).

This is also argued by Deliovsky (2008), who maintains that racialised beauty norms contribute to a cultural discourse that assigns varying degrees of femininity and beauty based on one’s race. Deliovsky (2008) asserts that this discourse is perpetuated by white patriarchal ideology, which presents white women as the benchmark woman and establishes dominant and subordinated femininities. As a result, white women and their beauty standards are positioned as the norm, creating a hierarchy of beauty that other races are subordinated to and expected to conform to. In other words, heteronormative femininity is interwoven with race and cannot be race-neutral. Black women and women of colour are constantly ‘othered’ and expected to

aspire to white heterofeminine beauty standards if they are to be regarded at all (Deliovsky, 2008).

Under the apartheid system, white Afrikaner feminine identity or aspirations to the *volksmoeder* ideal became closely tied to racial purity and nationalism. Beauty standards for white Afrikaner women centred virtues of motherhood, piety, and duty to the *volk*, positioning them as moral custodians of the nation (Elshtain, 1990). Stylised Victorian dress among rural Afrikaner women also signalled racial pride and economic prosperity (O'Meara, 1984). While some remained resistant to domestic ideals, white Afrikaner women remained bound by expectations to perform a racist femininity that upheld notions of racial superiority.

In post-apartheid South Africa, white Afrikaner beauty ideals or *ordentlikheid* hinge on the “successful management of the excesses of the female body” which excludes those who are not cisgender, white or have middle-class status (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:196). Black and working-class bodies are deemed out of control: displaying the ‘correct’ body is a sign of bourgeois whiteness, synonymous with an ethical self (van der Westhuizen, 2017:196). These practices are transferred intergenerationally, through “repetitions of rituals of induction and grooming into white heterofemininity by choosing to consume the right objects, starting with white cultural commodities” (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:196).

The complex interplay between race, gender, and class continues to influence how white Afrikaner women express their femininity. This is deeply connected to their racial identity making it difficult to establish clear-cut positions for both white and black women in relation to each other. White Afrikaans femininity is constructed through entitled racial status yet resists gendered divisions of domestic labour coded as the domain of black women (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Despite white women’s paradoxical privilege of self-ornamentation, invisibilised black women carry the burden of feminised household service, the very labour

that enables white women's status. White Afrikaans women derive power from this racialised hierarchy in which black women serve white women, reinforcing race and class divides under the guise of 'natural' relations (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:40). Thus, the complex interplay between white and black women reveals how white Afrikaans femininity is dependent on the labour of black women, even as it gains symbolic capital through beauty practices that adhere to middle-class white feminine ideals unencumbered by domestic work.

The racialised categorisation of black bodies as automatically 'there to serve' enables a classed division of labour in which non-bourgeois black women are confined to domestic service roles. Van der Westhuizen (2017:41) labels this a process of "intersectional shifting", where white Afrikaans femininity offsets the reduced status of womanhood by the elevated status of whiteness and middle-class privilege. This dynamic grants white women a privileged position by relying on the labour of black women to alleviate their own burdens associated with gender (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). This pattern of exploitation persisted throughout apartheid and continues to this day, with white women drawing on black women's bodies as a readily available resource. Interracial social interaction is thus restricted to a service dynamic, occurring only when black bodies can be usefully employed by white, middle-class women. Rollins (1985) describes this relationship as the insidious legacy of slavery that casts a long shadow, tacitly ascribing certain occupations, and social stations according to race and class. Black women of little means face constrained opportunity and are still too often viewed as only fit for domestic duties, a prejudice that confines their economic mobility while enabling affluent households to secure inexpensive labour. White Afrikaans femininity insists on civility and propriety, or their innate *ordentlikheid*, as reasons to avoid acknowledging and addressing the exploitative nature of domestic labour divisions, enabling a pragmatic colour-blindness (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:40).

Aspirational middle-classness is a salient factor in shaping the construct of hegemonic femininity, exerting an influence as significant as racial idealisation. Richardson and Monro (2012) argue that middle-classness is a signifier of heteronormativity and hegemonic femininity, acting as a critical component of their construction. Accordingly, middle-classness signifies respectability, morality, and conformity to heteronormative standards.

In the context of respectable white Afrikaner womanhood, middle-class aspirations were always linked to their racial identity. From the early 1920's to the 1950's, Afrikaner culture was defined narrowly, reflecting only the experiences and aspirations of the white middle class (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Poor whites faced the threat of 'forgetting' their Afrikaner identity and losing racial consciousness as their economic position led to assimilation with black and coloured people, who they considered inferior (Du Toit, 2003: 173). Those Afrikaners claiming middle-class status sought to divide themselves into categories of good vs bad, ensuring only the good, "right", white bodies were included to guarantee the *volk's* safety and respectability (Skeggs, 2002:37). Subsequently, Afrikaner women were tasked with maintaining "Boer manners" or white morality in this regard (Du Toit, 2003:162; Vincent, 2000; Swart, 1998).

In effect, women became keepers of white Afrikaner *ordentlikheid*, bound by norms of feminine respectability that were contingent on racial purity and middle-class status. In post-apartheid South Africa, racial inequality still equates 'black' with 'poor', and *ordentlikheid* discourse equates 'middle-classness' with 'whiteness' (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:36). Compulsory heterosexuality shapes and regulates not only gender identities but also the norms of femininity within the Afrikaner community. This heteronormative framework extends to the construction of aspirational motherhood, which is deeply intertwined with the perpetuation of white Afrikaner *ordentlikheid*, as discussed below.

4.4.3 Compulsory Heterosexuality and Motherhood

Although they are closely related, compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity have distinct meanings. Seidman (1999) explains that it is essential to differentiate between the two, referring to heteronormativity as the social norms and discourses which favour heterosexuality and traditional gender roles, while compulsory heterosexuality makes heterosexuality an official requirement enforced by institutions and social structures. In other words, heteronormativity compels individuals to conform to traditional gender roles, while compulsory heterosexuality takes it a step further by making heterosexuality a mandatory requirement. According to Ward (2020), compulsory heterosexuality enforces the belief that the most natural and fulfilling relationships are heterosexual, and a quintessential element to hegemonic femininity.

Compulsory heterosexuality is enforced through a myriad of subtle and overt ways that shape our understanding of gender and sexuality from a young age. Ward (2020:8) states that:

We are subject, as children and adults, to an onslaught of institutions and media images that link basic human happiness and nearly all significant rites of passage to heterosexual desire and coupling.

The pressure to conform to heterosexuality often leads to what Ward (2020) refers to as the ‘tragedy of heterosexuality’. Ward (2020:20) argues that patriarchal reliance on misogyny fosters a perspective where hetero-masculinity and femininity are inherently antagonistic. Ultimately, this leads to an environment where men and women’s goals and values in a relationship are inherently incompatible. Accordingly, heterosexual relationships are characterised by conflict stemming from rigid, sexist gender stereotypes and unfulfilled intimacy rooted in pervasive media-driven myths (Ward, 2020).

Enforcing heteronormativity in childhood can have unintended consequences. Children raised with a narrow view of sexuality might experience a delayed understanding of their own sexual

orientation. They may also become keenly aware of the challenges faced by adults in heterosexual relationships, potentially leading them to explore alternative paths for themselves. (Ward, 2020). This delay in understanding one's sexuality can lead to much internal conflict and confusion and can make the process of 'coming out' later in life more difficult.

Ward (2020:28) holds that a central dysfunction of this heteronormative culture is the "misogyny paradox", in which cisgender men's sexuality is distorted by a social environment that fosters deep-seated resentment of women. Violent expressions of the misogyny paradox frequently appear in popular culture, taking the form of men's 'animal attraction' to women they simultaneously desire and loathe, and expressions of attraction to women in disrespectful and degrading ways (Ward, 2020:35).

Male validation of femininity, through the institution of marriage, is seen as the final seal of approval in becoming *ordentlik*, while reproduction in the context of a legalised heterosexual union creates a "whole" woman (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:91). White Afrikaner womanhood is dependent on 'male activation', meaning that Afrikaner female subjects can only achieve true femininity if they are 'chosen' by a male counterpart. Within this schema, maternalism by itself, as in having a child outside of a heterosexual marriage, does not create valid feminine subjects, making 'true' femininity achievable only through heterosexuality. According to Lind (2016:1), society often views heterosexual marriage as a prerequisite for women to achieve full "maternal subjectivity". In essence, traditional femininity tied to heterosexual relationships is seen as a bargaining chip. Supposedly, women can leverage their femininity to attain a male partner, a necessary step toward legitimate motherhood. This illustrates how sexuality becomes governmentality: the indirect shaping of conduct through norms that make prescribed performances of gender seem mandatory for social legitimacy and acceptance, rather than one contingency among many other modes of being.

Furthermore, the normative ‘truths’ of heterosexuality posit that the transition to motherhood is contingent not only on a biological timeline, but also on a romantic one, thereby intertwining the quest for a mate with the desire for parenthood (Lind, 2016). Larrier (1997:197) argues that the socialisation of girls into heterosexuality and motherhood is intensive and starts early, arguing that from childhood, girls are bombarded with messaging about femininity that presents marriage and child-bearing as the ideal.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the *volksmoeder* ideal mandates that women domestically and sexually service their men, in an attempt to prevent them from straying outside the bounds of their union, while also absorbing aggression or violence that men choose to effect upon their wives and/or their children. As the ‘moral keeper’ in the home, Afrikaner woman are held accountable for all of Afrikaner men’s actions and the “recuperation of masculine *ordentlikheid*” hinges on the ability of Afrikaner woman to do the emotional and social heavy lifting (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:95). Yet Afrikaner woman are discouraged from embodying their sexuality in favour of embodying maternalism. Their feminine sexuality is coded as silent, naïve, innocent, passive, and ignorant, as opposed to Afrikaner masculinity, which is coded as sexually active, knowledgeable, and demanding (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:93).

Just as Butler (1988) describes the performance of gender over time, so too the repetitive discourses and behaviours continuously reinscribe feminine subjects with ideals of servitude, silence, and sexual accessibility for the purpose of white procreation: modalities that all stem from ideologies of compulsory heterosexuality and obligatory motherhood. Thus, the performative nature of gender intersects with regulatory power to reveal identity not as an expression of some interior truth, but as the embodiment of internalised and sedimented norms, the cumulative effect of the diffuse power of social and cultural conditioning that frame heterofemininity as a currency for belonging.

Motherhood itself as a performance of gender, is thick with idealisations such as the ‘perfect mother’ ideal (Simonstein, 2002:37). Furthermore, motherhood is inextricably linked with the domestic sphere or ‘home space’ as a space of socialisation, training children into their prescribed roles and status as men and women (Moon, 1999). In other words, homes function as key sites where beliefs about race, class, and gender are instilled and reinforced to uphold white supremacy (McClintock, 1993). According to Van der Westhuizen (2017), in the realm of the *volksmoeder* ideal, Afrikaner women are desexualised, and their sexuality displaced with maternity. *Ordentlikheid*, also masked as a currency of belonging, marks maternalism as an essential prerequisite to hegemonic femininity, making Afrikaner maternalism central to the embodiment of the *volksmoeder* ideal. Pre-apartheid, the *volksmoeder* positioned Afrikaner women as subjects in service of the *volk*, or for the project of the Afrikaner nation-building project. According to McClintock (1993:65), Afrikaner women’s inclusion in the *volk* was tied to heterosexual marriage in order to bear white Afrikaner children. In a redirection of the past, where Afrikaner women were subjectified for political gain, they are now directed away from public civic engagement and towards the private domestic sphere.

Van der Westhuizen (2017) argues that this post-apartheid shift of the ideal woman-in-service-to-the-country, has rebranded to the neo-liberal ideals of I-am-for-us, a position that places Afrikaner femininity in domestic service to others. Now, the central directive for becoming *ordentlik* is to self-actualise through service to one’s family (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

These enduring technologies of gender preserve the powerful yet diffuse presence of the *volksmoeder*, even in post-apartheid South Africa. Afrikaner women still navigate expectations that enable and expand male privileges, through conservative traditions and domestic labour in the private arena of home and family. Even as female agency expands globally, subjugation to hetero-patriarchal mores persist. The panopticon of familial surveillance, through the benevolent patriarchal overseer, has survived the post-apartheid transition to frame

domesticity, silence, and sexual availability as natural feminine traits. Despite a global shift toward agency and empowerment, transformation for the Afrikaner woman has stalled at the border between public emancipation and private regulation.

Just as diffuse power acts as a conduit to shape gendered behaviour, popular media, as a dominant channel, consistently reinforces and reproduces normative scripts across different eras and genres. In preparation for my analysis in Chapter 5, I discuss below how postfeminist film persistently upholds restrictive ideals of hegemonic femininity. I uncover the subtle technologies and messaging that prioritise the body as the primary site of self-actualisation, and I establish foundational concepts for the detailed discourse and character analysis that follows.

4.5 HEGEMONIC FEMININITY IN MAINSTREAM CINEMA

Despite individual attempts to resist or negotiate the pressures of hegemonic femininity, comprehensive resistance remains hindered by the colonisation of vision itself by the male gaze, a powerful pervasive presence ingrained in the collective consciousness of womanhood, ensuring compliance with what power deems to be acceptable femininity. The concept of the patriarchal/male gaze is used to emphasize how film and other media products, reinforces power and gender ideology (Mulvey, 1999). Mulvey's (1999) theory posits that the camera reinforces an object-subject split, reinforcing the masculine as the subject and the feminine as an object of inquiry. In other words, female characters are objectified as passive objects of desire for the presumed male viewer, thereby shaping how women are represented on screen but also influencing audience perception, ultimately leading to internalised gender norms and stereotypes. The effect of this gaze is to reinforce the commodification of female bodies with a "patriarchal capitalist coding", positioning femininity as a "desirable commodity and an undesirable identity" (Waters, 2011:96).

In feminist theory, the concept of the female gaze is positioned in opposition to and a challenge against the male gaze as it involves looking at the world through the eyes of women and representing their experiences, desires, and perspectives authentically (Skeggs, 1995). The female gaze offers women a path to reclamation in a society that has historically marginalised and objectified them. It aims to challenge stereotypes, break away from traditional gender roles, and provide a platform for women to tell their own stories and shape their own narratives.

Building on the concept of the female gaze as a means of reclaiming power and representation for women, the examination of hegemonic femininity in popular films provides further insight into how norms and perceptions of gender are perpetuated through media. The goal here is to establish its most prominent features, focusing on key characteristics that collectively define this framework. The characteristics of hegemonic femininity in film are reflective of the same culturally sanctioned norms discussed previously in relation to the *volksmoeder*. Stereotypes that entrench binary gender roles, subordination, objectification, maternalism, and compulsory heterosexuality, are almost always marked by a lack of diversity and intersectional awareness. These are hallmarks of this representation and inform my later character analysis.

While stereotyping is pervasive in social life, its danger in media stems from its reductive and exclusionary properties. The representation of women within stereotyped, predefined, restrictive roles is a crucial characteristic of hegemonic femininity in mainstream film. These roles, often intrinsically linked to familial or romantic relationships with male counterparts, uphold traditional gender norms while downplaying women's agency and individuality and centre around who they are in proximation to a male character (Schreiber, 2014). Thornham (2007) argues that even films aimed at female audiences can subtly reinforce the fantasy of male power and female subordination. With this in mind, the following section examines subordination in more detail.

4.5.1 Subordination – Serving the Patriarchy

Mainstream films typically revolve around male characters, while female characters are often relegated to subordinated supporting roles that reinforce male dominance and power imbalances. In this case, female characters are often devoid of substantive narrative arcs; their one-dimensional character development serves to advance the male character arc and is often contingent upon the experiences and actions of the male protagonists, while their own stories, goals and complexities are frequently neglected (Waters, 2011). Further manifestation of subordination places women in ‘service roles’ in homes, hospitals, or schools, and perpetuates the notion that women primarily exist to serve or nurture (Long et al., 2010).

Long et al. (2010) maintain that it is common for female characters to be portrayed as physically and emotionally dependent, intellectually inferior, and less competent than their male counterparts, reinforcing sexist tropes about female weakness, vulnerability, and instability. This trope simultaneously frames men as naturally gifted, wise and strong (Jang et al., 2019). These tropes tacitly imply that women’s stories are secondary, less compelling, or less deserving of exploration (hooks, 1996). Limiting views of femininity are linked with visual objectification, combining to symbolically erase and undermine progress toward equality by perpetuating tropes that subjugate women.

4.5.2 Objectification

Media frequently uses female bodies as potent signifiers and social products of heteronormativity (Hall, 2013). The phenomenon of objectification reduces women to objects of desire, eye candy if you will, rather than complex individuals with a story and a purpose. As such, it is imperative to dissect the various facets of objectification prevalent in mainstream cinema such as beauty standards, women as sex objects, the depiction of sexual violence, and the linkage between heterosexuality and maternalism.

4.5.3 Beauty Standards

The beauty ideal in mainstream films typically features young, thin women who adhere to hegemonic beauty norms. This emphasis on physical attractiveness “is often accompanied by a de-emphasis on other character attributes, such as intelligence, strength, or independence” (Schreiber, 2014:31). When narrow beauty ideals, thinness and youth are represented as the default, it reinforces harmful narratives around body size and contributes to the erasure of diverse body types and age. A crucial consequence of this is a lack of physical diversity in which films predominantly feature young, able-bodied, cisgender women, thereby marginalising the experiences of disabled, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals (Byerly & Ross, 2006). Schreiber (2014:30) further notes the link between performances of beauty and masculine validation, stating that “there is a renewed emphasis on the beauty of the female protagonist, which is often linked to her ability to find and keep a man.” In other words, beauty is linked to sexuality, which in turn translates to masculine approval through sexual desire, laying the groundwork for sexual objectification of female characters.

4.5.4 Sex Objects

According to Appel and Gnambs (2022), a persistent facet of sexual objectification depicts the female character as a reward for the male hero’s struggles, accomplishments, or heroic acts. Women are typically presented as desirable objects that validate the male protagonist’s masculinity, prowess, or status, enhancing his image, ego and standing among other male characters (Paasonen et al., 2020). These narratives dehumanise and commodify women’s bodies, reducing them to prizes to be won rather than autonomous individuals with their own desires, goals, and agency. Not only does this inspire an internalised gaze, it also reinforces the view that men have ownership and control over female sexuality (Paasonen et al., 2020). Woman and girls may also be depicted in gratuitous sexualised ways that serve little narrative purpose other than to titillate the audience and reduce female characters to their sexual

desirability (Paasonen et al., 2020; McRobbie, 2009; Mulvey, 1999). Women of colour, black women and Asian women face the intersectional experience of being both racialised and sexualised (Lee & Thai, 2015).

Women's sexual behaviour is also framed in a simplistic dichotomy of good vs evil, innocent vs corrupt, or moral vs amoral. Not only does this trope oversimplify the complexity of female sexuality, but it also frames female sexuality as a moral issue, with social approval or disapproval based on adherence to these roles (Tolman, 2006). The representation of hegemonic femininity virtue as sexually innocent intersects with concerning trends of sexual violence as eroticism. Rather than diverging from normalised objectification, this trend intensifies it by glorifying female suffering as a captivating symbol of male domination.

4.5.5 Sexual Violence

The portrayal of violence against women in film dovetails with Ward's (2020) conception of the misogyny paradox in which cisgender men are culturally conditioned to desire women while simultaneously being incited to disdain or degrade them. In popular culture, striking manifestations of this paradox often surface, illustrating men's primal attraction to women, paradoxically coupled with revulsion towards the same women when they diverge from the man's predetermined expectations of her (Ward, 2020).

The misogyny paradox efficiently reduces femininity to a target of violence, indirectly perpetuating misogyny, and rape culture (McRobbie, 2009; Projansky, 2007). Not only is this utilised as a plot device to advance the narrative of the male character, but Projansky (2007) asserts that through sheer repetition, these scenes condition audiences into acceptance and normalisation of violence against women. Beddows (2019) says that the portrayal of rape often simplifies it into an episodic, once-off event, contributing to the normalisation and glamorisation of sexual violence, which increases the acceptance of rape myths and decreases

the willingness to pursue sexual consent. hooks (1996) maintains that films often use violence against women, particularly black women, as a spectacle or entertainment rather than a serious social issue and asserts that this romanticises and sexualises violent behaviour towards black women.

Such narrative tactics reflect a lack of imaginative storytelling and contribute to a broader cultural discourse that trivialises and commodifies women's trauma for the sake of male-centric story lines. Besides this, hegemonic femininity is most often portrayed in terms of compulsory heterosexuality and aspirational motherhood.

4.5.6 Compulsory Heterosexuality and Motherhood

A significant aspect of mainstream film's portrayal of normative femininity is the presumption of heterosexuality (Ward, 2020; Richardson & Monro, 2012). According to Schreiber (2014:4) postfeminist cinema still portrays female sexuality confined within stale, stereotypical narratives that perpetuate longstanding myths that equate heterosexual love with female purpose, happiness, and fulfilment.

In other words, heterosexuality has been the foundation of mainstream cinema representations and typically centres around a male-female romantic plotline, upholding heterosexuality as the default and the norm (Richardson & Monro, 2012). When non-heterosexual identities are underrepresented or not represented at all, it sends a message that these identities are less valid or essential, further entrenching compulsory heterosexuality (Richardson & Monro, 2012). Homophobia, a direct outflow of misogyny, which degrades any way of being that might allude to femininity and deviates from hegemonic masculinity, are key features of this identity (Ezzel, 2012). In other words, male supremacy is reinforced by using homophobia to marginalise and stigmatise non-heterosexual individuals and relationships, thereby perpetuating gender-based discrimination (Ezzel, 2012).

As explored earlier, there exists a bind between heterosexuality and motherhood, the former acting as a femininity-sanctioning gateway to the second. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that a belief in inherent maternalism is commonly reflected in mainstream films, which frequently depict women within the parameters of motherhood or maternal-like roles. According to Kaplan (1992), the function of the motherhood trope is to frame motherhood as central to female happiness. It thus represents them as caregivers that shoulder the responsibility of emotional labour within relationships, families, and communities, especially through childcare. This common stereotype endorses the notion that all women naturally possess, or should possess, maternal instincts, thereby limiting the range of roles and identities assigned to women in film. By consistently aligning women's roles and identities with wifedom, motherhood and care work, mainstream films reinforce traditional gender norms that keep women firmly within the domestic realm.

Feminist scholars have extensively analysed how depictions of hegemonic femininity in mainstream media reinforces and perpetuates restrictive norms and forms of subjugation, even within portrayals that appear to promote female empowerment. This discussion has demonstrated that cinema often centres a cisgender, heterosexual white femininity that caters to the pervasive male gaze, while subtly conveying ambiguous messages that liberation can be found within conventional romantic or domestic roles. The power dynamics which determine who is seen and how they are seen underscores the need for ongoing analysis based on race, class, sexuality, gender conformity and (dis)ability.

4.5.7 Diversity and Intersectionality

Hegemonic femininity is often portrayed as heterosexual, cisgender and able-bodied, marginalising the experiences of women of colour, LGBTQIA+ women, disabled women, and others (McRobbie, 2009). While women's experiences are diverse and complex, mainstream cinema often privileges the experiences and narratives of white women, overshadowing the

experiences of women of colour and black women (hooks, 1996). LGBTQIA+ characters are likely characterised as stereotypes and their narrative arc may revolve around struggle, discrimination, tragedy, or sensationalism (Richardson & Monro, 2012). These characters are often the subject of homophobia, subtly validating such prejudices, and may promote self-loathing in the queer spectator (Richardson & Monro, 2012). Some films include LGBTQIA+ characters as tokens to create an illusion of diversity and whose primary function is to signify ‘difference’ or serve as comedic relief.

Even in films that explore non-heterosexual relationships, there is often a trend of returning to heteronormativity by the film’s end. Characters may end up in heterosexual relationships, or their queer identities may be downplayed or discarded, reinforcing the notion that heterosexuality is the expected outcome (Schreiber, 2014). Transgender women are often portrayed in harmful and reductive ways if represented at all, reinforcing the stigma and misconceptions about transgender identities (Kusumawardani & Trijayanto, 2020). MacKeigan (2018) emphasises the importance of inclusive personal experience narratives around disability and sexuality, including those of disabled women, asserting that women with disabilities are frequently depicted as helpless, pitiable, or inspirational, and their stories often revolve around their disability rather than encompassing the full breadth of their experiences.

Lastly, the portrayal of women from different socioeconomic backgrounds is often limited and portrayed in demeaning or victimising ways, reinforcing classist stereotypes, and ignoring the complexity and diversity of their experiences. hooks (1996) contends that poor women of colour are particularly vulnerable to being characterised in limited and demeaning ways.

In conclusion, despite the strides made in gender representation, the film industry continues to default to the portrayal of the white, heterosexual, cisgender, and able-bodied woman, leaving a significant portion of women’s narratives on the periphery. Unless confronted and undone

consciously, “mediated messages will fulfil and reify larger colonialist narratives about race, gender, and oppression” (Waters, 2011:158). It is evident that mainstream films tend to reinforce heteronormativity through various means including the objectification of women, sexual violence, limited roles, and the erasure of LGBTQIA+ characters regardless of any progress on these fronts. To counter these harmful stereotypes and promote social change, it is important to prioritise diverse and inclusive representation.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has contextualised the complex roots of Afrikaner nationalist identity through three pillars: masculinity, common-sense patriarchal wisdom, and a divine claim to power. I traced the development of the *volksmoeder* ideal and its most revered form of respectability, *ordentlikheid*, as apex standards of aspirational hegemonic Afrikaner femininity. By elaborating on the interlinked tropes of domesticity, beauty, reproduction, and heteronormativity underscoring this feminine ideal, I demonstrated its prevalence across private, public, and cultural spheres. Furthermore, I explored the similarity between postfeminist media messaging and the portrayal of the *volksmoeder* ideal, revealing the role of media as a bloodline for the maintenance of masculinity and femininity.

The next chapter explores the construction of respectable Afrikaner womanhood through a focused analysis of the character Adrie in the film *Stroomop*. Applying feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power, I explore to what extent Adrie reinforces or challenges the *volksmoeder* ideal, a pillar of hegemonic femininity. These theoretical frameworks illuminate how the Afrikaans film *Stroomop* (2018) reinforces this restrictive social construct.

CHAPTER 5: CHARACTER ANALYSIS – *STROOMOP* (2018)

“What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, or who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.”

Laura Mulvey (1999)

5.1 INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE

In Chapter 3, I elaborated on my social and epistemic location, arguing that developing an ethnographic awareness of the contextual factors, histories, and norms embedded within the Afrikaner culture I was exposed to allows for a deeper interpretation of the subjects portrayed in cultural texts such as *Stroomop*. In Chapter 4, I provided the context of the Afrikaner identity’s development and its co-construction of the *volksmoeder* ideal. Using historical context, discourse analysis, and an examination of related film conventions, I methodically outlined the array of behaviours and traits that constitute hegemonic femininity as constructions of gender truths prescribed for ideal, respectable Afrikaner womanhood. Given the complexity of the theoretical frameworks employed, this dissertation will thoroughly analyse a single, highly representative character, Adrie. This approach ensures that the exploration of respectable femininity is sufficiently robust, yields the most significant insights, and adds a more meaningful contribution to the discourse. By applying two critical lenses – feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power (discussed in Chapter 2) – this chapter explores how the representation of Afrikaner womanhood through the character of Adrie aligns with ideals of hegemonic femininity and the most revered form of the *volksmoeder* ideal, *ordentlikheid*.

Bourdieu (1986b) argued that our bodies are social products, and the most concrete representation of our identity. The argument by Bourdieu becomes an essential lens in analysing hegemonic femininity and its implication of the Afrikaner woman’s body and identity. In other words, the notion of the *volksmoeder* ideal and *ordentlikheid* is integrally

linked to the idea of the body as a social product. As Turco (2021) explains, these subjects occupy discursive positions that reflect social expectations around identity, behaviour, and norms, making heteronormative femininity relationally constructed based on historical struggles for power and dominance. A similar observation is made by Kaplan (1992) in which she argues that women's subjectivity is constructed through profound sexual categorisation. Skeggs (2002:118) reminds us that heterosexuality reinforces limiting social expectations for women, while ultimately contributing to their exclusion and disadvantages. In the context of Afrikaner womanhood, a similar observation by Skeggs can be applied to the analysis of cultural texts such as *Stroomop*. In other words, the extent to which the characters of *Stroomop* reproduce *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* and, borrowing from Skeggs (2002:119), how such images function as sites of "heterosexualizations".

Drawing from Skeggs (2002), it can be argued that such films become key spaces to challenge and define constructions of respectability where underlying and unspoken rules about family and caregiving become unavoidable.

An analysis of films such as *Stroomop* seeks to highlight the power of the institution of heterosexuality and heteronormative femininity. It is in this institution that one observes the technology of power in which subject positions that women embody such as wife, daughter and mother codified and entrenched by way of a mechanism of iterability and, to borrow from Derrida (1988:18), also normativised and ritualised – a technology into which Afrikaner womanhood is implicated on a daily basis (Butler, 1993). Film, as a discursive practice, prompts audiences toward certain meanings, often upholding dominant ideologies that shape gender identities. Succinctly put, they function as biopower in Foucauldian (1978) terms (discussed in depth in Chapters 2 and 3). Foucault argues that biopower is "the deployment of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 1978:140). In other words, films become an apparatus and a dominant

gaze over female bodies functioning as a performance of subjectification. Thus, it can be argued that heterosexuality and heteronormative femininity are continually given legitimacy through films such as *Stroomop* and others that perform a technology of repetition, silencing and delegitimising any alternatives. Modern media does this by continuing to objectify and subjectify women through narratives that glorify feminine beauty norms, compulsory heterosexuality, aspirational motherhood, consumerism, and individualism, thus performing a technology of subjectification. Furthermore, films also function as a site of compulsory heterosexuality, directly educating women in the performance of heterosexuality and straight culture. Persistent gender stereotypes and tropes further centre white femininity as the invisible norm, while otherising women of colour, or erasing their race all together, thereby burdening women to conform to homogenised, Eurocentric standards. As Skeggs (2002:120) maintains:

We are always implicated in the organizing system of heterosexuality, even if we define ourselves against it. Heterosexuality is the acceptable, dominant and for some often the only known way of speaking sexuality.

Chaudhuri (2006) argues that the ongoing use of female characters in traditional roles that revolve around a central male character perpetuates a patriarchal mythology that naturalises female passivity and subordination to active male dominance. This view is also held by Hart (1994) who argues that heterosexuality functions as a dominant ideology and social institution, but also as an economic system that upholds white supremacy. Hart (1994) maintains an example of this is the historical and recent 'right-to-life' movement. This movement advocates and passes legislation that makes access to birth control, abortion, and childcare almost impossible to come by with a view to encourage, white middle-class women to have more children while women of colour and working-class women are severely restricted in accessing reproductive care themselves. In other words, heterosexuality, as an institution, functions both as a technology of power and a space of surveillance. It compels individuals to regulate their

own sexuality and romantic relationships, essentially creating a form of self-surveillance similar to the idea of psycho-social surveillance (Elias, 1982). According to him, surveillance weakens resistance and creates a sense of helplessness against imposed notions of dominance (Elias, 1982). According to Skeggs (2002) heterosexuality is reinforced through social and economic rewards in which women are incentivised to conform, normalising heterosexuality and self-regulation.

This heterosexual matrix of power manifests clearly in the context of respectable Afrikaner femininity in which the female characters become a nexus for negotiations around respectability and conformity to the *volksmoeder* ideal, echoing broader discourses on femininity, power, and identity within Afrikaner culture. Considering the historical presence and purpose that film has had in putting forth the Afrikaner nationalist agenda, I first provide background on Afrikaner cinema more broadly and the film *Stroomop* specifically. A synopsis outlines the movie's plot and central tensions. Discussion of the symbolism behind the title and key character arcs establishes the necessary context.

Various settings within the film are analysed as “cartographies of struggle” (Mohanty, 2003), which illuminate the subjectifying nature of the power of hegemony at play. Through a Foucauldian lens, these settings not only reveal the distribution and operation of power but also the agency exercised within these structures, offering a nuanced understanding of how characters negotiate and resist the hegemonic forces that shape their lives. In the context of film locations as ‘cartographies of struggle’, the pervasive patriarchal gaze acts as an agent, compelling character behaviour and constraining their agency and autonomy. These sites of struggle become stages within a theatre of power where subjects perform under the constant surveillance of the patriarchal gaze. The *volksmoeder* ideal serves as the regime of truth, the standard by which characters are judged within these volatile spaces. The patriarchal gaze, expressed through these spaces, seeks to maintain the dominance of heteronormativity. Yet,

even within this oppressive system, and as discussed by hooks (1984), there are still liminal spaces where resistance and acts of negotiation allow for agency. Though often crushed by exacting expectations of heteronormativity, characters challenge their positions in small ways, exposing the fragility of such regimes of truth.

After the analysis of the film locations, the next component entails in-depth analysis of Adrie's character, applying the methodologies of feminist discourse and a Foucauldian notion of power, discussing the discursive technologies and 'codes of heterosexualisations' through which characters live out their 'regimes of truth'.

Throughout this chapter, I apply a critical analysis of how the film *Stroomop* reproduces dominant notions of Afrikaner femininity utilising various mechanisms through which heteronormativity and hegemonic femininity are upheld. Female characters become the focal point for negotiating respectability, caught in a theatre of power where their performance is constantly evaluated under a patriarchal gaze. Through the application of my chosen methodologies, I assess how the film's representation of femininity through Adrie reinforces and challenges ideals of hegemonic Afrikaner womanhood mapped in the literature discussed in this chapter. Findings demonstrate both how the character signifies the *volksmoeder* ideal through their performance of subjectification and heterosexuality and how they struggle against its constraints, revealing the technologies of iterability that normalise, ritualise and essentialise this restrictive version of femininity.

5.2 LOCATING STROOMOP

Contemporary Afrikaans cinema remains inextricably intertwined with Afrikaner nationalist filmmaking. The concept of the *volk* – the idealised Afrikaner family unit – was a cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalism during apartheid. In the post-apartheid era, this notion is displaced from the public sphere into privatised white spaces (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Afrikaner

cinema is one such retreat, offering an escape from the troubled democratic position in which Afrikaners find themselves and as a substitute for the Afrikaner nation-state. Within these white enclaves, racialised characters, especially black and coloured individuals, are typically relegated to token roles that vindicate and centre whiteness and male dominance. As such, the term ‘Afrikaans cinema’ broadly refers to Afrikaner nationalist cinema, which perpetuates myths central to this ethnic identity’s self-conception – a project now undertaken by private entities and not the state (Steenkamp, 2018). In other words, the role of Afrikaner cinema is to provide Afrikaners with a ‘safe’ space that is inherently white, patriarchal, conservative, and nationalist in nature.

Stroomop accomplishes this task by emphasising family, idealising domesticity, subtly othering non-white characters, and relying on symbolic cues such as the Afrikaans language and geographic locations. Female characters are portrayed within roles that reinforce traditional and conservative Afrikaner ideals that value female submission and male domination. This is reinforced by depictions of suburban life and a focus on domestic roles and the nuclear family. Furthermore, the characterisation of the non-white characters is stereotypical and marginal, reinforcing the perception of whiteness as the default. The film also ties the characters morality to their adherence to traditional social norms, implicitly suggesting that maintaining this identity is inherently righteous. Essentially, *Stroomop* constructs a nostalgic vision of Afrikaner life that strategically omits any references to the political and social consequences of apartheid. This selective representation reinforces a sense of cultural innocence and deflects attention from the challenges faced by Afrikaners as they aspire to recuperate *ordentlikheid* in a post-apartheid context (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

The film tells the story of five women brought together through various traumas. They meet each other in group therapy and decide to embark on a river rafting expedition on the Orange River as part of an ‘adventure therapy’ approach to ‘face their fears’. Amidst the adventure,

their raft is swept away in the rapids and their guide is lost, leaving them to survive for days while they make their way to their pickup point. After two days of walking, they find their injured guide and the raft. The bulk of the film takes place in the wilderness, and the viewer is shown flashbacks that contextualise each woman's personal struggle.

The title '*Stroomop*' alludes to the challenge of moving against the tide, an apt symbolic metaphor for the struggles the female protagonists navigate through restrictive and volatile channels in their quest toward self-determination and healing. While journeying upstream back toward civilisation and as 'whole women', their narrative arcs further embed them within the dominant current of feminine duty and propriety that robbed them of fulfilment and agency in the first place.

In this way, the film reveals a cruel paradox: the same patriarchal norms hindering their journey are presented as the ultimate solution. The characters suffer aspirational wounds in their battle toward fulfilling the expectations that heteronormativity requires of them, yet this struggle is romanticised as a 'good fight', with full commitment and conformity to heteronormativity framed as the ultimate remedy. Berlant's (2011:1) theoretical framework of "cruel optimism" offers further insight into the portrayal of a new empowered feminine existence in postfeminist films such as *Stroomop*. Cruel optimism denotes a paradoxical affective relationship, in which an individual's sense of self comes to rely on an optimistic attachment that ends up being detrimental to their personhood. As Berlant (2011:94) explains, "The object/scene of desire sustains the senses of continuity, but its realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic". This analysis provides insight into the influence of popular media narratives and idealised depictions of female success and fulfilment within a heteronormative framework, which evoke a desire for agency, independence, and happiness, while obscuring the unfeasibility of such aspirations, leading to what is known as cruel optimism.

The irony of the fraught ‘progress’ of the women paddling upstream, is that the tide they paddle against ultimately redirects them back toward the *volksmoeder* ideal and hegemonic femininity. By examining the specific ‘sites of struggle’ within the film, I further elaborate on the technologies of power these spaces give way to, revealing how characters become more deeply entrenched in the very systems that constrain them, even as they actively seek liberation and change.

5.2.1 Sites of struggle

Cinematic spaces within *Stroomop* transform from passive settings into active “cartographies of struggle” (Mohanty, 2003), directly contrasting the imagined ‘utopias’ of a capitalist patriarchal system discussed in Chapter 2 (McKittrick, 2006; Foucault, 1977). In Foucault’s (1977) view, spaces are constructed by the power relations enacted within them and these geographic sites reveal the disciplinary nature of power at work in society. Applying this understanding, the cinematic spaces in *Stroomop* shift from mirroring patriarchal utopic, idealised, perfect spaces into spaces that actively contest and resist dominating and oppressive systems. These sites of struggle symbolically express relationships, power, resistance, and identity formation shaped by specific geographical contexts (Mohanty, 2003).

Building on Mohanty’s (2003) framework, which examines black women’s liberation struggles, it is clear how gendered experiences are inextricably linked to physical and symbolic spaces. In Chapter 3, I explored, through personal life experience, the physical spaces of the church and home, the ideologies held and exercised within their walls, and their powerful and vast impact on their inhabitants. One example highlighted by Mohanty (2003) is the significance of the concept of ‘home’ as a geographical space where gendered experiences are not only lived but also constructed and negotiated. Mohanty (2003:18) further argues that conceptions of the physical and symbolic ‘home’, are shaped by factors such as race, class, and nationality, and inform political engagement and personhood. In other words, our personhood

is constructed and defined not only by the physical and ideological structures in which we find ourselves but also by our struggles against and negotiations with those structures.

In the context of the film, geographic spaces are intentionally constructed to stage the women's struggle and negotiation. Confined within these physical spaces, women have the agency to struggle. Yet, the agency to self-actualise and to seek liberation from social or physical bonds is actively misconstrued and withheld from them, under the scrutiny of the panoptic gaze. Within the film, four primary settings – the hospital therapy room, the suburban family home, the wilderness, and the therapy group – function as sites of struggle. They simultaneously reveal the protagonists' subject position within the heteronormative structure and provide a platform on which their struggle to achieve and measure up to the *volksmoeder* ideal under the pensive gaze of the agents of patriarchy is being played out.

5.2.1.1 Therapy Room

The opening scenes situated in the therapy room signify the women's collective need for intervention as they fail in their pursuit of ideal femininity. The very act of consenting to therapy implies a willingness by the women to submit to an authoritative figure, to be metaphorically pried into, and to be judged and reshaped, which reveals the process of subjectification at play in which the women position themselves as subjects needing guidance toward an idealised utopian version of femininity. As resident psychologist Dr Ezra facilitates discussion, 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1977) are voiced and each character's position and proximity to that truth is laid bare. What emerges in the therapy sessions paints a larger picture of how normative femininity has been collectively internalised and inflicts a corrosive self-judgement – again linking up with Elias (1982) who argues that individual psychology is intertwined with social controls in a constant interplay between social demands, norm enforcement and internal personality shaping. The women's 'self-confessions' of failure in motherhood and marriage highlight how this internalisation subjectifies the female body,

leading it to become a site of scrutiny and self-surveillance as discussed earlier in this chapter (Bourdieu, 1986b; Skeggs, 2002). Skeggs (2002:73) argues that:

When the women participate in finding the right solution or the correct practice they reproduce the genre of individuality, learning how to make sense of what are effectively collective problems. The 'right' practices enable them to recognize and produce themselves as subjects in alignment with the standards and judgments of others.

In other words, the women become agents of their own and each other's oppression through the practice of exacting confession from each other, and in holding each other accountable to live up to the provided 'solutions', they further entrench and perpetuate heteronormativity.

The serious, clinical hospital environment evokes institutional 'surveillance' (Foucault, 1977), shifting the power of moral judgement from the traditional realm of the church (a position previously associated with the Dutch Reformed Church) into a seemingly, secular therapeutic space. Dr Ezra, through the apparatus of therapy, summons the unhappy, wayward woman to align them with social expectations of femininity. This dynamic exemplifies Foucault's (1977) notion of biopower, in which bodies are disciplined into conformity through technologies of power and the concept of iterability (Butler, 1993). The support group functions as a technology of power whose authority is underscored by its medical/scientific foundation, constructing 'normalcy' by coercing subjects into self-regulation. Collective iterations of femininity discourse trains regulation through the self and each other, gaining power through assumed collectivity and over time becomes seen as fixed and natural. The performance of heteronormativity as it plays out within the therapy room demonstrates the intertwined nature of biopower and subjectification, as bodies are not merely controlled but individuals are encouraged to actively participate in their own domination and subjugation to align neatly with respectable feminine ideals.

5.2.1.2 *Therapy Group*

The therapy group itself functions as a site of struggle and surveillance. As Foucault (2003) argues, the ‘clinical gaze’ serves as a form of supervision and control, enforcing norms of behaviour. In this hierarchical space, the women are surveilled by Dr. Ezra, the psychologist. The rituals of confession and testimony enacted under Dr. Ezra’s clinical gaze ratify rather than contest the cultural invalidation of their realities. Furthermore, the women surveil each other, holding each other accountable to the ideals of the *volksmoeder*. Rather than surveillance only coming from figures of hierarchical authority such as Dr. Ezra, discipline and control are decentralised as the women police themselves and each other. They are pitted against each other as interrogators and confessors. The group continues its function even as the women travel together through the wilderness.

This speaks to how domination functions not just through top-down rule but through lateral surveillance within marginalised groups as a ‘diffusion of disciplinary power’ (Foucault, 1977). In this space, they turn the pervasive gaze inward and toward each other, as they are coerced to testify their inability to successfully embody the *volksmoeder* ideal. hooks (1984) describes this internalised gaze as part of the maintenance of systems of domination, while Van der Westhuizen (2017:96) describes it as an “invisibilized centre from which emanates patriarchal power”.

As Rich (1995) articulates, when women share candid truths, it can create emancipatory spaces which contest the social and cultural invalidation of their realities. The group scenes could have actualised Rich’s vision, where bearing witness to each other’s struggles fosters interdependence, affirmation, and solidarity – precisely the form of solidarity that might rupture the expectations of hegemonic femininity that demand women’s voluntary subordination. However, the viewer is never shown how the women are ‘healing’ or liberated through the therapy process by sharing their experiences with one another. Any potential

therapeutic breakthroughs remain entirely off-screen. This absence renders the therapy and the power of the group dynamic a success in controlling and regulating the women back in line with the *volksmoeder* regime of truth, rather than liberating them from the restrictions of respectable femininity.

5.2.1.3 Home

The middle-class home represented across various scenes serves as a loaded ‘cartography’ visibly encoding gendered power dynamics and cultural expectations mapped onto the characters (Mohanty, 2003; Foucault, 1977). The home, framed as a powerful symbol of heteronormativity, which includes domesticity and traditional gender roles, encapsulates the multifaceted struggles that women face in their quest for autonomy and self-determination within the confines of the suburban landscape. This is deeply rooted in the social construction of domestic space, which has been gendered as female (Marsh, 1989). The expectation on women to undertake the invisibilised and uncompensated domestic and emotional labour within the home, or “wifework” as Susan Maushart (2002) refers to it, which includes child-rearing, further reinforces the association of the home with traditional gender norms and expectations (Marsh, 1989).

Simonstein (2022) argues that the traditional matrix of power within the home, in which women are framed as natural caregivers and homemakers and men as providers and breadwinners, perpetuates gendered norms that constrain women’s agency and upholds patriarchal structures that prioritise male authority and dominance. Skeggs (1991) considers the home a significant site of influence where children may negotiate and internalise norms related gender, sexuality, and power. Furthermore, the home is depicted in films as significant hierarchical spaces of struggle, sites of comfort and confinement, intimacy and violence, abundance, and restrictions (Thornham, 1999). Van der Westhuizen (2017:188) argues that middle class normativity functions as the bedrock of the white Afrikaans enclave. Ultimately,

the home functions as a primary site of heterosexualisations, in which the characters absorb the codes that are encompassed by hegemonic femininity and the *volksmoeder* ideal as well as the consequences for subversion of these codes (Skeggs, 2002). This reinforces Skeggs' (2002) assertion that heterosexuality, as an institution and a system of power, compels subjects to define themselves through its categories and expectations.

5.2.1.4 Wilderness

On the other hand, the scenes in the wilderness seem to provide a contrasting space where characters negotiate and resist the pressures of hegemonic femininity, by giving the impression that the system of heterosexuality is not a pervasive system. Or that its performance of power is limited to certain spaces without the external surveillance and control prevalent in the hospital and home environments. Yet surveillance still takes place in this heterotopia in the form of a benevolent patriarchal overseer, Guy (the tour guide). In other words, the wilderness seems to function as an uncontaminated space, yet it is in this space that the performance of power and the patriarchal gaze exposes the pervasiveness of heteronormativity. Despite the illusion of freedom, the characters find themselves under the watchful eye of the tour guide and of each other as internal and external patriarchal surveillance infiltrates even the most remote corners of nature. In the wilderness, power manifests differently, with characters navigating a more fluid hierarchy than within the other settings. Here, the performance of power takes on a nuanced form, as individuals assert agency and negotiate their roles within the group dynamics. Furthermore, while the wilderness offers a reprieve from external surveillance and control, the intrusion of patriarchal authority is still palpable, albeit in a more insidious form. Guy serves as a benevolent patriarchal overseer, whose presence subtly reinforces the gender hierarchy within the group. His authority, while seemingly benign, represents a form of violent intrusion, imposing patriarchal norms and expectations even in the natural sanctuary of the wilderness. This creates a striking paradox: the wilderness offers an

uncorrupted space outside the patriarchal gaze, yet ultimately serves as a different canvas for the performance of power and control. The disciplinary hand of patriarchy infiltrates every aspect of womanhood, shaping their experiences and limiting their freedom even in the most isolated of geographic spaces. The wilderness leaves its mark as they emerge bruised and battered; a stark embodiment of the epistemic violence that patriarchy and the resistance to it, exacts on a person's spirit and personhood.

It is in these two positions that we can observe the type of violence that the system performs on its subjects. Thus, the wilderness becomes a theatre of subjectification, as such a space enables the agents to perform agency. It can be argued that the wilderness poses two sides of the same coin, as it also allows some growth for the woman to feel empowered. It is this empowerment that illustrates the argument by Foucault (1979:194) that power is not unilateral but distributional in performance of agency. He summarises it thus: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1998/1976a:93). Ultimately, the harsh threat of the heat and rugged landscape does little to liberate them, and instead motivates their pursuit of hegemonic femininity further.

5.3 FLOWING BEYOND: EMBODYING EXPECTATIONS OF THE *VOLKSMOEDER* IN *STROOMOP*

Afrikaans films frequently personify aspirations towards the *volksmoeder* ideal and *ordentlikheid*, an integral component necessary to maintaining the *volk* identity (Steenkamp, 2018). As an Afrikaans film operating within the parameters of Afrikaner cinema, *Stroomop* remains true to this ideal by employing four key discursive strategies: two that have been found to epitomise the modern *volksmoeder* ideal (Van der Westhuizen, 2017) and two that are characteristic of postfeminist films in general (Schreiber, 2014; Thornham, 1999).

Van der Westhuizen (2017:188) argues that there are two discursive strategies that epitomise the *volksmoeder* ideal. In the first strategy, ideological emphasis is placed on neo-liberal and postfeminist norms that preference individual self-responsibility and self-improvement over collective action and accountability, which encourage women to self-actualise by “reconfirming her devotion to white heteronormativity within the bounds of the *volk* and in reverence of hegemonic Afrikaner manhood”. In other words, the women of *Stroomop* are encouraged to see themselves as living extant to the system of normative heterosexuality which presents their choices, decisions, and experiences as a result of their direct action or inaction. Any negative consequences and systemic barriers that arise from this oppressive system remain obscured and framed as consequences that are entirely under their control and thus, within their power to change, if they tried hard enough and did it in the right way. This perpetuates the illusion that power lies solely with an individual, not within the structures they are subjugated to.

The second strategy, which epitomises the *volksmoeder* and is utilised by the film, promotes the selfless assumption of responsibility for others, along with an acceptance of sole accountability for the shortcomings that undoubtedly arise in heteronormative relationships (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). The women inhabit selflessness by assuming responsibility for the needs and behaviour of others, mainly men. In this way, they are made responsible for ensuring that heterosexual relations (in this case, marriage) are maintained under all circumstances.

These two strategies explicitly encode the *volksmoeder* ideal onto the characters and they perform and regulate their femininity identity according to these directives.

Additionally, *Stroomop* constructs its female characters according to two narrative devices commonly found in postfeminist films. In the first place, the characters are pigeonholed within

the familial role trope as mothers, wives, or girlfriends, restricting their development and intrinsically tying their value to their relational status and their service function to masculinity and heteronormativity (Schreiber, 2014). Schreiber (2014:24) notes that postfeminist cinema “has been characterized by a focus on the personal and the domestic, with women’s roles as wives, mothers, and daughters taking centre stage”, and even progressive, modern takes on femininity persistently pressure women to conform to traditional gender roles by characterising them within the familial role trope (Thornham, 1999). In other words, although the women are the central characters (and this may give the illusion that the film is a feminist film), their narrative arcs are based solely on their subject positions in relation to masculinity, centring masculinity, and its power to subjectify women. In this sense, the film’s ‘feminist’ approach is undermined by its reliance on masculinity as the driving force behind the character development.

The second narrative device is a preoccupation with the mental struggles of supposed ‘damaged’ female characters (Shefer & Foster, 2001). In this device, the psychological distress that arises as a consequence of constant surveillance and the pressure to perform heteronormativity, is presented as a testament to the fragility and instability of individual femininity. This device, especially, loops back in with the *volksmoeder* directives mentioned above, compelling characters into a cyclical, endless performance of subjectification in which heteronormativity causes distress. They react to distress with increased self-regulation and adherence to these norms, which in turn perpetuates their distress, creating a self-reinforcing loop that traps the characters within the confines of the *volksmoeder* ideal.

The central narrative of the film in which the women are in therapy as a result of the conflicts and struggles they face navigating their roles within heterosexual relationships, highlight these strategies. Their troubled relationships with men, who enforce the boundaries of hegemonic femininity, have left them grappling with traumas that shape their sense of purpose and identity.

For example, Vivian deals with suicidal tendencies due to the rejection she experienced when her boyfriend ended their relationship; Lana suffers from PTSD due to witnessing the death of her father when she was eleven and being unable to save his life; Diona blames her pursuit of a successful career and failure to be a ‘good wife’ as the reason her husband died in a vehicle accident; and Adrie’s mental anguish stems from a deep dissatisfaction and disillusionment with expectations of femininity and her role as a mother and wife, which prevents her from being sexually available to her husband.

In this way, the film not only perpetuates the notion that women are inherently vulnerable and emotionally compromised when faced with the demands of heteronormativity, but it also normalises and ritualises the tragedy of heterosexuality and the misogyny paradox (Ward, 2020). This paradox refers to the phenomenon in which cisgender men are conditioned to resent the very women they are supposed to cherish and love; and cisgender women are conditioned to aspire to and remain in relationships with men, at the risk of their mental, emotional, and physical safety. This paradox becomes the central theme within *Stroomop*, reinforcing the message that even toxic and harmful gender norms are inevitable, inescapable, and preferable to existing outside of them. Thus, the women aspire to respectable femininity through conformity and fulfilment of these rigid expectations.

The women of *Stroomop* individually represent the potency of gender performance and heterosexualisation as a technology of power that operates through disciplinary and self-regulating mechanisms. Each women’s story illustrates how power creates knowledge (Foucault, 1977), and through the internalisation of this knowledge, they actively participate in their own subjectification.

In the following section, using feminist discourse analysis and a Foucauldian notion of power, I focus my attention on Adrie. By examining the behaviour, dialogue, emotion, and character

relations, I aim to show how Adrie's 'regimes of truth' measure up against norms of *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* and normative hegemonic femininity (discussed at length in Chapter 4). Within this analysis, I emphasise the means by which Adrie's body functions as a site of heterosexualisations and is subjugated to the power of self-surveillance (through internalised fatphobia and a masculine pervasive gaze), which has negative implications for her primary role fulfilment as a wife. Additionally, I underscore how Adrie's disillusionment with motherhood, and womanhood in general, is represented to the audience as a reflection of her personal failure in creating a suburban heterosexual utopia.

I conclude the chapter with an assessment of Adrie's narrative conclusion in which the eventual acceptance of her physical body and her hunger, framed as acts of empowerment and agency, ultimately reinforces, normalises and essentialises the performance of hegemonic femininity which demands silence, service, and sex (Van der Westhuizen, 2017).

5.3.1 The Invisible Corset: Bodily Control in Service of Compulsory Heterosexuality and Motherhood

While no single framework designates the domestic realm as the sole determiner of heterosexuality and motherhood, several key concepts illuminate their interconnectedness. Adrienne Rich (1980) critiques compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood as an institutional power which restricts women's autonomy and identities, while Judith Butler (1998) argues that gender performativity underscores the way domesticity and motherhood become roles that women are expected to perform rather than inherent expressions of being. Importantly, Crenshaw et al.'s (1995) concept of intersectionality exposes the experiences of heteronormativity and motherhood through additional social identities such as socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, race, and ethnic identities which profoundly shape the expectations placed on women who are mothers. Skeggs (2002), for example, highlights how middle-class femininity is associated with domesticity and respectability, often presented as the ideal.

However, aspiring to this ideal comes at a cost (Skeggs, 2002), creating ontological victimisation for women struggling to meet the impossible standards set for them. Ultimately, the sphere of domesticity becomes a site where complex negotiations of gender, sexuality and social status occur. For women like Adrie, a middle-class wife and mother, achieving domesticity becomes a marker of respectability and biopower. Her success, both socially and personally, hinges on obedience to the dictates of heteronormativity and motherhood. Yet her home is transformed into a site of struggle, where she battles to meet the unattainable expectations of motherhood, heterosexuality, and respectability. As Nnaemeka (1997) argues, motherhood can be seen as a danger to women as it limits their agency to actualise their own subjectivities. In a nutshell, patriarchal heterosexuality that leads to compulsory motherhood is the “invention of the needy” (Haney, 2002).

As a consequence of a gender-sexual system that requires women to define themselves primarily through motherhood, Van der Westhuizen (2017:119) argues that “compulsory motherhood is co-implicated with female heterosexuality”. In Adrie’s case, she identifies herself primarily through motherhood and wifedom, and her primary struggles stem from the feeling that she is failing in both of these roles.

Here, the concept of ‘the politics of the womb’ becomes relevant; the ways in which childbearing can be used to gain both power and recognition within a contested social space (Mothoagae, 2019). In this sense, motherhood operates as a site of power, kept intact by women and which positions mothers above childless women within a social hierarchy (Mothoagae, 2019). Motherhood is weaponised in this manner by women against women, in a struggle between the powerful and the victimised. African scholars, such as Obioma Nnaemeka (1997) regard this as the politics of mothering, and work to separate the experience of mothering from the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Nnaemeka (1997) argues that there are contradictory ways women and mothers are represented in African literature, and these portrayals range from

idealised to objectified, powerful to powerless, reflecting the complex social construction of womanhood and motherhood. In Toni Morrison's *Theory of Motherhood*, O'Reilly (2004) interprets black motherhood as a site of power, as it plays a crucial role in the physical and psychological survival and well-being of black children, which enables them to be themselves and resist the oppressive force of white supremacy. This creates a space in which black motherhood functions as a site of resistance and agency. It can be argued that motherhood also functions as a site of power for Afrikaner white women, as they play an integral role in enculturing their children into white supremacy. According to Mothoagae (2019), the "eagerness to bear children, particularly male children, indicates the patriarchal gaze over the female body". This aligns with the historical construction of the *volksmoeder* by the nationalist state apparatus, and women's role in the reproduction, both physically and ideologically, of Afrikaner nationalist ideology (Van der Westhuizen, 2017; McClintock, 1995).

Although this power of motherhood may seem illusory in Adrie's case, I argue that Adrie performs as both agent and agency, in the same way that hegemonic femininity uses the victims of its system to perpetrate the same crimes. While Adrie performs her agency in vocalising her experience of motherhood and femininity, she also functions as an agent of masculinist gaze, passing on tradition and culture to her boys, enculturing them into Afrikanerhood as an extension of the masculine gaze. The reason that motherhood seems power-less stems from the myth that patriarchal virtuous motherhood and domestic service are innate instincts with which all women are born. This myth ties domestic service to motherhood and virtuous martyrdom, portraying women as self-sacrificing figures who should devote their lives to the service of their families as a testament to their moral purity and strength of character, often at a significant personal cost (Ambrosini & Stanghellini 2012:6-9). Crucially, Ibrahim (1997) has shown that African literature provides a different view of motherhood as a source of resistance against victimisation. African literature has attempted to decolonise and de-patriarchalise motherhood

in an attempt to unlink it from victimhood and reframe it as an “experience” that offers both “pains and rewards” (Mothoagae, 2019:6).

Here we see the technologies of hegemonic femininity functioning on behalf of patriarchy to trap women within a framework that restricts and subjectifies their personhood within the parameters of heteronormativity, imposing surveillance and judgment on their mothering style and their bodies. Van der Westhuizen (2017:36) shows that the supposed utopia of orderly white domestic spaces often hides profound crises for women coerced into relentlessly managing their bodies and desires in pursuit of male validation and peer approval, to signal their respectability. In other words, hegemonic femininity compels subjects into body discipline and restrictive beauty ideals that spark critical self-surveillance (especially for post-partum mothers) and perpetual self-reproach, and induce women to certain practices (Skeggs, 2002). Bartky (1990) argues that these practices, which range from the superficial (makeup application and shaving leg hair, for example), to the downright dangerous (liposuction, breast enhancement surgery etc.), are practices that produce and construct docile feminine bodies inscribed with inferiority. Although Adrie is shown to be severely distressed by her appearance, I argue that this distress can also be interpreted as the seeds of resistance. At the very least, questioning why one should aspire to constrictive beauty norms allows for a path to negotiation and resistance.

In Adrie’s case, this might still be a possibility, but for now, her struggle against unrealistic body ideals negatively impacts her sexual and emotional availability to Charl, potentially jeopardising her ability to embody *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*. As Van der Westhuizen (2017) argues, this concept hinges on constant self-surveillance, compulsory heterosexuality, and domestic servitude. As discussed earlier, Afrikaner women are compelled to self-actualise through self-regulation and service to others. Put plainly, Adrie cannot be considered a respectable Afrikaner woman until she has gained control over her physical self through the

regulation of her hunger and weight, and until she services her husband's sexual desires. In the context of postfeminist analysis, Adrie's character is depicted squarely within the compulsory heterosexuality/maternalism trope which frames compulsory heterosexuality, and by extension, motherhood, as a central tenet of female happiness. The disciplinary power of heterosexuality subjectifies Adrie into a performance of gender that has a profound negative impact on her mental and physical health.

It is with this in mind that we meet Adrie as she is surveying her body in a full-length mirror in a bedroom. She is wearing tight, full body shapewear (a kind of undergarment meant to flatten and constrict soft flesh, giving the appearance of a small waist) and is obviously unhappy with what she sees. The audience watches Adrie as she surveys herself, critically accounting for every perceived flaw. Her body, to borrow from Bourdieu (1986b), a social product shaped by cultural norms, functions as a site where the social and political forces of Afrikaner womanhood and compulsory heterosexuality intersect. Adrie's struggles reflect a misalignment between her lived experience and an internalised utopian fantasy of femininity that is eternally out of reach. Her internalised gaze, a form of delusion, becomes a tool of psycho-social surveillance (Elias, 1982) as she relentlessly polices her body. Her current reality is misaligned with her childhood visions of femininity: a jewellery box ballerina who is elegant, "sag en mooi"⁸ and the women and children in magazines that are glowing and happy.

The impact of this unattainable 'utopia' is manifested in Adrie's confession in group therapy that 'nothing fits' and femininity feels 'uncomfortable': she is clearly disillusioned with womanhood and the impact that pregnancy and birthing have had on her body. Patriarchal gaze through a technology of surveillance compels her to misattribute her unhappiness to personal failure, particularly her inability to become thinner, rather than criticising the social norms

⁸ Soft and pretty.

responsible for her suffering. This aligns with Bartky (1990) and Cloete's (1992) arguments that women are subjected to "tyranny" and "relentless" discipline to correct supposed "defects" and maintain a "gendered service role" constructed by capitalist patriarchal defined femininity. This is further highlighted in a scene in which Adrie is frantically cooking a 'weight loss cabbage soup' and proposes to only eat soup in order to lose two kilograms per week. She is willing to go to extreme and desperate measures to meet the demands of thinness. Adrie's attempts at weight-loss are rooted in internalised fatphobic norms that emphasise thinness as a prerequisite to feminine fulfilment, social acceptance, and success. Doria and Numer (2022) argue that the pressure to be thin leads to the denial of pleasure associated with eating, as women strive to adhere to the thin ideal at the expense of their physical and emotional well-being.

When Charl berates Adrie's private dieting efforts, after finding her hidden dieting pills ("Ek weet jy vreet koolsop!"⁹), he weaponises her intense self-regulation against her, citing it as justification to withhold emotional support and empathy, precisely when she needs caretaking herself. Charl's awareness of Adrie's dieting habits suggests not just surveillance over her body and choices, but a weaponisation of that knowledge. His subsequent outburst transforms this surveillance into a tool of judgment and emotional manipulation, upholding patriarchal power and authority within their relationship. This dynamic speaks to Connell et al.'s (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, as Charl prioritises dominance and control over empathy and support for Adrie's emotional needs. Morrell (2001:9) argues that this version of masculinity legitimates the power of men through a "gender consensus" which "does not rely on brute force for its efficacy but on a range of mechanisms". Furthermore, Charl's use of "vreet"¹⁰ rather than merely "eet"¹¹ connotes an animalistic quality to Adrie which frames her hunger as pig-

⁹ I know you are gorging on cabbage soup!

¹⁰ To eat like an animal.

¹¹ Eat.

like and gluttonous. Within colonial schema, this strategy of dehumanisation of the feminine, by associating her with the natural world in its most ‘uncivilised’ and ‘animalistic’ form, was used to justify domination and control (McClintock, 1995). This schema manifests in Charl’s verbal attack on Adrie: his intentional mischaracterisation of her behaviour obscures her profound distress, affirming the gender hierarchy and technology of power present within heterosexual relationships.

In the same scene, Charl accuses Adrie of being secretive (“Van wanneer af steek ons goed weg van mekaar?!”)¹². Adrie’s discontent is painfully visible to the audience, yet Charl remains oblivious, entrenched in his self-absorbed perspective. Charl’s accusation of secrecy reveals a household where Adrie’s struggles occur in isolation rather than through open communication. He functions here as an agent of the patriarchal gaze, blind to his wife’s emotional realities while demanding transparency from her. This dynamic underscores the power differential inherent in their relationship.

Adrie confesses to the therapy group that she felt that she had permission to satisfy her hunger while she was pregnant, subtly revealing the oppressive nature of feminine discipline. While pregnancy offered a temporary reprieve from self-surveillance, her acceptance of self-regulation underscores the notion that female hunger, both metaphorical and physical, is permissible only in the service of reproduction or domestic duties. In other words, women are permitted appetites only in service of satiating something beyond themselves. This encapsulates a broader devaluation and suppression of female pleasure, as cultural conditioning teaches women that prioritising their desires or appetites outside of heterosexuality is shameful or selfish (McKinnon, 1989). Consequently, women experience internal conflicts in which pleasure is incompatible with responsibility, leading to guilt about pursuing their own

¹² Since when do we keep secrets from each other?

fulfilment. Essentially, this guilt fractures women's relationships with their bodies by imposing irreconcilable dichotomies – indulge/deny, gratify/discipline – and operates as an insidious form of control over women's ownership of self.

Adrie links her disordered eating habits to 'pushing her husband away', signifying that her struggle with self-acceptance is directly tied to neglecting her spousal duties. A scene that plays out in the laundry room further illustrates this dynamic. Adrie is dressed in her full body shapewear, while Charl attempts to feed her a cupcake. At first, she resists, but then concedes to taking a bite. Charl reads this as an implicit invitation to lean in and fondle Adrie. Adrie pushes Charl's hands off her body. When Adrie rejects Charl's advances, it ruptures the heterosexual power balance that positions female worth in relation to male validation (Van der Westhuizen, 2017). A core characteristic associated with hegemonic masculinity is the expectation or belief that men are entitled to sexual access, control, or gratification from others, particularly women (Lemmelle, 2010). Lemmelle (2010) further argues that the notion that femininity gains value through male validation and sexual objectification leads men to believe that women should equate men's willingness to have sex with them as validation of their womanhood. Charl's angry response to this rejection reveals his inability to conceptualise Adrie's self-esteem outside of his own desire. His anger exposes a sense of entitlement and ownership of Adrie's body and a belief that his sexual desire is the sole source of her validation. This shatters his illusion of masculine power and his perception of himself as the one who bestows value on her and her body, ultimately reinforcing the conditional acceptance Adrie experiences within heterosexuality. This further underscores Van der Westhuizen's (2017:115) argument that Afrikaner womanhood silences the self in service of male and broader ethnic interests and that "women domestically and sexually service their men in an attempt to prevent them from straying outside the bounds of their union", regardless of costs to female well-being

or fractures in relationship reciprocity. In a sense, Adrie exercises agency as she weaponises her body against herself and Charl and is unaware that this rejection is an exercise in power.

The film creates a compelling narrative which highlights how women are often implicated as agents of gaze, normalisation, and subjectification even as they perform agency. The following scene perfectly illustrates how Afrikaner women perform *ordentlikheid* through the denigration and criticism of themselves, which also serves as a cue for other women to join in. As the group of women sit by the river and reflect on their journey so far, Adrie shares her body image struggles. The other women join in by listing their own ‘perceived flaws’. This transforms a potentially emphatic moment into a space of iterability in which self-regulation functions as a mode of respectable femininity and is ritualised and normalised. Critically, stretch marks, bunions, wide hips, and other natural variations are framed as shameful imperfections rather than rejected as unrealistic standards. This emphasis on imperfections reinforces the female body as a defective site of heterosexualisations in which it is framed as a collection of parts under relentless scrutiny and in need of constant improvement. This reveals the pervasive nature of disciplinary power: by internalising the need for perfection, they give power over themselves to the very structures that objectify them. Foucault’s notion of power is amplified: it is not top-down oppression, but exists fluidly in their ostensibly innocuous conversation, shaping their self-perception and actions. Power is everywhere, and the disciplinary power of patriarchy gives them the power to perform hegemonic femininity. This scene further exposes the body as a social construct (Bourdieu, 1986b), which confines women to a narrow, unachievable standard of beauty that emphasises youth, thinness, and flawlessness over natural variations. Furthermore, it speaks to the double-bind that women experience under patriarchy which demands that women bear children but stigmatises the physical changes that accompany it.

While the scene culminates in the women happily skinny dipping, ostensibly signalling liberation, the bonding ritual, rooted in self-critique, reveals the powerful grip of patriarchal regulation through the technology of hegemonic femininity. Ultimately, the scene depicts a seemingly supportive moment between women sharing their insecurities. However, their ‘bonding’ unintentionally reinforces harmful beauty standards and reveals the insidious power dynamics at play. The Foucauldian notions of utopia and heterotopia come to mind – in their attempt to embody a utopian ideal of liberation and support, they fall into a heterotopia of self-regulation. The illusion of agency, the feeling of exercising choice through self-critique, masks the true power structures that dictate beauty norms. In their search for solidarity, the women unwittingly perpetuate their own confinement within heteronormativity as power works internally to compel them toward self-consciousness, self-regulation, and self-correction.

5.4 CONCLUSION(S): ARRIVING AT *ORDENTLIKHEID*

In this chapter, I have argued that *Stroomop* functions as a site where dominant notions of Afrikaner femininity, through *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*, are reproduced and contested, particularly through the character of Adrie. When viewed through a Foucauldian lens, the film’s settings become ‘cartographies of struggle’ where the *volksmoeder* ideal, as a form of hegemonic femininity, exerts power over women’s bodies and exacts a particular performance of gender. Adrie’s struggles to conform to unattainable standards of heteronormativity expose the technologies of iterability that normalise and ritualise restrictive expectations around beauty, motherhood, and heterosexuality. Her eventual return to a superficially ‘improved’ state, marked by her renewed sexual intimacy with Charl and adoption of traditional feminine signifiers such as makeup, reinforce the film’s nostalgic yearning for a social order where women’s value is determined by submission and self-sacrifice.

This aligns with Foucault’s (1977) ‘regime of truth’, in which the film dictates proper respectable femininity and governs and measures female behaviour through external and

internalised surveillance. The characters' journey from rebellion to compliance exemplifies the media's power to regulate and classify femininity. Their transformations demonstrate governmentality in action, through internalisation of racialised and gender heteronormative codes, they effectively become model subjects of social control. These stories ultimately present the Afrikaner worldview as simple common sense, further solidifying its hold on viewers.

The emphasis on domesticity, self-regulation, and masculine approval as central to female identity, represents the limited scope of possibilities for Afrikaner women. Moreover, the film's nostalgic framing of white womanhood obscures the barriers posed by patriarchal power structures that hinder true gender and racial equality within post-apartheid South Africa. While *Stroomop* primarily reinforces the status quo, it also offers glimpses of resistance. Adrie's initial rebellion against the constraints of the *volksmoeder* ideal, and the moments of female solidarity formed during their journey, hint at the possibilities for negotiation. Yet, ultimately, the film suggests that true liberation for women within the confines of Afrikaner culture may be unattainable.

When considering that *Stroomop* was created with an Afrikaans female demographic in mind, it further underscores hooks's (1984) assertion that media functions as mass indoctrination, teaching audiences the dominant norms and values of a society. My analysis has shown that films such as *Stroomop* are a powerful tool for disseminating the ideals of respectable Afrikaner femininity and serves as a reminder that seemingly innocuous cultural products play a role in shaping our understandings of race, gender, identity, and power. The power of storytelling is crucial here as films such as *Stroomop* do not just reflect reality as we perceive it, they actively shape it. This analysis has set the stage for the final chapter, which offers a broader reflection on the significance of my research.

In Chapter 6, I summarise all the chapters and discuss how this study contributes to understanding media representations of Afrikaner identity today. I also address study limitations, propose avenues for future research, and discuss the potential implications for media creators and audiences.

CHAPTER 6: THE *VOLKSMOEDER* IN REVIEW – DISTILLING INSIGHTS AND PROPOSING CHANGE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter, I provide a comprehensive dissertation summary, highlighting the key points from each preceding chapter. I revisit the research objectives and discuss the main findings, which reveal how the film *Stroomop* perpetuates and reinforces dominant ideologies of gender, race, and Afrikaner identity through the lens of the *volksmoeder* ideal. I propose recommendations to address the limitations within the study and suggest potential future research that could expand on the insights from my analysis. By exploring the broader landscape of Afrikaans cinema and developing a quantitative framework for evaluating gender representation, future studies may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Afrikaner identity is constructed and contested. In time, this may guide filmmakers toward creating films that excavate the ‘safe space’ of Afrikaans cinema, challenging the restrictions of the Afrikaner ideology still loyal to a worldview embedded in white male supremacy and female subordination.

6.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, I introduced my dissertation, which explores the representation of hegemonic Afrikaner femininity, as *volksmoeder ordentlikheid*, in the Afrikaans language film *Stroomop* (2018). I provided background on the Afrikaner identity, its association with apartheid, and the ongoing struggle to recuperate its lost respectability. I argued that Afrikaner women, as keepers of the moral ideals of the Afrikaner identity, are central to this project and that media, particularly film, plays a significant role in disseminating this gender ideology. I outlined the research objectives, which included discursive elements of the *volksmoeder* ideal. I discussed the qualitative research design and how I planned to employ feminist discourse analysis and a Foucauldian notion of power in the subsequent analysis. Finally, I provided an overview of the

dissertation contents, which explore my positionality, the historical context of the Afrikaner identity, and an in-depth film analysis.

In Chapter 2 I introduced the theoretical frameworks that I used for my analysis, feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power. These frameworks were used as interconnected tools to locate my positionality, and to situate the Afrikaner identity, and analyse the representation of Afrikaner womanhood and *volksmoeder ordentlikheid* in the film *Stroomop*. Whilst I acknowledged the limitations of universalising theoretical approaches, I focused on how these lenses reveal the construction of gendered and racial power hierarchies and their influence on identity formation. Feminist discourse analysis provided the means to decode technologies of gender and heteronormativity, revealing how language and stereotypical tropes reinforce social constructs. Foucault's notions of biopower, governmentality and subjectification illuminated how power operates through surveillance, control, and self-regulation systems. These frameworks enabled a critical interrogation of technologies of power and how they shape the portrayal of the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* within the film.

In Chapter 3, I explored my positionality through my social and epistemic location as a white Afrikaans woman. Drawing on the concept of 'ethnographic awareness', I argued that my background and experience offered benefits in my interpretation of respectable Afrikaner womanhood. I explored how social structures, particularly religious and familial ones, enforced heteronormative colonial norms, which constructed my sense of femininity and whiteness. By discussing my subjective experiences, I aimed to personalise my understanding of Afrikaner culture within the broader context of post-apartheid South Africa.

In Chapter 4, I examined the historical construction of Afrikaner identity, focusing on the pillars that construct this identity: the forces of masculinity, common-sense patriarchal

wisdom, and claims to power through divine right and racial destiny. This examination traced the construction of the *volksmoeder* ideal as the most ideal form of respectable Afrikaner womanhood. I tracked the overlap of *volksmoeder* ideals that emphasise domesticity, beauty, reproductive labour, and heteronormativity with Westernised hegemonic femininity. While Afrikaner identity is complex and contested, I showed that dominant narratives and iteration continue to reinforce masculine power and heteronormative notions of femininity, primarily through postfeminist media.

In Chapter 5, I analysed the film *Stroomop*, precisely its geographic space and the character Adrie, to ascertain to which extent the *volksmoeder* ideal is reinforced or challenged. I drew on feminist discourse analysis and the Foucauldian notion of power to examine the subjectification of Afrikaner women's bodies as sites of heterosexualisation. I argued that *Stroomop*, as a technology of power, reinforces and reproduces heteronormativity through compulsory heterosexuality, maternalism, the beauty ideal and middle-class domesticity. I showed how the film serves as both biopower and a 'cartography of struggle', revealing how female characters negotiate the restrictive norms of the *volksmoeder* ideal.

6.3 LESSONS FROM *STROOMOP*

In my analysis, I found that seemingly harmless cultural products such as *Stroomop* perpetuate dominant ideologies about gender, race, and identity. While ostensibly centred around women's experiences, the film ultimately reinforces restrictive notions of Afrikaner femininity rooted in the *volksmoeder* ideal. Adrie's narrative normalises and idealises the epistemic violence inherent in these subject positions, which elevate female subservience, self-sacrifice, and self-regulation through adherence to narrow beauty standards, heterosexuality, and motherhood as markers of feminine respectability. Adrie's struggles expose the internalised gaze and pervasive power of heteronormativity in shaping women's actions, choices, personhood, and sense of self-worth. Her eventual acceptance of traditional femininity, framed

as a form of redemption and an exercise in agency, undermines any genuine challenge to the status quo. The nostalgic portrayal of white Afrikaner womanhood in *Stroomop* reveals how media functions as a technology of indoctrination, subtly shaping viewers' understanding of identity, power, and social norms. In the context of the Afrikaner woman, traditional expectations of her role in enculturating her children into the Afrikaner identity remain intact. As such, the film is a reminder of the need for critical engagement with cultural products to uncover the hidden ideologies they perpetuate.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND ENVISIONING PROGRESS

The limitation of this study is its focus on the single character of Adrie. This can be remedied with the following research objectives:

- A study of race and the *volksmoeder* ideal as it relates to the coloured characters, Diona and Nixie, examining how these portrayals reinforce or challenge the dominant conception of the *volksmoeder* ideal as exclusively white.
- An exploration of the erasure of homosexuality in Afrikaner culture, particularly lesbianism, using Nixie's character as focal point.
- An analysis of the portrayal of masculinity with a focus on the characters of Guy and Smiles, examining whether these portrayals diverge or align with traditional models of hegemonic masculinity.
- A critical study the of character of Smiles, the single black male character, to investigate how the film portrays black masculinity as it connects to broader power dynamics within post-apartheid South Africa.

6.5 FUTURE RESEARCH – DEVELOPING THE SCALE OF *ORDENTLIKHEID*

Building on the research findings in this dissertation, I propose a future research project that delves deeper into the portrayal of Afrikaner femininity and masculinity, across a wider

spectrum of Afrikaans films. The broader study would encompass a variety of genres and narratives, moving beyond the limitations of a single film. This approach would pave the way for a richer and more nuanced understanding of how the white Afrikaner identity is constructed and contested within contemporary Afrikaans cinema.

One potential avenue for this future research involves the development of a quantitative framework to analyse the discursive elements of the *volksmoeder* ideal. This framework could be used to create a numerical scale for rating films based on their representation of heteronormativity. This approach draws inspiration from similar studies that have established standardised methods for evaluating the representation of Asian, LGBTQIA+ and black characters in film. These studies provided valuable data, revealing correlations between on-screen portrayals of diverse identities and the lack of diversity behind the camera.

This future research could generate statistically significant data, revealing trends and patterns across the broader landscape of Afrikaans cinema. Additionally, a development of this rating system could serve as a valuable tool, providing a more objective basis for evaluating gender representation in Afrikaans cinema. A global movement is demanding better representation of gender, race and sexuality in film, as research exposes the harmful effects of heteronormative stereotypical narrative portrayals. The South African film industry, including its Afrikaans-language sector, is not exempt from this critical conversation. To challenge these norms effectively, we first need to understand their scope and impact. This study has served as a crucial addition to the academic body of research on Afrikaner identity and its dissemination through popular media. By implementing a quantitative framework such as the one proposed, future research may empower filmmakers, writers, audiences, and scholars to challenge deeply held beliefs about gender and race, and the portrayal thereof in popular media.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This dissertation has shown that the *volksmoeder* ideal still retains the historical imperative to dominate and subjugate female subjects through the pursuit of compulsory heterosexuality, a middle-class domestic lifestyle and motherhood. Through a critical analysis of the representation of femininity in *Stroomop*, I revealed how seemingly innocuous cultural products are active in reinforcing this damaging ideology. By using a feminist discourse analysis framework, I showed how heteronormativity, through the technology of iterability, ritualises, normalises and essentialises subjectivities that dominate and subjugate women into upholding and reinforcing patriarchal norms and values. The Foucauldian notion of power proved an essential toolkit with which to excavate the pillars of Afrikaner identity that led to the construction of the *volksmoeder* ideal and its governing of the Afrikaner woman, both historically and in modern post-apartheid South Africa. My findings underscore the importance of interrogating covert messaging in Afrikaner cinema, which allows a somewhat reformed ideology of nationalist, conservative white supremacy, and male dominance to continue unabated. As we strive toward creating a more equitable society, it is crucial to challenge the normalisation of heteronormativity and advocate for a broader range of perspectives and experiences to be represented on screen. I hope this study has added to the discourse around Afrikaner identity and will serve as a foundation for future research that can further illuminate the complex dynamics of power, identity, and respectability in Afrikaner cinema.

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