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## **ABSTRACT**

The construction of females in the media and popular culture remains a topical discourse. Dominant literature in the subject shows that the media are phallogentric and patriarchal. This study examines the construction of South African women in the film *Isibaya*. The study is guided by Africana Womanism and Critical Political Economy of the media theory. I employed Critical Discourse Analysis and semiotic analysis to examine images of African women in the film under study. Findings show that women continue to be objectified in the media. In fact, the movie *Isibaya* symbolically annihilates female bodies.

## DECLARATION

I, **Tatenda Laura Mawoyo**, hereby declare that I am the sole owner of this thesis. I authorize Midlands State University to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the sole purpose of scholarly research.

Signature.....

Date.....

## **APPROVAL**

This dissertation entitled **MEDIA AND WOMAN: THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN ISIBAYA** by **Tatenda Laura Mawoyo** meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of **BSc in Media and Society Studies Honours Degree** of the Midlands State University and is approved for its knowledge and literal presentation.

Supervisor.....

Date.....

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This research study focuses on media and female representation in the movie *Isibaya*. The representation of women in the media and popular culture remains a subject of contention in academic circles. With different stakeholders calling for positive representation of women, this study examines the construction of African women in an African produced film. Focus is on *Isibaya*, a South African production. *Isibaya* is a film produced by Angus Gibson, a popular producer from South Africa, co-created with Catherine Stewart, Teboho Mahlatsi and Desire Maarkgraaf who are directors and managing directors, respectively. *Isibaya* focuses on the day to day life of men and women residing in a valley, with the husbands as taxi bosses of a competitive and threatening taxi business. Despite the plot being centred on patriarchy, it however is a panacea to the once existing problem of absence of women on screens, especially in films (Atakav, 2013).

This study examines whether *Isibaya* breaks away from the traditional phallogocentric stance of the media which tends to vilify women. Through critical discourse and semiotic analysis of the movie, the study infers wider deductions about production process. The study sought to find out different images of women constructed in the film and the forces driving the representation. Studies by (Corwin 2009; Hill 2010) show multiple ways in which women have been constructed in traditional films and how these images have prevailed in the minds of different societies. The research examines how African women are constructed in the soap opera *Isibaya*.

## **1.1 Background of study**

The media as a culture industry are responsible for the production, construction and distribution of meanings through their mediated images and representations. Major differences can be noted in the manner through which the media represent men and women. In the mainstream media, women are domesticated, and are defined by the men in their lives (Brooks and Herbert, 2004), meaning that they should be confined to the public space which is culturally set for them. This view is further articulated on by Corwin (2009) arguing that black women are portrayed as matriarchs, mammies and jezebels, suggesting that nothing good ever comes out of a black woman. However, the media has recently become a force of change (Gauntlett, 2008), as it has constructed alternative images of an ambitious, self-driven and a career woman. Whilst research has been previously carried out, few studies have



examined the representation of African women by African produced movies or films. This research examines of African women in the soap opera Isibaya and possible forces behind such constructions. Isibaya is a movie produced by Angus Gibson. It focuses on power relations in the eBhubesini valley and the Zulu culture at large.

Isibaya is a South African prime-time film. During its introduction into the market, it was a telenovela in season 1. The story is based on the battle of wealth and power between three rival families, that is, the Zungus, the Ndhlovus and the Ngwenyas, who live in a valley and aspire to be auditor in the taxi industry.

Misconceptions about women and their representation in the media have since fuelled hot debate in the ancient and modern worlds. The Bible as a media text is not innocent in how it portrays the female specie. The creation story shows that the woman was taken from the rib of Adam, the man; to mean that the woman was a subject to the man and was supposed to be submissive hence patriarchy has always been in existence. When counting the number of people at a certain event, they only counted men, meaning that women had no citizenship, which in today's world they are recognized as second class citizens considering how they are represented.

Aristotle (2004) concurs with the above notion by arguing that the woman is a defensive part of humanity, which developed as a mistake when the temperature during conception was low (Weitz, 2003). The media are active players in shaping how a society behaves and how people perceive themselves. The media are instrumental in gaining public consent, as media texts do not simply reflect 'reality'; instead they construct hegemonic definitions of what should be the correct order of life. On the same note, Walby (1990) asserts that with capitalism, the woman's place was supposed to be in the home and when she got married she would lose everything she owned to the husband and become his possession. This means that the woman's role has since been limited to child-bearing and producing more children and men for labour, evident in several modern societies currently. This has fuelled the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of African women in the mass media.

Women's subordination is undeniably portrayed through roles assigned to women in television, advertisements and print just to mention a few. Storytellers are tremendous contributors in the construction and maintenance of gender stereotypes in prime-time television, through social roles assigned to female and male characters (Lauren, 2008). Minor and supporting roles are usually given to women, painting the picture that men possess social

power over women. Burton (2005) contends that the media industries are meaning producers and it is the power of these meanings, what we do with them, that shapes relationships, models reality and generates behaviours of domination and feelings of subordination. Which can arguably be referred to as reproduction of sexist norms, beliefs and values by the media (Carter, 2004)?

The media are a powerful force in influencing how the audiences or society view and define gender, sex, femininity and masculinity, which is done through creation of images which are distorted and biased. Hooks (1992) argues that black female representation in the media determines how blackness and black people are seen and how other groups will respond in relation to these constructed images. Hudson (1998), Hill, Collins (2000,2004) both advance the notion that media images of black women result from dominant racial, gender and class ideologies. Dow (2006) concurs with Hooks on the view that media representations and images distort the way women view themselves and how the society views them in return. The portrait painted by the media becomes the universal view and approach adopted by consumers and in most instances, becomes their way of life. The media are all powerful (McQuail, 1994).

The media are guilty of ignoring the so-called 'new woman'- the woman who seeks greater social, educational, political and economic rights (Carter, 2004). However, the media have started taking responsibility in protecting the interests of women, preaching the gospel of gender equality. The post-modernist perspective shows traces of how women can dominate the media (Hall, 1998). Women have been given a place in politics; Zimbabwe's government structure is one example. The United Nations is one board which has played a pivotal role in ensuring that the rights of women have been realized and have made efforts to deconstruct gender imbalances, which have been created before by the media as culture industries.

Although research has shown how women are overall represented, little has is known concerning the construction of images of the African woman. Therefore, it is in the interest of this study to explore how the media, specifically soap operas, construct images of African women. One therefore questions the extent to which the film *Isibaya* refrains from or maintains the anti-women stance.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The research examines the construction of African women in the South African soapie *Isibaya*. The intention is to show whether contemporary film is moving away or maintaining

the traditional anti-women stance. The study also examines forces behind such representations.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. Explain how African women are constructed in the soap Isibaya.
2. Explore the driving forces behind women's images portrayed in Isibaya.
3. Assess the extent to which the images of female characters in Isibaya are a true reflection of African women in African societies.
4. Explain whether the film Isibaya breaks away or maintain the anti-women stance.

### **1.4 Main Research Question**

- How are African women constructed in the film Isibaya?

#### **1.4.1 Sub-research questions**

- What are the driving forces behind women's images portrayed in Isibaya?
- Are the images of female characters in Isibaya a true reflection of African women in African societies?
- Does the film Isibaya refrain from or maintain the anti-women stance?

### **1.5 Justification of study**

Contestations surrounding the representation of women in different media prompted the researcher to examine the way Isibaya as a soap opera represents women. The researcher made an observation of how women are ridiculed by the media and made to be passive subjects of society, who accept whatever label cast on them. Debates surrounding the ideal definition of femininity also prompted the researcher to explore what is really means to be a woman. This led the researcher to further investigate how African women are constructed in the film Isibaya. Studies (Mulvey, 2006; Johnston, 2013) have examined the contribution of the media in existing images of women. Their study discovered that the representation of women by the media has been distorted and in different platforms women have been made spectacles and objects by the media.

However, this research is of great significance to the scholarly world as it contests the argument that images of women constructed by the media are the ideal definitions of femininity. The study focuses on African women as they are a minority group which has not

been previously examined, in studies carried out before. The study is therefore significant as it demonstrates that there is no universal definition of femininity. Ancient representation was characterized by the absence of women on screen, that is, there was underrepresentation of women (Atakav, 2013). An illusion has however been created, as the representation has arguably transformed from underrepresentation to misrepresentation, in the guise that there is a change in the manner women have been represented. Media representation of women has changed over the past two decades (Greetham, 2014). It is argued that the 'new wave' or contemporary film industry purposively includes a critical self-awareness of women's complicity with patriarchal culture (Atakav, 2013). This realization shows a discourse shift in the construction of images of contemporary women.

The major question lies within the forces behind the representation of women and how they immensely contribute to the construction of images of women. The research is therefore important in that it will help understand that media and advertisers are in business partnership with the aims of profit making. Hence, images constructed and portrayed in the media do not necessarily define universal femininity standards. The researcher attempts to define femininity. The study is of significance in my field as it seeks to how that femininity is fluid.

Isibaya explores both the modern and traditional African woman, contrary to soap operas like *Generations* which focus on the modern woman only. The media in their representation and construction of an ideal woman is done along Western lines; hence Isibaya producers deviated from that, making this study significant. The time frame to be analysed by the researcher is from February 2016 to February 2017. This selection helps the researcher to make a comparative analysis of trends of female representation from the time the Isibaya was first introduced on TV and the status now, in an effort to note the similarities and differences. The period under study also shows episodes when women were mostly active in the soap opera. Culture is also an influential element in the representation of women hence the research aims to deeply understand its contribution to the oppression and subordination of women. The study therefore examines the relationship between feminism, culture and the media.

## **1.6 Scope of study**

The study limits its focus on black traditional and modern South African women, in relation to how the female characters in the soapie are used to represent women in Africa. Black women have been underrepresented in the media, as compared to the coverage that white

women get; reason why the researcher chose to focus on black women only. The researcher examined Isibaya episodes from February 2016 to February 2017 and analysed how the text and image in the soapie represent African women, as well as how the audiences decode the message. The episodes chosen by the researcher enabled her to compare the representation from the past and the present situation.

### **1.7 Limitations**

The study focuses on Isibaya only and therefore it does not generalize the whole media landscape. Isibaya only has black characters, meaning that white African women as part of the African population are underrepresented in this study.

### **1.8 Assumptions**

- The way soap operas portray women is not a true reflection of a typical modern day African woman but rather an illusion of ideas the media intend to cultivate in people.
- The media objectifies women.
- How the media constructs images of women do not directly influence how women define themselves.
- Media industries are largely populated and run by men, which explain why male ideologies dominate media content.

### **1.9 Structure of study**

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter one entails the introduction to the study, while chapter two consists of literature review and theoretical framework; basing on what other scholars have discovered in relation to how African women are constructed. Chapter three presents the research methods and methodology used in the research. Chapter four focuses on the political economy and organisational analysis of the Bomb Shelter. Chapter five outlines the research findings of the study undertaken and chapter six outlines recommendations and concludes the study.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

The chapter provided the foundation on which the whole study will be based. The chapter looked at the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives; research questions, significance of the study, key assumptions, limitations and delimitations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The chapter introduces the literature review, which forms the basis of the study. This chapter reviews studies and researches done by various scholars and institutions on how female audiences perceive the notion of beauty presented in magazines and how magazines portray feminine beauty. It will also review theories and concepts that have been applied in order to gain a broader understanding of the research under study. Literature review is a record of what has been written and published on a subject by endorsed or credited scholars (Taylor, 2006). A literature review must be centred on or directly related to the thesis or research questions that are being developed. The literature review should also produce results into a summary of what is and is not known and evaluate it according to the guiding concept of one's thesis or research question.

#### **2.1 Media as constructors of reality**

Previous scholarship on the media and reality (Avraham, 2003; Couldry, 2003; Williams, 2003; Enli, 2015) argues that the media are constructors of reality. Other scholars such as Floyd and Katz (2015) explore the media as constructors of reality from a post-modernist view. In addition, (Gladstone, 2013; Davis, 2013) hammer on how the media reproduces stereotypes of minority groups, which they 'other' through the space and time they give to certain issues affecting them. However, this study explores the representation of women, specifically African women in Isibaya, who are frequently marginalized and trivialized by the media. The study examines the extent to which the images constructed by the media are a true reflection of African women in African societies. The researcher seeks to explore if the media construct reality or rather mirror what already exists in society.

Reality can be defined as the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them. Reality has simply become a narrow definition that suits the media and what they define as culture and social values. It is through these definitions that the media maintain their hegemony on the audiences and exercise their power on them, in an illusion that they are educating, informing and entertaining the audiences. Though they construct images of society as a whole, the media participate in the construction of reality and images of minority groups, which they tend to relegate. The media are more than an elite-centered information and communication propaganda-generating institution. They serve as a cultural intermediary among human communication, socialization and learning process (Rowell, 2011).

The media try to unify the public through creating common social values presented as reality. It is not just reality but social reality which is to be shared by members of a society (Couldry, 2003). Post modernism argues that reality is socially constructed and the media are the technical constructors of this reality (Floyd and Katz, 2015). This suggests that construction of reality is done through a social integration process, and the media are a part of it. The manner through which women are portrayed in the media, specifically soap operas, is argued to be 'reality' by the media. This is because the media are 'gatekeepers'. They have the power to regulate the flow of information, to block, rephrase or reorganize this information (William, 2003), in order to suit the meaning they are trying to convey to the audiences. What the media define as reality is, an African woman, confined to a private space, child bearing and taking care of the family and the society. In trying to create common social values, the media assimilate different people and cultures into the same civic society. However, during the integration process, the media enforce hegemonic culture and disregard other groups (Avraham, 2003). In relation to the researcher's study, women are part of the groups which are denigrated in the process, specifically African women and men continue to maintain their hegemony over them, fuelled by culture.

The media construct and represent reality through discourse, their products and the 'space' they give to a particular topic or issue, in an effort to make it appear as the acceptable social order. The media invent what they call 'reality' through manipulation of the public's memory and creating the illusion of serving interests of many whilst they only uphold interests of the dominant class (Parenti, 1993). Media production simply reflects the ideas of the powerful elements of society, greatly influenced by the political economy of the media. Owners, funders and the media are mainly concerned with what sells at that present moment and that

is what they present to the public as reality. Primasanti (2010) concurs with Parenti (1993) on that manipulation of public agenda by the media agenda is done by giving more space and time to issues considered critical. This determines the structure of the social world, as some events are given coverage whilst others are shelved. The media polarise, amplify and sensationalise images and ideas, within a limited and well defined range (Davis, 2013). This then results in the creation of single versions of 'reality' during the construction of reality process. The media tell the African story from a patriarchal and heteronormative perspective at the expense of women.

An understanding of a culture or society by its people is done through the mediated representation of reality by the media (Enli, 2015). One can argue that the media play an influential role in one's view of the world and how they impose meaning to their lives. This is as a result of negotiations which take place between the audiences and the producers, to illusionally agree on what an accepted definition of a culture of a society is. To further this notion, Gladstone (2012) argues that through this construct, people have fallen prey to stereotypes, especially minority groups, such as women. However, this view is dismissed by Shazz (2012), arguing that an individual already develops a construct since birth, through experiences and observations of what the world is. This is contrary to the popular representation of the media as the 'all powerful' institution, acting as a lens through which people view their lives. The above view ignores that not everyone in the social world is exposed to media content but they are still in contact with the reality of the world through social and cultural means (Weber, 2002).

Audiences are not passive, they have the liberty to discard or absorb what is presented to them as reality by the media. Society is not seen simply as comprised of passive recipients to a message disseminated by the media, rather society is actively part of the social construction process (Rowell, 2011). Researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham understand the audience as active constructors of reality, not simply mirrors of external reality (Steinberg & Macedo, 2007). This challenges the assumed power of the media as the disseminators of transparent and non-problematic messages. To advance the above view, Steinberg & Macedo (2007) further argue that media do not present reality like transparent windows or simple reflections of the world. This is because messages or content from the media through a construction process, are well positioned, created and shaped.



From the literature reviewed one can argue that the media do not represent reality; rather they represent an ideology and induce social control. The media induce ideology at the expense of reality; hence the representations of African women simply reflect patriarchal norms which are continuously used to win hegemony over women. The literature further disputes the power of the media as an all-powerful institution and recognises the ability of African women to reconstruct their images and redefine womanhood. The literature overlooks the fact that not everyone has access to media content but they are still able to separate reality from mediation, largely influenced by the way they are socialised and their culture. The study therefore explored the real images of traditional African women which have been left underlying, that is, the African woman as an independent being with the power of choice.

### **2.1.1 Patriarchy as the cornerstone of subordination and oppression of women**

Ancient and contemporary societies present patriarchy as the basic reason for the existence and success of the exploitation of women as a minority group (Hollow, 2010; Bebel and Engel, 2010; Marsh, Campbell and Keating, 2014; Zayko, 2017). Patriarchy is exercised largely in the family set up, where women assume the subordinate position unconsciously when they get married (Ryan, 2014; (Marsh, Campbell and Keating, 2014). In the context of this study, patriarchy can be labelled as one of the driving forces behind the images of women constructed and represented by the media. Nevertheless, there are other excruciating factors that fuel the subordination and oppression of women which include religion, capitalism and culture (Brook, 2008; McCammon, 2017, Zayko, 2017). All these factors however reflect male domination and supremacy. This study therefore focuses on examining whether the representations of African women in the media, reflect male supremacy and female subordination. The researcher further explored if the media have dissolved patriarchy and refrained from the anti-women stance or they have reconstructed patriarchy, into a finer prison.

The term patriarchy can be defined as a system where men hold power and women are greatly excluded from that system. Patriarchy is a social, cultural, political, ideological and sexual construct by the male species in an effort to maintain dominance in the areas stated above. Patriarchy is further referred to as a hegemonic culture which reproduces male power and unequal gender relations (Schneider, 2016). Therefore, patriarchy serves as an ideology which is meant to promote and maintain the dominance of men over women, who are constructed as powerless. This ideology is used by the media to exercise hegemony by the media and the dominant groups in a given society. Hassel et al (2011) goes on to contest the

definition of patriarchy by arguing that it refers to the society in which men and women participate, not only as a collection of men.

Gender differences are legitimized and constructed (Bhasin, 2000) in a patriarchal society. The causes of oppression and characteristics of patriarchy have been debatable amongst feminists, however they all share the view that patriarchy is the cornerstone of women's oppression (Hollow, 2010), which is in line with Bhasin's argument. Studies in Sociology (Marsh; Campbell; Keating, 2014) further stress the importance of the patriarchal family as a cornerstone of male authority and control. A patriarchal society is thus organised around an obsession with control as one of the key aspects, which is largely legitimized through cultural beliefs, institutions and ideology. This in turn aggrandizes the exploitation and subordination of women as a minority group.

Historically, the oppression of women started in the capitalism era where women were considered private property. The oppression of women lied in men's interest as workers and capitalists and in their interest as husbands. Bourgeoisie family structures made the oppression of women inevitable (Bebel, 2010) and Engel (2010) in Zayko (2017) further argue that patriarchy presented the world historical defeat of the female sex. The place of the woman in a capitalist system was the receiving end, where the woman constantly had to be at the mercy of the man. Heterosexuality was considered as the cornerstone of male supremacy (McCammon, 2017). The exploitation of women is institutionalized largely through marriages. Marriage is a tool of gender subordination, which men used to fulfil their patriarchal roles (Ryan, 2014) which men saw as a legal contract which ceased the rights of women to her husband (Marsh, Campbell and Keating, 2014). It is in these marriages where social roles of women are defined, which are passed down from one generation to the other. The main eulogized social roles in a patriarchal system are motherhood and wifhood, as women were arguably constructed as caregivers.

One can further argue that the family is not an innocent institution in relation to how they construct women. The family is not a benign apolitical institution; rather it is a political one, in which power is unequally distributed (Marsh; Campbell; Keating, 2014). This cements the view that men are obsessed with control, which is arguably a result of their use of the left side of the brain. Male supremacy is argued to be an ideology which is not up for debate and can never be reversed. Religiously, male dominance is supported by male deities, a male clerical class and ideologies of female subordination (Brook, 2008). This can be evident in churches

that do not allow women to take up leadership positions, for example, *The End Time Message*. Women are constructed as morally and emotionally inferior, unclean and physically weak and this awards men more social control over women. In the same vein as Brook (2008), Major (2010) propounds that male anarchists saw women's subordination to men as natural and so not an infringement on freedom and self-determination. The media as a culture industry are arguably part of the institutions that legitimize the subordination of women, through broadcast, print and different media platforms.

However, Morgan (2013) brings in a different view that the subordinate position that women possess now, was earned through their own physical weakness. She argues that the fact that women spend more time in the socialization of children has continuously led to their oppression. However, the question then becomes; who put the position of the woman in the home and who determines the woman's place of influence? This view ignores the fact that the media, men and society defined the place of the woman as the private and their role is to produce children. A feminist construction of lesbianism became a means through which to critique and confront patriarchy (McCammon, 2017), which is considered to be the base of women's subordination.

The definition of patriarchy as a society in which both men and women participate is problematic as men participate more in this community and have more privileges than women. It ignores that men still have power over women. The literature further shows that though patriarchy has been confronted, it is slowly being reproduced but in a civilized manner. Patriarchy subordinates the traditional African woman more than it does the modern African woman, which explains why the images of the traditional woman in Isibaya are too stereotypical as compared to the woman from the city. This explains the researcher's main focus on the traditional woman who is not awarded equal chances as the modern one.

### **2.1.2 Construction of the ideal definition of femininity**

The definition of femininity and being a woman has fuelled a great debate amongst scholars since time immemorial. The meaning of 'femininity' and definitions of 'feminine' behaviour, appearance and expected character vary widely among cultures, ethnicities and classes over time (Cahill, 2001; Kimmel, 2004). Femininity is however a construction (Berberick, 2010; Indrayani and Primasanti, 2010; McDemott, 2016) which serves to satisfy the needs and aims of the one defining it. Gender however is the only means through which bodies can be categorized and constructed. The study investigates how an ideal African woman is

constructed in Isibaya, contrary to popular definitions of femininity which were constructed along western lines.

The general idea is that being a woman means being beautiful, small, thin, confined to the home and sexy, and that is how the media construct images of women. This view however ignores the fact that this 'ideal feminine body' represents an oppressive femininity. The African woman is nonetheless presented as big, a caregiver, a sexual object, unclean and not so brilliant and this is a cultural definition of femininity. The discrepancy in the above definitions of femininity already suggests that the definition is arguably not universal. The cultural definition of femininity further positions the woman as a subject and constructs her as the 'other'. Femininity (also referred to as girlishness or womanhood) is a term which describes a set of roles, behaviours and attributes, which are generally associated with women and girls. Despite the definition of femininity being largely cultural, media content is an influential factor in defining the art of being a woman.

Gender however is the only means through which bodies can be categorized and constructed. An 'ideal woman' is surmised to be obedient, silent and chaste. This conviction of femininity encompassed the 'virgin Mary' herself, who exemplified obedience to God and despite her special status, obedience to her earthly husband (Taylor & Francis, 2006). In this vein, the media define an ideal woman as submissive to the husband, however, this is merely a societal construct which the media construct and represent to the audience as norm and reality. To develop the concept of femininity, Campbell (2007) in Segal (2010), advanced the definition of femininity as 'looking the part' that is, everything about a woman has to match, and the woman has to be pretty. Femininity was further defined as having a gentle spirit, more laid back, having proper etiquette, being clean and being girly (O' Reilly, 2012). One can however argue that the above definitions of femininity ignore the fact that the definition of femininity is universal, it is influenced by culture and it further ignores the contribution of patriarchy in constructing the definition.

To be feminine in the media is to be emotional, attractive, unaggressive, concerned with the family and the community at large (Wood, 1999). This view is supported by McDemott (2016) who argues that womanhood is characterized by childlike, flatterable and gullible behaviour; which is a reverse of what masculinity is constructed to be. A real man is marked out as aggressive, analytical, dominant, forceful and assertive. However, both females and males can possess feminine traits and an individual can exhibit two sets of traits at the same

time, that is, to be masculine and feminine. In agreement with Wood, Berberick (2010) posits that the media have also created a definition of what beauty is and this is a standard which women constantly compare themselves to. However, this notion of beauty is defined along Western lines and does not exactly apply to the African set-up. The study then aimed at reconstructing the definition of femininity along African lines and in the African context. Isibaya constructs two images of women, the traditional and the modern one and both images are created using a different frame, though the major thrust is put on the traditional woman. The traditional woman, according to the media, is the ideal definition of an 'African woman'.

The media as a culture industry frame women equally to or less than a mere commodity (Indrayani and Primasanti (2010). This means that the value of women has been reduced to that of an object (they have been objectified) and in most media constructions in different genres, they have been sexualized. Women have been represented and constructed as agents of sexual pleasure and titillation for men. The definitions of masculinity and femininity reproduce power relations (Kimmel, 2004), with masculinity over-powering femininity. The definitions of femininity constructed by the media advance the needs of men over the needs of women. This allows men to acquire more power over women, advancing the perception that women are weak and naturally occupy subordinate positions as a result of that weakness. As stated by Markula (2007) and Foucault (2007) in Wheaton (2014), what matters is how femininity and the feminine body are defined in a contemporary cultural constellation of discourses and the influence of these definitions in relations of power to dominate women.

The media perpetuate gender roles and social constructs through the images of the 'ideal woman' that they create. De Beauvoir (1949) in Merskin (2011) disagrees with the media's ideal definition of femininity. He argues that a person is not born feminine but she is made to behave that way. This can be evidenced by men who behave as females and the opposite is true, resulting in the existence of queer genders or homosexuals. In this view, the researcher seeks to deviate from Berberick's definition of femininity, as recent views of femininity have been associated with a much stronger and independent and confident woman.

Cultural barriers have been overcome as women are now portrayed in professional careers just like men. This then means that gender is fluid and it is only the society which creates gender categories (Koshl, 2012). Previous studies (Thabethe, 2008) and research have only focused on modern women in cities and towns, however the study examines both traditional

and modern woman in the African context and how they are both represented in the media. The study further deviates from ignoring the contemporary definitions of femininity prove to be more associated with a more independent, confident and stronger woman. The definition of 'ideal femininity' provokes how one understands the body, social power and the self.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theory is a supposition or a set of ideas used to explain intricate concepts or phenomena. It is a set of principles used to account for a situation or justify a particular course of action.

### **2.2.1 Critical Political Economy of the Media**

The study is guided by Critical Political Economy (CPE) theory of the media. The theory argues that the media have the role of educating, informing and entertaining the general populace; however, these roles have since been diluted by the current status of the media as an economic industry. This status is influenced by the political economy of the media, which recognises the media as an economic industry that functions like other industries, regardless of their special roles in society (Graham, 2002:213). In the context of this study, I examine the bearing of ownership, funding and control on the images of African women in Isibaya.

As an economic industry, the media's role is to produce and distribute content or commodities to a targeted audience, with an aim of conveying a certain meaning. Political economy of the media is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources (Moscow, 1996:25; Curran, 2015). It explores the relationship between power and the economy and how these both influence the operations of the media, in performing their duties. CPE further exhibits interest in the politics of resource allocation including communication, putting a major thrust on who is and who is not participating. In relation to this study, CPE is employed to examine the level of participation women in African societies and the public sphere.

Critical political economy of the media is a Marxist approach that argues that the market needs to be regulated, showing the importance of public intervention. It is an approach which is inclusive and wholistic, that is, it focuses on society as a whole. However, this is an approach which has given society a false political and economic efficacy as the entire society is not considered in the decision making process. In the representation of women by the media, women of colour (blacks) have been marginalized and sometimes excluded, fuelled by the capitalist nature of the owners of the means of production. Not only are women of colour

marginalized, the media have created heroes out of modern black women and glorification of the traditional woman has never seen the light of day. The general assumption is that the modern woman possesses more power than the traditional woman as they are bearers of dominant ideas. One can therefore argue that public intervention in Critical political economy of the media is a mere illusion.

The media as an economic industry bear all the characteristics of capitalist production, which is based on class exploitation. In every stage of the production process, dominant ideas are those of the dominant class, which also owns the means of production. The media as the superstructure, they reflect the interests of those who own the means of production. Traditionally, the man is above the woman and they are the dominant class and the media has reproduced this ideology through the content that they distribute to the audiences. The media as a culture industry participate in defining gender roles and the position of the woman as the private sphere. Men own the means of production and in these production houses, there are a few or no women, which cements the cultural definition of the woman's place as the home. In Isibaya, women are given subordinate roles, which are inferior to the roles awarded to men and this gives men the platform to reproduce their domination over women. Isibaya reflects and furthers interests of men as the dominant class, at the expense of justice and equity. CPE then attempts to explore how content, communication systems and the media challenge, reinforce and influence the underrepresentation of traditional African women, as well as the negative and positive portrayals.

Through advertising, the media are part of the capitalist machinery and are conservative. CPE examines how funding, ownership and control influence the type of content distributed to the audience by the media and how images of certain classes are constructed. It illuminates the forces shaping media institutions and what they produce (Davies, 2008). Advertisers have become the latter-day licensing authorities and through this they have direct influence over the content that the media disseminates to the audiences. Class exploitation is motivated by profit maximization, which has become the core business of the media. The media have since deviated from meeting and serving people's (educating, informing and entertaining) needs to making profits. For example, to lure men into buying a Mercedes Benz, a woman is placed beside the car, which one can argue that it objectifies and sexualizes women. The advert for pacific storm cigarettes in Zimbabwe also constructs the woman as an agent of sexual pleasure. The organization and funding of the media is therefore central to the assessment of the role of the media in the society. The general assumption is that those who

control the economy control the media and our consciousness, world views and social values. . However, the influence of ownership, funding and control infringes on communicative democracy, especially access and participation of the minority social groups. The study examines how the above patterns have a bearing on content in Isibaya.

Critical political economy of the media is flawed and reductionist, that is, it reduces complex phenomena to simplifying economic explanation (Hardy, 2014). He further argues that it is more of a ‘conspiracy theory’ whereby a ruling directorate of the capitalist class dictates to the media what content to include in their broadcasts. In context of the study, the researcher examines the influence of patriarchy, culture and power relations on the discrepancy between the representation of the modern and traditional African woman; the participation of men and women in the public sphere as well as the extent to which the ‘real’ African woman is reflected. The theory is implausible as it assumes much concerning the effects on and conduct of the media who facilitate and drive the cultural and meaning production process. The theory ignores the power of the audience to determine the content they consume as well as the power to define themselves.

### **2.2.2 Africana Womanism Theory**

This study is further guided by the Africana Womanism. This theory attempts to explain the life of the African woman, who unlike the white woman has had so many privileges (Hudson-Weems, 1993). It examines the discrepancies that exist between the social, economic and cultural lives of the black and white woman. It recognises the unique struggles fought by the African woman and what they desire as a social class. The researcher examined this theory to best explain if and whether Isibaya breaks away or maintains the anti-women stance, in their representation of women. The study further explores if the images of female characters in Isibaya are a true reflection of the typical Africana woman.

The theory was propounded by Hudson-Weems who further argues that Africana Womanism is a family-centred and race based theory. This means that the theory recognises the family as an occupant of the woman’s heart and thus the woman is represented as more of a caregiver and it highlights race distinctions in society. Soap operas and films constantly construct the woman, specifically the African woman as a tender hearted being, which is one of the most common images of women in Isibaya. The theory of Africana Womanism can be advanced as a movement which is culture centred, that is, it stresses how important it is for African women to uphold their culture. The media in their representation of women, construct women



as citizens who do not challenge their culture, leading to their acceptance of the subordinate position.

Africana Womanism is constantly confused as African feminism and/ or black feminism. It is merely an ideology designed and constructed for every woman who is of African descent, making it an 'inclusive' ideology on paper. It brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct and create a cultural integrity (Dove, 1998), which is all grounded in the stability of the family. This further cements the importance of the family as a central element in upholding a culture. *Isibaya* as a soap opera provides a platform for this struggle, as it constructs, reproduces and represents different images of women, which are in contrast to the ideal cultural definition of a woman. Women from this movement argue that their worth is not defined by men. This notion is advanced by Hudson-Weems (2004) who postulates that self-naming and self-defining are a birth right. Principally, this means that for a citizen to fully enjoy their rights they should be awarded the opportunity to define and name themselves. The media as a culture industry have been the agents of culture, responsible for defining an ideal woman, her position in society and the roles she is to perform. This shows the influence of culture on the representation of African women by the media.

The primary goal of Africana women is to create their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action (Hudson-Weems, 2004: 24, 50). The need to have African theories which have a direct link to the African context fuelled the construction of the Africana Womanism theory. Being an Afro-centric perspective, Africana Womanism directs its efforts to gender imbalances which subsist amongst women and men in the African society, the traditional setup especially. However, Africana Womanism does not accept the idea of a woman as the victim and it rejects the feminism approach that men are at the forefront of women's oppression. The media since time immemorial have constructed the image of men as villains and the root cause of the marginalization of women. Africana women nevertheless do not fight with their male counterparts, rather they argue that their problems emanate from the systems that govern both men and women, and not from their men (Hudson-Weems, 2004). This stance however discounts women's oppression and focuses on the black man's oppression in the work place, overlooking the real issue which is subordination of women. One can therefore assert that the representation of African women by the media is characterised by gatekeeping, inclusion and exclusion, whereby the media choose to address some issues, leaving out others.

The Africana Womanism theory also questions the accepted idea of womanhood (Verners, 1994). In an African setup an ideal woman is one who stays at home full time and takes care of the family and society, which is also the definition shared by the media in their constructions of womanhood. However, Africana Womanism goes on to describe an ideal woman as someone who is able to strike a balance between taking care of the family and juggling it with a career and should adapt to the harsh experiences that come with marriages. This is a contrast to the argument by Makaudze (2012), who argues that the Africana womanist does not and is not keen to take part in the public sphere.

Africana Womanism approach is pertinent to this study in view of the fact that it ushers in the momentousness of combined effort of both sexes, that is, women and men to obliterate the prolonged tyranny against women. It deconstructs the gender imbalance created by the media as well as giving more pragmatic fact with relation to social relations between men and women in the African setting. The African Womanism approach examines the perceptions, interest, concerns and priorities of men and women in the mainstream of the planning process to achieve gender equality and equity in society (Walker, 1983).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3:1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses the methodology and methods of the study. Strengths and limitations of the methods are discussed.

#### **3.2 Research approach**

The study utilizes qualitative research approach. The researcher was interested in the instinctive evaluation of conduct, sentiment and orientation, which arguably made qualitative research approach the most appropriate method to conduct the study. Qualitative research involves studying the meaning of people's lives as they are represented and it has the capacity to represent the views and perspectives of the people under study (Yin, 2011). Qualitative approach assisted the researcher to make an impartial analysis of how the media represents African women in *Isibaya* and how the women and society decode the messages sent to them by the media. Qualitative research approach is conducted through prolonged contact with a life situation, which is typically 'banal' and reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups or societies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Soap operas most often dramatize the lives of women, mainly focusing on what the society accepts as the normal behaviour expected of women. This prompted the researcher to use qualitative research

approach, as *Isibaya* is a soap opera that largely explores the lives and constructions of African women.

One major feature of qualitative research approach is it focuses on naturally occurring, events in natural settings, so that there is a view of what real life is (Berg, 1989). The media as a culture industry play a major role in defining what is real and what is natural to its audiences and what culture is. The approach was then foundational in this study as it helped in examining if *Isibaya* breaks away from the anti-women stance or it maintains it, with the traditional or natural place of a woman being the home. The media in their construction and representation of groups or societies further convince the audience that what they present is reality undiluted and it is not subject to criticism. This view triggered the researcher to employ qualitative research approach which would help assess the extent to which female characters in *Isibaya* are a true reflection of African women in African societies.

Qualitative methods also pursue to answer questions about what, how or why of a phenomenon rather than concentrating on how many or how much which is answered by quantitative research approach (Neumann, 2000). In the same vein, the researcher employed qualitative research approach to answer the question how African women are constructed in the soap opera *Isibaya*? And to further answer the question-what are the driving forces behind women's images in *Isibaya*; qualitative approach was utilized. Qualitative research assisted the researcher in answering her proposed research questions. It was also a touchstone to gauge how society attaches meanings to the representations of African women posed by the media in the soap opera *Isibaya*.

### **3.3 My Population**

A research population consists of all individual units whom the researcher is interested in getting information from (Frankel and Wallen (1996). It is further argued that a research population is a totality of all objects, subject or members that conform to a set of specifications (Polit and Hungler, 1999:37). In line with this study, the researcher intends to tackle the concept of representation of African women through evaluating female characters in the South African film *Isibaya*. The population also includes samples of images and media texts of how African women are constructed and what the media define as the ideal image of a woman. A population is employed to examine symbols, words, themes, or storylines (Gunter, 2002), hence the researcher reviewed *Isibaya* episodes from February 2016 to

February 2017. The researcher referred to different texts, cinematographic techniques and images to examine how they affect the final construction represented by the media.

### **3.4.1 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES**

To single out a sample, the researcher employed non-probability sampling. A sample design is a definite plan for getting a segment from a given population (Kothari, 2004). He further argues that it refers to the technique or the procedure the researcher would adopt in selecting items for the sample, hence the researcher took the women in *Isibaya* as a sample of all the African women, to explore how the media represent them. The sample should be representative, in the sense that each sampled unit will represent the characteristics of a known number of units in the population (Latham, 2007). This suggests that a sample should represent the full population, without reflecting bias towards specific attributes. In this light, *Isibaya* portrays a sample which does not have specific attributes; rather it encompasses different characteristics of women from the full population. A sample is thus defined as a miniature quantity calculated to uncover what the entire is like. Therefore, sampling is a procedure of singling out units from a population of appeal, to fairly generalize findings back to the population from which they were chosen.

### **3.4.2 Non-Probability Sampling**

Owing to the qualitative disposition of the study, the researcher used non-probability sampling. This sampling method involves the selection of the sample in a manner which does not ensure a known chance to the units of being selected (Viswanathan, 2003). In agreement with the above view, Singh (2013) argues that non-probability sampling is a process of selecting a sample without using any probability. This simply means that there is no assurance that every unit off the population will be chosen for the study. Non-probability sampling can also be defined as a procedure for selecting certain units “based on specific purposes rather than randomly” (Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:713). The researcher used this method with the purpose of exploring how the media through the soap opera *Isibaya* construct the images of women.

Non-probability sampling methods are used when the number of elements in a population are either unknown or cannot be individually identified (Kumar, 2005). The population of African women was unknown to the researcher, hence the need to employ non-probability sampling. The researcher further utilised non-probability sampling as it gives in-depth data from a small number of people carefully selected (Patton, 2002). In addition, non-probability

sampling was the best method to conduct the study as it banks on instinctive judgement of the investigator. The researcher was also prompted to choose non-probability sampling as it is not time consuming and is less costly.

### **3.4.3 Purposive Sampling**

The study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, which is also referred to as judgemental sampling involves selecting a sample 'on the basis of your own understanding and knowledge of the population, its elements and nature of the research aims (Babbie, 1997). The soap opera *Isibaya* has female characters that are African, hence purposive sampling was necessary to explain how women are constructed and to understand whether the media have maintained or deviated from the anti-women stance. One can therefore argue that a purposive sample involves units chosen based on distinct characteristics and terminates units that fail to meet the chosen criteria. In the same light Lankshear (2004) purports that purposive sampling involves the researcher handpicking respondents for the study. In the same manner, the researcher employed purposive sampling to strategically single out *Isibaya* episodes which feature women mostly.

Purposive sampling can further be defined as selecting units based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions (Teddlie and Fen Yu, 2007). The researcher's use of purposive sampling was valid as it assisted her to explain if the images of female characters in *Isibaya* were a true reflection of African women in African societies. Purposive samples are chosen with the consciousness that they are not illustrative of the universal population; rather it strives to represent a definite section of the population. The samples of *Isibaya* episodes chosen by the researcher do not represent all women in general, but they aim to represent African women. One major strength of this method is it made it relatively easier for the researcher to fabricate generalisations about the sample as almost all units have the characteristics the researcher is studying. Purposive sampling has a weakness that it is prone to researcher bias since a sample is created based on the judgement of the researcher.

### **3.5 Methods of Data Collection**

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on varying interests in an established and efficient way that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypothesis and evaluate outcomes (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005). The major purpose of data

collection is to cover quality evidence that translates to rich data analysis and allows the building of convincing and credible answers to questions that have been posed.

### **3.5.1 Archival Collection / Research**

The researcher deployed Archival collection to analyse the data collected for her study. Archival collection is an ‘integrated and conceptually informed’ procedure of locating, evaluating and systematic interpretation as well as analysis of sources found in archives (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Boyd-Barrett, 2002). This method helped the researcher to understand the founding of the soap opera *Isibaya* and it set a clearer picture of the community where it is being aired and its influence on the representation of African women. Archival sources can be manuscripts, documents, sound and audio-visual materials (White and McBurney, 2012). *Isibaya* has specific archive material of its episodes on YouTube, which helped the researcher answer her proposed research questions. These episodes further enabled the researcher to evaluate the current stance of the media in the representation of African women in soap operas.

Archival collection has both negative and positive connotations on society. This method can be used as memories for what a certain society went through, or how a behaviour has been passed down from one generation to the other (McKemmish et al, 2005). In the context of this study, archival collection is relevant as it assisted the researcher in evaluating the trend of construction and representation of African women, especially to note any major shifts. However, the very archival sources can be used to maintain hegemony and dominance over some groups of society. In relation to this study, archival collection can constantly serve as a reminder of male superiority over women and how an ideal woman is defined. It further helped to evaluate the type of images constructed by the media and their impact and possible solutions to the problems they create.

The main gain of archival collection is that the data is always readily available, which makes the collection of data less time consuming and less costly. Through employing archival collection for data analysis, the problem of reactivity is somewhat minimized (Jackson, 2012). This was crucial during carrying out the research as it reduced bias, as the data was already gathered and the researcher had no interaction with the participants. However, archival collection can be a drawback in that the researcher can never be sure whether the data is reliable or valid (Jackson, 2012). One cannot be guaranteed that the data found through archival collection is representative of entirely everything which was originally

gathered. The media as gatekeepers regulate content that is to be remembered and what to leave out. Thus, one can argue that the media give out images they want the audiences to capture and obscure the ones that are controversial to the desired ideology. The researcher then gathered *Isibaya* episodes posted on the internet, specifically YouTube, which featured constructions and images of African women mostly.

### **3.6 Methods of data analysis**

#### **3.6.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

The researcher employed critical discourse analysis to analyse the manner through which African women are represented in the film *Isibaya*. Critical discourse analysis enables one to analyse texts or images in a thorough judgmental way to bring out underlying meanings that can be embedded in a text or image. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) texts have to be analysed in relation to what they include or portray but also note what they omit or do not say (Komplit, 2000). The researcher used critical discourse analysis for examining the images and constructions of African women in *Isibaya* and the hidden meaning behind these images.

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice and focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced in text and talk. This view is cemented by Van Dijk (1998) who posits that critical discourse analysis focuses on the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. CDA is identified with the Frankfurt school of thought who questioned the social order and how capitalism is aimed at maintaining that social order. The researcher utilized CDA to bring out the unequal power relations that take precedence in the media, especially when women are constructed or reported on. CDA was relevant to explore how social and political domination is reproduced in *Isibaya* as African women are represented.

Critical discourse analysis helped the researcher critically analyse the various imbedded ideologies that are portrayed in the soap opera *Isibaya*. Critical discourse analysis is aimed at uncovering ideological assumptions imbedded in words or images to resist and overcome various forms of power (Fairclough, 1989). The researcher used this method to explore if the representations of African women in *Isibaya* challenge the power relations that exist in society. The method was further valid to the study as it helped examine whether the media maintain or refrain from the anti-women stance. Texts are polysemous, hence this study



aimed at revealing that texts are subject to different interpretations and they convey multiple meanings.

The post-structuralist approach to discourse implies a social constructionist view of discourse, that reality is not fixed but it is constructed through interactions and it is mediated by language. In other words, reality is mediated and it is open to change. This assisted the researcher to understand whether the images of women constructed in *Isibaya* are a true reflection of the African woman in African societies. CDA is therefore relevant in this study as it seeks to explore the discourse employed by the media through *Isibaya* in representing African women and how it is involved in the production of meaning in society. The strong point of CDA is it reflects a commitment to connecting texts to the widest possible social contexts. However, the shortcoming of CDA is it has an overblown practical ambition with respect to effecting change that interferes fatally with its scholarly task.

### **3.6.2 Semiotic Analysis**

The researcher used semiotic analysis as a method of data analysis. Semiotic analysis is based on the theory of semiotics, which is the study of signs and what they stand for in human culture. Semiotics can be defined as a study of anything which ‘stands for’ something else (Chandler, 2001). In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, objects and gestures, which may mean something different to people in different capacities. The study therefore employed semiotic analysis to best understand the significance and meanings carried by the images of African women constructed in *Isibaya*. The study focused on cinematographic techniques which include camera/ production techniques.

Images have layered meanings. From a semiotic perspective, signs and images are denotative and connotative (Barley, 1983; Barthes, 1987). Through denotative meaning, one only recognizes what they already know and interprets an image in the manner the encoder intends them to. Therefore, viewers can be directly and unconsciously affected by the images of African women in *Isibaya*. In contrast, connotative meaning builds on what the researchers know and explores the ways in which ideas and values are expressed and represented in images (Johnson and Christensen, 2013). Connotative meaning therefore goes beyond the surface meaning and is influenced by socio-cultural contexts. The key assumption of semiotics then is that surface signs are related to an underlying structure. The researcher thus used this method to examine meaning of the images of African women and if the images are a true reflection of African societies.

Semiotics is fundamentally cultural in its approach (Feldman, 1995), which involves studying representations and the processes involved in representational practices (Chandler, 2001). One can argue that all media texts, though presented as reality, are simply representations and reproductions of reality. Watching soap operas involves a kind of emotional realism for viewers which exists as connotative rather than denotative (Ang, 1995). In this vein, the researcher utilised semiotic analysis to understand the denotative and connotative meanings associated with the images of African women in *Isibaya*.

### **3.7 Methods of data presentation**

The researcher used thematic data presentation. Data was presented thematically and was discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and literature reviewed in chapter two of this study. This method allowed the researcher to interpret and clarify the research findings. The researcher employed thematic data presentation as it goes beyond simply counting phrases or words in a text and moves on to identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the data. However, this method is a challenge in that it emphasizes the participant's perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount object of the study.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Researchers ought to be guided by ethics when conducting research. Ethics are codes of conduct one should observe when conducting or intending to conduct a research. The researcher subscribed to the channel on YouTube which allowed her to access the episodes of *Isibaya* online.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The chapter outlined the research approach that was utilised, data gathering techniques and data analysis methods used by the researcher. Other concepts were also defined in the chapter such as the steps that were taken by the researcher in answering her research questions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE BOMB SHELTER PRODUCTION COMPANY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The chapter utilises a political economy approach to discuss and analyse production context of *Isibaya* soap opera. Political economy is the study of power relations particularly social relations that cascade to the production, distribution and consumption of media products.

#### **4.1 Historical Background of The Bomb Shelter**

The Bomb Shelter is a South African production company which is rooted in the South African experience and energised by local talent. It was founded in 1997 with the aim of resurrecting lost African cultures. The formation of the production company was further fuelled by the need to promote local content in South Africa. The Bomb Shelter has created ground breaking television dramas, documentaries, commercials and museum installations. The company initially was funded from the pockets of the owners as it was involved in small productions. However, with the growing industry and the need to reach a wider audience they

had to source funding from donors and other able organisations. From the onset, the company had the intention to empower voices in the documentary space that have previously not been heard. To date, the company still shares experiences and stories with audiences within and outside their societies and on issues that affect their everyday lives.

#### **4.2 Vision Statement**

A vision is an inspirational goal and statement of what an organisation hopes to achieve; it is a picture of the 'future' an organisation strives to reach (Kaplan et al, 2008; Grusenmeyer, 2011). Hence a vision is a depiction of what an organisation expects its institution to become in the long run. The Bomb Shelter's vision is, "To engage with the South African population to elevate and embrace their indigenous languages and culture". In as much as they want to embrace the indigenous culture, they also strive to emancipate the African women who are in polygamous marriages and have husbands who work in the urban industries. Isibaya aims to influence its viewers through its content hence it problematizes the female body and image in order to push its audience into reminiscence of their culture and values. Its vision is to show how the life of an indigenous African woman has changed over time; hence the film examines the construction of the African woman in the media.

#### **4.3 Mission Statement**

A mission statement can be defined as a short statement that highlights the fundamental purpose of an organisation, by offering clarity on its operations and behaviour conduct (Hall and Levenhager, 1995; Kaplan, Norton and Borrows, 2008; Desmidt and Prinzie, 2009; Grusenmeyer, 2011). The Bomb Shelter's mission statement is 'telling something new all the time'. The above mission statement is in tandem with the researcher's study as she examines the representation of the traditional African woman, which has not been given the green light by previous scholarship (Thabethe, 2008). By telling something new, it goes beyond the stories told by popular South African soap operas like Generations which hammered on the life of the modern African woman, who reflected the western culture. Not only does Isibaya tell new stories, it also addresses real issues corrupting their South African culture through dramatization. It has managed to capture a huge audience because of the new story it tells, coming out as the soap opera with the largest viewership in South Africa. Hence the mission statement of Isibaya will helped the researcher to examine whether the media has maintained or refrained from the anti-women stance.

#### **4.4 Core Values**

Core values are a set of universal principles of an organisation's standards, behaviours and culture which enable the right course of action (Kaplan et al, 2008; Anwar, 2013). The core values of The Bomb Shelter are authenticity and genuineness. By authenticity and genuineness, the producers of the soap opera aim to give the viewers a real glimpse of the world, just as things really happen in the day to day life. The core values of *Isibaya* assisted the researcher to answer one of her proposed research questions which is; are the images of women in *Isibaya* a true reflection of African women in African societies? With authenticity as one of the core values, *Isibaya* explores the shift in power relations and how this paradigm shift has influenced the representation of African women. Genuineness and authenticity are however affected and influenced by funders and advertisers who are largely concerned with figures rather than telling the story like it is.

#### **4.5 Objectives of Organisation**

The aims of The Bomb Shelter through *Isibaya* are to provide people with opportunities to explore their values and beliefs through telling the South African story from a Zulu perspective. The team recognizes the importance of deviating from the current trend of telling stories in a western manner. The fact that they use mostly Zulu and a bit of Suthu when acting critically depicts how much the team seeks to address the life of a traditional 'African' woman and the paramount importance of culture. However, one can argue that the Bomb Shelter production team are not the ones responsible for developing or constructing the images of African women. They are the ideas of the advertisers, the elite and the funders which are imposed on the audiences through the organisation. Although the objective of *Isibaya* is to tell an African centred story, it still celebrates the modern African woman, who is constructed and represented along Western lines. It portrays the modern African woman as an independent being who is better off without cultural values and beliefs. One can argue that *Isibaya* as much as it aims to be 'different', it breaks away from putting the modern and traditional woman on equal footing.

#### **4.6 Funding mechanism**

Funding refers to the process of being sponsored or supported financially either by stakeholders, advertisers or by investors. The Bomb Shelter Production Company is mainly donor funded. It is funded by CrossCurrents Doc Fund which is an international production endowment that nurtures storytelling from within communities whose standpoints have been

historically underrepresented or marginalised. It is also funded by Department of Trade and Industry which offers incentives to increase local content generation. Thee donors have direct influence on the themes and storylines of *Isibaya*. The Bomb Shelter is profit oriented; they also depend on advertisers, investors and on viewership of episodes that they broadcast. Audiences further make online subscriptions to watch the film and the production house sells content to MultiChoice as well. Advertisers as part of the capitalist system have power to influence media content; hence it can be argued that the representations of African women in *Isibaya* simply reflect the ideas of the dominant classes of society. The Bomb Shelter is further engaged in other projects that bring in income to run the organisation. These projects include production of music videos, documentaries, feature and short films and museum installations.

#### **4.7 Editorial Policy of The Bomb Shelter**

An editorial policy is the endorsement of objectives and objectives are aims or goals that an institution survives on or adheres to (Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 2005). The Bomb Shelter Productions is a private limited company and is not prone to direct government intervention. One can argue that The Bomb Shelter broadcasts content which is usually in favour of their funders and reflects the ideas of the dominant class, in disguise of telling a genuine story. The media tends to shape public opinion by controlling how information is presented (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Hence the media may not be successful in telling people what to do, that is, what is authentic and genuine, but they are successful in telling people what to think about.

#### **4.8 Editorial Structure**

The production team of The Bomb Shelter starts with the Managing director, who is arguably the company's vision bearer. Their Managing Director is Desireé Maarkgraaf who is also one of the producers of the film *Isibaya*. She is the driving force in both the creative and business dimensions of the company. The managing director is followed by directors, who assume the duties of the Managing director in her absence. The Bomb Shelter has two directors who include Angus Gibson and Teboho Mahlatsi. Angus handles documentaries, television dramas and museum installations of the company. The latter oversees the production of the company's commercials. The *Isibaya* story is crafted by Catherine Stewart and a few other volunteers. Philip Miller is responsible for the musical score and Cathrine

Miller is the script writer. The *Isibaya* story is crafted by Catherine Stewart and a few other volunteers.

#### **4.9 Political Economy of the Bomb Shelter**

Political economy has been defined using the media output or outcome source whereby media products or news content is consumed by audiences is influenced by ownership, funding and control. Political economy can be defined as the study of social relations particularly power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of media content or products (Curran and Gurevitch, 2000).

The Bomb Shelter production company is partly owned by Desireé Maarkgraaf, Angus Gibson and the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF). Ownership and control largely determine what is and what is to be excluded. Those who own the means of production have their ideas reflecting the most in the content distributed to the audiences. The content in *Isibaya* reflects the ideas of the dominant. NFVF has social issues at its core hence the content in *Isibaya* shows the ability to achieve real change, thereby addressing plights which African women are facing through representation. The Bomb Shelter production company is controlled by the owners as well as the funders. The company is mainly funded by CrossCurrents Doc Fund and the Department of Trade and Industry. These funders have direct control over the productions of the company. The images of African women in *Isibaya* simply reflect the ideas of the owners and funders.

One can however argue that sometimes funders want to generate audience and please them hence they produce content that pleases their audiences. Audiences are an important factor in the political economy of The Bomb Shelter Production Company, because without audiences there is no reason to produce a show. The production house is after audiences who will help them to generate revenue/ profits, hence when they produce *Isibaya* they target certain audiences. For instance, owners, funders and those in control of The Bomb Shelter Production Company work on maintaining the man's position in society because this is what audiences want to watch. *Isibaya* massively glorifies and romanticizes masculinity and patriarchal norms, which influences the representation of women in the film. In relation to the study, the funders might possess the ideology that an ideal woman is one who should be only be exposed to the private sphere and should always be a shadow of the man. They go on to deposit that ideology through the female characters they place in the soapie. Through control, the funders manipulate mind of the audiences by creating false perceptions in order to make

more money. The company therefore employs market research to study what audience are interested in watching and then produce content which will appeal to those audiences.

The Bomb Shelter also makes profits through advertising (commercials) hence the content in Isibaya will portray what the advertisers want. It has been argued that advertising is the lifeblood of any media organisation. Advertisers are now the latter day licensing authorities as they certify what gets coverage and what does not. Therefore the way in which Isibaya constructs African women can be said to be reflecting the ideologies of the advertisers.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

The chapter looked at the political economy of The Bomb Shelter, its core values, objectives and mission statements. It can be argued that Isibaya is a representation or a replica of what content funders want to see.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Data presentation and analysis**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The chapter presents and discusses findings of the research. A thematic approach is employed in presenting the findings. As mentioned earlier, the study examines how Isibaya represents African women in African societies.

#### **5.1 African Women as objects**

The study shows that the film Isibaya constructs women as male objects. The representation of African women is merely a construction, as the media construct images that advance the ideologies and ideas of dominant groups. The female body can be described as a “site of performance” where the dominance of men is highly materialized. Women are constructed as



objects for sexual pleasure, a means for production and machines for child bearing. Sex sells and it remains a strong selling point. In Isibaya, Mabuyi and Zanele are constantly used by their boyfriends Sbusiso and Qaphela respectively as “stress relievers” and dumped afterwards. For example, in episode 813 Sbu dumps Mabuyi:

*Mabuyi: But I thought you loved me and we were in a solid relationship! I love you Sbu. I don't want you to leave*

*Sbu: You're sexy. Deal with it. No man wouldn't want to be with you. But I love my wife and what happened between us was a mistake. I just got distracted by my wife's absence but she is back now, so I'm setting you free*

One can therefore argue that the images of women portrayed in a manner which enables them to attract more viewers and to generate more revenue.

From the findings, the researcher discovered that an ideal woman is presented as a woman who is confined to a private sphere, bearing children and looking after the society at large. These duties are assigned to women by the society. From Isibaya, Thandeka Zungu is constantly scolded by her mother-in-law because of her resistance to bear children for her husband Sbusiso and wanting to be a career woman. For instance:

*Thandeka: What did I ever do to you?*

*Mam Khanyi: How do you like someone who does not have respect and does not care about tradition? Someone who walks around in short dresses in this yard? Are you surprised that Sbu want to take another wife? It's because Mabuyi respects tradition*

*Thandeka: Did I not cook and clean, but you were never satisfied?*

*Mam Khanyi: My goodness, Sbu made a mistake by marrying you. Mabuyi is good for Sbu. You're just a disgrace*

In addition, Zungu marries a second wife after his first wife Siphokazi fails to conceive children for him. In this vein, women are constructed as objects in the form of child bearing machines that do not have value in their society. African women are constructed with a biological reproductive function crucial to the reproduction and continuation of society. The media further objectify women by portraying them as passive and waiting for men's attention, whilst men are shown ignoring, exploiting or directing women. This view is

cemented by Barber (2011) who posits that men have always been considered the makers of meaning in films and soap operas and as long as this continues, women will forever be objected to voyeuristic gazes of the masses.

From the film *Isibaya*, most female characters in the film are set in a domestic situation. Women are constructed and portrayed as furniture and means of production or workforce (objects for labour). There is traditional division of labour in families. In the Zulu culture, women in Bhubesini are restricted to their homes and few of them have opportunities to work in the private sphere or even getting white collar jobs. For example, Phumelele who plays the character of Zungu's second wife spends her entire day doing household chores and taking care of the family. She only leaves the premises when attending important functions.

Fig.1.1 shows Phumelele doing household chores in *Isibaya*.



Fig 1.2 Shows Phumelele at a function at the Chief's court



However, the film also portrays employed African women, though they are only a few and are further shown in traditionally female or feminine occupations and as subordinates to men and with little status or power, such as nursing and teaching. These occupations all require

gentleness, patience and warm heartedness which are all part of the 'ideal' definition of femininity. These working African women are constructed as beings with loose morals and without an upright behaviour. For example, Iris is a female taxi boss and she sleeps around with three men and Mabuyi is a teacher and is impregnated and aborts. One can therefore argue that though the media have fairly moved away from underrepresenting women, they still construct stereotypical images of them.

The researcher found out that the construction and portrayal of African women in Isibaya is greatly influenced by the patriarchal system. The family is an institution where patriarchal norms and values are elevated at the expense of women. From the film the researcher observed that polygamy is one of the most oppressing practices in an authentic manner, that is, they tend to glorify it and it is legitimized to a larger extent. This can be cemented in Isibaya through Zungu's two wives, who are co-wives but treat and look out for each other as sisters. The media through Isibaya are stabilizing and legitimizing identities as argued by \*\*\* However the research also discovered that the media through Isibaya challenge patriarchy and polygamy, through Thandeka who does not accept the idea of S'busiso marrying a second wife, as shown in episode 815:

*Mabuyi: But now he's ignoring me, he is pushing me away. I don't know where I stand. May you please ask Sbusiso to talk to me?*

*Thandeka: I made it very clear from the very start Mabuyi that I will not accept you and I'm not happy about you and him. I do not support his decision of taking a second wife and it will never happen as long as I am here*

In this light one can therefore argue that the media have since refrained from the anti-women stance and have given African women a voice to deconstruct and reconstruct gender. The researcher noted that if done in the right manner, polygamy in the African culture is not as bad as the Western society portrays it to be. This is why Isibaya arguably attempts to show the good side of the practice and minimizes the bad side to it.

Fig 1.3 shows Zungu's wives co-existing peacefully and posing for a picture with their husband



Female characters are further objectified through physical appearance as observed from the film. The researcher observed a clear distinction in the manner through which the modern and traditional women are constructed. The traditional woman is portrayed as the yardstick for morality and signifies cultural authenticity. For example, Siphokazi, Phumelele, Mkabayi, Ma Cele all have chubby bodies, they are big in stature and usually put on oversized dresses in a scruffy manner. In contrast, Iris, Zanele, Kaone and Pam are slim and small bodied and dress up with time. However through the manner they dress they attract sexual attention from a lot of men. For example, in episode 915 Gumbi advances sexually towards Pam when she was wearing tight pants:

*Pam: May you please put away your dishes once you are done eating and switch off all lights*

*Gumbi: I never realized you have such a stunning body. Those thunder thighs can be my dessert tonight (he smiles and lick his mouth)*

*Pam: If you do not shut that filthy mouth of yours this minute I'm calling Iris on you and she will send you back to your backward valley where you mushroomed from*

Fig 1.4 shows a mismatch between the dressing of Iris (the modern woman-second from left) and that of Zungu's wives in the valley.



Zama is a female character who is constructed to show how much African women fear ridicule and rejection. When she is in Johannesburg she wears short pants and short dresses; however when she travels to the valley she puts on long dresses to try and fit the standard image of an ideal African woman as evidenced in episode 979.

Through *Isibaya*, the researcher discovered that motherhood and wifehood are greatly celebrated by the media. In patriarchal systems, parenthood and marriage are considered less important to a man's than a woman's life. For an ideal African woman, society considers her greatest and most valuable life achievement as getting married and conceiving. However, this does not only apply to the traditional woman, it does to the modern woman too. For example in episode 787 Siphokazi is ridiculed and pressured into adopting after her co-wife and the Bhubesini community despises her for not being able to bear children:

*Phumelele: Why are you so quiet?*

*Siphokazi: I've been thinking Phumelele. Things are tough for the youths in Bhubesini. Thandi is pregnant and is suffering. I'm thinking of adopting her child when she gives birth. Besides, people have been laughing behind my back for failure to bear children for Sengwayo, especially because I'm the first wife*

*Phumelele: She's not the first girl to go through this and you cannot take a child away from their mother. Your womb is cursed and you need to accept that. You should be thinking about how we can stop Sengwayo from being attracted to that journalist*

Iris is constructed as a businesswoman in the taxi industry, but without a husband. In this manner her success is given less light and the Bhubesini society largely scolds her for that and she is presented with a sluttish behaviour. One can therefore argue that the patriarchal society does not recognize a woman without children and not married as an 'ideal African

woman'. The researcher observed that whether a woman is married or not is more likely to be revealed no matter to what extent it relates to the plot.

Following Thandeka's denial to have children and focus on her career first, her husband's family arranged a second wife for her husband, thus showing that in a patriarchal society an ideal woman is one who is married, has kids and does not go to work. In this manner women are constructed as subjects of male domination. African women are punished for wanting to pursue a career. One can however argue that the images of women in Isibaya are not entirely a true reflection of African women in African societies. Being a successful woman in the corporate world does not mean that one is an adulterer and that they have crude behaviour.

The researcher further noted that African women are constructed and represented as agents of 'witchcraft' and perpetrators of 'evil' doings. In Isibaya in episode 863 Sihle and Mam Khanyi are represented as masterminds in a plot to kill the queen mother and take over from her:

*Sihle: How long is it going to take for her to die, considering that the cream does not kill at once? How much more cream does he need?*

*Mam Khanyi: She just needs to apply it one or two times every day for a few weeks then it's over*

They are constructed as female characters with dark and cruel hearts, which cements the argued view of Africa as a 'dark' continent. However, the plan to kill the queen was crafted by Nkabinde who is wizard and Sihle was only used as a tool to carry out this task. In this light, one can argue that women are objectified. To further paint the women black, Jola ill-treats her daughter-in-law because she is an independent career woman. Thandeka and Mabuyi in episode 850 engage in a fist fight over a man and Thandie and Kentucky's conversations are more of gossip than real life issues. From the above, the researcher noted that African women are constructed and represented as the cradle for animosity and are largely uncivilized.

Furthermore, the researcher observed that women depend on men for their survival, reason why they are taken for a ride as subjects. In episode 963 the Zungu women are attacked by Ngwenya when Sengwayo is in jail as they could not protect themselves in their husband's absence. Iris falls into a deep depression when Jabu leaves her for Zama to an extent that she could not go to work in episode 852:

*Pam: Iris, what's wrong, why are you crying?*

*Iris: That Zama girl, he took my man. I'm so heartbroken. After all that Jabu and I have been through together, how am I supposed to pick up the pieces and start a new life without him?*

This suggests that women depend on men to define themselves and this representation of female characters in Isibaya is a true reflection of African women in African societies, though it is to a lesser extent.

The researcher however observed that the mass media are now a force for change, that is, they no longer maintain the anti-women stance. The traditional construction of an ideal woman as a housewife or low status citizens have been kick boxed out of the picture by a feisty, successful 'girl power' icons. In episode 904 of Isibaya Thandeka starts her own company though she fails to fully establish it following 'sexual harassment' and racism from one of the investors. Lieutenant Mkhize is constructed as a successful police officer, a job traditionally designed for men. In addition, Siphokazi is represented as the head of the Chief's council, Mabuyi becomes a teacher and Qondisile is elected as regent of Bhubesini, which had a lot of men capable of grabbing the post. The researcher observed that the media is objective in their representation of African women.

## **5.2 Women as active participants in the Public Sphere**

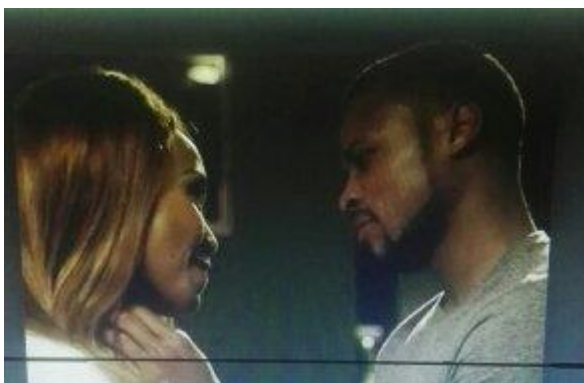
From the soap opera Isibaya, the researcher observed that there is a notable increase in the participation of women in the 'positive public sphere'. The researcher acknowledged that African women in the soapie are presented in a manner that suggests that they are now equally climbing the corporate ladder with men. Being part of the corporate world allows them to take part in public debates together with men. One can argue that soap operas are a new 'public sphere' that is empowering the marginalised groups by giving voice to women not usually heard on mainstream media. In the Zulu culture, the chief's council was traditionally constituted of men only and women had no representation. However, the researcher noted the appointment of women in the council in Isibaya, and the chairperson of the council being a woman.

Fig 1.5 shows the members of the Chief's council in Bhubesini.



Media representations of women, professionals and leaders are either absent, gendered, sexualized and often communicate contradictory messages. The media place maximum focus on hair, clothes, weight and children, therefore questioning the competence to serve in senior roles. In Isibaya, though Siphokazi has assumed the position of the chairperson of the Chief's council, the society constantly refers back to her chain smoking habits to discredit her ability to lead a community. In the same vein, Iris is reminded of her ordeal with the Zungus, whereby he slept with Zungu and his son, thus they do not award her respect as a businesswoman. This shows the relationship between the media and women and how it reveals the struggle that women have engaged in and their use of media to gain a 'public voice, presence and influence'.

Fig 1.6 shows Iris and his stepson whom she was sleeping with.



The researcher further noted that the media have refrained from the anti-women position, whereby women were not awarded leading roles and were confined to the private space. In



episode 704 of *Isibaya*, following the departure of Zwelibanzi for diaspora, Qondisile is appointed regent for Bhubesini, which was a new and rare occurrence in the valley. In episode 891 Thandeka arranges paperwork to start her own environmental management company, which is contrary to culture which defines the place of a woman as the home. In addition, Iris is constructed as a taxi boss and a club owner in Johannesburg, which is a job which was traditionally designed for men. Another example from *Isibaya* is the female character Mkabayi who is awarded a position in the Memel taxi association, once again an industry which is labelled as a ‘no go area’ for women. Furthermore, the Queen mother gives out scholarships to the girls in the valley, highlighting the empowerment of the girl child, who previously was not treated with such importance:

*Sihle: It is now time to hand over R25 000 to the top achievers*

*Qondi: As the Queen Mother of eBhubesini, I'm donating R10 million towards the tuition of girls who passed matric*

One can argue that the media have since engaged in reconstructing the images of African women.

Fig 1.7 shows the inauguration of Qondi as the regent of Bhubesini.



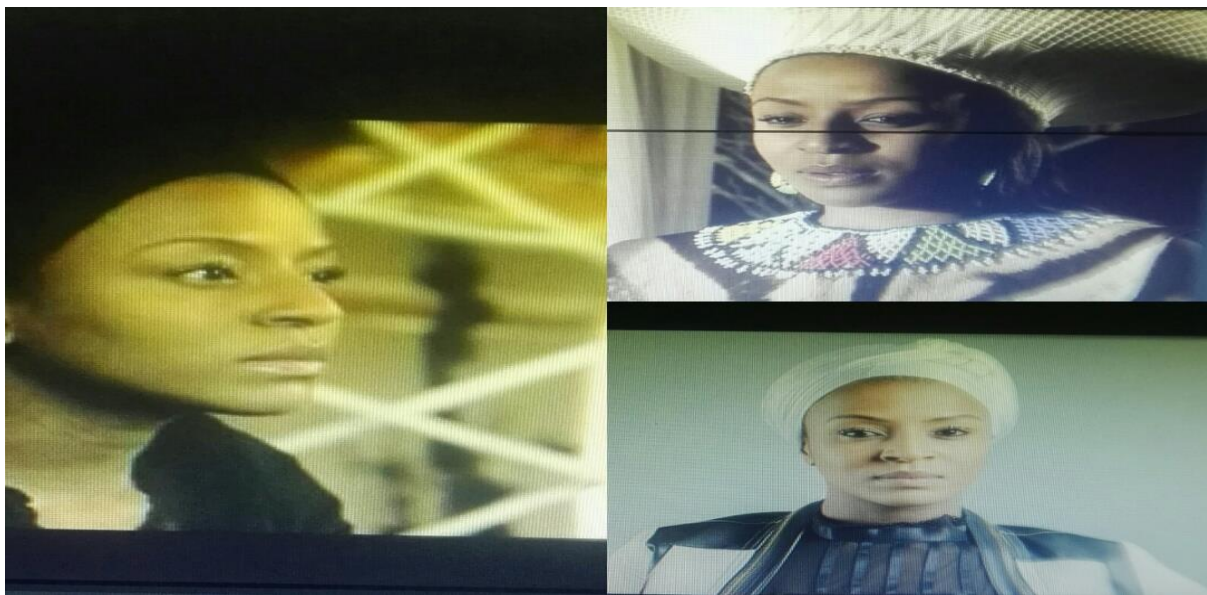
The researcher singled out examples of situations where women have risen to be active participants in the positive public sphere. The researcher observed a paradigm shift in the African culture as women are now challenging patriarchy especially in issues concerning adultery and polygamy. A typical African woman is expected to support her husband’s decision if he decides to take another wife. In episode 831 Thandeka Zungu files for a divorce when her husband takes another wife, following her refusal to have babies and choosing to focus on her career:

*Thandeka: I respect our marriage, so I had to do this face to face. I'm ending our marriage. I want a divorce*

*Sbu: But our marriage is important to me. Mabuyi was a mistake. I should never have got involved with her*

From the findings the researcher further noted that cultural barriers are also broken through female characters in Isibaya. African women have constantly been oppressed by patriarchy, African values and beliefs. After Qondi's husband dies, she is forced to wear special mourning garments (ukuzila) which resembled that there was a dark cloud which was hanging over her. Ukuzila meant that the widow was a threat to others and it identified the widow as the cause of the death. Qondi however in episode 770 forcibly took off the mourning clothes and performed a cleansing ceremony for herself, before the mourning period was over. She did this a way of liberating herself from the bondage which comes with marriage. Hence one can argue that women have become active participants in the public sphere, as they can challenge patriarchy.

Fig 1. 8 shows Qondi before and after cleansing ceremony.



However, the researcher also observed a form of 'refeudalisation' of the public sphere in Isibaya. Although these African women are represented and constructed as powerful, they are still belittled one way or the other, thus insinuating that their success does not change that they are just women. In that light, women are still defined outside what they have achieved, hence they still suffer oppression and discrimination from the patriarchal system. For example, Qondi as the Queen mother is a power house but she still has to answer to Sengwayo and consult him before she makes any decisions involving the valley. In addition,

Iris is an 'independent' business woman but Zungu still decides her fate, that is, who she does business with, when and where she can see his son. This vehemently suggests that in as much as the media deviate from the anti-women stance, African women are still suffering the same plights as ordinary African women who are not learned. Furthermore, the researcher noted that all of Zungu's wives are educated but it is because the writer uses these characters to bring out the fact that patriarchal norms are slowly disappearing in the African societies. It is not to say they have been completely eroded but patriarchy is still in existence, only in a different form. For example, Siphokazi is a qualified secretary but it is worth noting that she is only cast at home, either in the valley or in Protea, being the loyal wife and not in her field of work. This is done in an effort to verify and describe an ideal woman's place in the society. The researcher thus argues that no matter how educated an African woman can be, she still has to conform to the stereotypical definitions of being a woman as laid out by the society. In this vein, the researcher noted that the above images of the female characters in Isibaya are a true reflection of the contemporary African women.

From the findings, the researcher further observed that the older generation of African women do not approve of the participation of women in the 'positive public sphere', that is, they do not appreciate women being treated as equals to men. One can note that they are in agreement with the Africana woman who argues that men and women should work together to fight oppression in the work place and that men are not responsible for women's oppression. They see patriarchy as the 'best' social order. Gogo Ntozabantu in episode 895 of Isibaya, is against the idea of her granddaughter going to university to further her education after passing her matric, as she argues that she will only become an uncontrollable prostitute if she's learned:

*Mabuyi; Silindile has passed her matric and the queen mother listed her amongst the students to university under her scholarship*

*Gogo Ntozabantu: I'm sick and I have no one else to take care of me if Silindile goes to University. Not many girls have gone to the big city and come back without a baby. I can hardly take care of her alone, what more if she returns pregnant? If she goes to University she will only become an uncontrollable prostitute*

She further argues that the city was only designed for men and not for women. Gogo Ntozabantu is also amongst selected older women who are appointed as advisors in the valley, who advocate elevation of culture.

Male characters in the soap opera Isibaya are employed to argue that the representation of women as independent beings in the public sphere is creating trouble within homesteads and

families. They label African women deviants after assuming independent positions in an oppressing patriarchal system. However, the researcher noted that there is still much that needs to be done to further increase the participation of women in the public sphere and make it an 'ideal' public sphere 'undiluted' for all African women.

### **5.3 Women as perpetrators of self-domination**

From the findings, the researcher observed that the oppression and subordination of African women is arguably linked and traced back to their fellow women. In line with the findings from the analysed episodes of the film *Isibaya*, one can note that women also fuel the marginalisation of other women, that is, they perpetrate self-domination. From this, the researcher observed that patriarchy, the political economy and culture are not the only driving forces behind the images of female character constructed in *Isibaya*. The producers from *Isibaya* use old aged female characters to show how oppression of the same sex occurs. Ma Cele amongst other women from the valley, force Qondi to wear mourning regalia and isolate her from people especially her boyfriend Fezile. In this manner, Qondi is denied sexual rights by her fellow women, all in the name of observing cultural values. Mkabayi in episode 792 advises Sengwayo not to allow Siphokazi to take up the position of chairperson of the council:

*Sengwayo: Sister, what do you think of Mam Mthembu as the chairperson of the council?*

*Mkabayi: Who will help Phumelele with chores if she starts working at the lodge? She needs to accept how us the Zulus do things. Once she is married she has the responsibility of taking care of the family and the household. She is married to the Zungus and not the valley. She has to choose*

*Sengwayo: I do not want to deprive her of the opportunity to do something she likes. She is a good leader with people's needs at heart*

One can therefore argue that these old aged characters largely reflect Africana womanism as they are used to show the importance of upholding a certain ancient culture undiluted.

In addition, old female characters in *Isibaya* do not believe in the education of the girl child as they culturally understand the position of the African woman as the home, while taking care of the community. For example, in episode 895 Gogo Ntozabantu initially does not agree to the proposed idea of her granddaughter Silindile going to university to further her education. To further the view of women oppressing other women, in the film *Mam Khanyi* is against the idea of her daughter-in-law Thandeka being a career woman as she argues that she should be a stay at home wife and should be cooking and washing for her husband and

give him children. The researcher observed that not only do these old female characters clamour for male domination but they also play a pivotal role in advancing the ideology of male superiority. This goes in line with what Althusser (2008) coins 'dominant ideology', whereby the base is interpellated to accept the status quo. In this light the researcher found out that most women have been interpellated to accept their place in societies and not challenge their defined positions. One can therefore argue that the older generation in an effort to uphold and maintain culture, they oppress the younger female generation. They do so by preserving the oppressing patriarchal norms and values, which is witnessed in the everyday lives of women. From this one can argue that the female characters in Isibaya are a true reflection of African women in African societies.

A typical African and traditional woman is constructed as an individual with a lot of endurance and should succumb to any pressure that the world gives. Mothers, aunts and guardians constantly remind their daughters what it means to be a woman. In episode 870 of Isibaya, when Thandeka has a heated argument with her husband, her step-mother Phumelele talks her into revising her stance on polygamy:

*Thandeka: I don't care that Mabuyi is pregnant for Sbu but I will not allow her to take over my marriage*

*Phumelele: You should sit down with your husband and try to understand where he is coming from. I know you are worried that if Sbu marries Mabuyi, you will not get the same attention you used to get before Mabuyi got into the picture. But look at us here, your father loves Siphokazi and I equally. Nothing will change between you and Sbu if he takes a second wife. Your love is strong, you can get through this*

In this manner, a fellow woman advises another woman to persevere in an abusive marriage which then proves how women are not exclusively innocent in their subordination. This is cemented by Strinati (2004) who suggests the 'symbolic annihilation of women' practiced by the mass media, which confirms that the roles of wife, mother and housewife are the fate of women in a patriarchal society. Women are socialized into performing these roles by cultural representations which attempt to make them appear to be the natural prerogative of women.

The Zulu culture celebrates the role of being a wife. This has resulted in most mother-in-laws and mothers ill-treating the girl child. For example, Mam Khanyi has negative energy towards her daughter-in-law Thandeka. Beauty Ngwenya always goes to the extreme in an effort to separate her daughter from their rival's son Jabu. The researcher observed women have a tendency of meddling in other women's affairs. Mam Khanyi in episode 853 tarnishes Thandeka's image in the valley, as she insists that she was having an affair with Don:

*Mam Khanyi: Busi, have you heard what that loose daughter of Zungu has done?*

*Busi: I don't mean to disrespect you but Mam Khanyi whenever you open your mouth you brew trouble*

*Mam Khanyi: Mind how you talk to me little girl. Thandeka has been having an affair with that boy he works with. She lied she was at work in Kenya, whilst they had gone for a vacation. She was caught with him in bed in Protea by Sbusiso. I heard it with my two ears*

In episode 863 Sihle poisons Qondi simply because she was jealous of her being the Queen Mother. However, Iris tries to upgrade Pam her maid by funding her to get a driver's licence, showing that not all women are on the verge of destroying each other. One can thus argue that though men play the major part in the subordination of women, women are also responsible for their position in society.

#### **5.4 The family reproducing female domination**

From the findings, the researcher observed that the family is an ideological institution and is an influential force in the construction of images of African women. The researcher noted that the family was used in reproducing female subordination by men. From a traditional perspective, the husband is the head of the family and is responsible for handling the decision making process and women simply have to adhere to those decisions. The researcher discovered that the family in Isibaya is rendered an all-powerful position in the film. Therefore, African women who question these decisions are subject to ridicule and punishment from the entire family or subsequent leaders of the family. Institutions such as families, churches and schools are agents of identity formation and they prescribe and enforce thinking in specific ways about their identities, relationships with other individuals and also their connection to social institutions and acting accordingly (Wolff, 2007). In this vein, the family propagates control over individuals and African women tend to be controlled and subordinated by the family to a larger extent, especially when one considers how men are treated and represented in return.

In Isibaya, Sengwayo's wives are Christian and believe in God, however they are not allowed to attend church services as their husband is purely traditional and he argues they cannot mix Christianity and African Traditional Religion in one house:

*Phumelele: I think Lerato's situation is beyond Mehlo's power. It's time we pray to God to show us where Nkabinde could have possibly taken Lerato and Manqoba.*

*Sengwayo: Are you listening to yourself? Since when do I believe in God. My ancestors are capable of taking of my family. They have done it countless times and I will not begin to doubt their power now. Who is God? In the KwaManzini home we do things my way and no other*

hence they are forced to abandon their religious values. In ancient Africa, the birth of a girl child as the firstborn was not recognised and appreciated; they would start counting the number of children from the first male child. Mkabayi Zungu is one example of how women are constantly under the rule of men. Mkabayi is Sengwayo's sister and is older than him but she does not have the power and right to make decisions in the family, Sengwayo does. Beauty and Zama also serve as examples of women who have their lives controlled by their family, as evidenced in episode 905 whereby Zama is forbidden from leaving the house by his father and brother, in an effort to try and stop her from getting in a relationship with their rivals:

*Zama: You can't take my phone from me*

*Judas: I'm your father, I'm doing it because I can and I have every power to do that. If it wasn't for me you wouldn't have this cosy life you have*

*Zama: But my phone has all my contacts*

*Judas: You don't need to talk to anyone, your whole family is here and we are all you need.*

*Zama: That's not fair baba. At least allow me to go to the movies*

*Judas: You cannot leave this house, unless in your brother's company*

This shows that the family is not an innocent institution and it is arguably one of the major driving forces behind the images of African women portrayed in Isibaya and the media.

Furthermore, from Isibaya the researcher observed that women who go against the family's decisions never go unpunished. Following Iris' refusal to be a housewife and stay in the valley performing her expected duties, her son is forcibly taken away from her by Zungu and his two elder wives and they deny her the right to see her son constantly (episode 754). However, Qondi as the Queen mother, she challenges this decision and assists Iris to see her child in episode 755:

*Qondi: Iris Rasebitse has formally asked me as queen to talk to the council about her seeing her son.*

*Siphokazi: Send her away from the valley.*

*Qondi: I can't do that. She's Manqoba's mother. I have discussed this with Zweli and he agrees with me. It's my duty to be fair to every woman who appeals to me. She should be allowed to see her child.*

In addition, Thandeka's in-laws in episode 815 also punish her for refusing to be a stay at home wife and arrange a second wife for their son without Thandeka's consent as a form of punishment. In this manner, African women are often punished for choosing to pursue careers or deviating from the expected norms of the society or African culture.

The researcher noted that the family as a cultural institution further guides one's thoughts, values, beliefs and interests and reinforce the status quo. This is cemented by Althusser (1971) who posits that the family discourages individuals from challenging their existing positions in society. In Isibaya, Zama is not involved in the family business but Qaphela is a part of it simply because he is a male child:

*Zama: Baba, since you are here today and working in town, can I come with you to the rank. I'm sure there are one or two things I can help out with.*

*Judas: Zamangwenya, why don't you just focus on painting your nails and leave this job to us who were born for it (Qaphela, let's go)*

In addition, when Melusi fails dismally in school in episode 923 he is given a hard knock by his parents as they argue that he is the future of the Zungu clan, whereas Thokozani's success went unrecognized simply because she is a girl. In this light, such constructions and representations of female characters seek to make African women accept their permanent label as 'second class citizens' and not challenge the 'accepted' social order.

From the findings, the family further robs women of their rights, in the sense that if a woman is married into a certain family, it seems she will have been married to the whole clan. The family usually overworks the daughter-in-law as they argue that she will be compensating the bride price that would have been paid for her by the family. In episode 959 of Isibaya, Mandla demands breakfast from Thandeka and he advises her that that is the reason why she was married into the Ndlovu- Gatsheni family and Sbu complains to his father:

*Sbu: Gatsheni, Bafo is treating Thandeka like a slave. Giving her a list of things to do*

*Ndlovu: What's wrong with that? That's what makotis do*

However, Zungu's family asks Thandeka to come back home when Sbusiso wants to take another wife and do not force her to stay and try work things out with her husband:

*Thandeka: I can't stay under the same roof with that woman anymore baba*



*Sengwayo: I hear you Manzini and I cannot force you to be where you do not want to be. You know you are always welcome here*

In the context of this study, the researcher noted that the images of female characters in Isibaya are a true reflection of African women in the African communities. Furthermore, though there are other factors which contribute to the oppression and domination of women like patriarchy, the family chips in as an influential factor in the construction of images of African women in Isibaya. The researcher can further argue that the family has the same contribution as the patriarchal system as the family is still headed by men; hence men still remain the major driving force behind the subordination of African women.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The chapter presented the research findings and analysed the different representations of African women in Isibaya. The chapter went on to bring out concepts that were prevalent in the film.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research examined how *Isibaya* constructed and represented African women. The study further investigated the extent to which the images of female characters in *Isibaya* were a true reflection of women in African societies. The researcher discovered that numerous images of African women were constructed in the soapie. These images are tools to cement different definitions of femininity which prevailed in African societies.

The researcher employed the qualitative research approach to carry out the study. This was the most relevant method as it assisted the researcher to make an impartial analysis of how the media represents African women in *Isibaya* and how the women and society decode the messages sent to them by the media. The approach was foundational in this study as it helped in examining if *Isibaya* breaks away from the anti-women stance or not. The approach however was time consuming especially when collecting and analysing samples of the population the researcher had singled out. Owing to the small number of participants involved in the study, it was difficult for the researcher to generalise findings on the representation and construction of the total female population and make accurate conclusions.

The study limits its focus on black traditional and modern South African women and how female characters in *Isibaya* represent women in African societies. There are contestations surrounding the representation of women as one can argue that white women have been overrepresented; which prompted the researcher to study black African women only. The study is of importance as it contests the argument that images of women constructed by the media are the ideal of definitions of femininity. Femininity is however a construction (Berberick, 2010; Indrayani and Primasanti, 2010; McDemott, 2016) which serves to satisfy the needs and aims of the one defining it. The study hence investigated how an ideal African woman is constructed in *Isibaya*, contrary to popular definitions of femininity which were constructed along western lines. The study analysed forces behind the representation of African women and how they immensely contribute to the construction of women's images.

The researcher targeted Isibaya as it features more female characters than men, showing how the soapie slowly moves away from the anti-women stance.

The researcher observed that Isibaya constructs African women as sex objects, objects for labour and production as well as child bearing machines. These representations are mainly aimed at attracting a following from men, who believe in the domination of men and the functionality of patriarchy. One can argue that patriarchy is one of the driving forces behind the images of women that are constructed in Isibaya. As they construct objects out of women, the media perpetuate gender roles and social constructs through the images of the 'ideal woman' that they create. The researcher noted that an ideal woman is presented as a woman who is confined to a private sphere, bearing children and looking after the society at large. From the findings, the researcher further observed that the film Isibaya legitimizes identities through glorifying polygamy. In so doing, it continues to maintain the anti-women stance by promoting male dominance, as polygamy is characterized by the superiority of men. In addition, Isibaya brings out the 'new' professional woman, however, she is still subject to subordination.

Furthermore, the researcher observed that women have now become active participants in the 'positive' public sphere. The woman's sphere of influence has been extended from the private sphere to the public sphere, where they can rub shoulders with men at almost the same level. This complements scholars like Hudson- Weems who coins the Africana Womanism theory that realises the importance of the Africana woman redefining themselves and destruct the gender imbalance which exist in the African system. For example, in Isibaya women are elevated to positions of influence in the presence of men; Qondi is inaugurated as the regent of the valley and Siphokazi is appointed the chairperson of the chief's council. The researcher further observed that cultural barriers are broken through female characters in Isibaya, contrary to what Africana womanism advocates for. Though they seem to be 'independent', African women are still stereotyped for the new positions they assume in society.

The study explored the driving forces behind the representation of African women and the researcher discovered that women are also perpetrators of their own domination. He subordination of women by other women is largely acted out through the older generation of women who live to see culture being observed and followed. The roles of being a wife and mother are greatly celebrated and these roles also serve as the means for the domination of women by other women. The researcher thus observed that patriarchy is not the only driving

force behind images of African women in the film *Isibaya*, though it contributes to a larger extent. The oppression of women by fellow women is done in disguise of upholding a culture. The researcher found out that the older female generation totally embraces the Africana womanism concept, which seeks stands against the erosion and dilution of culture.

The researcher further discovered that the family is an institution which continuously reproduces female subordination. It is an influential force in the construction of images of African women in African societies. The family is employed to advance dominant ideologies, that is, the it is used to maintain the dominant position of the man. The researcher noted that the family as a cultural institution further guides one's thoughts, values, beliefs and interests and reinforce the status quo. The study advocates for equal participation of men and women in the public sphere. The study also highlights the bearing of patriarchy, culture, the family and the political economy on the images of African women constructed by the media. In conclusion, the research under study portrayed how African women in African societies are portrayed by the mass media through discourses and images in the soap opera *Isibaya*.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher recommends that the producers of *Isibaya* should have more women in the production team so as to have a balanced representation. The organisational or editorial structure arguably has an effect on content. The researcher further recommends that the *Isibaya* production team should extend its focus to other African cultures too and not be limited to the Zulu culture only, as the Zulu culture is not a total representation of the African population.

### **Recommendations for further research**

The researcher recommends that further studies should be carried out on the representation of African women in other media genres besides film. Further studies can be carried out focussing particularly on Zimbabwean films, rather than going beyond borders. There is room for other researchers to study other soap operas besides *Isibaya*. The researcher also recommends that studies should be carried out on the representation of African women who are part of the group with 'queer genders'.

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