

**THE PORTRAYAL OF RACIAL CHARACTERISATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOAP
OPERAS: THE CASE OF *SKEEM SAAM***

by

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DISSERTATION

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Master of Arts in Media Studies has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Mathobela RSL

September 2021

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the girl who got suspended and grounded in the sixth grade,
Semange sa Dinose.

Authors Acknowledgement

I thank Jehovah for granting me the strength to finish this project and his undeserved love and mercies throughout. Thank you, God.

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Abstract

The emergence of democracy in South Africa brought a fallacious rainbow nation to permit all citizens to benefit from equal opportunities regardless of colour. The national broadcaster, SABC as a tool of transformation to promote multiracialism was meant to depict balanced representations of all races through its programmes such as soap operas. This study's aim was to examine the depiction of racial characterisation in *Skeem Saam* which is broadcast by the SABC. The study employed a qualitative approach which allowed the use of descriptive analysis. Purposive sampling was used to determine the soap opera as the most appropriate to examine racial characterisation. The data was collected through qualitative content analysis which enabled the researcher to peruse *Skeem Saam's* episodes which address the study's objectives. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data which enabled the analysis of ten characters and the contexts these characters are portrayed in. The study found that there are negative racial misconceptions and stereotypes attached to Black character roles through occupational roles, personality traits, social and economic status as compared to White character roles. Therefore, that there is misrepresentation of Blacks through roles played by Black characters. The study recommends a need for transformative policy amendments which will bind soap opera producers to include realistic and balanced representations of race and gender. Narrative formations should also feature realistic developments in society rather fictional storylines that run at the expense of daunting Blacks growth in South Africa.

List Acronyms and Abbreviations

SABC: South African Broadcasting Corporation

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Globally, the public perception about the world is enormously influenced by mass media such as television, newspapers and the radio. In the case of television, it is through its various genres such as soap operas that it influences public opinion about social issues including race, class and identity (Knoetze, 2015). Although the concept of soap operas on television historically emerged in the 1930s and was popularised by detergent companies such as Colgate and Palmolive (Marx, 2007), it took a long time to become a global phenomenon. These companies had peripheral countries in the developing world including the African continent as their secondary target market, hence their advertisements would often portray Black women negatively, particularly as domestic workers (Slade & Beckenham, 2005). As such, it can be argued that soap operas emerged with a racial undertone of segregating content targeted at people of colour from their inception.

The construction of race around the world has made a significant contribution on the manner in which characters are portrayed in soap operas in both the developed and developing countries (Barnard, 2006). Racial characterisation is mostly based on a political construction which is an edifice created by people with a literal economic and political agenda and purpose (Coetzee & Roux, 2003). This then implies that this construction is not based on a natural development. Similarly, racial characterisation can be based on an initial false classification of people. The classification grants particular racial groups power over others that are then classified as minority and inferior to legitimise the dominance of 'superior' groups known in the real world (Blanford, Lacey, McElroy & Williams, 2011). Several studies have identified pseudo-science, religion, eugenics and manifest destiny as reasons for racial construction. As a result, racial constructions influence political and economic stances that infuse the representation of

White and Black characters on television, particularly on soap operas (Kivel, 1996; Lindqvist, 1996; Brooks & Rada, 2002; Bornman, 2013).

Winter (2002) postulates that representation refers to how the media present race, age, gender and other social issues to the audience in the form of news, soap operas, documentaries, reality shows, talk shows and sitcoms. This entails the notion of construction, which is the first stage of representation when a television programme is put together. Representation can also be defined as the process of depicting and symbolising something through use of language and actions to create a portrayal or imagination in the senses of an audience which receives and interprets the depiction differently based on personal experiences, race and status (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). This is followed by mediation where decisions are made about the contents of a programme. Stereotypes are used for describing characters through exaggerated and basic characteristics which sometimes work negatively as audiences perceive these generalisations as facts about a particular group of people (Winter, 2002). Therefore, representation on television can also be referred to as a portrayal due to the use of visual images and audio that tell stories to the audiences.

Hall (2017) argues that what is portrayed on television is often not understood and interpreted the same way by the audiences. This is owed to the fact that, the interpretation of such content is usually influenced by individual or group experiences, culture and the mind-set of what constitutes the audience. Soap operas represent values and norms that generally exist in society. Globally, these values and norms revolve around themes of family, love, wisdom, trust and business. Personal problems, conflict and unrealistic minority characters as well as social and racial issues characterise the main content in soap operas (Behm-Morawitz, Miller & Lewallen, 2018). For such reasons, more often than not, non-Whites and middle-class characters in soap operas are usually depicted in stereotypical ways. Minority characters such as African Americans often have roles that are violently negative with codes of powerlessness often portrayed where Black characters become villains and victims in storylines (Smiley & Fakunle, 2015). In South Africa, some scholars have reported that racial representation consists of more Black characters with less dominant roles in soap operas (Okoro & Meyers, 2012).

Subsequently, the rise of the rainbow nation in 1994 when South Africa attained independence, ushered hope that there would be no racial segregation because all citizens are equal before the law. However, the portrayal of Black characters on television remains negative as it still perpetuates historical notions of Black citizens who continue to show up as socially and economically marginalised people (Aiseng, 2017). Black characters continue to be given career roles as domestic workers, blue collar employees, receptionists, personal assistants and other low-ranking occupations in most soap operas. Conversely, White characters are continuously given dominant roles such as successful business people, academics and investors (Worden, 2013). Hence, the notion of equality and a fair representation of the Black race remains delusionary in the context of a progressive rainbow nation as espoused in the laws and policies of the country.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), previously a bastion of the apartheid regime and a mouthpiece of the former National Party currently claims to be independent, fair and objective in all forms ranging from news to other programmes such as soap operas produced and broadcast on its platform (SABC, 2019). The claims are based on the Regulations on Local Television Content Gazette of ICASA which stipulate that programmes broadcast on SABC ought to develop and promote national identity (ICASA, 2016). However, the portrayal of race which relates to racial characterisation to a certain extent is based on apartheid political and economic agendas which maintain the viewership as the audiences continue to watch soap operas from SABC on a daily basis in the comfort of their homes (Dhoest, 2009). The SABC as a national broadcaster has a mandate to continuously act as an enthusiast for post-apartheid transformation where racial fairness is depicted in all programmes broadcast on its platforms on all channels (Anderson, 1991). This study focuses on the examination of racial characterisation on *Skeem Saam* as a soap opera. It seeks to critique characterisation, determine inherent themes and analyse excerpts that portray of White Supremacy in *Skeem Saam*.

1.2 Research problem

In the backdrop of the aftermath of misrepresentation through popular media, Afshar (2017) noted that there is a need for a diverse and balanced representation of all ethnicities and races on television globally. However, studies have shown that some script

writers and producers in Africa have demonstrated their tenacity to conform to historical depictions of race, White privilege and supremacy to the detriment of equality in society (Gledhill, 2003). Arguably, the media fraternity has operated within the notion that having diverse and equal representation of characters on television programmes may be detrimental for audience-building dynamics, particularly with respect to ratings and viewership towards target demographics. However, popular genre such as soap operas have the power to decolonise the image of the oppressed and the oppressor (Steyn, 2012), hence the racial inequality notable in soap operas need to be subjected to scientific investigation. This is important because representation of race immensely influences the audience's perceptions of reality and may affirm the stereotypes that exist in the audience's minds (Happer & Philo, 2013). This study seeks to examine the manner in which racial characterisation is depicted in South African soap operas, particularly on *Skeem Saam* as a programme broadcast daily across the country. There ought to theory-based scripts which will address racial issues and bring transformation in South Africa. *Skeem Saam* as a soap opera ought to redress South Africa's past oppressive system.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

1.3.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to examine racial characterisation in the South African soap opera, *Skeem Saam*.

1.3.2 Objectives of the study

- To critique context and characterisation of roles in *Skeem Saam* soap opera.
- To determine inherent theme focalisation in *Skeem Saam*'s storyline.
- To analyse excerpts that depict White privilege and supremacy in *Skeem Saam*.
- Recommend production guidelines that promote non-racial *soap opera* storylines.

1.4 Definition of terms

1.4.1 Portrayal

In this study, portrayal is defined as the process of depicting a phenomenon or constructed image on television visually accompanied by audio. Portrayal broadly refers to representation in the media, which is a process of offering a selection of reality (Curran & Hesmondhalgh, 2019). Representation consists of images, written and spoken words

which are used to depict reality in a fictional sense. It also consists of repeated elements, specific point of view, stereotypes, counter-stereotypes and categories of ideas, events and people (Talbot, 2007).

1.4.2 Race

For this study, race refers to a large population of individuals distinguished from one another based on genetics and are geographically separated. Race can be blatantly described as the initial division of mankind based on the privileges that economic and political institutions characterised groups based on genetic differences (Clair & Denis, 2015). The concept of race is socially constructed through a biological fiction. Therefore, race can exist in a 'social meaning of colour' which implies that certain groups in society can be treated based on subordinate or privileged dimensions of their social position and physical attributes (Hurtado, 1994). This in the media, particularly in soap operas, is portrayed through a 'fictional' racial characterisation.

1.4.3 Soap operas

Soap operas in this study refer to television programmes that are packaged into seasons with more than forty episodes broadcast weekly at a specific time and channel. Soap operas reflect on realities of the world, with scenes and episodes that entail themes that audiences relate to (Geraghty, 2005). Furthermore, Ahmed (2012) describes soap operas as a realistic form of entertainment that broadcast weekly with focus on domestic and personal issues such as death, romance, divorce and other issues which are portrayed across episodes that contain realist conventions.

1.4.4 Characterisation

In this study, the concept characterisation in television programmes means the manner in characters that usually comes off as underdeveloped in their first appearance. However, the first appearance of a character will showcase its role and importance to an episode or season. Characterisation assists the audience to make sense of the relevancy of a character in the storyline (Marx, 2007).

1.4.5 Black

For this study, Black refers to the racial identity that people of colour are socially classified within around the world and in South Africa. The term differentiates persons with African

ancestral origins from White minority populations, which are referred to as Whites in this study (Brunsma & Rockquemoore, 2002).

1.5 Significance of the study

It is important to examine the portrayal of race relations in the media, particularly soap operas as they have a large following and do exert a significant amount of influence on society's level of consciousness. This is important in South Africa to facilitate media monitoring and provision of guidelines with which public entities like the SABC can deliver on their public mandate to unite society through informational, educative and entertainment activities. Essentially, this could help in redressing the discriminatory practices that were initially depicted on public television during the apartheid era. Furthermore, this is important as this awareness may influence producers to shift away from the historical and colonial portrayal of race, wherein people of colour were presented as inferior to Whites. The study may help to create awareness among creative artists such as writers and producers to create balanced scripts or storylines which promote the values of democracy and constitutionalism. While the study has the potential to add value to the existing literature on the representation of race in soap operas, future scholars may find the study findings interesting to inspire further research in the same or related disciplines.

The overriding significance of the study is to make efforts to develop best strategies to ensure a balanced representation in depiction of race through fair distribution of character roles for the transformation and sustainable development of the sector. Subsequently, a studious endeavour informed by scientific research that creates cognisance in the entertainment industry, particularly soap operas creative writers in South Africa is espoused. The researcher makes comprehensive and effective recommendations throughout the chapters based on socio-economic realities, challenges and policies of the SABC as a national broadcaster. Through this, it is hoped that soap operas in South Africa will positively transform and have a capacity to produce and broadcast programmes that showcase parity in terms of racial characterisation. This will maintain relevant content which meets the needs of the sponsors, advertisers and adhere to the fair policies of the broadcaster. Consequently, this may assist to instil confidence to creative writers and

foster self-reliance on producers by encouraging them to refrain from stereotypical depictions of race.

In South Africa and other countries across the world, various stakeholders in the television sector emphasise on content being educative, informative and entertaining to the audience to rectify the skewed representations of race that was popular in the oppressive era in developing countries. Such commissions, policies and organisations include governments and independent media regulators such as the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA), Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), Media Monitoring Africa and the Broadcasting Act (2017) of the SABC. These regulators may find this study useful as a conceptual framework in the process of reviewing the sector's policies which will in turn influence a balanced representation of race. This study provides practical ways in which soap operas can transform scripts to being real and fair to benefit all South Africans living in this democratic country.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study is focused on the racial characterisation in South African soap operas that are broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation on a weekly basis watched by millions of audiences across the country and the world. However, the study is limited to *Skeem Saam*, a soap opera produced in South Africa by a team of Black writers and producers on Channel One (SABC 1).

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section explores two theories that are the Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory. These theories are relevant as they assist in addressing the racial characterisation of Black and White characters in South African soap operas. These theories are important in the contribution of fair representation of Black versus White characters in soap operas through equal distribution of dominant roles.

1.7.1 Critical Race Theory

The theory emphasises that race is socially constructed and popular media influences how society views race. It also maintains that to a larger extent, popular media enables racism through its systematic reinforcing institution. Therefore, it is relevant to the study

and South African media context as the distribution of racist representations and misrepresentations of minority races is depicted by the media through its different genres. This theory assists in the examination of racial characterisation based on the negative character roles and types that Blacks are often assigned to in media, specifically soap operas. Blackness in South African soap operas continues to be allied with failure, crime, and rape coupled with less-dominant occupations as compared to White counterparts. The representation of Black's remains questionable despite that South Africa is a democratic country where all citizens should be treated and represented in media fairly (Gumede, 2016; Puttick, 2011; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Magubane, 2001).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s to reform racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. Scholars of race theories as Delgado, Bell Derrick, and Crenshaw Kimberle challenged the colour-blind philosophical approach that degraded social justice. The main premise of CRT was based on that racism is a way of life in the United States of America (Delgado & Stefanic, 1999). Feminist, philosophical, political, social, economic and legal perspectives assist in dissolving the Black-White segregation that African Americans faced in the past. Gray's (1986) ideological analysis of Black characters on prime-time television programmes disengages racial harmony. In the early 1980s, assimilationist views of racial segregation accentuated middle-class success which is linked to side-lined races that are internationally known as minority. The ideological function of skewed racial characterisation of Black characters support the argument of that all citizens in America and South Africa can achieve the American dream and the 'rainbow nation' that all individuals in these countries regardless of gender and colour (Martin & Yep, 2004).

The theory focuses on the transformation of racial relationships and power. Perspectives on history, economics, political status and social cohesion are central tenets in critiquing race and equality issues (Stelfancic & Delgado, 2012). According to Winant (2000), race is a constructed constitutive element that emerged with modernity, when colonialism took place in peripheral countries of the world. Critical race theory focuses on addressing issues of racism, racial inequality and power. The theory explains how systems maintain and perpetuate the status quo of institutionalised injustices and racial minorities

(Martinez, 2014). Critical race theory argues that White supremacy and racial power is maintained through systems. Therefore, it advocates for racial equality, anti-subordination and racial emancipation (Elias & Feagin, 2012). It maintains that television and other forms of media adversely promote White supremacy through the misrepresentation of other races such as Blacks.

In the context of South Africa, the dawn of democracy is associated with counterfeit thoughts of equality as issues of White privilege and White supremacy remain unaddressed (Suttner, 2019). In addition, the media as an informative and influential social institution that remains ineffectual in transforming the depiction of Black characters. Therefore, the theory is useful in critiquing the representation of White characters featured in *Skeem Saam* against the depiction of Black characters.

The CRT traces racism that continues to prevail through systems as a historical and theoretical experience that affects society regardless of ethnicity. This theory is an interpretive mode that scrutinises race and racism that exist in cultural and communicative modes of expression. In the context of this study, communicative modes refer to South African television soap operas, which specifically focus on *Skeem Saam* as a phenomenon. CRT scholars attempt to comprehend how cultural, systemic and societal racism affects its victims and how they attempt to represent themselves through communicative systems to counter prejudice. These scholars argue that racism triumphs in film, literature, law and textual sources, which is in this case it is examined through film which is television soap opera genre. Therefore, the CRT further investigates the effects of racism in the realm rather than identifying it in fictional works where characters of superior races are assigned to dominant character roles (Delgado & Stefanic, 2013).

CRT elucidates that racism in society denies citizens of democratic states a fair experience of constitutional freedom that the law promises all citizens. It probes into how fictional texts develop that ultimately leads into racist representations of minorities, further revealing how pervasive systemic racism affects society at large. Hence, CRT originated in America to address the racial issues that aroused with representations of Black characters in soap operas and films which was adopted from the realistic racism that the Black race endured to an extent that law enforcers were brutal towards Blacks.

The use of CRT in the South African context originates with the historical definition of race which refers to the difference that is physically seen from the skin colour or ethnicity. The use of racial characterisation in the examination and portrayal of characters was deliberate as it explicitly states that the depiction of roles and character types in South African television is to some extent based on race and ethnicity. CRT deemed relevant in this study based on its advocacy for fairness amongst all races, specifically minorities. Establishing that the media, through soap operas has the power to deconstruct racial stereotypes and dictate which depictions of ethnic minorities should be selected and broadcasted for nation building, CRT supports fair depictions of racial representations through impartial distribution of roles amongst Black and White characters (Delgado & Stefanic, 1999).

Most South African soap operas have similar themes, story lines, plots and characters as it has been largely discussed earlier in this chapter. These soap operas have a poor family, rich family, villain, never-ending love triangles, scandal, gossip and murderer or dodgy character. However, it has always been that South African soap operas will have White characters as the saviours of Black characters through character types as law enforcers, investors and employers as in the case of *Skeem Saam* characters which will be discussed in chapter four of this study. The CRT assists in addressing such depictions on television as it promotes realistic and balanced representations. Therefore, this theory is related to fields of Black feminism as it addresses issues of minority races, class and gender (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

This theory explicitly discusses terms such as White privilege and supremacy which indicate that to some extent, the White race has privilege economically, socially and politically based on the pigmentation in their skin which dates back to historical construction of race (Feagin, 2001). Their privilege can be seen subtly and overtly in their access of social status, educational opportunities and power that Black individuals are certainly not entitled to (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). White privilege does not concern itself with the experience of non-Whites as stated earlier in the chapter.

1.7.2 Black feminist Theory

This theory argues that Black women are entitled to fair statuses of all citizens in democratic countries regardless of race. In the media context, an adoption by Nkealah (2006) explicates that writers and producers have a responsibility to produce scripts and character roles that positively portray Black women. A positive portrayal of Black women would require these writers and producers to be Black feminists at heart to execute the role. This speaks to the production team of the soap opera being studied, *Skeem Saam* as the producer is a Black South African woman. It is important for post-apartheid media programmes to deviate from apartheid-era stereotype of Black women in the structuring of storylines (Gumede, 2016).

The Black Feminist Theory was derived from the Feminist Theory which mainly advocated for gender equality. It is concerned with differences that are based on genetics, biology, cultural norms and psychology which influence the social construction of gender (Knowles & Mercer, 1992). Feminism explored segregation and discrimination that led to oppression, sexual objectification and patriarchy that was led by stereotypes that exists in different societies based on the exaggerated norms that were practiced by both males and females (Aziz, 1992). Throughout the development of feminism as a movement, Black Feminism raised from the discoveries by researchers and activists that could see and instigate discussions that would question the inequalities that existed between the White and the Black race, particularly for Black women.

According to Collins (1990), Black feminism developed from Black activists that yearned for change towards institutionalised racism and brutal conditions that non-western women endured. These non-White women experienced oppression based on the assumed female biological differences as mythically compared to White females. Early Black feminists as Sojourner Truth explains the Black feminist as 'double burden' thought that interrogates sexism and racism that include the segregation that happens based on class.

Black Feminist Theory emerged from contributions by advocates that question feminism as a thought that initially empowered and protected western women against oppression however, excluding Black women and the multiple oppressions that they experienced even after colonised countries of the world gained their independence (Frederickson,

2002). In the United States of America, Black women were concerned that feminism was a vehicle for change for the oppression that White women and middle-class endured whilst 'womanism' was a subtle term used for Black women struggles (ibid).

In artistic works such as soap operas, White women are initially portrayed as delicate, respectable and rational beings that need protection from Black irrational women by law enforcers (Feagin, 2001). Furthermore, feminists have questioned the portrayal of Black women in soap operas as their roles are built around gossip, false promises, irresponsibility and incapability in terms of accomplishing tasks when assigned to them. These kinds of representations are hardly found in the character roles assigned to White women (Bajner, 2008). However, some feminists have argued that gossip should continue to feature in roles of female characters as it sparks creativity and is resistant to patriarchy. It is maintained in current soap opera storylines, even in the phenomenon being examined in this study through female characters. The argument is that patriarchal men denigrate gossip as it is a consistent form of culture that men cannot practice and control thus it continues to feature in soap operas across the world (Kozloff, 2000).

This theory is relevant to the study based on the representation of Black female characters in *Skeem Saam*. The misrepresentation noted earlier in this chapter of the characterisation of females in South African soap operas emphasised an element of patriarchy and gender imbalance in the distribution of character roles of White and Black female actresses. The Black Feminist Theory emphasises on the ability and democratic rights that Black females are entitled to in the artistic field of television programmes as soap operas (Collins, 2015b). Therefore, the distribution of Black female character types and roles should be equal to that of males and White female characters. This theory also features in the study as a Black women critical social theory that assists in examining the portrayal of Black female characters in soap operas to oppose oppression as the subjugation of Black women does not only happen in the United States of America, but across the globe (Kolawole, 2002). Therefore, this theory is relevant and applicable in South Africa in this democratic era of two decades (Collins, 2000).

1.8 Summary of the chapter

In light of the brief introduction that this chapter encompasses, soap operas should be viewed as an important element of a collective democratic nation information system. Soap operas have the ability to deconstruct some of the past challenges such as racial stereotypes and constructions that are bound to influence oppressive and racist experiences created by former systems which did not favour all citizens in the developing countries such as South Africa. It is through media, and soap operas to a particular greater extent that individuals and communities are empowered to understand their history, current stance and the future through the depiction of characters and their roles. Therefore, for South Africans to develop as a nation, there is need for a balanced representation of race in soap operas from the national broadcaster. This will foster a change in the manner in which White and Black South Africans view themselves in the context of the constitutional rights, responsibilities and opportunities that have to assist them in their personal development as a people. Nevertheless, it is also important to examine the stance of the Black producers in the writing of artistic works such as soap operas to gauge how progressive they are personally through the roles assigned to Black and White characters in the media productions. Knowing the reasons behind the racial characterisation in South African soap operas will assist significantly in finding solutions towards the manner in which characters are portrayed. This chapter presented the Background of the study, Problem Statement, Objectives and aim of the study, a brief definition of concepts and the Significance of the study. The chapter includes the theoretical framework with two theories, namely the Critical Race Theory and the Black Feminist Theory which serve as a lens in the examination of racial characterisation in this study. The following chapter presents an overview of soap operas through subheadings that entail characterisation of roles in soap operas and the theoretical framework of the study.

1.9 Structure of Chapters

This study is divided into five chapters in the following sequential order:

1.9.1 Chapter One

This chapter introduces the study as it gives a background and motivation of the study. It includes the aim, objectives of the study and the research problem. The chapter problematises the situation on the characterisation of roles in South African soap operas. The background leads to a discussion about how roles are assigned and represented in both Black and White characters in soap opera productions. Definition of the key terms in the study are outlined in this chapter, which key terms are fully discussed in chapter two of the study. Lastly, the significance and scope of the study are presented in the chapter, followed by the summary of the chapter.

1.9.2 Chapter Two

In this chapter, an overview of soap operas is provided and the current state of global and national television soap operas is discussed. Subtopics in this chapter briefly provide a global gestalt which narrows down to the African and finally tapers to the South African context on issues of classification, functions, representations and themes in soap operas. Racial and gender stereotypes are also discussed in this chapter to explore the extent to which they influence racial characterisation in soap operas. Furthermore, the chapter critiques previous studies through analysing their strengths and limitations. The review of the literature made it easier to notice the gaps that this study needs to fill.

1.9.3 Chapter Three

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the study. The study is anchored on the qualitative research approach and the descriptive research design. Purposive sampling and qualitative content analysis are discussed in detail in the chapter. The chapter also discusses how qualitative content analysis was used in collection and how data were thematically analysed. A synopsis of the soap opera being critiqued is given in the chapter, which includes its target audience, focus, production and plot development. Lastly, quality criteria are outlined to show how ethical considerations are objectively and systematically adhered to throughout this study.

1.9.4 Chapter Four

This chapter focuses on the data analysis and interpretation of the results. The results are categorised into three sections: critiquing context which characters are depicted;

analysis of characters, excerpts and characterisation of roles; inherent themes in the soapie; and racial stereotypes in *Skeem Saam*. Each section addressed the first three objectives of the study through themes that divided the sections. The selected characters are used as examples for each theme that emerged as the researcher watched and analysed the episodes. The data includes excerpts and props from episodes relevant for the examination of racial characterisation in the soapie.

1.9.5 Chapter Five

Chapter five presents the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the aim and objectives of the study. The chapter mainly addresses the last objective which speaks to the recommendations of the study. The recommendations sought to promote production of a balanced racial representation in South African soap operas. The limitations and the contributions made by the study are also delineated.

CHAPTER TWO

2. SOAP OPERA, REPRESENTATION AND THEMATISATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on reviewing literature from previous studies conducted across the world and in South Africa about the portrayal of racial characterisation on television, particularly soap operas. Classifications, codes and conventions of soap operas are outlined with locally produced soap operas as examples. The chapter also delineates types and functions of soap operas to assist in the description of the soap opera being examined in the study. The chapter outlines and discusses themes that emerge with soap operas as storylines evolve and transform in the production of film genres. Literature on feminist views on the characterisation of females, males, patriarchy, crime, gender and racial stereotypes are presented in this chapter as these aspects contribute in the examination of racial characterisation in soap operas.

2.2 A historical overview of soap operas

Soap operas are sensational artistic programmes by creative writers and producers that narrate realities of life through scenes that depict daily experiences and situations. These programmes portray untold stories in distinguished ways depending on their types. Soap operas originated when detergent manufacturers such as Procter and Gamble (PG) sponsored daytime programmes to advertise detergents to housewives and audiences throughout the days of the week (Onuh, 2017). They can be described as continuous fictional television serials with interlocked plots that are played by main and supporting characters who are given roles to play to bring the script to life (Jedlowski, 2018). Furthermore, Muindi (2015) asserts that soap operas are episodic, melodramatic and an influential medium that cut across race and gender through character roles that tell stories of real people.

The first soap operas in the 1930s ran for fifteen (15) minutes on radio in the United States of America. They ultimately, progressed to television in the 1950s as thirty (30) minute episodes interjected with detergent advertisements. Most soap operas that were broadcast in African countries in the 1960s were produced by American production

conglomerates such as Dallas (Adejunmobi, 2015). Conversely, when colonised countries were in the process of developing and transforming from being colonised, state owned broadcasters were formed to empower, educate and inform Africans through radio and television thus soap operas were produced by and for Africans with enormous relevancy (Jedlowski, 2018).

According to Igbal and Abdar (2016), soap operas are predominately female programmes that showcase domesticated meek characters who nurture those around them. Soap operas initially depicted non-existent psychological advice, gender and race inequality and educational deprivation for females through less empowered female characters. Ahmed (2012) argues that soap opera plots and storylines have evolved with both male and female characters having dominant characters. Nonetheless, this study focuses on examining racial characterisation in the South African soap opera, *Skeem Saam*.

Conventionally, soap operas produced from the early 1930s portrayed the minorities through less dominating characters. The notion that Latino, Black and Indian characters are incapable of playing leading roles on screen and in reality prevailed and was sustained through soap operas (Mastro, Tukachinsky & Yarchie, 2015). Furthermore, the initial soap operas excluded minorities characters in their storylines and this insinuated that minorities did not contribute to the development of communities or lacked stories to tell as a people. In the 1980s when peripheral countries started producing their own soap operas, the imposing countries as the sponsors maintained that minorities should be given undignified, corrupt and domesticated roles (Harrington, Scardaville, Lippmann & Bielby, 2015).

Soap operas are infused with popular culture depending on the era in which they are produced. Idang (2015) defines popular culture as a way of life that people in a society choose to live by and follow. The culture marks a society distinctively from other social groups. This implies that a society has shared norms, tradition, values and principles to sustain its existence. Soap operas are considered as a global popular culture as audiences watch them on a daily basis thus learning the way to live through themes portrayed by characters. In the United States, Armenia, soap operas have become part of people's lives as they render real life situations that audiences see themselves through

(Keshishian & Mirakyan, 2017). Similarly, South African soap operas represent the state of affairs and occurrences that happen on a daily basis through complex storylines (Onuh, 2017).

On the contrary, Blose (2020) asserts that soap operas are programmes initially produced for female audiences to influence women's identity construction, considering the fact that they were initiated by detergent companies which cater for domesticated females in households. Soap operas centralize their themes on female characters thus giving these characters powerful roles to play since plots are intentionally romantic, intimate and sensational. Subsequently, soap operas are historically defined as female programmes as they portray nurturing, romantic, empathy and problem-solving skills that women naturally have and share with those around them. However, Somani and Doshi (2016) believe that the definition of soap operas based on gender is stereotypical and biased as soap operas are produced and watched by millions of males and females across the world. It is almost impossible to study soap operas without stating their functions and categorizing them. The next sections outline and discuss the main functions and types of soap operas.

2.3 Functions of soap operas

2.3.1 Soap opera as a vehicle of social change

Through television programmes as soap operas, the media sets the agenda for each programme that is produced and broadcast to target audiences. Soap operas have a series of issues that occur on a daily basis for audiences which unfold in the form of an agenda. To some extent, this can contribute to the development of society, also assisting in the expanded image of social reality. Some socio-political or economic agendas are set through soap operas that have enormous social interest where current events can be addressed and humourised (Mahlatsi, 2018).

However, in the colonial era, the media through press, radio and later television were used for seduction and dissimulation to inform and influence citizens of the peripheral countries about colonial culture. It is common knowledge that colonisers made programmes that would promote oppressive values and with the aim of demolishing local

cultures, traditions and values of the colonised (Oliver & Oliver, 2017). However, most colonised countries were resistant enough to fight for liberation and democracy around the world. The existence of colonial media was that it was meant to bring civilization, popular culture and education to the colonised nations as it is claimed that there was no culture amongst those living in the marginalised countries (Oliver & Oliver, 2017).

2.3.2 Soap opera as a tool for edutainment

Soap operas also exist to entertain and educate audiences depending on their types. Harrington, Scardaville and Lippmann (2015) maintain that entertainment is the main reason for the existence of soap opera in the developed countries where basic education is not relative to soap operas as citizens are mostly literate and well informed about social issues. Soap operas in developing countries entertain and subsequently serve as educational tools to reduce conflict amongst communities, eradicate poverty, communicate personal and educational development approaches to citizens. For that reason, a term referred to as edutainment which refers to a purposive placement of educational information in entertainment programmes and messages was coined to accommodate a relatively new purpose that soap operas serve in marginalised countries (Borzekowski, 2018).

Aladé and Nathanson (2016) elucidate that the edutainment function is referred to as drama-for-development because television programmes such as soap operas that were initially created to entertain are coupled with learning and progressive themes in their plots. Aspects of social, cultural and personal development are stewed in the narration of stories which prompts audiences to anticipate and expect more episodes to feed their suspense. Soap operas' narrative traits allow them to be educative and entertaining within episodes with interchanging relevant themes that revolve around national, global and social issues that affect the society at large.

In Mexico, soap operas were specifically made for development. These soap operas are referred to as pro-development programmes as they were produced to promote development (Khalid & Ahmed, 2014). Soap operas are broadcast with the purpose of increasing society's knowledge and shifting values and norms that influence social change. Equally important, soap operas are meant to spark conversations amongst

audiences, interpersonal and intrapersonal introspection that should lead to social development (Phiri, 2019).

The most important strategy of edutainment through soap operas is to influence awareness and attitudes for the development of a country. For instance, a soap opera called *Twenda na Wakati* in Tanzania was produced to educate sexually active citizens about HIV prevention methods whilst, in 2007, India broadcasted *Tinka Tinka Sukha* to create awareness and educate audiences on issues of gender equality and community empowerment (Riley, Sood & Robichaud, 2017). In South Africa, soap operas such as *Tsha Tsha* and *Yizo Yizo* were used in the early 2000s to educate audiences on HIV/AIDS and the importance of civic education because it was significant and relevant at that time in the country (Milton, 2015).

In the developed countries, soap operas exist primarily to make revenue as these programmes are not primarily used to develop and educate citizens. This is influenced by the high rate of literacy, civilization and social, economic and political stability found in developed countries (Valor, 2018). The mandate of soap operas depends on the development of a country as broadcasters' visions differ depending on the availability of funds among the private broadcasters as public broadcasters usually focus more on news and informing the citizens on core issues that concern the economy and the political state of affairs (Bello-Bravo, 2019). Soap operas in the developed countries are referred to as conventional programmes as their main aim is to depict issues of greed, violence and materialistic lifestyles. It is argued that these programmes are not concerned with development and pro-social values (Khalid & Ahmed, 2014).

In New Jersey, soap operas such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *General Hospital* and *One Life to Live* continue to purely entertain and generate revenue. These soap operas continue to survive although series programmes have taken over as the new soap operas, as they run on platforms such as Netflix where audiences pay monthly to watch these series. Public broadcasters continue to produce and broadcast the soap operas for entertainment of older generations that prefer to watch television sets rather than access programmes on gadgets as laptops and cell phones. This is an indication that public

broadcasters do not rely on soap operas to educate but rather to entertain the few audiences that prefer traditional television networks and systems (Silver, 2019).

For this study, *Skeem Saam* is classified as an edutainment and pro-development soap opera as it is produced and broadcast in a developing country through the public broadcasting service. *Skeem Saam*'s storylines and themes are educative as social and economic challenges such as human trafficking, unemployment, *black tax* and poverty are showcased throughout the seasons of the soap opera. In the next chapters, a thorough examination of racial characterisation will elaborate on the kind of programme *Skeem Saam* is based on the classification in the next section.

2.4 Classification of soap operas

There are different types of soap operas which are characterised by the manner in which scenes, plots, characters, episodes and music are used. In the 1960s, 'kitchen-sink' dramas were broadcast in America featuring primarily domesticated female roles with household scenes. These kitchen-sink dramas were compatible with the sponsorship of soap detergent manufacturers as their products would be advertised throughout the episodes during ad breaks (Suggs, 2019). State broadcasters of peripheral countries such as South Africa, would buy these kitchen sink programmes such as *All My Children* to broadcast them to the citizens.

2.4.1 Dynastic soap operas

Dynastic soap operas make characters connect through broad themes of entrepreneurship, rivalry and politics. Luxurious lifestyles of rich characters in dynastic and dyadic soap operas portray notions that wealthy people are emotionally unstable and unhappy (De Kock, 2010). For instance, *Generations* storyline revolves around a wealthy Moroka family that is influential politically and leads one of the best marketing and advertising empires that keeps surviving generationally. The storyline is the same with *The Queen* where one family is wealthy because of illegal drug dealings to sustain an empire of the late husband of the drug queen whilst the family in *The Throne* is powerful due to their royalty bloodline (Zeeman, 2018). According to Syed (2011), dynastic soap operas are concerned with the portrayal of real-life situations where both males and females have daily jobs coupled with marital challenges. Black characters are portrayed

as subordinates in dynastic and dyadic soap operas while White characters are prioritised through dominant character roles (Grassi, 2018).

2.4.2 Community soap operas

Unlike dynastic soaps, community soaps run with several families that belong to different socio-economic statuses to showcase middle-class lifestyles and their challenges. In these soaps, families might be child-headed to depict poverty-stricken situations that some Black citizens face where parents are irresponsible, sick or have died. Some families might have single parents to showcase the struggles in semi-rural communities wherein parents strive to emotionally and financially support their children to meet their daily needs (De Kock, 2010). According to Ferreira (2015), community soaps showcase the nostalgic depiction of life that happens daily in small communities where life continues despite the many challenges the community members face behind closed doors.

2.4.3 Dyadic soap operas

Dyadic soaps are uni-generational and interchanged with various plots and themes throughout different seasons. The romantic theme is normally showcased through young characters than old ones. Love lives of older Black characters are depicted as failed, dysfunctional and burnt out with old characters that continue to sacrifice their happiness and sanity in loveless marriages and relationships (De Kock, 2010). For instance, in *Scandal* the young Black characters strive to be in meaningful relationships where their emotional needs are met as compared to the older characters that stay in relationships for sacrifices relating to their children and financial security.

All types of soap operas are characterised by tension which keeps audiences enthusiastic about storylines that evolve over certain periods of time. The tension created and maintained by characters makes audiences to be engaged in daily conversations through social spaces. Speculations and the suspense of the audience maintain the viewership of dynastic, community and dyadic soaps throughout the tension made by the characters in different episodes. It is argued that the tension in soap operas provokes “gossip” amongst those engaging about soap operas on a daily basis (Knoetze & Dhoest, 2016). Which is the case in social spaces such as workplaces, schools and households where people conversate about what they have seen on soap opera episodes.

Table 1 presents the soap opera genre sub-types that are produced and broadcast in South Africa by public and private broadcasters.

Genre	Description	Examples
Dynastic soap	A powerful family with dominant characters in business or politics that other characters relate with for their power and influence.	Generations, The Queen, The Throne.
Dyadic soap	Are concerned with motherhood, career, romance and a destabilised network of interchanging couples played by various characters that change over time.	Isidingo, Scandal, The River.
Community soap	Consists of various multigenerational family transitions from childhood and teenage hood to adulthood. Normally represents typical semi-rural lifestyles with multiple families in the same neighbourhood.	Skeem Saam, Rhythm City, Isibaya

Genre sub-types (De Kock, 2010)

2.5 Major Codes and conventions of soap operas

Soap operas are differentiated by their conventions that are predictable, expected and repeated plots. However, soap operas are not limited by fixed or permanent existing inherent characteristics (Baym, 2016). In this sense, soap opera plots and storylines are broadly dependent on shared cultural references that are found in society (Harrington, Scardaville, Bielby & Lippmann, 2015). This corroborates with Gledhill's (2003) view that soap operas in the globe revolve around the same themes, codes, conventions and narratives based on the issues that pertain audiences locally and regionally. The three conventions that feature in this study are realism and ideology, narrative themes and characters.

2.5.1 Realism and ideology

Realism in soaps reflects and represents issues that occur in the realm which audiences encounter and believe in through characters, scenes, real locations and props. The realism convention influences location scouting teams to look for locations that audiences can geographically relate with. Location is important as it sets the tone and has components that determine the realistic feel of a scene shot (Fourie & Milton, 2015). Local

soap operas are produced and broadcast to a specific audience in a national space as the storyline encompasses specific problems, history, culture and norms of a local space. Regional soap operas are broadcast to a wider regional audience that has interest in the issues that affect a particular community (Karlidag & Bulut, 2014). As such, one would describe *Skeem Saam* as a local soap opera as it is based in a particular township of Mankweng (Turfloop) that encompasses a racial makeup of Black Africans, Coloureds, Whites and others. However, its viewership showcases extraordinarily high ratings that indicate appeals to a wider South African audience, thus it can also be regarded as a regional soap opera (Ferreira, 2015).

2.5.2 Narrative themes

Soap operas use narrative themes where interweaving threads are used to connect plots and storylines with more than ten episodes per season that entail different structure and topics that are temporal and permanent based on their significance. The narrative theme includes a melodrama code that is coherent with themes that the storylines are based on (Mpanza, 2018). Melodrama refers to the heightened sense of the drama where characters create emotions through the realist point of view of what the audience experience on a daily basis (Aldama, 2016). This confirms Fourie's (2018) view that soap operas are at the core of moral fantasy of depicting rightness and realities of the world. Codes and conventions are exaggerated through shots, twists and dramatic music that give a storyline uniqueness and credibility. Therefore, it is complex for soap operas to have realism and melodrama to make up a complete episode (Pitout, 2018).

Narrative themes featured in soap operas are domestic, personal or family orientated. They feature all at once in a season through the relationship of characters in births, marriage, illness, accidents, business, crime, unemployment, domestic violence, racism, death and community set ups in the script (Fourie & Milton, 2015). New characters, plots and storylines change through the narrative themes which are closely based on realism and ideology to make interesting effects that audiences will relate to. Narrative themes make it possible for producers to inject controversial storylines, entertaining and dramatic effects through taboo issues of society which spark public debate to popularise the soap opera (Kosut, 2012).

2.5.3 Characters

Alderson (2017) explicates characters as figures that the audience relates to and are also a vehicle for the plot. They are introduced in a soap opera with a built-in storyline, through a secret in their past, a serious illness, an occupation or a relationship. Characters are based on stereotypes which relate to existent narrative themes in a season. Soap operas have various types of characters ranging from central characters that provide the focus of action in all episodes with the assistance of background actors that dramatize and make a scene to be realist. According to Wheatley (2016), central characters are made through consistent personality traits, fictional setting, socio-demographic characteristics, occupational roles and educational levels which feature in the analysis of characters of this study. Characters are the main figures that bring a soap opera script to life (Knoll, Schramm, Schalhorn & Wynistorf, 2015). Characters are meant to appeal to target audience's emotional needs where viewers attach themselves and relate to the characters. Soap operas provide companionship and emotional release through character roles (Dias, Dias & Lages, 2017). Consequently, realism and ideology, narrative themes and characters cannot exist without the actual production and characterisation which are what make soap operas.

2.6 Production of soap operas

According to Ballinger (2004), soap operas are usually thirty (30) minute programmes that run for twenty (20) minutes as they are interrupted by commercial breaks that make up ten minutes of the duration. The production of soap operas includes three stages which are namely, pre-production, production and post production as explained below.

2.6.1 Pre-production

Soap operas are produced as serial dramas that are edited into daily episodes that can be broadcast as continuous narratives. Executive producers bring a written script to life through the help of a creative production team. The executive team then decides how long a soap opera will run on a daily basis, making sure that continuous episodes are extracted from the written script (Gledhill, 2003). After a script is presented to the director and auditions are held to find characters, the production team scouts for location where scenes will be shot. The location scouting includes obtaining permits from authorities and

release forms from land or property owners which will enable the crew and cast to access the location during the time of shooting (Mngomezulu, 2017). With soap operas, most production teams use large studios found at the broadcaster's building such as the SABC where Generations and Muvhango are shot. The budget is prepared in the pre-production stage. Furthermore, shooting scripts and script breakdowns are prepared in this stage. All equipment such as lenses, props, costumes, grip, lights, cameras and microphones are purchased, leased and tested in the pre-production stage to avoid time wasting in the production stage when casts are on set (Chalaby, 2015).

2.6.2 Production

According to Fourie (2002), the production stage allows the cast and crew to meet on set as rehearsals commence on set. After all rehearsals are completed, the actual shooting commences on locations scouted. The photography, sound and editing teams are all present on set to capture their scenes whilst the editing team gets an idea of how the director wants the script to unfold on screen. The production stage allows the director to retake unsatisfactory scenes which will be better versions of the first takes. At this point, the cast is familiar with its lines as they bring them to life through actions in the scenes. According to Millerson and Owens (2016), the production stage encompasses all parties involved in the making of a programme. Art directors and producers ensure that locations used to shoot scenes represent what the has director specified, this can only be implemented if thorough research is conducted on characters, location and the feel of the specific scenes.

2.6.3 Post production

The post-production stage is dedicated to editing. The editing team assembles sound, subtitles, effects and music into scenes which are ultimately turned into continuous episodes. The sound team also enhances the dialogue and sound of characters with assistance of the editing team where sound is not clear and audible enough. The post-production stage is the final stage of producing the soap opera episodes that are broadcast with advertisements in between which are either sponsors of the soap opera or associate themselves with the soap opera because of its target audience (Kruger, 2012). With South African soap operas, the executive producer of the channel watches

the episodes before they can be commissioned for broadcast to ensure if there are any changes to be made which will align to the channel's programming policies. Therefore, this gives the production team ample time to edit or reshoot scenes if there are amendments recommended by the executive producer (Mngomezulu, 2017).

2.7 Characterisation of roles in soap operas

This study is concerned with racial characterisation in South African soap operas, thus this section will deal with the characterisation of females, males, LGBTIQ, Black and White characters. Feminist scholars have studied the portrayal of females to establish if females are portrayed in a manner that is fair as compared to their male counterparts. Hence, the study refers to the feminist perspective in the review of literature in this section.

2.7.1 Feminist views on the characterisation of females in soapies

Feminists around the world are concerned with the depiction of race and gender in the media which is done in soap operas through characters and roles played by these characters. Characterisation refers to the act of characters bringing out a role written in a script to life. Roles consist of fictional speech, actions, personality traits, social status, economic and political influence (Khatti, 2019). Critical debates have been made to argue the representation of Black females as opposed to White females through characters that have roles to depict the realities. The portrayal of females in soap opera storylines indicate oppression at a moral level as plots are centered on the basis of patriarchal systems that continue to prevail through private and public broadcasters (Khan, 2010).

Female characters in soap operas usually revolve around matriarchal roles. Matriarchs are defined as powerful roles such as mothers, heads and rulers of households. The word matriarch emanates from a Latin word which refers to *matri* as "mother" and *arch* as "ruler" (Mupavayenda, 2017). Matriarchs are influential women in society by advocating for radical women empowerment and taking full responsibility in families. Matriarchs are not socially defined as females with biological children, in soap operas these characters are portrayed as activists for responsibility and authority as they bring order to a situation through scenes (Beisner, 2014). However, Wiedenbeck (2015) posits that the female body's ability threatens masculinity in real life and that matriarchs are often viewed in

society and depicted on television as characters against patriarchy as they defy male-controlled systems that oppress women and children on the basis of traditional norms.

It is further argued that in South African soap operas, matriarchal statuses are attained by default as women age, by marriage and social status which is determined by community activities where a woman is involved in solving problems of community members (Onuh, 2017). It is assumed that women gain knowledge with age, where wisdom and experiences are presumed to be acquired as a woman ages through traditional and cultural practices. These assumptions continue to problematise ageism as a prejudice against young people that they are inexperienced in traditional and cultural practices based on their age, with assumptions that older people in society are more competent to deal with social issues even without merit (North & Fiske, 2012). Matriarchy features in the representation of racial characterisation of females in South African soap operas to measure the extent to which Black young females are portrayed based in their age as compared to older White females. This kind of portrayal will be examined in the analysis of this study in the fourth chapter.

According to Kaul and Sahni (2010), the involvement of feminists comes as a pledge of advocating for equality amongst races and genders. Women are marginalised in societies economically, politically and socially through collective norms that have been established and practiced in the past. Feminism in this context speaks to the commitment of fairness amongst people of colour and Whites regarding the distribution of roles. Terry (2018) explicates that feminism is involved with transforming the devaluation and empowering those who are marginalised in society through giving them power to enable capabilities of interrogating oppression to fight against it. Empowerment promotes emancipation of the mind that allows for the marginalised groups to be liberated on their own before media depicts a transformative depiction of feminist views.

2.7.2 Female characterisation, patriarchy and dominant systems

The initial depiction of females through characters on television was influenced by oppressive systems such as assimilation, apartheid and acculturation which are forms of colonialisations to different peripheral countries by the dominant states (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). These systems brought about a devaluation of Blacks in the African continent

wherein conservative traditional norms had already existed to oppress women and children. Cole (2019) argues that the oppressive systems led to great exploitation of Africans in their territories. Kumari and Joshi's (2015) conception of the portrayal of females in soap operas is aligned with Frenkel (2008) notions which makes reference to the representation of women in soap operas being a reflection of unfair systems that continue to prevail through fallacy democratic systems.

Nonetheless, this study will showcase the representation of Black females and males in soap operas which is apprehensive based in the manner in which roles are distributed amongst Black and White characters. The sociology of race has an undisputable relationship with media representation of Black females which needs to be monitored and critically examined based on the 'democratic' systems put in place in countries to measure the level of equality in the distribution of roles. According to Terry (2018), Black females marginalisation is invisibly maintained on television through over congestion of Black women with less dominant roles, the overpopulated roles that Black females are assigned enquire an examination. Most studies are concerned with the population of women in television programmes than exploring the quality of roles they are assigned to as compared to White female characters (Boothroyd, Jucker, Thornborrow & Barton, 2019; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Emons, Wester & Scheepers, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2004; Down & Smith, 2010). However, this study examines the racial characterisation rather than female roles in soap operas.

Collins (2011) questions the quality of roles that Black females play in television programmes by making reference to the circumscribed depictions of female roles as sexual gatekeepers, housewives, prostitutes and nonprofessionals that intend to play roles of that nature endlessly. Non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, desires and incapability of the roles Black females play confirm traditional feminine stereotypes that corroborate with norms of conservative societies. However, Collin's notion is contradictory to the depiction of women on a South African soap opera, *The Queen* where Black female characters such Harriet, Keabetswe and Goodness have dominant roles and are successful as compared to their male counterparts and White female characters (Magadla, 2018).

2.7.3 Crime, stereotypes and characterisation of males in soap opera

It is nearly difficult to unpack the characterisation of females without addressing the depiction of males in soap operas. The characterisation of Black males is also of interest as it is argued that they are represented in a skewed manner (Denzer-King, 2016). According to Jacobs (2018), television programmes as soap operas perpetuate racial and social stereotypes that have existed through former colonial systems. This notion then suggests that, globally stereotypes are maintained through broadcasting systems in the peripheral countries. Males are depicted as angry, irresponsible and violent through characters and roles assigned to them in soap operas. Mngadi (2017) further elucidates that the representation of Black males is accompanied by a 'negative' genre. This implies that there is lack of context and continued stereotyped representations of male Black characters in soap operas.

Schmader, Block and Lickel (2015) assert that Black males are a threat to law abiding White citizens, particularly to females and youngsters. Thus, Black males are depicted as criminals in media through programmes such as soap operas. These Black men are usually portrayed as perpetrators of violence and crime which then creates a link between the Black race and crime (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). This notion validates Diangelo's (2018) illustration of real-life situations she encountered with the views about Black and White citizens. One of the concerns was how White people felt unsafe in Black neighbourhoods due to their opinions of the Black population having a violent nature and crime culture. The characters and roles that Black males play are similar to the stereotyped characterisation of females. Black male characters play roles of janitors, irresponsible father figures and lawbreakers that constantly have to be bailed out by White characters (Sangster, 2011). For instance, in *The Queen*, a Black male character, Shaka is an irresponsible father who only maintains his children financially. He constantly breaks the law due to his involvement in drug dealings where he gets involved in shootings with other dealers over territory. The shootings result in arrests where a White legal representative, Sandra Stein bails him out of jail and represents him in court (Ferguson, 2019).

A negative imagery of Black men commenced in the 21st century with words such as criminality and thug being synonyms. In the United States of America and South Africa, racist ideologies, law and stereotypes that manifested into discriminatory policies and judiciary rulings advocated for racial segregation and violence (Tukachinsky, 2015). Few studies have given proof of the criminalization of Blackness being a scapegoat of White privilege maintained through fictional and reality programmes such as soap operas (Hurley, Jensen, Weaver & Dixon, 2015). However, the criminalisation of Blacks in South Africa and in the United States of America has evolved due to the equality laws and democracy granted to citizens. The liberation that led to a shift of racial tolerance has assisted to reduce racist conduct by law enforces (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Although Black Americans in the United States of America continue to experience police brutality where they are attacked, killed by police based on accusations and police racism. One of the popular cases captured by media around world is George Floyd who was killed in police custody beside that he pleaded for his life and was attacked by the police because he is Black, thus seen as a criminal deserving to die (Kenya, 2020).

The debate around racial characterisation and racial inequality features in the characterisation of males due to stereotypical depictions of men that surfaces in soap operas and television advertisements. In New Zealand, White actors and actresses dominate in soap operas with different characters justifying that the population in New Zealand is mostly made of Maori and Pacific people who may be portrayed with negative stereotypes due to their ethnicity (Rubie-Davies, Liu & Lee, 2015). The justification is similar and relevant in South Africa where soap opera casts are dominated by Black characters as the majority race playing both dominant and less dominant roles with the justification that most of the population in South Africa is Black (Smith, 2011). However, this does not suit as a counter-argument for the unequal distribution of characters and roles in South African soap operas as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

2.7.4 Race, characterisation and gender in soapies

American soap operas such *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Days of our Lives* often feature Black characters in cameo roles, where these characters feature in scenes as extras or voice parts thus implying that they play a brief role as distraction and production

value. White American soap operas include Black characters for political alignment, which implies that Black characters exist in American scripts to create a false impression of reality (Talley, 2014). While South African soap operas are predominately occupied with Black female characters as the majority in the country. However, the roles of these Black characters evolved over time as production companies are owned by Black entrepreneurs and film makers unlike in the early 1990s where soap operas were produced internationally and broadcast in South Africa. The formation of production companies by Black citizens was influenced by the dawn of democracy and liberation in South Africa which was followed by the public broadcaster creating its content than primarily broadcasting international content, specifically soap operas (Reddy, 2018).

Soap operas where Black women play dominant characters are embedded with negative factors such as these Black female characters achieving everything through crime, infidelity and bad morals which then suggests that the Black race has a crime culture that assists it to survive (Hatter, 2020). In the contrary, White dominant characters are guided by principles, norms and ethics which they naturally have as law abiding citizens. This depiction in soap operas speaks to White characters playing roles as law enforcers and characters that “save Black characters from themselves” (Mpanza, 2018).

2.7.5 Racial superiority, privilege and identity construction

Whiteness dominates in the characterisation of females in soap operas in democratic countries where western nations had colonised the states historically. The domination of Whiteness stems from White supremacy as a social construction in democratic countries such as the United States of America and South Africa. Freedom and equality are subtly mythical as racial construction is not equal, in most cases, the White race is represented as superior when compared to other races in these democratic countries (Diangelo, 2018). Furthermore, it is argued that the inequality that exists between the Black and White race would not be intensified if slave owners such as Thomas Jefferson did not scientifically attempt to prove that the Black race is genetically different from the White race. Jefferson’s findings advocated for race science which influenced social construction and economic interests (Diangelo, 2018).

In view of the adoption of the notions above, Whiteness is perceived to be a worldview. Whiteness can be argued to be a property (Withers, 2017). According to Burt, Simons and Gibbons (2012), White privilege is an institutionalised identity that forms part of the world's socialisation, perceptions of identity to grant White race resources of positive expectations, entitlement, privileges, sense of worth, psychological freedom and the liberty to move across the world with confidence. However, Myers (2019) states that 'inferior' races ought to focus on themselves other than Whiteness and supremacy to explore what it means to be Black and proud. Baldwin's notion concurs with Nkealah's (2016) development to the Black Feminist Theory that was discussed in chapter one. The development of the theory illustrated how creative writers of soap operas and other television programmes should be proud to portray the Black race through character roles in a positive light. This implies that Black characters should be granted dominant roles in artistic works such as soap operas.

Kiran (2005) elucidate that, through its programmes as soap operas and news, television is a universal foundation of culture through which significant roles of society are depicted. The depiction of these imperative roles ought to be fair as the audiences may tend to believe that the fictional representation is accurately illustrative of an ethnic group, gender and/or race. Initially, female African Americans were portrayed as overtly sexual beings fussed with anger from being an inferior race. It is further argued that Black characters were not only misrepresented and/or underrepresented, rather characterisation of Black females has been associated with playing roles such as background actors to White characters to portray the White characters positively while their roles are questionable (Terry, 2018).

2.8 Representation of race

The portrayal of race in soap operas remains debatable due the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Black people on television particularly in the 1980s in South Africa. For this reason, some scholars have noted the need to dismantle the White-Black binary that exists in the representation of characters due to the racial segregation that occurs in soap operas. In the United States of America, African Americans are overrepresented in soap operas as compared to Asians and Latinos due to African American's huge

involvement in media in America (Gohr, 2017). However, the White race is also overrepresented with main character types and roles in most soap operas (Suggs, 2020). In South Africa, the representation of race is destabilised thus it is significant to reconceptualise the manner in which soap operas portray race and racial issues in the current era of democratisation. The transformed representation of race fosters a new sense of equality in society in the South African context (Akala, 2018).

Characters in soap operas are racially classed based on their appearance which is projected through a script, social status, language, behaviour, occupational role, style of dress that is determined by the costumes department in the crew which then distinguishes characters through clothing and other props (Hobson, 2003). Characteristics of patriarchy and colonialist values triumph through the misrepresentation of the Black race. For instance, a Black female's body was historically capitalised and objectified for male gaze whilst a White female's body is respected and seen as valuable in society's stereotypical understanding of race (Wieringa, 2008).

The characterisation of Black and White characters in soap operas perpetuates racial myths. The world views the White race as dominant and superior to other races due to the historic reasons such as colonisation, assimilation and other forms of oppression by the White race to other races such as the Black. The White race is prioritised as real, White citizens in developing such as South Africa and under-developed countries fall within the category of upper and middle-class citizens as compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Bajner, 2008). However, according to Williams (2012), the Black race has reverted by being radical through Black consciousness which then advocates that producers, writers and actors fight for dominant roles and characters in artistic works such as soap operas, movies, and other television programmes. The representation of race to a certain extent entail stereotypes that are attached to race as discussed in the next section.

2.9 Depictions of racial stereotypes in soap operas

Dow (2006) explicates that the representation of Black characters in soap operas regulate how other races view them based on constructed images. Television makes audiences

to conceive, alter and support their beliefs and opinions about Blacks (Charmaraman, 2010).

2.9.1 Racial stereotypes and characters of colour

A research study conducted in the United States of America has proved that student perceptions about Blacks and Whites are formed and maintained by their interests on media messages in soap operas as they watch them in groups (Dixon & Williams, 2015). Prince (2018) affirm that the depictions on television have an effect on audiences and these perceptions ultimately turn into believed notions. According to Edwards (2019), negative depictions of the Black race endorse unfavourable beliefs and mind-set that relate to criminality and no work ethic. Meanwhile, constructive views relating to intelligence, socioeconomic status and values can be in the minds of the audience as they watch positive depictions about the White race (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006). Furthermore, Dow (2006) explains that, through the process of programme packaging and portrayals of Black characters' images in a particular way, producers wish to reach and maintain a larger viewership. Conversely, these images and scenes can in turn distort or under-represent how Black societies view themselves and their capabilities. Hence, the researcher has taken interest in the depictions of racial characterisation in the South African soap opera, *Skeem Saam*.

Racial identifiers were used to distinguish the Black and the White race. The Black race was identified through bad behaviour based on their skin and historical presumed differences. During the apartheid era in South Africa, the Black race was identified through a propaganda mantra called '*swart gevaar*' which implied that Blacks are dangerous and are a threat to social order and peace. This was an insult to the Black race, considering that Whites were not racially marked (Langa, Kirsten, Bowman & Eagle, 2018). To some extent, it is argued that primetime media programmes support racist ideologies. According to Van Dijk (2010), racism is concerned with political, social or economic domination that functions as a structural system. Racism in media is the reproduction of historical and existing ethnic domination over other ethnicities through maintenance of negative racial hegemony.

The separation and the identification of the Black race are based on the relationship between ideology that shapes media content and the structure and ownership of the media. The evidence suggests that the owners and/or funders of production conglomerates are Whites who then influence a negative depiction of Black people through shallow characters types (Zellers, 2006). Ultimately, the content of media is injected with racist ideologies and stereotypes that have been historically constructed. Some of the evident racial stereotypes are that Blacks are criminals which is supported by the depiction that it is normal for the Black race to commit crime and have a rape culture, that illustrates how brutal and inhuman they are towards their people of colour and other races (Burr, 2001). Further, soap operas will usually depict Black characters committing crime in fictional White areas where 'innocent Whites' live in peace. This depiction then makes crime committed by Whites questionable and requiring an explanation because it is not like them to be perpetrators (Media Awareness Network, 2010).

2.9.2 Negative stereotypical portrayal of Blacks

The most stereotypic depiction is that Blacks are stupid and irrational. This is depicted through Black characters with comical roles which make them act brainless. The counter-stereotypes to this are that White people are victims of Black people's wrong doings, they are intelligent, problem solvers, kind and superior (Francois, 2013). This suggests that Blacks lower standards in society due to their social, mental and emotional intelligence. Thirdly, Blacks are primitive. This implies that the Black race does not support transformation and modernity as they do not contribute to civilisation. The assumed primitive nature is supported by myths that Blacks are barbaric, lazy and act on instinct. Thus, it is believed that Blacks need Whites to socially and economically progress as they have African childish mentalities (Weaver, 2016). Blacks are incapable of legally running anything by themselves without the supervision and assistance of Whites, this speaks to the government departments that fall part under the leadership of Black corrupt leaders which breakdown social peace (Goto & Ogunnubi, 2014). These are some of the apparent racial stereotypes that soap operas portray.

The portrayal of minorities shapes the viewers' attitude and understanding about the ethnic minorities such as Latinos in real life, this includes both positive and negative perceptions and stereotypes. The depiction of negative racial stereotypes images has been prevalent throughout the decades around the world about minority and majority ethnicities (Berg, 2002). In the same way, Black South African characters are stereotypically represented on the national broadcasting platforms that millions of citizens watch across the country. South African programmes continue to dastardly depict the Black race through lenses of crime and inadequate actions despite the efforts of Black people to empower themselves through education and make an honest living (Durden & Govender, 2012).

2.10 Representation of gender stereotypes in soap operas

Gender stereotype is a preconception about characteristics and attributes that ought to be possessed by males and females which are attached to specific roles based on their membership in the social group. After several decades, gender stereotypes become beliefs that a society normalises and lives according to. For that reason, women can be expected and perceived as nurturing and weak while men can be perceived as strong (OHCHR, 2014). In soap operas, gender stereotypes are featured through male and female characters that have occupational and domestic roles.

Initially, females in soap operas were portrayed through gentle, non-competitive, domesticated, sensitive and submissive roles which in turn make characters opposite to being 'bad'. Whilst, men are portrayed through stereotypical characters of being heroes in family setups and situations as they are ambitious, hard, aggressive, independent and assertive. This representation of men implies that they are geared and capable of leadership and are competitive in the economic system as compared to females (Ahmed, 2012). Recently, some soap operas seem to be aligned with feminist views in their depiction of female characters. These characters are empowered as they have a place in the economic system through being businesswomen, investors, power mom and assertive women that are capable of making sound decisions about their lives and careers (Brunsdon, 2000).

In South Africa, soap operas have adopted feminist approaches which influence the representation of women and men. However, the empowerment of women through characters depicts females in a negative manner, wherein their empowerment is attached to crime, objectification and domestication. The representation of women has subtle gender roles which suggests that historical perceptions about women are maintained by mass media (Sczesny, Bosak, Neff & Schyns, 2004). It is argued that gender stereotypes on television are normalised in society and created by programme producers for the audiences to identify a gender with what is normalised in society. Similarly, Kachel, Steffens and Niedlich (2016) explicates that soap operas in the United States of America, use feminist views to construct characters that illustrate that there is a balance between the male and female gender.

2.11 Thematisation in soap operas

This section focuses on the themes featured in most soap operas. Themes refer to genre excerpts that a soap opera entails which feature in a continuous storyline (Feasey, 2013). Habitually, soap opera genre revolves around family life, marriage, divorce, domestic tribulations, class politics, poverty, education, women empowerment and socio-economic issues that affect society. All episodes of soap operas address issues that are important at a particular period in a country and society depending on the target audience. Onuh (2017) explicate themes as primary topics that guide the script into more secondary topics that run as seasons of a soap opera in the process of being written and produced. Themes in soap operas include domestic settings and low production as compared to other television genres. These themes revolve around open-ended narrative structure that includes conflict to keep the storyline interesting and continuous (Neophytou, 2012).

2.11.1 Family life and marriage

The representation of marriage in soap operas is based on social constructions which make behavioural expectations from men and women or other non-conforming genders in between, based on their gender with specific conventions that restrict women and Blacks a fair representation in soap operas (Neophytou, 2012). Marriage as a primary theme in soap operas is represented according to cultural norms and expectations of specific cultures. A study by Neophytou (2012) outlined a significant factor that should be

considered in the production of South African soap operas, which is a fair representation of women and a fair distribution of roles where different ethnicities and races are involved to showcase a democratic element in the shaping of the nation.

Soap operas are centralized systems of storytelling to audiences with relative coherent messages and images. The depiction of marriage in soap operas lies in the transcending historic barriers that are influenced by culture, norms and values wherein Black and White characters are depicted in dysfunctional marriages that ultimately lead to divorce. This depiction is influenced by media imperialism wherein peripheral countries historically had segregation between Blacks and White as shown in *Skeem Saam* (Knoetze, 2018). Therefore, soap operas are influential in society in the way race, class, gender, social roles and lifestyles are depicted through family life and marriage (Mahlatsi, 2018).

Soap operas have evolved over the years as issues attached to extra-marital affairs which were previously considered taboo are depicted in the programmes. These issues are rape, cohabitation, polygamous relationships and infidelity which are rapidly being featured in marriage storylines which means that the stigma previously attached to these issues is lessening and be dealt with candidly in society (Ahmed & Khalid, 2012). Segrin and Nabi (2002) explicate that soap operas have created unrealistic marital expectations of what an ideal marriage is in the depictions that include overly open communication, passion, happiness, a great deal of romance, empathy and physical beauty.

Muindi (2015) explicates that soap operas provide a coherent picture of what a “perfect” marriage and family life should look like in society where men lead the family unit as the woman/ wife follows the lead. Black women in the institution of family are undermined as it was depicted in initial soap operas that were produced in the first-world countries and broadcasted in third-world countries in the early 1980s. However, the depiction of Blacks and a fair representation in marriage emerged when soap operas started to be written, produced and broadcasted in these third-world countries from the 1990 to date (Jedlowski, 2018).

Infidelity in marriage

Characters are shown having no respect for marriage in South African soap operas. The soap operas portray infidelity that occurs in relationships which lead to divorce, separation and compromises being made by couples for children's sake (Eype, 2016). Unfaithfulness remains a consistent factor in marriage thus infidelity is a common element in soap opera storylines. Characters are portrayed having extra marital affairs and breaking their matrimonial vows. Therefore, characters are represented within triangular drama where spouses have to deal with their partner's extramarital affairs. In *Generations*, Smanga and Siphesihle had an affair that resulted in a child being born out of wedlock. However, the Moroka family as royals, labelled the relationship as a measure to bring an heir for the family's sake as Siphesihle's husband is infertile (Herbert, 2018). Similarly, in another South African soap opera *Imbewu*, MaZulu and Shongololo had three children from their long-lasting affair which resulted in MaZulu and her husband, Ngcolosi having a strained relationship resulting in a separation before Ngcolosi's mysterious death (Opera News, 2020)

South African soap operas depict some characters as adulterers who care less about the stability and reputation of their families when they are involved with other people than their spouse. Producers feature infidelity in soap operas to bring the daily realities that audiences experience in their lives. The portrayal of infidelity is meant to bring realism in the storylines of these soap operas. However, male characters are shown as initiators of infidelity as they approach female characters whom they eventually end up in romantic relationships with (Motsaathebe, 2009).

Divorce in soap operas

The repercussions of infidelity, desertion, adultery and loveless marriages is divorce where couples officially and lawfully end their marital union. Soap operas portray the effects of divorce on the wellbeing of children, affected couples and society at large (Moe, 2011). In the beginning of the 20th century, soap operas depicted characters that actively sought divorce negatively. Characters who initiate a divorce will be blamed by other characters for social disorder directly through words or subtle disparage actions and behaviour (Andeso, 2019). South African soap operas depict the disruptions that divorce

bring in a family structure where children are affected emotionally, mentally and psychologically (Worden, 2103).

Some South African soap operas such as *7de Laan* depict divorce as a normal phenomenon that both Black and White characters are found in if genuine love is not shared amongst a couple in a marriage. For instance, when Paula and Altus marriage fell apart after their baby died, Altus decided to cheat as a way of grieving the baby whilst Paula visited her parents to recover from their loss. Both Paula and Altus decided that they should officially end their marriage because they were unable to rebuild the trust lost between them due to Altus extramarital affair (Soapie Chat, 2015). However, some South African soap operas such as *Generations* which feature African arranged marriages through Black characters portray divorce as a taboo. For example, Siphesihle and Mazwi's arranged marriage that was meant to protect the Cele's and Moroka's royal and business agreements has fallen apart due to the trust lost and infidelities of the couple. However, the soap opera producers portray divorce as an inappropriate decision for the couple based on the family's business interests (Sanelyf, 2020). Therefore, the depiction divorce as a solution to loveless marriages.

2.11.2 Race, class politics and patriarchy

Soap operas have contributed to the political status quo in South Africa over the last two decades with themes such as class politics. The political theme is depicted through Black characters that usually represent the working and middle class which in reality form part of worker's trade unions, factions, slates, alliances and federations (Kulaszewics, 2015). During the eras of apartheid, assimilation and oppression in third world countries, stories of the minority and Black citizens were not fairly depicted as they are currently. For instance, African Americans were unable to narrate their stories, history and identities due to the fact that the media was controlled by the oppressors who misrepresented the Black race through use of Black characters with skewed character roles (Barlow, 2011).

Barnard (2006) posits the notion that political representation in South African soap operas attempt to dissolve the racial, sexuality and class imbalances that existed in the era of apartheid where the authoritarian state had control over citizens lives and manipulation of the system to solely benefit those in power in that era. The depiction of class politics

through Black and White characters in prime-time programming showcases the possibility of a fair and just system that protects all citizens regardless of their race and class (Bradfield, 2019). The post-apartheid multicultural nation begins with a balanced political representation of all citizens in the 'rainbow nation' (Van der Merwe, 2013).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter (see section 2.4.1), soap operas that have political themes are usually dynastic. These kinds of models entail patriarchy as the main issue that is portrayed and addressed at some point in the episodes of the programme. Political themes are portrayed in soap operas such as *Dallas* and *Generations* where power is centered in a specific family (Teer-Tomaselli, 2005). These kinds of political themes showcase Murtiningsih, Advenita and Ikom's (2017) notion that soap operas with political themes are involved with patriarchal ideologies where male characters are solely responsible for running the family business, ordering the female characters of the family around as these male characters are depicted as responsible, sensible and upright beings as compared to female counterparts. Moreover, the authority that White male characters in Asian soap operas had as compared to Black characters showcased the racial imbalance that television maintained which created a division of racial characterisation (Geraghty, 1991).

2.11.3 Transformation issues in soap operas

One of the major functions of soap operas is to bring about change in society (Skuse, 2000). Soap operas as a vehicle of social change portray transformation for previously disadvantaged racial groups. South African soap operas continue to construct the 'rainbow nation' through depictions of a unified national identity where Black and White characters play as fictional autonomous citizens which benefit from economic opportunities that storylines include (Knoetze, 2015). An Afghanistan soap opera, *New Home New Life* featured politics as a theme to empower citizens that were affected by conflict. The inclusion of the political theme in the soap opera has provided practical advice and counsel to those that suffered racial, class and gender imbalance through solidarity acts that were initially depicted in the soap opera from the year 1994 (BBC, 2008). This proves that soap operas can be agents of change in societies where people

encounter political and racial issues that can be addressed through class politics storylines and themes (Mandel, 2002).

The depiction of transformation issues in South African soap operas is congruent with government strategies meant to address the deep levels of poverty, racial and economic inequalities that Black citizens face due to the residues of apartheid (Clarke & Bassett, 2016). Soap operas depict fair educational and financial opportunities through female and male characters that are depicted to be in fictional prestigious universities with funding provided by the government and private sector. These kinds of depictions replicate the equal opportunities that citizens are exposed to which ultimately bring positive change in their lives and those around them. Soap operas in third-world countries such as South Africa represent a democratisation story where Black characters are portrayed having access to health services and infrastructure although the development is snail-paced (Nyadi & Du Plooy, 2019).

2.11.4 Reflection of poverty and socio-economic issues

Soap operas in developing countries are concerned with themes that revolve around poverty and socio-economic status as most citizens in developing countries are impoverished. For instance, a soap opera in India *Tinka Tinka Sukh* had themes of community empowerment and pride that assists viewers on how to overcome poverty in their homes and as a community at large. This soap opera also introduced themes of women empowerment and gender themes (Ahmed, 2012). The representation of poverty in soap operas is progressive, Pitout (2007) maintain that soap operas should include stimulant educational content that will assist in fighting poverty. An exemplification feature in productions that are produced and broadcasted in developing countries include episodes, characters and scenes that show audiences how to deal with issues of unemployment, poverty and other daily problems that people face which then assist audiences to make sound decisions (Ferreira, 2015).

Berg and Zia (2013) conducted a study that focused on the representation of poverty and socio-economic issues in South African soap operas, based on *Scandal* as a lens of how poverty prevails in Black communities, which is through debt, gambling and lack of basic education. In state owned broadcasting cooperation's like SABC, poverty is widely

represented only through Black characters as shown in *Skeem Saam* which then is a misrepresentation of a realm because some Whites in the country fall in the category of impoverished citizens (Berg & Zia, 2013). Further, soap operas depict the notion that Black females in the racial minority are impoverished as compared to men and White individuals. The depiction is represented through female characters that suffer and strive to take care of themselves and their children while lacking friendship, power and love as they are poor (Orgun, Yurdakul & Atik, 2017). It is argued that mass media should improve the depictions of impoverished communities to enrich them mentally to change their situations. These improvements should be infused in fair representations that inform the audiences of opportunities available that will assist them overcome poverty in their lives (Achrol & Kotler, 2017).

The portrayal of female characters playing as victims of poverty and unemployment in South African soap operas is argued to represent the population of impoverished citizens, considering that soap operas are a reflection of realities that exist in the realm. Gledhill (2003) maintains that mainstream programmes such as soap operas contain stereotypical melodramatic depictions to cater for all its audiences and to maintain their viewership, regardless of how unreal the depiction is and how it affects the distribution of characters amongst races (Knoetza, 2015). In dispute of Gledhill's notion, Lamuedra and O'Donnell (2013) explicate that soap operas should include an element of realism in the racial depictions of character roles, types, occupations and life situations. It is argued that soap operas contain far-fetched, extreme, surreal and overboard representations of characters which do not represent what is happening in the realm. This speaks to the representation of Black female characters in the phenomenon being studied which will be clearly outlined in chapter four.

The representation of women empowerment in soap operas was a shift from the portrayal of Black female characters being highly sexualised and emotionally vulnerable. Character roles of Black females in the 1980s to late 2000s was characterised by sexual exploitation of women and domesticated females with characters roles as wives, domestic workers, lovers, sisters and daughters of wealthy men in business, criminals and soldiers (Nash, 2018). These representations upheld patriarchy as a system that ruled and oppressed

women socially, politically and economically. For instance, a main female character, Rhodiyah in a soap opera that was converted to a series, *Porridge Seller Goes on Haj* is depicted as a submissive woman that is an ideal wife in a patriarchal system. This representation is an indication that soap operas to some extent maintain oppressive systems that coerce women (Nash, 2018).

2.11.5 Women empowerment in the South African context

Few soap operas in South Africa assert feminist depictions of Black women through dominant character roles and types played by Black female characters. Unfortunately, these soap operas empower Black character roles through crime and brutality. On South African television, the success and power of Black female characters comes through scandals, crime, lies and death which then implies that success of Black people is based on unlawful dealings. An illustration of this is shown in *Uzalo* where a Black female character, Lindiwe eventually got wealthy through being involved in illegal dealings, murder and crime which were after she retaliated to her patriarchal husband that oppressed her even in her home on merits that she is a woman (Onuh, 2017).

Contrary to the notion above, some films and soap operas depict women empowerment through female characters playing roles of activists, professionals, businesswomen and political figures that strive to be exceptional community leaders and examples (Holley, 2019). Soap operas in this century are more concerned with women empowerment though it is with few Black characters as compared with White characters, which implies that more production teams associate their work with historical presumptions about women (Lacalle & Gomez, 2016). Black female characters are empowered through dominant characters in South African soap operas as compared to the initial depiction of women in the apartheid era, where the representation was marginalised. The characterisation of females during apartheid existed to support and compliment characters of men. Conversely, the empowerment of women is currently featured in most South African soap operas (Smith-Shomade, Barette, Pierson, Coleman, Cavalcante, Warner & Acham, 2013).

Women empowerment is a mainstream feature that forms part of soap opera themes globally. Most soap operas portray this theme through what development does for women

(Batliwala, 2007). This theme was introduced in developing countries such as South Africa to allow a radical approach that brings an element of consciousness and collective power. Women empowerment has historically existed to benefit females in dominant racial groups such as Whites, these females would be given jobs based on empowerment not merit. It was introduced in South African soap operas after the apartheid regime, with *Generations* being one of the first locally produced soap operas in the country (Cornwall & Eade, 2011). Women empowerment transforms patriarchal systems to power relations that support and advocate for women's rights and gender equality between women, men, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQs) in workplaces in the creative space and in society. Soap operas create an awareness of how important women are in society as they help in the development of the economy and the changes they bring in the political space (Cornwall, 2016).

However, soap operas tend to portray women empowerment in a different light where women do not empower other women, but rather men through male characters will strive to empower women around them. The depiction is believed to be realistic as women live by the 'bring her down syndrome' which is also known as the Phd '*put her down*' mentality in the real world (Donstrup, 2019). Women empowerment in South African soap operas is portrayed through Black female characters being politically active and successful in business who become activists of change in fictional communities on television (Cornwall & Edwards, 2014).

Complimentary to the notions above, transformation is a theme that is featured in soap operas that are broadcasted in formally colonised and developing countries. Transformation in media is defined as fundamental change that takes place through the influence of the media. Social transformation traits in soap operas are depicted through female characters that are involved in politics, community engagements and enrichment (Khondkher & Schuerkens, 2014).

2.12 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter reviewed literature by presenting a historical overview of soap operas and classifying soap operas in three categories with South African soap operas as examples. The chapter presented codes and conventions such as realism, ideology, narrative

themes and characters which explain what are included in storylines and how they are included. The chapter also included the production of soap operas, from the pre-production, production and post-production stages that enable soap operas to be broadcast as episodes. The characterisation of roles through feminist views were presented. Racial and gender stereotypes were also discussed on how they are featured in soap opera storylines. Themes found in soap operas are also presented in the chapter with examples from South African soap operas to showcase how characters revolve around these themes.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology used in the study. It discusses the procedures that were used for the collection and analysis of data on the portrayal of racial characterisation in South African soap operas with *Skeem Saam* as the case study. A descriptive design is applied to examine the racial characterisation of Black and White characters. The researcher attempts to examine the depiction of characters based on their race. Most of the literature reviewed and subtopics in the previous chapter are about the kind of character roles and types that black actors are assigned to as compared to their white counterparts and the extent to which black characters are assigned to peculiar characters in soap operas and so forth. Therefore, the researcher attempts to examine the racial characterisation in *Skeem Saam*. Research methodology in this chapter entails qualitative content analysis, descriptive research design, purposive sampling and thematic content analysis as these approaches and methods are employed in the collection and the analysis of the data. An outline of the quality criteria and ethical considerations that relate to the study is provided, following which a summary of the chapter is presented.

3.2 Research methodology

Research methodology is a systemic analysis that a researcher applies to a study to achieve the aim of the study (Creswell, 2018). Also, Corbin & Strauss (2014) describes it as a scientific process that provides instructions to the researcher for guidance on how to assemble specific methods in research. There are three main categories of methodology in the field in social sciences, namely, qualitative, quantitative and the mixed method that require the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse the data (Neuman, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the researcher utilised the qualitative approach.

3.2.1 Qualitative approach

According to Brennen (2013), the qualitative approach assists in examining social contexts, traditions, cultures, concepts and meaning of words. It is an inductive method that allows researchers to investigate local knowledge about a given programme, meanings, relationships, social processes and contextual issues. The approach enables researchers to study visual texts and productions, which in this study refer to media texts that *Skeem Saam* through its script and characters bring out to audiences on a daily basis through episodes (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, the qualitative approach's inductive and flexible nature assists the researcher in thoroughly critiquing the roles of characters and their representation in this study. Research objectives of a study guide the researcher on which research approach to use (Borrego, Douglas & Amelink, 2009).

The qualitative approach is more relevant for this study as it addresses research objectives that require the researcher to explain and understand social phenomena and contexts. Qualitative approach assists in gathering data for critiquing and explaining the representation of characters on television programmes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Reciprocally, qualitative research is more interpretative as compared to quantitative approaches. For this study, the researcher dealt with words and audio-visual images that assisted to make the analysis outlined in chapter four. Uwe (2009) explicate that qualitative research offers the researcher the privilege of subjectivity which implies that the interpretation of the data will be based on the researcher's perspective that is guided by the research objectives drafted prior the data collection process.

The fact that qualitative research has an inductive and deductive nature is a strong reason for its use in this study. The inductive nature requires a researcher to collect ideas from the initial data collected and analysed in order to identify commonalities and general patterns in the data. Whereas, the deductive nature involves relating ideas and data collected to the literature reviewed in the study. The inductive and deductive method assists researchers to understand and thoroughly interpret data through words, imagery and scientific language (Brennen, 2013).

According Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013), qualitative research is flexible and the data are more likely to be small in size as compared to quantitative research. Qualitative

research seeks to understand the phenomena under the study, which in this study is racial characterisation that has been elaborated on in the first two chapters of this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explicate that qualitative research allows for emergence of new theories as the study continues to explain a new or refined component or assumption of the theory. Coding, themes and text analysis are used in qualitative research for analysing data, particularly words used to explicate the significance in the results. Qualitative research allows for research objectives that require the researcher to be more descriptive in their writing as they are defined as conceptual and operational definitions (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2007). For this study, the method was deemed more appropriate as it enabled the researcher to be descriptive in explaining the racial and social contexts that characters are portrayed in. The method assists in describing ideologies featured in *Skeem Saam* which are matters that cannot be numerically quantified because they are social in nature.

3.3 Research Design

Creswell (2015) describes research design as a comprehensive data collection plan that answers research questions and assists in exploring and examining the research objectives of a study. This description concurs with Du Plooy's (2009) elucidation of research design as a plan that outlines how a study is going to be conducted. It indicates who and what is involved, it also stipulates the reasons why the study will take place. Bless et al. (2013) further perceives research design as a scientific planning of a study from the first to the last stage. This implies that research design entails research methods and procedures that assist researchers to achieve research objectives through use of systematic methods of data collection and analysis. Research design in qualitative studies is more concerned with data collection, analysis and processes to address the purpose of the study which in turn assists researchers in developing a convincing argument (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Descriptive research design

This study employed the descriptive research design based on the study's explorative nature. For Keppel and Wickens (2003), descriptive research design refers to studies with the main objective being the accurate or representative portrayal of groups, people and

situations. Polit and Hunglar (2004) define descriptive research design as a method that is concerned with experiential meaning of being involved with the phenomenon being studied. This implies that the researcher needs to be well abreast with the phenomenon being studied and others that are related to what is being studied. This design is utilised to describe a phenomenon or variable rather than to assess the relationship between the variables involved. In this study, descriptive research design was adopted based on the nature of the study to critique the representation of racial characterisation and determine inherent themes in *Skeem Saam*.

Researchers have the advantage of collecting accurate data and providing a clear picture of the phenomenon under study when utilising a descriptive design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this study, the descriptive design was particularly appropriate because an authentic description of the portrayal of Black and White characters in *Skeem Saam* is required to address the objectives of this study. Descriptive design is applied when research objectives and questions have not been explored adequately in previous research studies (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the descriptive design is used in this study as racial characterisation in soap operas has not been abundantly explored in scientific studies. In descriptive research the variable is examined without interference of the researcher, this implies that the researcher has no direct control over the data or the control is limited (Miller & Salkind, 2002).

Descriptive research design in qualitative research is central to unstructured and semi-structured data collection techniques that can be altered as the data is being collected based on the additional themes and patterns that arise as the researcher peruses the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this study, the researcher formulated a research tool that entails questions for data collection purposes. The questions can be amended by the researcher as data is being collected based on the data that arises in the process of data collection. Qualitative descriptive approach requires that a researcher gathers data utilising qualitative data collection methods and analyse the data qualitatively, manually or through computerised software's as mentioned earlier in this chapter (Maxwell, 2013).

One significant characteristic of a descriptive study is that only one variable is required for a study. Non-quantifiable topics require descriptive designs for data collection and analysis. However, this method does not apply in studies where a cause behind a described phenomenon is required. Descriptive studies are non-repeatable due to their explorative and observational nature which requires the researcher's insight about the phenomenon at hand (Fox & Bayat, 2007). Based on the interpretative and subjective nature of descriptive research, researchers are required to be ethical and strategic to remain objective in the process of analysing data. The researcher was objective in the collection of data, thus avoiding to be subjective as it is unethical to do so.

3.4 Population and Sampling

3.4.1 Population

Kumar (2014) define population as total aggregation of cases that make a designated set of criteria. A target population is selected from the total aggregation that exists which a researcher would like to make scientific generalisations from. In the same way, Bhattacharjee (2012) define population as the whole collection of events, conditions, individuals, groups and organisations that a researcher intends to conduct research on. Among this collection, a researcher is required to choose a specific or targeted abstract idea from the large population. Berg (2009) defines population as a set of entities that encompasses the entire collection of units on which conclusions are made. In this study, the population encompasses South African soap operas which include *Skeem Saam*, *Muvhango*, *Uzalo*, *Isidingo*, *7de Laan* and *Generations* that are broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) channel One, Two and Three. Citizens in South Africa have access to these Free-to-Air channels on their television sets on a daily basis. Private broadcasters such as OpenView HD and Digital Satellite Television (DStv) broadcasters were not selected for this study as not all South Africans have installed or can afford to pay subscriptions to watch channels such as Mzansi Magic, 1Magic and Bioscope channels where soap operas are broadcast on a daily basis.

3.4.2 Sampling

Sampling simply refers to a subset of the population selected for the study at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Sampling refers to the process and technique of selecting the

appropriate representative part of a total population for the purpose of fulfilling the study objectives (Yin, 2011). Similarly, Taherdoost (2016) define sampling as the process of selecting a specific portion of the population that conforms to a set of specifications being studied by the researcher. Sampling is imperative in scientific studies as it allows researchers to choose a small number of the large population that will represent the entire population to make the study narrow rather than being broad and lacking a specific focus. In brief, selecting a sample saves the researcher's time in the process of collecting and analysing data (Kumar, 2014). For this study the researcher selected purposive sampling.

Purposive Sampling

This study used a non-probability sampling technique as *Skeem Saam* was purposively selected based on the researcher's judgement. The purposive sampling technique was chosen for this study as it allows researchers to select samples or phenomena that are appropriate based on the researcher's knowledge and experience with the phenomenon. Zhao (2020) posit that purposive sampling is generally classified as judgemental sampling where researchers usually do not have direct contact with the phenomenon or sample being studied as is the case with this study. Creswell (2016) defines purposive sampling as a selection of events, phenomenon or sites that will assist the researcher to address the research problem and unpack the objectives of a study.

According to Denscombe (2010), purposive sampling is most appropriate when the researcher is familiar with specific excerpts about the phenomenon that directly relate to the study at hand on the assumption that the phenomenon will produce valuable data in the analysis process. Roa and Fuller (2017) concur that purposive sampling relies on the researcher's ingenuity and knowledge of previous research studies that relate to the study at hand. Therefore, the purposive sample was obtained on the basis of the researcher's knowledge and familiarity with the relevant patterns and characteristics of this study.

Skeem Saam is appropriate for this study based on its storyline and the manner in which actors of colour are assigned to character roles and occupations are distinct from white actors. The researcher used her judgement in the selection of this soap opera. The experience acquired and the familiarity of the storyline for the past eight years has influenced the researcher's perception and understanding of the representation of racial

characterisation. This implies that the soap opera was selected based on the researcher's particular knowledge about the manner in which characters are depicted. Themes were derived as the researcher thoroughly watched the chosen episodes and all excerpts of the scenes that make up the representation of race and characters. Much of the data collected and themes developed are discussed in chapter four of this study.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 Qualitative content analysis

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis based on the qualitative nature of the objectives of this study. Schreier (2012) defines qualitative content analysis as a flexible systematic method that allows researchers to collect data qualitatively through themes. Similarly, Krippendorff (2018) describes qualitative content analysis is an appropriate method employed in studies where the researcher examines and critiques text, audio and visual data for the creation of codes and themes to analyse the data. It is for this reason that qualitative content analysis is used in this study as one of the study's objective requires the researcher to present inherent themes featured in *Skeem Saam's* storyline. Qualitative content analysis allows for the thorough observation, interpretation and analysis of text, document, visual and audio meant for media representation (Lal Das & Bhaskaram, 2008). For that reason, qualitative content analysis is deemed appropriate for this study as words, subtitles, images and audio are used as data in this study.

According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), qualitative context analysis is most appropriately used within media and communication research, thus enabling researchers to collect content within the film genre. It is for this reason that qualitative content analysis is used in this study as the researcher extracts the data from a soap opera, *Skeem Saam*, which comprises texts, images and audio from characters. Therefore, qualitative content analysis is appropriate for this study based on the objectives of this study that require the researcher to examine racial characterisation in through analysing characters and contexts in *Skeem Saam*. These factors require the researcher to watch and analyse episodes to extract data through qualitative content analysis.

The researcher personally collected data through repeatedly watching episodes chosen for this study. A qualitative audio-visual analysis tool was used to collect data as the researcher watched the episodes. The questions allowed the researcher to examine and critique the depiction of racial characterisation in the chosen soap opera. The data collection comprises plots, script writing, shots, lighting, location, costumes, themes, character assignment, roles and occupations distribution and other props that make up the scenes. The researcher drafted questions based on aspects discussed in the literature reviewed as well as data when the researcher watched episodes with the aim of obtaining data. This is in agreement with Yin (2016) who maintains that qualitative content analysis require researchers should immerse themselves in data several times in order to fully comprehend the data.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis refers to a mechanism for organising and reducing data to meaningful and manageable data that will produce findings through use of a researcher's interpretation Bless et al (2013). Similarly, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) define data analysis as a process of following procedures to identify, understand, categorise and interpret data based on the researcher's experiences of the phenomenon. The thematic analysis was employed for this study as it allows researchers to categorise data through themes.

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

Data collected for this study was analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic content analysis is a comprehension process where a researcher identifies cross-references in the data wherein themes could evolve. Similarly, Halldorson (2009) defines thematic analysis as a qualitative technique that classifies and present themes that relate to the data. Thematic analysis further illustrates the data in a detailed manner that makes up subjects through researcher interpretations. Thematic analysis is easier to use since it has few prescriptions and procedures. It also requires less detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches which make it easier for new researchers (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016). The researcher utilised five steps which assisted to formulate themes.

- **Step 1: Become familiar with the data**

For this study, the researcher began the process of analysing data through familiarising with the data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The researcher repeatedly watched episodes in slow motion and noted initial ideas. The researcher perused and reread the notes compiled in their entirety, reflecting on the episodes as a whole. The researcher identified words, phrases, expressions and actions of characters which were jotted down keeping in mind that more than one theme could exist from those scenes and episode. Thematic analysis assisted the researcher to classify data according to similarities and differences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher read the notes coupled by the kind of shots, lighting and sound of each character for each scene watched to gauge the dramatic effect and meaning behind

- **Step 2: Generate initial codes**

The researcher identified segments of data that deemed to be in the same categories. The researcher codified data on context, characterisation, plots, narratives, shots and props which directly relate to the objectives of this study. The chosen scenes from episodes were played numerous times in order to enable the researcher to jot down patterns appearing in the scenes and episodes. Coding the data assists the researcher to spot similarities and differences which leads to sorting, merging and clustering the data accordingly (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). As the researcher identified the initial codes, more significant focused codes emerged which led to the identification of themes. Some of the initial codes that emerged were the manner in which White characters communicate with Black characters, the type occupational roles that Black characters were assigned to and the geographical context that White and Black characters are portrayed in throughout *Skeem Saam's* episodes.

- **Step 3: Search for themes**

The researcher highlighted categories of codes that related to the study's topic from the data collected. Similar units were grouped together to formulate themes using phrases extracted from the highlighted texts in the categories of the codes. Different units were regrouped and various categories were relabelled to formulate more similar

categories. Creswell and Poth (2018) explicate that themes are broader than codes. Therefore, it is significant to combine several codes to make themes. The researcher used similar codes that were grouped into broad potential themes.

- **Step 4: Review themes**

In order to find out if the preliminary themes are accurate and related to the data, the researcher compared the themes to the data. Most units were discarded and split up, whilst some were combined to formulate new meaningful and relevant themes. The new themes were re-labelled as appropriate and divided into manageable categories that allow data to be presented in a thematic manner. The researcher read the data associated with each theme to determine if there is a correlation between the data and the theme. This assisted the researcher to find subthemes in broad themes where ideas would overlap.

- **Step 5: Define themes**

This final stage involves refining the themes and subthemes formulated from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher removed unrelated elements to relocate them into more appropriate themes. The researcher renamed and relocated elements across the data to satisfaction until the accurate themes were formulated and finalised. The researcher reread the themes and the data to determine the essence of each theme. The researcher finalised concise phrases as names of the themes in accordance the data that appear in the theme, with subthemes entailing overlapping elements from the broad themes. These five thematic analysis steps assisted the researcher to present found in chapter four of this study.

3.7 Delineation of the Study

The study focused on examining the representation of racial characterisation of South African locally produced soap operas aired on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Although the SABC has at least eight soap operas that are currently on air, this study considered only one soap opera, *Skeem Saam*. Several representation issues interplay in the debate of racial characterisation and the issues are normally unique to particular soap operas, contexts and storylines. This study was limited to one soap opera to examine and critique the racial representation. Therefore, the research critiqued

the inherent theme focalisation in the storyline; excerpts that depict white privilege and supremacy; context of roles and occupational roles and the formation of the storylines by Black South African writers which influence the manner in which race is represented.

3.8 Skeem Saam: A brief synopsis

Skeem Saam is a South African soap opera created by Winnie Serite. Her career in the television industry started when she became part of the scriptwriting team for various SABC projects. Winnie Serite started her own production company, Peu Communications Solutions in the year 2009 and started producing *Skeem Saam* which aired from October 2011 to date. A brief background about the producer is significant in this study as it speaks to the Black Feminist Theory and the script formation by black female writers. *Skeem Saam* airs on SABC 1, weekdays for approximately twenty (20) minutes from 18H30 to 19H00 with advertisements that make up the ten (10) minutes of the broadcast. It falls within the top three most watched soap operas in South Africa and maintains a viewership of 8 788 444 (Lord, 2020).

Skeem Saam uses five South African official languages, namely Sepedi, English, IsiZulu, IsiXhosa and SiSwati, which main and supporting character use throughout. The soap opera is set around the semi-rural area of Turfloop, Mankweng outside the City of Polokwane in the Limpopo Province. The storyline initially revolved around the challenges black teenagers encounter as they transition into adulthood. Currently, the storyline revolves around complex socio-economic and political aspects of the 'rainbow nation' that South African is known to be, which advocates for non-racialism, non-sexism and equal opportunity for all citizens (SABC, 2011). It includes various themes that are outlined and analysed in the chapter four. The story also follows the daily trails that residents in townships and middle, lower-class face daily, thus it is labelled a youth-centred show that educates and entertains audiences ranging from teenagers to youth (Lord, 2019). One known sponsor of the soap opera is a funeral and life insurance company which does not directly influence the plots and focus of the soap (Insurance Gateway, 2019).

3.9 Quality Criteria

This section discusses the quality criteria that ensure that the findings of the study could be confirmed by other studies utilising similar methods. The researcher adhered to credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility seeks to convince the readers that the findings of the study were extracted from the data that were collected and that they are a true reflection of what transpired during the research process and not a fabrication by the researcher. According to Bless et al. (2013), credible studies entail and utilise appropriate methods and internal logic of the study's objectives, research design and the method of data analysis to be used. In this study, the researcher ensured that this is achieved by providing accurate analysis of *Skeem Saam* episodes and excerpts which can be revisited for reference.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability seeks to convince the readers that the findings of the study are broad and universal to a degree that they can be used in other contexts in research. The researcher has ensured transferability by thoroughly describing the research context and assumptions that are essential to the study (Bless et al., 2013) and providing recordings of the soap opera's episodes, indicating through notes in the file were used and how data were collected, analysed and interpreted. The analysis was based on original episodes and was supported by relevant literature to augment the data collected. All sources used in the study were thoroughly cited in-text and in the reference list to acknowledge other authors' work and to allow other researchers to verify the content.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability requires the researcher to follow a clear and thoughtful research strategy to ensure consistency in the research findings (Bless et al., 2013). It is achieved when replications of the study can produce the same results in research. This was achieved as the researcher conducted the study logically and kept record of all methods involved in coding, sorting and identification of themes from the data. The researcher ensured that the processes of the study are studiously explained to a satisfactory level and the analysis of data is linked to the stated theoretical framework.

3.9.4 Conformability

According to Bless et al. (2013), conformability refers to the degree to which the results are not biased and can be substantiated by other researchers. The researcher's judgment was minimised to ensure that conformability is achieved in the study, therefore, the results of this study are objective and free from the researcher's personal view or bias. The researcher did not temper with the episodes or excerpts from the data collected and has objectively utilised the literature review to provide insight based on what other studies have found out.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This study has conformed to a range of ethics which the researcher abided by in order to conduct the study. The following ethical procedures were followed:

3.10.1 Permission to conduct the study

The researcher obtained a clearance certificate from the University of Limpopo Research Ethics Committee (ULREC) before commencing with the data collection process. However, the soap opera being used for this study is broadcasted on SABC for public consumption thus the researcher does not need permission from the broadcaster to use its excerpts for data. The clearance certificate binds the researcher to fairly use information from the soap opera for the purposes of this study only.

3.10.2 Honesty

This study strived for honesty in all its scientific communication, the researcher ensured that data is not fabricated, misrepresented or compromised in any way. The researcher collected and analysed data with high levels of trustfulness, this implies that the researcher did not temper with the data in any manner.

3.11 Summary of the chapter

This chapter discussed the qualitative research approach as the research method used for this study. The chapter outlined and discussed the descriptive design as the research design. The design enabled the researcher to be elaborative in the manner objectives of the study are addressed in chapter four. The chapter discussed the population of this study and included purposive sampling as the method used to select *Skeem Saam* for

this study. The chapter also discussed the qualitative content analysis as the data collection used to gather data for the study. Qualitative content analysis enabled the researcher to be examine and be critical in analysing the data from the soapie. Thematic analysis was discussed through five steps to indicate how it has been used to assist the researcher to formulate themes in chapter four. A brief delimitation of the study is included to justify the examination of racial in SABC's soap opera, *Skeem Saam*. The chapter included a brief summary to explain what the soap opera entails. Lastly, the quality criteria and ethical considerations of the study are outlined and explained as they assisted the researcher to be objective throughout the study and in the presentation and analysis of data found in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of data which the researcher collected through qualitative content analysis (see sections 3.5.1 and 3.6.2 in the previous chapter). Data were collected from *Skeem Saam*'s scenes and episodes to critique context and characterisation of roles, analyse excerpts that depict White privilege and supremacy. Data were also gathered to determine inherent themes in the soap operas' storyline to showcase how the characterisation of roles unfolded. The cyclical process of data analysis was used during the data familiarisation process through identifying main themes in *Skeem Saam* when the researcher analysed the soapie. The episodes and specific scenes were examined in-depth to provide detailed descriptions of the information which was categorically coded into grouped themes. The researcher interpreted and synthesised the organised data into general statements or understanding in the form of descriptive analysis. This process was based on the aim and objectives of the study as achieved through the descriptive content analysis method as stipulated in Chapter Three of this study. The objectives were set to:

- To critique context and characterisation of roles in *Skeem Saam*.
- To determine inherent theme focalisation in the *Skeem Saam* storyline.
- To analyse excerpts that depict White privilege and supremacy in *Skeem Saam*.
- Recommend production guidelines that promote non-racial *soap opera* storyline.

4.2 CRITIQUING CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISATION OF ROLES IN *SKEEM SAAM*

This section discusses the contexts in which characters are depicted throughout the episodes that shape the plots, storylines and narratives in *Skeem Saam*. The contexts outlined and discussed in this section are relevant to address matters relating to spatial segregation vs Rainbowism; Unemployment among the Blacks, accumulation of wealth and crime in *Skeem Saam*.

4.2.1 Context and setting in *Skeem Saam*

Spatial segregation Vs Rainbowism

Skeem Saam is filmed at the Peu Communications studio in Johannesburg, however the storyline suggests that it is based a few kilometres outside Polokwane in Turfloop. The depiction and choice of the producers to use Turfloop as a location where *Skeem Saam*'s Black main characters live is realistic. Turfloop was mainly meant in real life for Black residents of the Limpopo Province, formerly known as Northern Province. Suburbs such as Ster Park, Flora Park, Fauna Park and many others in the Polokwane City were initially meant for White residents and remain largely White. Although this is gradually changing as more Black people are buying and renting houses and apartments in the mentioned suburbs. This is due to the development in Black people's level of education, job ranks, income and lifestyles (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The apartheid era implemented segregation between the White and Black people in South Africa. Therefore, it is imperative for South African soap operas to depict a representation of the Black South African citizens through the lenses of a "neo-liberal post-apartheid national imaginary" outlook (Ives, 2007). *Skeem Saam*'s setting in Mankweng is ironic as the depiction of Black characters such as MaNtuli, Bigboy and Principal Thobakgale is a misrepresentation of how people in a township live. Black people in most South African townships currently have access to basic services, are literate and civilised (Bähr, Donaldson & Rule, 2014).

Skeem Saam is slightly different from other SABC soap operas such as *Generations*, *7de Laan* and *Isidingo* that represent an ideal context of the 'rainbow nation' (Barnard, 2006). *Skeem Saam*'s storyline and initial plot focuses on the journey of teenagerhood into adulthood infused with multilingualism where White characters use English meanwhile Black characters use Sepedi, IsiSwati, IsiZulu and Khelobedu with English subtitles. Props such as costumes, furniture and homes of Black characters such as Bigboy and MaNtuli (see section 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.7) indicate that they are in an ideal township setting. The production team's decision not to place a White character in the township subtly perpetuates the stereotype of Black people living in the townships while the White race distances themselves from the townships as that is where savages belong

(Diangelo, 2018). The township is mediocre for Whites based on its peculiar spatial institutional nature as townships were initially created for Black people (Mbembe, 2003).

Unemployment among Blacks

The large race gap in unemployment is represented in mainstream media through programmes such as soap operas which are watched by citizens on a daily basis. South Africa has an unequal racial distribution of unemployment which is influenced by the historical employment discrimination against Black citizens (Alenda-Demoutiez & Mügge, 2019). Although *Skeem Saam* only portrays unemployment through two Black female characters who are Sthoko and her mother, MaNtuli, the representation shows the struggles that an unemployed citizen with children experiences daily. MaNtuli's occupational roles as a former receptionist and nut factory employee suggest that she has attained primary education. Therefore, her primary education is a contributing factor to her employment status when compared with other employed Black characters who have higher education. The setting that MaNtuli finds herself also disadvantages her in finding a job as compared to White characters who are located in the city where job opportunities are available.

However, in Season seven (7), episode 29 MaNtuli is portrayed as being inconsiderate to her daughter, Sthoko. MaNtuli angrily tells Sthoko that she expects her to make financial contributions in the family despite Sthoko being unemployed. In the same episode, MaNtuli further compares Sthoko with the family's breadwinner, Zamokuhle on the basis that they are both educated, hence she fails to comprehend how Sthoko remains unemployed. Her outrage is based on the fact that young people who have attained tertiary education can only be unemployed if they do not actively seek employment. This insinuates that Sthoko is comfortable with being unemployed and being unable to provide for her son. The representation of MaNtuli's views on youth unemployment is not a true reflection of the factors that contribute to high rates of Black youth unemployment in South Africa. The apartheid legacy contributed fundamentally to the high rates due to the creation of Black homelands where Blacks were situated with fewer job opportunities for graduates (du Toit & Neves, 2014). Therefore, the apartheid government's geographical architecture of placing Blacks in the townships and homelands contributed to the racially

skewed unemployment rates as more Black South Africans are without jobs than Whites (Cousins, Dubb, Hornby & Mtero, 2018).

Historic inequality and distribution of wealth

Some research has focused on non-White apartheid-induced lack of wealth which resulted in the creation of poverty for a majority of Black South Africans (Mariotti & Fourie, 2014; Francis & Webster, 2019; Bhorat & Ravi Kanbur, 2016; Gradin, 2013). However, the focus gives an idea that most White citizens are wealthy and economically empowered. *Skeem Saam* portrays wealth through two White characters, Mr Riaan and Vivian who are represented as successful entrepreneurs who are able to make financially sound decisions. Mr Riaan is shown in episode 114 giving counsel to his daughter, Candice about the importance of investing in businesses that have the potential to make her wealthy as time goes on. In the same way, Vivian is shown in episode 114 warning Francois about the consequences of not investing early into a career during his youthful years. Vivian demonstrates that wealth can be accumulated if one is disciplined and focused on achieving their career or business goals.

Skeem Saam producers' depiction of wealth through White characters only disregards the South African transformation legislative frameworks such as the BBE (Black Economic Empowerment) which were established to redress racial inequalities caused by Apartheid. Wealth can be accumulated through access to quality education, political participation and exposure to financial resources and economic opportunities (Meiring, Kannemeyer & Potgieter, 2018). However, most Black characters in *Skeem Saam* are portrayed through lower economic class roles which reveal dire social, racial and economic inequalities that contribute to social division through the manner characters are located in the soapie.

The crime spectre in South African townships

South African soap operas broadcast by the national broadcaster, the SABC and DStv platforms usually depict violence and organised crimes which are recognisable to audiences as producers include elements of reality yet the scenes are melodramatic (Mngadi, 2017). Local soap operas broadcast on DStv such as *Isibaya*, *The Queen* and *The River* portray taxi violence, drug dealings and common crimes such as murder and

fraud because of characters who yearn for power. *Skeem Saam* portrays crime through characters such as Lehasa Maphosa, Nompumelelo Mthiyane and Noah Matloga who commit crimes for power coupled with psychological issues such as childhood trauma. In Season eight (8), episode 45, Lehasa receives a call that reminds him of the fraudulent crimes he committed to get Café Rovuwa which he runs as part of his other businesses. Nompumelelo bribes a medical practitioner to fake a pregnancy in order to swindle Lehasa's money and to earn his trust as she is desperate to mend their toxic relationship. In Season seven (7), episode 12, Noah sets the nut factory on fire, committing a criminal offence. Noah's childhood trauma caused by being raised by his gangster father made him to set the factory on fire. Noah becomes aggressive and irrational when he encounters flashbacks of his upbringing when he was forced to commit crimes as a child. This shows that various crimes are featured in *Skeem Saam* to provide a complex socio-economic milieu within which most black communities live in post-apartheid South Africa.

4.2.2 Analysis of characters, excerpts and characterisation of roles

Soap opera storylines and plots are kept alive by characters and roles that bring out a written script to life. Therefore, soap operas cannot be produced with the absence of talented characters who act in vibrant roles (Harrington, Scardaville, Bielby & Lippmann, 2015). The section analyses select characters to show how characterisation of roles unfolds in the context of race in South Africa.

4.2.2.1 Ntombi Seakamela

This female character popularly known as MaNtuli plays the role of a Black unemployed underprivileged single parent who supports the educational goals of her children. Her family is located in the Turfloop Township in a 4-roomed house where she lives with four children. MaNtuli is a representation of thousands of Black South Africans who live in townships, are unemployed and do not benefit from the economic opportunities which Whites enjoy in South Africa (Boshoff, 2018). Her township family life is characterised by a backyard shack that is rented out to her son in law or students for additional income she uses to pay for essential services such as electricity and water bills. In Season six (6), episode 31, MaNtuli worked at a local hospital as a receptionist before she was dismissed for incompetency and unprofessional conduct as her personal problems

affected her duties. Her occupational role as a receptionist suggests that her educational level is low considering that education outcomes in townships are skewed and limited (Spren & Vally, 2006). This occupational role illustrates what Igbal and Abdar (2016) explicate about soap operas depicting women as educationally deprived people through portraying them in less privileged roles.

MaNtuli is known for her boldness and determination when she is depicted as an emerging political leader who strives to fight for employment with her co-workers in a local firm. This depiction demonstrates the effectiveness of the Employment Equity Act, *no. 47*, (2013) which is meant to protect employees in South Africa from unfair treatment in their workplaces. According to the storyline, MaNtuli's costume keeps up with her socio-economic background as an uneducated woman living in the township. This character signifies what Sekayi (2003) notes about the media's tendency to identify women and depict them anyhow that suits the writers, even when the depiction comes at the expense of women who strive to transform themselves. MaNtuli's role confirms Kumar and Joshi (2015) as well as Daalmas, Kleemans and Sadza's (2017) views that females in soap operas are a reflection of unfair systems such as apartheid that portray fallacies that continue to separate people based on race. The fallacies are meant to differentiate Blacks from Whites and deprive them of economic and educational opportunities just as MaNtuli could not further her education which is evident in her occupational role as a receptionist.

The representation of most Black characters in the townships in *Skeem Saam* through Black character roles depict an undertone of pejorative living where residents are unruly. For instance, MaNtuli's character props such as the furniture in her home, clothes and dependents' costumes suggest that Black people in townships need to be transformed and as MaNtuli constantly reminds her children to change the situation in their home. This depiction speaks to *Black tax* which refers to the monthly mandatory income that Black professionals give to their families to cover expenses in the households (Oliver, 2019). To a greater extent, *black tax* leads to youth's financial distress as they are expected to provide for their families despite the financial challenges they may encounter. MaNtuli's character is located in a township where she is portrayed as an ill-mannered woman who was left by her husband. The husband could not tolerate her behaviour as an

uncontrollable blether that interferes in other people's lives. Her behaviour ultimately inconveniences her family as the community attacks them after she gossips about community members. Similarly, MaNtuli's character is the same with that of Petronella in another South African soap opera, *The Queen*. Petronella is a nosy domestic worker from a township called Tembisa. She meddles into other people's personal affairs like relationships, family matters and conversations she is not supposed to be part of and persistently gives advices even when people are not interested in it (Ngwadla, 2018). Petronella's personality traits are similar to those of MaNtuli's. This is a misinterpretation of Black women who live in the townships, especially in the post-apartheid era where women focus on jobs, education and personal lives rather than township gossip. Therefore, the transformation has changed the social, financial, educational and personal goals of each citizen despite where they come from (Chisholm, 2012). Subsequently, Black women become more involved politically and economically to change the status quo in order to improve their lives.

4.2.2.2 Jacobeth Thobakgale

Thobakgale is presented as a professional female School Principal with good leadership skills as she is able to work collectively with her subordinates to reach a common goal which is achieving a 100 percent pass rate every year in all grades. Her character requires assertiveness and diplomacy as she makes decisions in the school. Therefore, this suggests that to a greater extent, education enables people to make well informed decisions. Thobakgale's character is in corroboration with the intellectual activism in the Black Feminist Theory which states that Black writers in the artistic field should portray Black females as educated people. It is believed that the portrayal will empower the audience and change the perceptions, stereotypes and myths that exist in society about Black people (Nkealah, 2006).

Thobakgale's character represents typical Black female professionals who are able to secure jobs on merit and work experience but are unable to maintain order in their homes by being socially exemplary to their children as they are single and incapable of maintaining intimate relationships. Thobakgale's character portrays the gender stereotypes that limit women to be depicted as capable of maintaining personal

relationships and to pursue professional careers (Gadassi & Gati, 2009) This representation insinuates that Black women have challenges in striking a balance between sustaining successful careers and married life. Comparably, a female character, Gladys who plays the role of a qualified social worker in a South African soap opera, *Gomora* is depicted like Thobakgale as she is unable to nurture her children due to her work. Gladys constantly puts her family in danger by allowing strangers who threaten her family when she accommodates them at her home. Her character shows that Black women become too committed and devoted to their jobs and neglect their children and family responsibilities. Therefore, they are unable to strike a balance between work and parenting (Dladla, 2020). This is a gender stereotype because there are Black married women in society who balance being married and furthering their careers without failure as they continue to empower themselves educationally, nurture their children and become exemplary in society as leaders (Hoffnung, 2004; Chaney, 2011).

Her actions coupled with props on Season seven (7), episode 150 such as her costume, makeup, furniture and office as a School Principal corroborates what Connell (2002) describes as objects of leadership and power. These props demonstrate professionalism and educational mentorship to learners and subordinates even in times of distress, where she manages to comfort her staff members. However, Bonnie (2006) bases the assumptions of how a professional woman should physically look on the western standards of beauty where a woman should be petite with long stretched hair that signifies seriousness and emotional fitness. These assumptions concur with excerpts of two White characters, Candice and Vivian who have petite bodies, long hair and costumes that suit their body types. The two White characters are depicted as physically and emotionally fit to endure the demands of professional duties and managing institutions or businesses. However, Thobakgale's character goes against Bonnie (2006) view on how professional or successful females should look. Although Thobakgale is able to control her emotions and work harmoniously with her subordinates. In episode 248, she converses with the teachers to find out their plans on how they can achieve the hundred percent pass rate in Turf High. Therefore, the stereotypical representation of Black big bodied women being unable to carry out tasks at work and unable to control their emotions is invalidated through this character.

4.2.2.3 Candice Riaan

This is a White young professional Chef who graduated with other Black students from a culinary academy. This character is passionate about cooking that she decided to go into partnership with her boyfriend, Katlego Peterson to run a restaurant. This was a business decision which her father, Mr Riaan did not approve of, thus he constantly kept talking to his daughter out of the relationship and financially bailing their business out when they encountered financial problems. The irony in this representation is that Katlego's parents could not afford to assist financially as they are Black and coloured, the races that have been negatively depicted in initial soap operas in the 1980s when third world countries began to produce soap operas (Marx, 2007). Also, this is a contradiction of what the rainbow nation represents, where the democracy explicitly states that Black people should be at liberty to associate which implies dating, marriage and business association with anybody regardless of colour, status or political standing (Rhodie & Liebenberg, 1994; Tshawane, 2009). Mr Riaan's role which is classified as a supporting character in *Skeem Saam* depicts an undertone of White supremacy through the dictatorial manner Riaan speaks to Black characters because he is wealthy. The representation suggests that Blacks are not privileged to co-exist in the same environments with Whites. The representation is in line with apartheid's racial segregation policies which supported separate development of races which were actual reality meant to preserve White privilege (National Action Plan, 2017).

As Bonnie (2006) observed that successful females should be petite and have straight hair. In *Skeem Saam*, Candice and Vivian's bodies symbolise professionalism in Bonnie's view. The two characters continue to be portrayed with straight blond hair, assertive traits and continuously progressive businesses throughout the Seasons. These White female characters are depicted as being able to make good financial and business decisions. They do not encounter financial shortfalls as compared to businesses owned by Black characters such as Meikie Maputla who continuously neglects the Supermarket she runs and not invest the profits made. Furthermore, Candice's non-verbal cues showcase power. Wykes (2005) defines non-verbal communication as a powerful tool that tells the audience more about a person or character, and this involves movements, posture, facial

expressions and physical gesture which ultimately display lifestyle and social status. Initially, Candice's role showcased favouritism and privilege when a White lecturer, Chef Marlene at the Polokwane Culinary Academy was constantly protective of Candice. Marlene began to be overly protective when she found that Katlego and Candice were in a relationship. Chef Marlene felt that Candice's Black fellow students such as Katlego could potentially harm her. Thus, in Season six (6), episode 101 Marlene accuses Katlego and gets him arrested regarding a missing examination question paper which she believes he stole. This was Marlene's way of getting rid of Katlego and ending his relationship with Candice in order to 'protect her'. The lecturer felt the need to favour her against other students even when Candice was at fault. This role is an illustration that White characters fear to be around Blacks to avoid 'potential anti-social behaviours' that Blacks possess (Newburn, 2016). It also shows an element of structural racism where specific races are portrayed as dominant, like in Marlene's role seen as a lecturer in a learning institution thus ensuring that they remain privileged (More, 2019). In this study, Candice's role appears to show structural dominance as it reproduces existing racial privilege of White citizens in South Africa who have opportunities which other races do not attain socially and economically thus its depiction maintains a racist hegemony (Plagerson & Mthembu, 2019).

The kind of subtly demeaning language and non-verbal cues that Candice uses when conversing with Katlego, who is her ex-boyfriend and business partner indicates the level of disrespect which Whites have towards Black characters on both television and in real life. In Season eight (8), episode 192, Candice asked what was causing Katlego to pull back from the business deal as they were supposed to purchase shares for a building where their restaurant would operate. As Katlego stated that he did not have enough money, Candice insisted that she will buy the shares that Katlego is unable to pay for. The manner in which Candice expressed that she will buy the shares had an undertone of disenchantment. This is an indication that Blacks are most likely to disappoint in the most severe times, especially financially as they are born poor and never work hard as much to save money. Katlego's grandmother, Koko Mantsha, further assured Katlego to be content with what he had saved over the months and never compare himself with

Candice who was born rich and privileged. These two scenes signify that White privilege and supremacy do feature significantly through White character types in *Skeem Saam*.

4.2.2.4 Kobus Grobber

Kobus is a White male legal representative who is well experienced in legal practice. He is a responsible citizen who instils moral principles in his clients that are usually Black as he has developed a social relationship with them. He offers legal advice to two specific Black characters, Lahasa Maphosa and Nompumelelo Mthiyane who usually need to be bailed out of jail, including in financial and social situations which result in them being on the wrong side of the law. Simply put, Kobus is actively involved in the lives of Black characters to assist them make legal and business decisions in their lives. In the same way, a White lawyer called Sandra Stein legally represents the Khoza and Dikana family on *The River* and *The Queen* to bail them out from their illegal dealings that bring them money to sustain their lavish lifestyles. Stein's character is similar to the Kobus character as a White lawyer who legally represents Black characters as they are prone to being involved in illegal business and committing other crimes regularly (Zeeman, 2018). This speaks to the myth that White people bring order and civilisation among Black people's lives as they are unable to do so themselves. This also purports societal myths and stereotypes about how peaceful, educated and informed the White race is as compared to the Black race (Guess, 2006). Kobus's role as a legal representative in Season six (6), episode 259 when he stopped Lehasa from physically attacking a woman, Sonti Magongoa whom he scammed and stole a nut factory business from. This shows how uncontrollable and unethical Blacks are in a sense that they will engage in illegal activities to make money. A specific scene in episode 259 where Kobus saves Lehasa from being on the wrong side of the law when he attacked Sonti, illustrates what More (2019) viewed as a skewed philosophical perspective. This view has been criticised for unfairly presenting the Black race as 'needing' Whites for moral guidance, thereby demonstrating the maintenance of the erstwhile ideology that the apartheid era orchestrated before democracy in South Africa.

Kobus's character further illustrates what Vincent (2008) states as a commonly known myth and representation from an American drama film, *White men cannot jump* which

gave the notion that Black men are good in basketball as compared to White men. The depiction in the film ironically portrayed Blacks being able to carry out lousy activities without supervision instead of being involved in serious life activities such as successfully running a business. This misrepresentation was eventually equalled to the racial myth that Black 'folks' cannot think; hence they need Whites to persistently guide them. Therefore, this apparent myth and stereotype insinuates that Blacks need Whites' 'advice' as they are unable to think critically and decisively for themselves. In the soapie, *Skeem Saam*, Kobus regularly makes contact with Lehasa and Nompumelelo to guide and protect them from 'themselves'. This confirms scholarly views that, White characters in soap operas are associated with positive stereotypes and achieving status whereas Black characters are associated with negative personality characteristics, less dominant occupational roles and negative stereotypes (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Furthermore, this is an indication that producers do not entirely address the social stereotypes and realities that could be dealt with through daily soap operas with potential to transform society and bring credence in the audience through positive depiction of Black characters.

Props such as costume in Kobus's character indicate that he is a reputable member of society considering the occupational role he plays. This character wears formal clothing, mainly Black suits, collared shirts and ties coupled with a neat and well-maintained haircut. Formal clothing is associated with professionalism, respect, honesty and maintenance of social distance (Slepian, Ferber, Gold & Rutchick, 2015). On television, formal clothes indicate an element of rationality and competency through characters that have dominant and professional occupational roles. In the contrary, less dominant roles assigned to Blacks are presented with below par costume in the form of casual clothes which depict Blacks as less serious, friendly and laid-back people. Normally, casual attire is associated with Black characters because it shows that Blacks are not concerned with being professional and competent (Motsaathebe, 2018). To a greater extent, formal clothing can influence self-perception. This implies that clothing can create impressions about one-self and how they view themselves in the manner that differentiates them from the others (Pelichette & Karl, 2007). Kobus's body language, non-verbal cues and choice of words signify elements of dictatorship whilst legal representatives are meant to guide clients and not to give orders. This deliberate depiction shows how White characters

prefer to instil order to Black characters who seemingly lack discipline. Lastly, the scenes where Kobus features are often coupled with low angle shots that demonstrate the character's power and authority as an attorney who is superimposed over other characters (Ballinger, 2004).

4.2.2.5 Sphola

This is a supporting character featured in the college storyline. It is a role of a Black young man who was once a convict trying to find a way back into being accepted into society. The role deviates from portraying transformation issues with regard to ex-offenders in South Africa making a re-entry back into society after rehabilitation and serving their sentences when authorities determine it is safe to do. When ex-offenders are back in society, they are given chances to make changes in their lives through employment or are given support to run businesses to make an honest living (Chikadzi, 2017). However, Sphola's role does not give him a fair opportunity to start a business despite the commitment and determination he put into his dream. As compared to Candice, he did not have the capital to start his business because he was not raised in a wealthy family. Lack of capital to build his business shows structural racism that Black South Africans encounter on a daily basis where most Whites have generational wealth to support their dependents' business dreams and Blacks do not. White people have power economically and that enables them to afford extravagant lifestyles though this is done through democratic institutional elections (Philip, Tsedu & Zwane, 2014). Sphola's role blatantly illustrates the relationship between structural and ideological racism. Black writers portray Black male characters with the colonial ideologies that continue to thrive in the national broadcaster. The ideologies carry on to run with historical narratives that depict Blacks negatively (Van Dijk, 1991). This also shows how Black characters in soap operas are not given equal roles and opportunities as compared to White characters who are introduced in the storyline and become dominant and successful in a short space of time. In turn, this might bring the Black audience into despair as they are not motivated through the storyline.

One of the primary functions of the media in developing countries is to bring change through depicting stories of hope to the audiences (Collins & Zoch, 2001). In that regard, *Skeem Saam* does not portray characteristics of developing and encouraging young impoverished men in South Africa through Sphola's character in the rural areas and townships where millions of citizens watch the soap opera on a daily basis. This role has maintained that young Black men who grow up in townships are constantly involved in criminal activities to entertain themselves and elevate their lifestyles through cutting corners in life. Some studies have maintained that broken homes which are usually in townships are prone to produce generations that are likely to commit crime based on the ecological factors. These factors include physical environment which consists of pollution, overcrowding and lack of recreational spaces (Eagle, Benn, Fletcher & Sibisi, 2013; Eagle, 2015; Hirschfield & Bowers, 1997; Jackson, 2004).

Sphola's character does not include many excerpts that are relevant for this study, apart from the language he uses which is a mixture of 'kasie' and Sepedi a language popularly used in the Limpopo Province. This character brings comic relief to audiences after tense scenes that could convey sad depiction of reality. Sphola 'makes light of difficult situations' through humour to dark stories. Colman (2014) maintains that comedy scenes are deliberately produced to relieve audiences from social frustrations and provide momentary escape from their daily lives more especially if the programme is broadcast in the evening. This is the case with *Skeem Saam* which broadcasts daily at 18h30 as shown in (see Section 3.8) in the chapter three.

4.2.2.6 Alfred Magongwa

Alfred is one of the Black male characters that depict how Blackness is associated with ignorance and a desire for power. Alfred is married to Celia Kunutu-Magongwa, a receptionist at a local hospital. In the storyline, Alfred is a deputy principal and teacher at a local school where he attempted to overthrow the female school principal a multiple times as his wife encouraged him to do so for financial enhancement and economic status. These representations contribute to the racial stereotype that Blacks use anarchy and disruption of social order that damages society. The representation goes against one

assumption of the Critical Race Theory which state that negative depiction of race roots from misconceptions meant to preserve racial privilege (Delgado, 1995). Accordingly, the soapie gives an impression that it is imperative that Blacks be micromanaged by their White counterparts. Alfred's character is projected as the diplomat in disputes between his wife and her step daughter, Rachel Kunutu-Maphutuma who is married to an older man, largely seen as a 'blesser'. However, Alfred is a double-edged sword in situations where he may appear to be a mediator and diplomat at the same time.

This character is dynamic in nature, considering that Alfred was poor when he met Celia who then taught him to be manipulative in securing a higher occupational post that allowed him to relocate from the township to the suburb with his family. Nonetheless, he has not learned to use money prudently, thus he habitually borrows money from an illegal moneylender as shown in Season six (6), episode 29 where the moneylender threatens to harm him and take his car if he does not settle his debt. This depiction illustrates the racial stereotype that Blacks are child-like, which insinuates that they are irresponsible (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, 2006). Alfred's character fits in within the category of a stock character as he also brings subtle comic relief through use of Sepedi language and outrageous actions. His character is what Miyamoto (2018) calls the *joker and mentor* since this character assists in rounding out the cast and making the audience feel included and 'at home' as the soap opera unfolds.

Alfred's geographic location, which involves moving from the township to the suburbs implies a level of improvement financially in the way he utilises money after getting his monthly salary. Magongwa struggled to save money as a teacher who manipulated the system and colleagues to get a promotion to be the deputy principal. The character's home and furniture indicate that the home is urban and fall within the upper middle class as he lives with the elite in town where Black characters rarely afford to stay. Magongwa's character illustrates what Entman (1990) states as a mediation of cultural change through depicting Blacks as normal citizens who deserve the same treatment and fair representation as Whites. This character gives the impression that the segregation of Black people from White citizens is over in the current democratic state of South Africa. However, the portrayal subtly leads to modern racism which gives Blacks the mentality

that they are deservedly equal to White citizens in democratic countries such as South Africa. The character brings a fallacy mentality that Blacks have equal opportunities which White people have if they determined and work hard. However, the equality comes with the challenge where Blacks are compelled to commit crimes to reach their goals. White characters are depicted as vigilant and protective of each other as Black characters commit crimes and behave unethically. White characters continue to protect themselves from 'danger' (Taylor, Guy-Walls, Wilkerson & Addae, 2019).

4.2.2.7 Bigboy Mabitsela

Bigboy is featured as an alcoholic township car mechanic who strives to take care of his son, Leshole Mabitsela. Bigboy's character blatantly makes reference to poverty-stricken and underprivileged families. Single fathers such as Bigboy endure daily hardships to provide for their families without stable jobs. Bigboy's struggles portray how illiterate the character is as he is unable to find steady employment. He becomes abusive towards his son when he is intoxicated and becomes irrational when he makes decisions concerning the future. However, he is assertive about his son acquiring a profession and he supports all his educational goals. The character is portrayed to be incapable of maintaining a romantic relationship due to his impatience, abusive nature and a demanding job though he works from home. He is constantly in disputes with his clients who are Black characters from the township and those from the suburbs who try to exploit him when they have to pay him for his services. Bigboy's character reinforces how the apartheid system took advantage of Blacks who were staying in the townships. These townships were classified as ghettos of reserved labour where Black people lived in squalor conditions although the White people used their cheap labour for domestic and handy duties. Blacks were obliged to stay away from the White supreme areas and privileged people (More, 2019).

Conversely, this character dismisses the slander that Black people do not value education which is indeed a myth as people in the townships use their limited funds to invest in education (More, 2019). Scenes that depict Bigboy giving his son money for his tuition speak volumes with regard to how people in the townships understand the importance of education. Two significant excerpts that make up this character that need to be

considered for the analysis is the lighting and kind of shots that are usually used to depict Bigboy and its surroundings. According to Nicholson (2010), lighting engages the audience if the lighting is realistic or in a naturalistic manner despite the efforts of producers and editors to utilise stylistic elements to amplify the aesthetic demands of a scene. In episode 169, an ironic subversion of flat lighting is used for Bigboy's scenes, home and furniture to create a dramatic effect and replicate the limited natural lighting coming from outside. This is despite that some of *Skeem Saam's* scenes are shot in studio rather than in real homes and apartments. Therefore, this implies that motivated lighting is withheld in the depiction of this character to illustrate that he is poor and, in some way, isolated from society as he is not privileged to own a decent home. Furthermore, the natural behaviour of light is graphically manipulated to depict the home and all other props are dull as compared to the urban homes of other characters.

The kinds of shots usually used to capture Bigboy and his son are close-up and medium shots with the aim of constructing feelings of sympathy from the audience as the family is frequently in distressful situations. More often, high angle shots are used in scenes where the son is having a dispute with the father. The high angle shot is used by directors of photography (DOPs) to illustrate that a character is beleaguered, inferior and deficient (Brown, 2002). Subsequently, the shot may blatantly insinuate that the character is somewhat pathetic and that his/her life has fallen apart (Ballinger, 2004).

4.2.2.8 Francois Swanepoel

Francois' role was initially constructed as a student at the cooking academy with other Black students (extras) who did not fully feature into the storyline. He and another White student, Candice became successful in the food industry as professional Chefs because the White chef instructor favoured them and gave them marks even when they did not deserve them. Francois landed a job at a restaurant in town owned by two Black characters, Lehasa and Cindi where he was approached by a White successful businesswoman, Vivian for a better offer to work on a Yacht as a Chef and travel the world in Season eight, episode 114. He is known for making exquisite dishes from his special recipes, because of that Lehasa adores Francois work ethic and passion.

Francois was Lehasa's pillar of strength during his emotional turmoil when he lost his wife to cancer. This depiction of an emotional Black man is a contradiction of Motsaathebe's (2009) view about Black men being emotionless as an indication of strength during difficult times.

Francois is a successful young professional Chef who lives in the City of Johannesburg as shown in the soapie. Props that form part of this character are urban, expensive and depict an upper middle-class social status as he lives in a well-furnished up-market apartment. Perhaps, the excerpts are influenced by the race and where the character is based unlike most Black characters who are based in the townships with furniture and houses that suggest that they are poor. Nicholson (2010) maintains that tracking shots are used to offer a dynamic point of view on a character. As a young successful White character, Francois is usually portrayed through tracking shots to convey the dynamic lifestyle that he leads. His character encompasses a drive to excel at a young age which hurries past all his stationary peers who are ironically Black characters that he attended college with such as Sphola, Katlego and fellow students not featured in the storyline.

4.2.2.9 Rachel Kunutu

Rachel is a young Black female who was initially introduced as a problematic teenager who lost her father and was emotionally damaged. She does not have a healthy relationship with her mother, Celia Kunutu-Magongoa hence she is labelled as the Black sheep of the family when her stepbrother moved in with them. Rachel is characterised as a rebellious child as she got romantically involved with an older man, Marothi Maphuthuma whom she married despite her family's disapproval of the relationship. The 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon in South Africa came to the public domain in 2015 and since then, the media through productions such as soap operas has featured it as part of the secondary themes (Mampane, 2018). This depiction displays one primary function of soap operas in developing countries which is to warn and educate audiences about current social challenges (Singhal & Rogers, 2002).

When *Skeem Saam* featured the blesser-blessee phenomenon in Season four (4), young girls in South Africa started to indulge with older rich men in exchange for money and this

has resulted in more unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections (Jones, 2019). Thus, soap operas in the African continent feature the phenomenon in storylines to educate the public, specifically parents on how to handle the situations involving teenage girls being in romantic relationships with old men. However, Rachel's character reveals the stereotypes about Black parents in the townships being irresponsible and unable to support their children emotionally and financially causing the girl child to resort to transactional relationships. This insinuates that Black mothers are negligent towards their children, which is not the case in reality because families in the townships are functional and parents are supportive with the limited funds (Sonamzi, 2016).

The arrangement of Rachel's character that include scenery and props, particularly referred to as *mise en scene* is important as it constructs the character. Rachel's body language and facial expressions depict a connotation of disrespect as her words are coupled with smirk smiles. This character is fluent in sarcasm and her fluency flourishes when she converses with her mother and other older characters. In Season five (5), episode 238, Rachel scolds her mother explaining to her that the reason why she does not listen to her and dates an older man is because she distastes the ordinary life that her mother lives. Simply put, Rachel is portrayed as being unruly. Body language and facial expressions in *Skeem Saam* are significant for the analysis of female Black characters. The Black female characters such as Rachel are portrayed as being disrespectful. Whereas White female characters such as Candice are portrayed as cultured and meek characters. The representation of Black young women is socially damaging globally as Black women are portrayed through stereotypical roles that entail negative personality traits such as anger (Terry, 2018). Initially, Rachel's character as a teenager living with her mother and step brother depicted a surface level of poverty as they lived in a two-bedroomed house in the township of Turfloop. Her wardrobe, makeup and shallow space was reflective of a family that is completely dependent on handouts from relatives as the mother worked as a cook at a local high school. The initial *mise en scene* of this character portrayed images of the socio-economic struggles associated with Black people in South Africa.

4.2.2.10 Mr Riaan

Mr Riaan is a White shrewd businessman who supports his daughter's business dreams but seeks assurance that the business will make profit and be amongst successful businesses in the food industry before he can invest in it. This character showcases what is commonly known as '*parents' tough love*' as a measure to nurture his daughter into being responsible and independent. In Season six (6), episode 145 Riaan is portrayed as an opportunistic businessman who manipulated the former owners of Capsy's restaurant which his daughter and boyfriend needed financial assistance to purchase. Riaan is a resourceful enemy of Katlego because of the backstabbing that he experienced from Riaan which keeps Katlego alert and always ready to take on a business challenge.

Riaan's character is static as he is not a main character. Fishelov (1990) describes a static character as one that does not develop at all throughout the storyline. Static characters do display different personality traits or change as the plot changes. Two props that are relevant and significant for this study is Riaan's wardrobe and language which signify status and financial stability. The tone that Riaan uses is that of a dictator and Katlego's response through his body language is often meek as he takes orders and heeds counsel. This is an intentional depiction as the character speaks to the myth that Blacks are usually servants of the White people as it dates from the era of apartheid (Magubane, 2001). Furthermore, Riaan's character depicts what the Critical Race Theory argues about racism that White supremacy and racial power are maintained through systems such as the media where white characters are depicted as superior to other races (Elias & Feagin, 2012). In this case, *Skeem Saam* is showcasing how the White race may be at liberty to oppress the Black race through words and actions during social settings even when the country has attained democracy.

4.3 Beyond characterisation: Inherent themes in *Skeem Saam*

Themes are significant in the creation of storylines and characterisation of roles. This section entails the analysis of inherent themes found in the soapie which are namely, family poverty and social security; education and transformation trajectories in the new South Africa; patriarchy, women empowerment and leadership roles; parenting in South Africa; racial economic privileges and marriage for Black South Africans.

4.3.1 Family, poverty and social security

The importance of family for the Black community in South Africa shows that it is the bedrock of the national culture dating back to times of apartheid. In considering the effects of the apartheid system, the ties of Black family units were distorted as Black men had to move to the cities from the rural villages and small cities to find jobs in the industrial firms, meaning that they would irregularly see their families (Freeks, 2017). However, it is important to mention that forced collectivism enabled survival from the apartheid era to fight White supremacy over the Black people when they became liberated through the democratic system. Nonetheless, family remains the stronghold of Black societies despite the dysfunctional nature of some of the relationships. In the same way, soap operas around the world feature family as a primary theme through Black characters to showcase the importance of family in Black societies (Hall & Posel, 2019). In South Africa, soap operas produced and broadcast by the national broadcaster such as *Skeem Saam*, *Muvhango*, *Generations*, *7de Laan* and *Isidingo* specifically emphasise on marriage and parenthood. This is seen when examining roles which screenwriters deem appropriate for Black characters that are set in townships and suburbs in the soap operas. In *Skeem Saam*, characters such as Bigboy and Leshole who form the Mabitsela family, Jacobeth and Elizabeth who form the Thobakgale family, Alfred, Celia, Nimrod and Bushang who form the Magongwa family, Marothi, Nakedi and Rachel who form the Maphuthuma family and others illustrate the family theme.

Parenthood is one of the palpable illustrations of the family theme in *Skeem Saam* with Black characters such as Bigboy being portrayed as a responsible and supportive father to his son despite that he was initially represented as an abusive drunken father. White parents such as Mr Riaan are depicted as supportive and involved in their children's lives and offering financial support to the children. This theme illustrates how White parents give counsel to their children and those around them. The illustration is showcased by Mr Riaan who constantly gives his daughter, Candice advice on 'doing the right thing' in business and financial decisions. *Skeem Saam* insinuates that White families are functional as compared to Black families. The young adults in White families take counsel from their elders as a form of respect and discipline instilled in them as young children that were guided to teenage stage. Parenthood through Black characters such as Celia

Magongwa and MaNtuli is depicted as a toxic exercise. These Black parents are entitled and manipulative such that children want to detach themselves from the parents and siblings as the materialistic expectations are financially and emotionally demanding. This depiction speaks to *black tax* which disadvantages Black young adults from building generational wealth and investing money as they are expected to support their families with income for survival (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2018).

The social security level in South Africa is low due to the country being a developing country. However, for White families, social security directly from the government is not a basic need given their preferential access to jobs and education which allow them to create generational wealth. Whites are generally strategic in ensuring that they prevent themselves and their future generations from falling into poverty in South Africa (Makino, 2004). Therefore, social security for White citizens is not problematic as most of these citizens are not poverty-stricken as compared to numerous Black citizens in South Africa (Goldblatt, 2014). In *Skeem Saam*, characters such as Kobus Grobber, Mr Riaan, Francois Swanepoel and Vivian' portray how White citizens follow careers that allow them to build generational wealth rather than to benefit from welfare assistance from the government or depend on their children as is the case with most Black people.

4.3.2 Education and transformation trajectories in South Africa

More (2019) notes that in reality education is a life insurance policy for Black societies and families. This means that when a Black child completes high school and ventures into tertiary education the family is certain to benefit financially when the child gets employed. The 'willingness' of the child to assist the family financially is seen as *Ubuntu* consciousness and giving back to those who have birthed and supported her through the journey of acquiring a qualification. Similarly, South African soap operas purvey Black characters through this 'education as life insurance' view to showcase realities of the Black societies, more specifically those living in the townships and rural areas. In *Skeem Saam*, MaNtuli's son, Zamokuhle Seakamela is an illustration of how education can serve as an insurance policy as the mother expects him to build her a double-storey house. In Season seven (7), episode 171, the mother is shown demanding and convincing her son that this is the right way to show gratitude for the support he was given throughout all the

years of schooling. Zamokuhle's facial expression and reluctant responses to his mother insinuate that he is financially and emotionally unable to deliver to the mother's orders and wishes. Zamokuhle's reluctance is blatantly shown when MaNtuli shows him a drawn house plan that she paid for without consulting him. To a greater extent, the manner in which MaNtuli communicates with her son and boasts to her colleague, Celia Kunutu-Magongwa about the house plan shows a heightened sense of entitlement attached to her son's monthly income.

The foundation of this representation dates back from the historical depiction of African-Americans where the portrayal of Black families was distorted. Black characters would be given roles of lazy, irresponsible parents who would expect their children to provide for them financially using their talents, skills or education (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). In a positive light, nowadays more Black characters are associated with education which elevates them from the level of minor roles. However, it is significant to note that since the 1950s, White characters always had dominant roles. They would be assigned to roles of professors, educators, businessmen, engineers and scientists whilst Black roles remained domesticated, hyper-sexualised and objectified (Motsaathebe, 2018; Matthews, 2018). Equally important, *Skeem Saam* can be classified as a developmental programme where many social and academic realities are featured to educate the audience about specific issues such as adolescence, teenage pregnancy, sex education and the importance of an educated society. This depiction confirms Khalid and Ahmed's (2014) and McPhail's (2009) notions about soap operas in developing countries being pro-development and educating to influence social change and positive behaviour. This is an indication that the SABC is fulfilling its mandate of educating audiences through its daily programmes. While this is the case, few Black characters are positively portrayed in the soaps as there are societal expectations of what a graduate need to achieve despite that they are from a poor background like Zamokuhle. Conversely, a character such as Candice who recently graduated is positively represented in a dominant role as she makes money from being a professional Chef. She owns a restaurant and her parents have no financial expectations from her, thus she is depicted as somebody who is able to build a legacy and generational wealth to her name.

Soap operas as vehicles of transformation in societies portray educational opportunities that both males and females can benefit from, especially if they fall within the historically disadvantaged race (Khalid & Ahmed, 2014). Female and male characters are given equal education-career opportunities as most characters in *Skeem Saam* start off as teenagers who attend secondary school, move to university and ultimately get jobs in the fields they have studied. *Skeem Saam* portrays transformation through Black females who venture into careers that were previously male dominated such as Elizabeth Thobakgale and Charity Ramabu whose occupational roles are Medical Practitioner and Speech Therapist.

4.3.3 Patriarchy, women empowerment and leadership roles

Globally, women empowerment and leadership roles were introduced as a means to fight patriarchy and gender oppression in the media fraternity. In *Skeem Saam*, women are empowered through the depiction of female characters who play roles of professionals, university students and political activists who strive for equality in workplaces and in the community. Three female characters fall within this theme, namely Elizabeth Thobakgale, Charity Ramabu and MaNtuli. Elizabeth's character featured in Season six (6), episode 216 as a doctor depicts the struggles that a Black female from a female-headed family experiences and endures to achieve a career goal, specifically in a traditionally White and male dominated field of medicine. Charity's occupational role as a therapist illustrates a misconception of Black women being habitually unable to balance their careers, family responsibility and romantic relationship which ultimately lead to the character being scandalous and losing their career. MaNtuli's character role as a factory worker and single parent demonstrates the challenges that push women into politics as they become activists for the voiceless in workplaces. The character becomes a stalwart that fight for other factory workers' rights as some were dismissed unfairly.

Women empowerment and politics emerged in South African soap operas based on the oppression imposed on Black women in the apartheid era. Soap operas had to portray this theme to address the gender and racial inequality issues that affect the representation of women and Blacks. This view agrees with assumptions in the Black Feminist Theory which advocate for equality for Black women in the manner they are depicted in the media

through roles that represent women. In the development of the theory, Nkealah (2006) notes that it is pivotal that Black females in the media industry be given positive roles which will encourage the society to adapt to the feminist aspirations that the African artistic field espouses. This speaks to the depiction of women empowerment and feminism in media programmes such as soap operas. The depiction of Elizabeth, Charity and MaNtuli in this theme confirms Czarniawska, Eriksson-Zetterquist and Renemark's (2013) findings that South Africans soap operas are less likely to contain intentional messages meant to influence the society based on its marginal nature because they focus on family life. Therefore, soap operas reflect the 'taken for granted' beliefs, norms and myths to maintain their viewership even when the representation comes at the expense of the viewers and society (Blose, 2020). The myth represented under this theme is that women are incapable of successfully leading political positions and striking a balance between their careers and social life as revealed through Charity's character.

4.3.4 Challenges of parenting in South Africa

Parenting changes as a child grows into different stages of development. For instance, an adolescent cannot be treated and be communicated to like a child in middle childhood. Children learn what is morally right and wrong in accordance to what they are taught as they grow in different families. They also learn the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in society to understand roles, values and norms of the community they grow within. However, the manner in which Rachel and her mother, Celia are depicted in episode 228 when Celia advises Rachel to come back home instead of looking for a luxurious life, clearly showcases that parenting is a challenging task. Parenting becomes challenging when a child such as Rachel comes off as rude and disobedient because she claims to know her rights and is able to manipulate situations in her favour. The depiction is line with what Roman (2014) elucidates that raising children becomes a more challenging task especially in the rainbow nation where children have rights stipulated in the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005). It is claimed that, the rights are meant to stop parents from disciplining their children through corporal punishment which the parents were exposed to when they were children. One of the historical beliefs that parents in non-western countries such as South Africa are familiar with is the "if you spare the rod, you spoil the child' mantra. The mantra is deemed legally unacceptable in this

democratic era. The South African Constitutional Court ruled against corporal punishment or spanking children for various reasons as this is inconsistent with the constitution (Modise, 2019). In the Maputla family, Meikie and John had to endure when Thabo and Leeto made various mistakes from committing murder as teenagers, dropping out of school, mistaking a hobby for a career, teenage pregnancy and typically being disobedient children. The depiction of challenges of parenting in South Africa about Black characters suggests that parents are bound to keep an eye on the children even when they are adults because they can be irresponsible and not act out of the goodwill or care of the parents. Parenting in a country such as South Africa is complex. The complexity is due to the various cultures, languages, races and socio-economic statuses which parents and children learn and adapt to. The constitutional changes also affect various ways of parenting thus making it challenging (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2000).

Rachel defies authoritarian parenting when her mother gives her orders that she should quit dating an older man, Marothi whom she later married despite numerous attempts from the Turfloop police, friends and relatives to stop her from marrying him. Rachel's relationship with her mother and relatives depict the realities of parenting when children do not heed counsel from their elders. Poverty and being within the low socio-economic environment in the democratic era further pose a challenge in parenting as children are more likely to look for greener pastures in forbidden spaces. This is proven when Rachel falls in love with Marothi as her way of escaping poverty and securing a financially stable future in a marriage of convenience. Therefore, the depiction agrees with the findings by the South African Institute for Race Relations (2011) which reveals that children brought up in 'fractured families' are most likely to trouble their parents. This is because fractured families entail distorted and broken relationships between parents and children due to poverty. To some extent, poverty ultimately destroy family bonds and make it difficult for mothers and fathers to parent in harmony. Other black characters who are featured in the challenges in parenting theme in the soapie are Leshole and Bigboy Mabitsela who have a strained relationship due to their financial hardships which consistently arise when school fees for Leshole's aviation studies have be paid.

4.3.5 White character roles and economic privilege

Although the aspect of racial privilege in South Africa has historically been associated with apartheid, its depiction in the media remains subtle. This is evident in the manner in which White characters in soapies are depicted alongside black characters. The roles assigned to White characters and the narrative behind their actions sustain white privilege. In *Skeem Saam*, White actors such as Kobus, Riaan, Candice and Francois are presented as financially stable personalities with dominant jobs which enable them to sustain their flamboyant lifestyles. Furthermore, Kobus and Riaan's roles are filled with power and as they consistently give instructions to Black characters in their occupational roles as a legal representative and a wealthy businessman. According to Alley-Young (2008), power is one of the functions used to hide white privilege in communication strategies or performative actions. In *Skeem Saam*, power is depicted through White characters' presence in dominant roles when compared with Black characters. The economic privilege of Kobus, Riaan, Candice and Francois is depicted through elegant clothing, affluent locations such as Johannesburg where they are exposed to good opportunities. The kind of shots used to capture their words and non-verbal cues in the scenes depict how comfortable they are in the spaces they are located in. Hence, it can be argued that, the historical and political prominence of White people in South Africa and the advent of democracy that gave birth to the rainbow nation granted and still grants White people economic privilege. The privilege is based on White people's numerical minority and economic opportunities that they are entitled to dating back from the apartheid era (Steyn, 2007).

Although the advent of democracy in South Africa was meant to eradicate the blatant visibility of whiteness, this does not imply that Whites have lost economic privilege. Their sense of entitlement to the privileges of White supremacy which enable them to occupy economically dominant positions still abound. Therefore, these positions allow some Whites in South Africa to continue to clandestinely induce ideologies of whiteness in institutions such as the SABC. Soap opera storylines such as *Skeem Saam's* are approved to depict whiteness to shape the current social relations in South Africa. Initially, White privilege was evident through high paying jobs and affordability of a secured life as a defense against the "swart gevaar" which implied that blacks were primitive and violent

(DiAngelo, 2018). This justified the need for the government of the time to designate racially prejudiced policies to protect the White people, a gesture which eventually granted them economic privilege.

4.3.6 Marriage and family among Black South Africans

As explicated in the literature review of this study, soap operas are family-oriented programmes that are based on everyday lives of different social classes. The theme of family and marriage typically consists of character roles featuring females as housewives and husbands as breadwinners in the family (Neophytou, 2012). However, the female roles are aligned to the roles of businesswomen, and professionals rather than mere mothers who are only able to nurture their children and keep the household. Marriage is a significant theme in the storyline of soap operas as all characters ultimately come back home after a long day of what they do on a daily basis. Therefore, it is also significant to note that the construction of gender roles, role models and behaviours in soap operas influences the values that audiences hold about the social institution of family (Grassi, 2018).

In *Skeem Saam*, family and marriage are depicted through plots which feature black characters only. For instance, the Maputla and Magongoa families are used as contexts where couples encounter problems caused by poor decisions among them. For the Maputla's, some challenges are power struggles where Meikie independently makes decisions without considering her husband's views or opinions. In Season five (5), episode 209, Meikie makes a decision that everyone in the Maputla family should stop talking to Mokgadi, her daughter in law and that Mokgadi must not visit the Maputla household. In the scene, Meikie refuses to listen to what her husband's view is on the matter. Furthermore, Meikie refuses to listen to her husband's advice on how much control they should have on their children, who should exercise independency and not make decisions on their behalf since they are young adults. Celia and Alfred's problems relate to financial matters and meddling of their relatives into their marital life. As shown in this chapter (see 4.2.1.6) Alfred is incapable of managing his finances and this creates problems as Celia has to pay for some household expenses which they often argue about. Relatives from Celia's first marriage also interfere in her current marriage and often make

decisions for Alfred. This becomes problematic as Celia and Alfred are unable to make decisions in their marriage without the views, opinions and interference from the relatives.

The representation of family and marriage in *Skeem Saam* fits into Miller and Henry's (2004) findings on family conflict where two factors are identified as problematic in these institutions, namely dealing with children and finances. These factors create a hostile and toxic environment within a home where a couple is supposed to be safe and find peace. Ultimately, power struggles, financial matters and poor communication result in partners being emotionally detached from each other and having extramarital affairs (Mohlalole, 2017). Black characters in *Skeem Saam* are portrayed as being unable to handle the pressures in marriages and to address related problems successfully. However, the producers in *Skeem Saam* employ the role of a priest from a local church who assists couples when they encounter problems, especially when these couples are at the verge of divorce. In Season seven (7), episode, 153, the priest visits the Magongoa family as a mediator between Celia and Alfred to assist the couple to forgive each other. This follows Celia's antics to put pressure on Magongoa to overthrow Thobakgale for the Principal's post as a remedy to their financial problems. The priest's counselling in both the Maputla and Magongoa families is effective as the couples eventually find common ground upon which to solve their problems. This form of representation is line with Govender's (2016) findings which indicate that counselling from a Christian perspective is effective in dealing with marital problems among most South African couples.

4.4 Racial stereotypes and prejudice in *Skeem Saam*

In this study, a racial stereotype refers to the exaggerated visual pictures which *Skeem Saam* portray about particular racial groups. These visual pictures categorise characters based on their skin colour which determines whether characters are inferior/bad or superior/good. According to Pickering (2001), racial stereotyping refers to fixed and unchanging representations and evaluations of different races that endorse unequal social relations. These prejudiced evaluations judge people on alleged racial characteristics of the category they are assigned. The distribution of roles among Black and White characters in *Skeem Saam* shows a subtle imbalance between races and their respective status. The representation of race, social class, age, occupational roles,

storyline and themes in the soap opera understudy largely depict Black characters in derogatory roles. The manner in which Black characters are typically portrayed in the townships suggests that they naturally belong to the crowded places where social order and peace are unavailable (More, 2019). The representation further perpetuates the racial segregation that the apartheid system enunciated. One notable stereotype about the Black race is their association and involvement in crime in order to quickly enrich themselves and to gain respect in society as revealed through Lehasa's role (see 4.2.1.4 and 4.2.2.4). Apparently, Lehasa's criminal affairs confirm Mtose's (2008) findings which noted how corrupt Blacks continue to thrive in their crime-related dealings disguising their inferior and power-hungry mentality (Possley & Stephens, 2017).

On the contrary, White character roles and representation suggest superiority as their roles portray them in a positive light. This implicitly means that they are responsible citizens who work hard to achieve their goals and accumulate wealth through legal ways. Hence, in most instances, South African soapies do not feature White characters in poverty inclined storylines or needy people narratives. As demonstrated in the analysis of White characters in the previous section (see Section 4.2.2.3, 4.2.2.4, 4.2.2.8 and 4.2.2.10), their occupational roles are professional in nature and are often juxtaposed with unkempt Black characters. The representation of race in *Skeem Saam* confirms Nendauni's (2016) finding that posits that South African soap operas perpetuate Eurocentric views which strive to depict Black characters in stereotypical frames embedded in historically nostalgic confines of colonial bigotry. This has the potential to reinforce racial stereotypes which are evident in *Skeem Saam*, to the detriment of the constitutional obligations mandated to the national broadcaster through its edutainment programmes. Furthermore, this type of scripting and artistic expression may be a hindrance to the attempts at the elimination of racial stereotypes and prejudice in contemporary South Africa.

4.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has presented findings based on the data extracted from *Skeem Saam's* episodes, specifically purposively selected scenes by the researcher. The chapter has

outlined and critiqued the contexts that characters are depicted during the different seasons and episodes. The characterisation of roles was analysed through a scrutiny of the main characters based on their occupational roles, personality, stereotypes attached to the roles and materialistic references that indicate whether the characters are racially privileged or not. The chapter also discussed themes inherent in *Skeem Saam* which feature in the storyline and plots of the soap opera. The themes outlined and discussed amongst others are patriarchy, women empowerment and leadership roles; marriage and family among Black South Africans; and White character roles and economic. The chapter discussed racial stereotypes and prejudice that exists in *Skeem Saam* which show the white privilege and supremacy in the storyline.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings based on the data presented and analysed in Chapter 4 of this study. The chapter affirms the consummation of the study's aim and objectives as stated in Chapter 1 (see section 1.3.1 and 1.3.2). It entails the summary of the study findings, with specific reference to the contexts in which the soapie unfolds and characterisation of roles in the storyline. The context is discussed in relation to spatial segregation vs rainbowism; unemployment, poverty and crime; and historical inequality and skewed access to wealth among South Africans. The chapter also presents a summary of findings based on the manner in which Black, White, female and male characters are portrayed in *Skeem Saam*. The summary of findings further presents a discussion of the inherent themes evident in the soapie to validate the arguments made about white privilege and supremacy in Chapter 4. Lastly, the chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

5.2 Re-statement of the aim and objectives of the study

5.2.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to examine racial characterisation in the South African soap opera, *Skeem Saam*.

5.2.2 Objectives of the study

- To critique context and characterisation of roles in *Skeem Saam*.
- To determine inherent theme focalisation in the *Skeem Saam* storyline.
- To analyse excerpts that depict white privilege and supremacy in *Skeem Saam*.
- To recommend production guidelines that promote non-racial *soap opera* storyline.

5.3 Context and setting in *Skeem Saam*

In section 4.2.1 of the study, the researcher identified ten (10) main characters, comprising six (6) black and four (4) white characters who fell within the unit of analysis for the examination of racial characterisation in the soapie under study. These characters are MaNtuli Seakamela, Jacobeth Thobakgale, Candice Riaan, Kobus Grobblers, Sphola,

Alfred Magongwa, Bigboy Mabitsela, Francois, Rachel Kunutu and Mr Riaan. Each character is depicted in one or two socio-economic contexts that represent the nature of racial characterisation in South African soap operas as depicted in *Skeem Saam*. An analysis of these main characters is presented under the following aspects:

5.3.1 Spatial segregation vs rainbowism

The study found out that the producer's decision to represent Black characters in the township settings despite their seemingly affluent occupational roles is meant to reflect and possibly perpetuate the former "ugly" realities of the Black race in apartheid South Africa. This posture has the potential to reinforce erstwhile separatist ideologies which divided people according to skin colour as a systematic creation of unequal social standards among citizens. The arrangement gives credence to Soni's (1992) observation who noted that the apartheid government was a racially construed regime which orchestrated Black townships and 'homeland' areas based on ethnicity. To a great extent, the racial classification ultimately led to the White race having privileges which the Black people did not have access to. In this case, *Skeem Saam's* representation of Blacks living in the townships such as Turfloop speaks directly to their underprivileged lifestyle due to their skin colour. Subsequently, the study found out that the representation of Black people predominantly living in the township fails to move beyond the apartheid era stereotypes about Black people. A true reflection would be to depict the current socio-economic patterns where some of the Black citizens have since transformed into affluent positions following the enactment of inclusive non-racial and non-sexist policies in South Africa. A significant number of South African citizens currently live in the affluent suburbs around the length and breadth of the country. This is evident in all spheres of life where they strive to develop themselves particularly through education so that they can equally contribute to the development of human skills, entrepreneurship and technological innovations in the different sectors of the economy.

The study also found out that the soapie's selective depiction of Blacks in the township undermines the celebrated view about South Africa being the 'rainbow nation' which has evolved from an apartheid system particularly the segregation of racial groups. In view of the fact that, the media, particularly television should serve as a communication tool to

redress issues of discrimination, segregation and colonial prejudice, it can be argued that the public broadcaster continues to shortchange South Africans through airing programmes that carry apartheid undertones. As such, through *Skeem Saam*, the SABC still lacks the professional rigour to drive the transformative agenda which the rainbow nation purports to cherish and espouse.

5.3.2 Unemployment, poverty and crime

The discussion on unemployment, poverty and crime issues is presented within the view that, whereas the demise of apartheid somewhat brought change in the social and economic spheres of South Africans, the plight of the poor or working class within the neo-liberal society has not changed significantly when compared to other countries (Francis & Webster, 2019). Therefore, the study notes that the soapie's representation of unemployment challenges, abject poverty and rampant crime is realistically relevant to the socio-economic prognosis of democratic South Africa. This context in *Skeem Saam* is predominantly portrayed through Black female and male characters, a gesture that projects a racial inferiority narrative.

Skeem Saam presents unemployment as the largest contributor to dire poverty levels among the Black people, as is the case with characters such as MaNtuli, Bigboy and Sphola presented in Chapter 4 (see section 4.2.2.1, 4.2.2.5 and 4.2.2.7). However, the depiction is overshadowed by the efforts that characters such as MaNtuli and Sphola make to fight poverty in the face of some difficult socio-economic conditions. The depiction largely represents realism which envisages a new society abound with opportunities where citizens resort to community-based entrepreneurship and other economic engagements to alleviate poverty in their lives. The study further notes that the producer's decision to depict poverty through Black characters speaks to the inequality that exists between Black and White citizens in contemporary South Africa. Although the depiction of Black and White characters seems to be skewed, *Skeem Saam* is a miniature resemblance of the dire socio-economic realities in South Africa.

The above situation is made complex by the fact that, while Black characters are portrayed as criminals in *Skeem Saam*, they are not given an opportunity to take part in rehabilitation programmes. Secondly, in most scenes the soapie does not present White

characters as implicit nor explicit perpetrators of crime, but depicts them as victims of bad morals from Black citizens. This is shown when a Black male character called Sphola, who is an ex-convict is re-integrated into society without the necessary support from the state on how to live a normal life again. The producer's decision to assign a Black person to the role of a convict in the current era of democracy feeds into the Critical Race Theory that examines the preservation of the legacy left by apartheid systems to label Black people as perpetrators of crime. Sphola's role is in line with Kulaszewicz's (2015) argument that negative depictions such as crime through Black people are a result of broadcasters who follow models and ideologies of former oppressive systems. Meanwhile, white characters are portrayed as law abiding citizens who assist Black characters with legal and emotional advice when they are involved in criminal activities. The Black characters seemingly heed the counsel from the White professionals as shown with Kobus, who constantly gives his Black clients personal and legal advice to keep them away from legal troubles. Fundamentally, *Skeem Saam* portrays crime as a 'black problem', where the White citizenry has the responsibility to "shield" or provide a buffer between Black people who have to be "protected from themselves". This scenario falls short of depicting the reality of contemporary crime related problems that equally affects both White and Black citizens in South Africa (Zhou, 2020; SAPS report, 2018/2019). Furthermore, the depiction of crime through Black characterisation has the potential to perpetuate negative racial stereotypes about Black people as unruly and violent people (More, 2019).

5.3.3 Historical inequality and skewed access to wealth

Skeem Saam' storyline reveals the historical inequalities caused by the apartheid system which brought racial inequality and affected the manner in which wealth was and continues to be distributed in South Africa. *Skeem Saam*'s Black characters are depicted as people trapped in the historical economic order of racially determined structural inequalities which thrived on unskilled labour and largely semi-literate workers. Apparently, in post-apartheid, this system continues to sustain White South Africans' economic privilege through subtle opportunities and access to splendid national wealth (Puttick, 2011). For instance, the property rights in Section 25(1) of the South African Constitution (1996) under the Bill of Rights, state that land may be expropriated to the

benefit of the rightful owners and those who were dispossessed due to racial discrimination. However, to date the land is still not in the hands of the rightful owners as a stark reality among a majority of Black South Africans. The statute entails a long and arduous legal process when Black people have to claim their ancestral land back, thereby protecting those who benefitted from land dispossession. Hence, it can be argued that, *Skeem Saam's* portrayal of skewed ownership patterns justifies the status quo including the privilege of White farmers who took land away from its rightful owners (Zenker, 2015).

Furthermore, the depiction of all sampled characters reveals the privileges that White citizens are seemingly entitled to which most Black characters have no access to. Conversely, this alludes to the counter-argument where the entitlement and privilege leads to discussions about the formation of BEE groups which arguably benefit the elite South Africans and not the ordinary citizens who were directly affected by the apartheid era (Lloyd, 2018). Despite the presence of a minority of poor Whites in South Africa, the character roles played by White characters in the soapie represent White privilege which continues to prosper through the structural remnants of the apartheid system. The spatial segregation between White and Black characters (discussed in section 5.3.1) contributes to the economic inequalities as most Black people do not benefit from the opportunities associated with the City of Johannesburg where White people own properties. *Skeem Saam* seems to thrive on the narrative that justifies why Black characters have no access to wealth because they are either "lazy" or not creative, hence their involvement in unethical behaviour as exemplified by Lehasa who rips off company owners their lucrative businesses.

5.4 Representation of race and characterisation of roles in *Skeem Saam*

The sampled characters in this study are depicted in various ways that speak to the racial issues that play out in democratic South Africa. This section presents the summary of findings based on the analysis of character roles in *Skeem Saam*.

5.4.1 Portrayal of Black male character roles

Male Black characters such as Alfred, Bigboy and Sphola in *Skeem Saam* are depicted differently as they are within different socio-economic categories. Alfred is depicted as a power-hungry Black man because of the financial pressure that his wife puts on him. In

this case, a power-hungry person is someone with an ultimate goal to be in power despite the person's responsibility is to serve the community and meet the needs of other people (Matterra, 2013). The producer's decisions to depict Alfred as an unethical man sustains the view that Black men are generally power-hungry and often use money to enhance their selfish socio-economic statuses. Alfred's character further fulfills the racial stereotype that Black people become immoral to achieve whatsoever they yearn for, even if it involves breaking the law. In the context of democratic South Africa, Black male character roles presented in the media tend to come with the misapprehension that they feel inferior, thus they are willing to do anything to live a better life (Denzer-King, 2016). Furthermore, the misrepresentation of Black male characters implies that Black people can hardly improve their livelihood through honest and ethical conduct as depicted in *Skeem Saam's* plots.

Contrary to Alfred's demeanour, Bigboy makes an honest living to meet the financial needs of his son as a single parent. The character's conduct is relevant in the depiction of working-class Black men in the townships and their attitude towards their children's education. Bigboy's assertive involvement in Leshole's education represents the realistic aspirations of many Black South African parents who support their children's efforts to receive good education. This is evident in their display of fervent emotional and financial support to both their biological children, siblings and extended family despite their level of deep lack and dependency on government welfare grants (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

In the *Skeem Saam* narrative, Black males are portrayed as not deserving of the privileges and opportunities that White men often have access to. For instance, the manner in which Sphola's peers, particularly Francois who was able to get his dream job in an up-market restaurant, shows that White people can easily "hook up" with business links such as Vivian. Furthermore, the manner in which Francois gets salary increases at the restaurant and financial assistance from his employers reveals the impartial application of labour practices between Blacks and Whites. The financial assistance enables Francois to invest in his future business project, thereby putting him on an unequal pedestal towards sustainable access to creating wealth over his Black

counterparts (Kaba, 2011). These displays carried by the public broadcaster (SABC) have the potential to deprive Black people from being positively represented in society. As such, Black people's illuminant stories and identities may end up being overshadowed because producers tend to choose negative images to depict Black people in skewed ways.

5.4.2 Portrayal of White male character roles

Despite *Skeem Saam's* representation of White male characters in professional roles, their portrayal as law-abiding citizens who engage in ethical business ventures illustrates the producer's preoccupation with Black identity prejudice. For instance, Kobus's character role as a legal representative within a Black community is an illustration of the myth that Black people need constant guidance from White citizens to be law abiding. His superimposing role as well as that of other White characters such as Riaan and Francois diminish the prospects of Black characters to secure dominant occupational roles in the storyline. The depiction concurs with what Gradin (2018) observed about most White people in South Africa, that they hold professional and high paying jobs than Black people. This is despite the fact that the Blacks are closing the educational gap that previously existed between the two races in apartheid South Africa.

The analysis further shows that the depiction of White characters in *Skeem Saam* speaks to the racial myth that maintains that Blacks are irresponsible people as shown when Kobus repetitively bails out Black characters. These superficial White male character roles are presented to sustain the argument that Blacks are generally delinquent, which justifies the need for legal support and guidance from 'lawful' White citizens. This argument ultimately presents White citizens as primary victims of South Africa's criminal social ills perpetuated by the Black citizens (Silber & Geffen, 2009). As such, this form of characterisation of Whiteness does not persuade South Africans to deal with the brutal past scars of systematic racism which existed before the advent of freedom in the country. Instead, the characterisation insinuates racial undertones that have the potential to undermine the constitutional prescripts and democratic principles of the post-apartheid South African society.

The White male character roles in *Skeem Saam* further reinforce the reality that most White people in South Africa continue to benefit from 'White Monopoly Capital' in terms of privileged access to financial and economic investments which has been accumulated over multiple generations (Lloyd, 2018). This kind of portrayal fits into the Race Critical Theory's assumption that media programmes do sustain and perpetuate racism in their storylines and narratives by depicting other races in impotent occupational roles as compared to White characters (Gumede, 2016). These roles of White characters do not feature the qualities of behaviours that the South Africans are supposed to uphold as equal citizens of the highly esteemed rainbow nation. This is problematic as *Skeem Saam* forms part of critical educational and reconstructive programmes meant to unite South Africans across race and creed.

5.4.3 Depiction of Black female character roles

Skeem Saam features Black female characters such as Jacobeth, known as Principal Thobakgale, Charity Ramabu and MaNtuli who are both portrayed as industrious women in their respective roles. Their depiction as adults who are unable to maintain romantic relationships and struggle to take care of their families is demeaning in an African cultural context where personal respect and dignity are usually attached to social values (Idang, 2015). Jacobeth Thobakgale's and Charity Ramabu's roles represent matriarchical stereotypes explicated in terms of controlling images in television programmes such as soap operas (Collins, 1990). Their character roles go against the patriarchal historical narrative which presented Black women as subordinates in most roles in soap operas dating back from the 1930s. However, Jacobeth and Charity's inability to play a part in their children's lives gives an impression that both women give their work responsibilities more time than their families. This then makes Jacobeth a major contributing factor to Elizabeth's school and social challenges as she struggled as a teenager in her early career life as a medical practitioner. Charity also becomes a contributing factor to the social and business challenges that Katlego encounters owing to lack of assistance from his mother. Principal Thobakgale and Charity are depicted as overly aggressive characters. Both characters become irritable to their children and subordinates at work when duties are not performed according to their preference, which makes them to be unapproachable as parents and community leaders. In light of this, Jones and Norwood

(2017) postulate that Black women often respond with aggression when they face daily frustrations and use anger to deal with problems. With regard to the racial issues in the current context of democratic South Africa, Black female character roles entail subtle gender stereotypes which perpetuate the depiction of systematic racism. Therefore, the depiction of 'angry Black women' continues to persist in South African soap operas despite that there is significant need to change the negative narratives about Blacks (Wooten, 2019).

In the same way, MaNtuli's incapability to keep a job gives credence to the exposition made by Clawson (2007) that Blacks are disproportionately represented in stories about poverty which reinforce existing racial stereotypes. Furthermore, the role depicts the myths about low-income Black earners who are likely to live in slums, particularly in the townships where they idle or loaf as unskilled folk. However, the producers also portrayed a positive trait that Black women possess as they are selfless and strive to support their children's academic goals despite their poor financial position. In agreement with this portrayal, Anyiwo, Ward, Fletcher and Rowley (2018) aver that Black women are often depicted as bold, emotionally strong and self-sacrificing beings who lead families successfully through difficult times. Unlike MaNtuli's role, Jacobeth and Charity's conduct goes against Cheer's (2020) findings that Black women have the capability to handle their professional as well as family responsibilities with desirable outcomes. For this reason, the producer attempts to portray MaNtuli effectively demonstrating affection to her household while also continuing to uphold her disciplinarian role to maintain order in the home.

5.4.4 Depiction of White female character roles

The depiction of White female characters in *Skeem Saam* can be summarised through two main characters, namely Candice and Vivian. Their characters display Black-White discrimination in episodes where Mr Riaan constantly encourages his daughter (Vivian) to stay away from a Black character called Katlego. The manner in which Candice takes counsel from her father with regard to conducting business and how to handle her social life relates to connotations of White power. The depiction of this character is in line with what Happer and Philo (2013) explicates about the media, that television programmes

encourage bias, disempowerment and discrimination where White characters are involved. This is owed to the fact that, White character roles in *Skeem Saam* subtly depict racial insinuations deeply ingrained in society to an extent that Black characters are nearly invisible in most storylines. Conversely, some scholars believe that White citizens in South Africa are unaware of the privileges they enjoy in the media through positive representation and in real life (Pimental & Santillanes, 2015). Unfortunately, such privilege continues to preserve the racial inequalities of the past which transpired during the years of apartheid. To a great extent, this may unintentionally influence the discrimination of people of colour in South Africa. Similarly, Vivian is portrayed as a successful business woman who mentors other young White people such as Francois to invest in their business careers. Bearing the above references in mind, it can be argued that, although the critical feminist theory espouses the upliftment of women in society, the portrayal of White female supremacy in *Skeem Saam* comes with theoretical drawbacks since the premise thrives on selective empowerment.

5.5 Theme focalisation in *Skeem Saam*

Theme focalisation entails a broad notion that shapes the narratives, plots and storylines of a soap opera throughout its seasons. Themes are brought on screen through the manner in which characters are grouped together over realistic social aspects such as family, marriage; social security; education as currency of upward mobility; patriarchy; women empowerment and leadership; and challenges of parenting in *Skeem Saam*.

5.5.1 Family, marriage and social security

The findings of the study show that, most soap operas all over the world portray family as a significant institution in the existence of the human race. *Skeem Saam* also emphasises the importance of this social institution through both Black and White characters. However, families and marriages of Black parents are depicted as chaotic where children are unruly and parents become irresponsible. White children as reflected through Candice discussed in Chapter 4 (see section 4.2.1.3) as responsible, successful and supported by their parents socially and financially. Ostensibly this is shown as a reward for obedience among White families as this is not common among Black families. Nonetheless, this

representation demonstrates society's willingness to support young people in their personal and collective endeavours despite the social challenges that families encounter.

As noted in Chapter 4 (see section 4.3.6), *Skeem Saam* focuses on multiple family plots, where marriage issues are often portrayed in complex settings. Black parents are represented in a skewed manner as they seem to be incapable of keeping order in their households. The study found out that Black children are also depicted in a negative manner in *Skeem Saam*, which case is evident in other soap operas such as *7de Laan and Generations* which misrepresent the general behaviour of Black children. Traits of disobedience, unruliness and rebellious behaviour are attached to Black children while White children are portrayed as being respectful and compliant to the rules set by their parents. This is evident both at home and school where teachers expect learners to abide by the rules. As explicated within the Critical Race Theory, both Candice and Francois as White children in their formative years are seen to adhere to the rules of the school as "disciplined children". Moreover, social insecurity is largely problematic to Black characters' families where Bigboy, MaNtuli and Sphola are either not gainfully employed or have erratic jobs which cannot guarantee nor sustain their livelihood. This condition is compounded by absence of family investment, low literacy and lack of life insurance policies owing to the Black characters' occupational roles whose packages do not guarantee such amenities. This feeds into the historical narrative that most Black families will continue to be trapped in the generational poverty circle unless the new democratic government effectively redresses the inequality gap between races in South Africa.

5.5.2 Education as currency to upward mobility

In South Africa, formal education is deemed an important social service, particularly as a means of socio-economic progression to a better life among the formerly disadvantaged Black majority (Mirza, 2006). This is noted when MaNtuli admonishes her children to work hard academically so that they can take care of her financial needs in the future. Despite her demanding work which sees her coming home fatigued, this gesture exemplifies the need to be persistent in one's educational goals as a Black South African. Furthermore, the scene shows the amount of academic and financial pressure that most students receive in their families before and after acquiring professional qualifications and related

skills. To a large extent, education is represented as a transformative mantle that has the potential to redress the racial inequalities which Blacks incurred during the colonial period. This refers to the historic prejudices where the Black race was marginalised from acquiring particular skills and some categories of professional qualifications, due to discriminatory policies (Ratuva, 2013).

The study further found out that the involvement of Black parents in their children's education is meant to enhance the elimination of poverty in the families as the children have the potential to complete their schooling and get jobs, which in turn becomes a form of 'life insurance'. Equally important, *Skeem Saam* reveals through a character like, Zamokuhle that the expectations that Black parents have on their children upon completing their education inspires them to be resilient and work hard to acquire professional skills. This view is in line with studies that note how high expectations and goals set by Black parents for their children assist them to achieve their academic goals (Kumi-Yabaoh, Tsevi & Addai-Munukum, 2017; Butterfield, 2006; Roubeni, Haene, Keatley, Shah & Rasmussen, 2015). This is despite the view that Black parents usually exert unnecessary academic pressure on their children for their (parents') own future benefit in the form of what is informally called *Black tax*. Efforts towards educational attainment further demonstrate parental involvement that takes place in Black communities where adults actively contribute to their children's education, including the girl child who has traditionally been placed on the margins of academic investment (Ntekane, 2018).

5.5.3 Patriarchy, women empowerment and leadership

Patriarchy and gender inequality remain a problem both in reality and on television programmes. In the context of feminist theory, this relates to the manner in which women should be empowered to penetrate the traditionally male-dominated sectors and professions such as medicine and business. *Skeem Saam* portrays women as people with the potential to contribute to the development of communities and those around them in the workplaces. However, the representation of women is clouded by the impression that they are unable to simultaneously lead in dominant careers, take care of themselves and look after their families. The study found out that this representation is solely on Black

characters such as Jacobeth Thobakgale, the industrious School Principal. She leads a school that produces a hundred percent pass rate every year but is unable to maintain a stable marital relationship or dedicate adequate time to her lonely daughter at home.

Male characters such as Magongoa display patriarchal traits as he attempts to overthrow Thobakgale from being the School Principal. Magongoa undermines Thobakgale as he constantly challenges the decisions that Thobakgale makes in the school. Patriarchy is displayed through Magongoa when he does not support Thobakgale in her leadership role. Good judgement and leadership skills are portrayed through female characters such as Candice who co-owns a business with Katlego. Candice makes well informed business decisions as she heeds counsel from her father who gives her financial, business advice and assistance. Candice maintains good relationships with the staff at her restaurant and is able to solve the daily problems that arise in the restaurant. Katlego supports the decisions Candice makes and reassures her that she makes sound business decisions which benefit their business.

5.5.4 Challenges of parenting in *Skeem Saam*

As the storyline of *Skeem Saam* unfolds, the producers have been able to depict the realities that Black parents face as they raise their children in South Africa. However, the depiction of challenges of parenting through Black characters subtly represents the notion of negative racial stereotypes about Black children being unruly and uncontrollable. This case is illustrated through the social institution of the family on issues relating to care, loyalty and discipline which feature predominantly in the soapie. From the initial stages of *Skeem Saam*'s first season in 2011, the soapie featured Thabo Maputla and Zamokuhle being involved in a car accident after they childishly stole John Maputla's car. Although this action was done for fun, unfortunately it resulted in Ben Kunutu's death, thereby depicting how unruly minors can cause trouble in families. Secondly, Meikie and John had a hard time accepting the shame when Thabo impregnated Mapitsi during their high school years. Another depiction of this theme was when Leshole became aggressive at school where he hit his Mathematics teacher, Alfred Magongoa. This caused the Principal and Bigboy to quarrel leading to more tension in the Mabitsela family. The depiction of challenges of parenting particularly among Black characters and not portrayed in both

ances presents a consistent narrative that juvenile delinquency is a problem among people of colour and not the White race. This may further imply that White parents have appropriate parenting practices that enable them to discipline or handle their children's demeanour internally within their families. The narrative is in-line with Maiter and George (2003) who observed that Black parents have various views on effective parenting which are largely against children's laws. Failure to uphold children's rights and to protect them from abuse may lead to strained relationships between the parents and the children (South African Child Act, 2005). In view of *Skeem Saam*, it can be argued that the narrative gives an impression that, most Black parents encounter parenting challenges in their family settings than Whites do.

5.6 Conclusion

In recognition of the role and contribution to social and economic development of society, soap operas remain a significant platform upon which audiences mirror themselves and others. *Skeem Saam's* storyline is a reflection of the prevailing socio-economic and ideological praxis in democratic South Africa. It poignantly reveals the remnants of the apartheid system in the form of spatial segregation that keeps the idea of a rainbow nation elusive. It highlights the extent and devastating consequences of high unemployment, dire poverty and rampant crime patterns which point to dithering transformation trajectories which fall short of changing the plight of the poor. *Skeem Saam* further presents the complex socio-economic and ideological milieu represented through the race discourse and characterisation of roles. This is evident through depiction of the contours of unequal distribution of wealth among South Africans on the basis of colour to sustain the erstwhile patterns of White privilege and superiority. The study has also observed that, both Black males and females are portrayed in negative and inferior roles that confirm racial stereotypes derived from the apartheid context. While the soapie understudy is acknowledged for its reflection of real-life situations, the study argues that its form of scripting and production borders on demeaning Black people's intelligence and prospects for personal and collective development in South Africa. This is particularly applicable to Black women who are currently faced with multiple challenges including embedded patriarchy, single parenting, and the trust deficit experienced in their respective leadership roles.

5.7 Recommendations of the study

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

SABC Commissioning guidelines

There is need for a review of policy guidelines on the SABC's commissioning of independent productions because they have a negative bearing on the mandate of the public broadcaster which means the following need to be taken into consideration. The guidelines should encourage production storylines that attempt to redress South Africa's past oppressive and racist system which viewed Black Africans as an inferior race. Amendments to this policy should make it mandatory for both writers and producers of programming content to be transformative in order to instill social cohesion and unity among all South Africans despite their different races or creed.

Research and theory-based scripting

Most of the current programming at the public broadcaster is based on scripted edutainment content generated by independent producers and this includes soapies such as *Skeem Saam*. Despite the high levels of creativity and innovative packaging involved in the production process of these offerings, this tends to enhance the aesthetic quality of the programmes while ignoring the theoretical or conceptual imperatives. This entails writers, directors, producers as well as other stakeholders in the government's lack of capacity to produce research and theory-based scripts with which to approach sensitive issues such as racism, poverty and the transformation discourse. Therefore, seminars or training in this regard will help in the development and creation of scripts or storylines which are informed by scientific evidence in order to dissuade society from perpetuating racial prejudice in democratic South Africa.

Future research

This study has the limitation that it only covered the representation of racial characterisation based on one particular soapie, namely *Skeem Saam* aired on the public broadcasting service in South Africa. Therefore, it does not claim to uphold any generalisation about any of the themes analysed based on its script. Nonetheless, the findings of the study may serve as an inspiration for further research which may include

a larger sample or a comparative analysis of different soapies to determine their degree of contrast on how racial characterisation of roles unfolds or is represented.

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Appendix A
RESEARCH TOOL

SECTION A

1. Who are the main characters in *Skeem Saam*?

2. Which character roles fit into the scope of the study?

3. What is the detailed description of the main character types understudy?

4. What motivates the choice of the specific characters chosen for the study?

5. How is each character relevant in the examination of the portrayal of white privilege and supremacy in *Skeem Saam*?

6. How many white characters exist in *Skeem Saam* compared to people of colour?

7. What kinds of roles do these characters' play and what is their significance?

8. How dominant are the roles played by white characters when compared with black characters?

9. What does the distribution of roles among black and white characters imply in the context of the South African rainbow nation?

SECTION B

10. Does racialisation of casts influence the characters' social standing and career roles in the soap opera?

11. What are the racial undertones depicted through characterization of roles?

12. How do these depictions confirm white privilege and supremacy in the soap opera?

13. Does *Skeem Saam* follow dominant ideologies or reflect the ethnic tension that exists in South Africa?

14. What kind of language is embedded in the *Skeem Saam* storyline?

15. What are the attitudes of white characters featured towards black characters or communities?

16. What are the main structural themes in *Skeem Saam*?

17. How are narrative themes interconnected through continuous episodes?

18. Do these themes represent the realities of typical South Africans who live in semi-rural places?

19. To what extent do the themes represent black characters in positive light?

SECTION C

20. To what extent are *Skeem Saam* themes interconnected to portray racial relations in South Africa?

21. How are people of colour portrayed on television in South African television?

22. What are elements that portray an unbalanced racial characterisation in *Skeem Saam*?

23. How is white privilege and supremacy portrayed through characters in *Skeem Saam*?

24. What are the indicators of racial stereotypes that exist in *Skeem Saam*?

25. How are these stereotypes depicted in *Skeem Saam*?

26. What are the possible effects of the representation of black characters in the soapie?

27. Which excerpts (objects, images, props and location) are portrayed and mostly associate with black characters than white characters?

Appendix B



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TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
PERMISSION LETTER

Date: 17 June 2020

PROJECT NO: TREC/08/2020 (NE1)

Title: The Portrayal of Racial Characterisation in South African Soap Operas: The Case of Skeem Saam

Researcher: RSL Mathobela

This serves to confirm that the abovementioned study involves secondary use of data and has no ethical implication. After review of the study protocol, the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) hereby grants the researcher permission to proceed with their research.

PROF P MASOKO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**