

**Interpretations of a Contemporary Transgender Representation as Encountered in the  
South African Soap Opera, *Generations: The Legacy* by Ndakane's Rural Audience.**

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## DEDICATION

*In loving memory of my late parents: my mother, Nobongile Thuku, and my father, Lindela Thuku.*

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My dearest friends who have provided me with so much encouragement whenever I was frustrated and discouraged, I thank you so much.

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigates how people from Ndakane, a rural community in the Eastern Cape, interpret a transgender narrative in the soap opera *Generations: The Legacy*. Located within the theoretical framework of cultural studies and drawing on audience reception theories, the study focuses on how Ndakane residents bring their understanding of gender and sexuality, derived from their lived sociocultural experiences, to their decoding of the transgender narrative. The study is contextualised against the backdrop of prevalent hate crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals in South Africa, particularly in rural and township areas, where such violence is reported to be more severe.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on media representation, audience reception, and the role of cultural narratives in shaping societal attitudes toward marginalised identities. The research highlights the significance of media representations of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially in soap operas like *Generations: The Legacy*, in fostering visibility and potentially enhancing acceptance and support for LGBTQ+ communities. By examining the sociocultural factors that influence audience interpretations, the study investigates how the portrayal of a transgender character offers viewers an opportunity to challenge and rethink their preconceived notions of gender and sexuality. Using Stuart Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model, the study analyses the audience's dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading positions when engaging with the transgender narrative.

A qualitative research approach was employed to gather and analyse data. The findings reveal that the interpretation of the transgender storyline among Ndakane residents aligns with Hall's (1980) concept of polysemy, indicating that viewers derived varied meanings from the narrative. While some viewers embraced the storyline as an opportunity to explore new perspectives on gender and sexuality, others adopted negotiated readings. Although these viewers did not entirely align with the ideological stance of the producers, they nonetheless accepted the narrative and its implications to some extent, acknowledging it as an acceptable representation. These findings underline the critical role of media in shaping public discourse on LGBTQ+ issues, especially in culturally conservative spaces. By offering a nuanced exploration of audience interpretations, the study underscores the transformative potential of media to challenge deeply rooted social biases and foster inclusivity in communities that may otherwise remain resistant to change.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### 1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the general background of the study, the research problem, the significance of the study, its purpose, and the general outline of the thesis.

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Historically, South African media representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and gender non-conforming (LGBTQ+) minorities were characterised by severe limitations and negative stereotypes driven by conservative social norms and government censorship (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989; Wasserman & Jacobs, 2003; Reid & Walker, 2005). Media representation is a process of producing, circulating, and interpreting images, signs, and discourses within media texts (Hall, 1997). It encompasses how these representations can shape and influence public perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about specific groups or issues.

During apartheid, the representation of LGBTQ+ people in South African public broadcasting was limited and predominantly negative. The apartheid regime had significant control over broadcasting content and distribution through the Publications Control Board, which censored any material deemed morally or politically subversive (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989). This censorship extended to any representation of LGBTQ+ people who were considered deviant by the laws (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989).

Apartheid in South Africa created various forms of marginalisation for certain groups, including racial, sexual, and economic forms of exclusion. The regime was founded on principles that promoted racial segregation. The Population Registration Act of 1950 required that inhabitants of South Africa be classified and registered by their racial characteristics, while the Group Areas Act of 1950 designated specific areas for different racial groups leading to forced removals and the

creation of racially homogenous areas (Posel, 2001). Black South Africans were exploited through cheap labour practices, while laws such as Pass Laws restricted their movement and economic opportunities (Wolpe, 1972). The regime was also marked by conservative values that were anti-homosexual. The Immorality Act of 1957 was amended in 1969 to include a prohibition of homosexual acts, leading to the persecution of LGBTQ+ people (Gevisser & Cameron, 1994).

Marginalised people in the apartheid heteronormative and racist media landscape were invisible or portrayed negatively. Public broadcasting, controlled by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), promoted heteronormative content that aligned with the conservative and patriarchal values of the apartheid government (Wasserman & Jacobs, 2003). For instance, Tomasselli (1989) writes that *The Villagers*, a drama series that aired from 1976 to 1978, portrayed Black South Africans in subordinate roles, such as servants and labourers, reinforcing the apartheid government's stereotypes. Women in *The Villagers* were portrayed in subordinate roles, including housewives and secretaries, reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes (Tomasselli, 1989). This paternalistic racial portrayal also translated to a lack of visibility for LGBTQ+ people and their issues. This lack of visibility contributed to the marginalisation and isolation of LGBTQ+ individuals (Reid & Walker, 2005).

Similar trends could also be witnessed in Apartheid cinema. Apartheid cinema often depicted marginalised communities (Black people) through negative stereotypes and caricatures, perpetuating racist ideas (Treffry-Goatley, 2010). For example, the 1965 film, *Dingaka*, depicted Black South Africans through a lens of primitivism, often emphasising tribal customs and violence in a way that reinforces the stereotype of Black people as uncivilised (Botha, 2012). The cinema of propaganda, censorship, and oppression catered almost exclusively to the white population, with very few black filmmakers being empowered to participate in cinematic production (Treffry-Goatley, 2011). Specifically, homosexuality had no place in Apartheid cinema. Botha (2013) writes that films had to subscribe to conservative and homophobic norms to do well at the box office.

As such, Apartheid films seldom attempted to explore a national cultural psyche that would include 'other' cultures, genders, sexualities, and demographics (Botha, 2013). LGBTQ+ characters and

storylines across all media were often marginalised or presented in a negative light, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing societal biases (Harris, 2017). Raymond (2003) also argues that LGBTQ+ representations were frequently reduced to one-dimensional characters and defined solely by their sexual orientation or gender identity. An example of this is the 1992 film, *The Good Fascist*, which relied on stereotypical representations of LGBTQ+ people for comedic relief, portraying LGBTQ+ as objects of ridicule rather than fully developed characters (Giliomee & Schlemmer, 1991).

These limited representations have evolved and transformed, although progress has often been slow and uneven. In South Africa, contemporary media platforms, including digital and terrestrial, have represented LGBTQ+ people. For domestic media, this shift would begin with a new constitution in a democratic state that envisioned a progressive society, emphasising equality, multiculturalism, reconciliation, and freedom (Treffry-Goatley, 2010). The *SABC 1* drama series *Yizo Yizo* is known to have paved the way in exploring homosexual themes in its storylines in 2001 through its depiction of Chester, whom a fellow male inmate in prison raped (Gallagher, 2019). Even though this is somewhat credited with having paved the way, it must be noted that this form of representation is inauthentic and does not provide an accurate portrayal of LGBTQ+ people.

Most countries across Africa are still witnessing stagnant progress in terms of LGBTQ+ representation in traditional media. This stagnant growth results from laws that criminalise homosexuality that many African countries still enforce (Amnesty International Report, 2013). An Arcus Foundation report revealed that coverage of LGBTQ+ people ranged from neutral to negative in countries like Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya (Arcus Foundation Report, 2017). For instance, the media in Malawi falls short when reporting on transgender issues. Malawi's transgender representation is consistently the worst, misgendering sources and reinforcing dangerous stereotypes that transgender people are impersonators, performing, deceptive, and fake (Arcus Foundation Report, 2017).

However, the representations of LGBTQ+ people have evolved in other parts of the world, primarily Western countries, reflecting changing societal attitudes and a growing recognition of the LGBTQ+ community's rights and experiences. In America, increases in representations of gay

people in news, television, and movies started in the 1990s – prominently exemplified by Ellen DeGeneres’s coming out on mainstream American television in her portrayal of Ellen Morgen in the ABC-sitcom *Ellen* (Ayoub and Garretson, 2017). Recently, the depictions of LGBTQ+ people have strengthened in popular platforms like *Netflix*, which has produced numerous shows with LGBTQ+ characters and storylines in recent years. One of the most recent LGBTQ+ series is *Pose*, an American drama television series about New York City's ballroom culture, an LGBTQ + subculture in the African-American and Latino communities, throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Framke, 2018).

These representations of LGBTQ+ people in media are deemed necessary as they promote visibility, challenge stereotypes, educate the public, drive social progress, and empower individuals within the LGBTQ+ community (Joyrich, 2014; McLean & Mugo, 2015; Harris, 2017; Bruce, 2018). Harris (2017) has claimed that media can transform how people perceive others while simultaneously validating those it represents. Representations in the media inform our understanding of our lived reality and normalise specific worldviews or ideologies (Fursich, 2010). Even though this is the case, there remains an intolerance for LGBTQ+ people in South Africa, especially in rural communities (Morris, 2017; Makhaye, 2021). LGBTQ+ people in South Africa have endured violence and rejection in various communities, with some hate crimes amounting to gruesome deaths (Makhanye, 2021).

The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) (2021) brings to light that queer-identifying people, with an emphasis on black-femme bodies, are disproportionately the target of violent crimes and open to discrimination in South Africa. Furthermore, this report elucidates that belonging to the LGBTQ+ community is often seen as a clear and problematic defiance of traditionally established gender norms. As such, this outward defiance can be used as an excuse to "punish" LGBTQ+ persons. Notably, Morris (2017) explicates that the forms and severity of punishment have been notably higher for black LGBTQ+ youth living in rural and township communities. One of the recent hate crimes occurred in Ntuzuma Township, KwaZulu Natal, where a proudly gay man, Sphamandla Khoza, was discovered dead with multiple stab wounds in a ditch (Makhanye, 2021).

This research uses this backdrop to form the basis for an inquiry into LGBTQ+ representation in local television through a reception study. The aim is to uncover how people in a certain rural community in the Eastern Cape interpret, conceptualise and understand storylines exploring LGBTQ+ themes. Wandile's storyline in the soap opera *Generations: The Legacy* will be used as a case study for this research. This is to inquire about and perhaps gauge the impact of LGBTQ+ representation on influencing and shaping perceptions in rural communities.

### **1.1.1. The Soap Opera Genre**

This research uses a South African television program that forms part of the soap opera genre as a case study for this research. The soap opera genre originated in the 1930s when the American daytime radio serials dominated. The genre was invented as an advertising vehicle to attract particular audiences to sell their attention to product manufacturers (Allen, 1994). There was no emphasis on the psychological development of the characters in the serials; the protagonists were familiar, and the audience anticipated new events instead of new insights (Czarniawska et al., 2013). They were the first radio serials, popular until World War II, when television replaced most radio functions (Czarniawska et al., 2013).

The main target audiences were women, at times when they were typically limited to domestic duties. The storylines of soap operas were marked by a focus on domestic themes, romance, and everyday struggles of characters (Allen, 1985; Brown, 1994). Burton (2013) writes that their storylines typically involved forbidden sexual liaisons and business relationships, with physical and psychological behaviours that centre on powerful families. Early soap operas also heavily focused on domestic life, romance, and the challenges faced by women, such as managing households, raising children, and managing romantic relationships (Fiske, 1987). For example, *Painted Dreams*, one of the earliest soap operas aired in the early 1930s, centred on the life of an Irish-American widow and her family, focusing on her everyday struggles, relationships, and personal dramas (Brown, 1994).

Since they were primarily centred on women, the daytime serial faced derogatory and reductive criticisms. "Lowbrow culture" is one of the derogatory terms many critics use to describe them.

Czarniawska et al. (2013) argue that part of this critique is that they were seen as pleasurable but not artistic. It has also been claimed that the soap operas presented a feminine narrative form in contrast with the masculine tradition that emphasised goal orientation, pre-established conflict, and a climactic resolution (Czarniawska et al., 2013).

As time went on, after facing many feminist critiques and evolving social attitudes, soap operas evolved. They went from primarily targeting women to include broader demographics such as men and LGBTQ+ people. They began incorporating more action-centred and career-driven storylines to appeal to male audiences. Bowes (2000) writes that soap operas incorporated themes such as business intrigues, crime, and political dramas in storylines to attract male audiences. They also developed more complex male characters integral to the narrative, moving beyond the traditional roles of husbands and fathers (Geraghty, 1991).

There was also an inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters, which marked a significant shift in the genre, a reflection of broader social changes, and a push for diversity. Becker (2006) argues that the storylines began to explore LGBTQ+ relationships, struggles, and triumphs, offering representation that had been previously lacking. The storylines representing LGBTQ+ people often addressed issues such as coming out, discrimination, HIV/AIDS, and same-sex relationships (Gross, 2001). *All My Children*, one of the first soap operas to feature an LGBTQ+ storyline, introduced a character who came out as lesbian in the early 2000s.

Soap operas gained popularity worldwide for their relatable storylines and ability to adapt easily to different cultural contexts. This global appeal led to the production of soap operas in various countries, including South Africa, each incorporating local contexts and societal norms (Hobson, 2003). While the narrative elements of the genre are very similar, soap operas, otherwise known as “soopies” in South Africa, formed a unique role in purposefully writing and producing stories that raise sensitive social issues (Burton, 2013).

Airing on M-Net in 1989, *Egoli: Place of Gold* was the first locally produced soapie by Franz Marx, which revolved around the daily ups, downs, trials, and tribulations of a handful of families in and around Johannesburg (*Egoli: Place of Gold* | TVSA, 2022). As time passed, South African

television witnessed the emergence of other soap operas in the early 1990s. The South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) aired one of its first soapies, *Generations* (now known as *Generations: The Legacy*), on SABC 1 in 1993. The popular soapie has over four million viewers, making it one of the most-watched soap operas in South Africa in recent years (Bambalele, 2022).

Soap writers exploit intertextual codes in searching for new plot twists. The genre's open-ended form and slow progression let producers ease audiences into a narrative (Buckman (1984). Thus, the viewers of these shows are often hooked on the storylines and kept interested to watch how each storyline unravels.

### **1.1.2. LGBTQ+ Programming on SABC**

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is South Africa's public broadcaster, established in 1936. Its mandate is to inform, educate, and entertain the public (SABC online, 2023). Before South Africa became a democratic country, the SABC functioned as a propaganda tool for the apartheid government led by the National Party. As such, the SABC was used to further the goals and interests of the party (Wasserman, 2020). Afrikaans and English, the languages of the ruling minority, were privileged as the national broadcasting languages (Barnett, 1999). The state broadcaster and its programmes thus reflected those audiences, mainly White and Afrikaans (Giffard & Hachten, 1984). During this time, the media was used as an ideological and material technology of separation and division (Barnett, 1999).

However, between 1990 and 1998, a broadcasting reform introduced a diversified form of the broadcaster, providing a space for democratic communication and national unification. In this period, the broadcasting environment was transformed, with changes in programming, diversification of ownership, and expansion of services (Barnett, 1999). In the 1990s, the broadcasting sector was reconfigured around the normative ideal of the electronic media serving as a single public sphere at a national scale, providing space for democratic communication and national unification (Barnett, 1998). Public service broadcasting and its practicability in South Africa were reconceptualised (Teer-Tomaselli, 1998). It was transformed from a state broadcaster under apartheid to a public entity that reports to parliament (Wasserman, 2020).

New programmes would be produced during this period to form part of this transformation mandate. *Generations*, founded by Mfundu Vundla, would be one of the first soap operas to help fulfill the transformation mandate. As Aiseng (2022) argues, these television programmes were produced to transform the apartheid representations associated with black characters as poor, uncivilised, and unprofessional. Before this, apartheid television shows like *The Dingleys* (an early South African television drama from 1977) centred on fictional middle-class, white South African English-speaking families (Alfred, 2016). The drama series only had one black actor, Celia Motsie, who played a servant (Alfred, 2016). Celia's character was removed after she shared a table with white cast members in the SABC's whites-only canteen (Mahajan, 2022).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the SABC went further with its transformation mandates through a change in policies. The new SABC policies reflect nation-building values, diversity, editorial independence, and human dignity. One of the key achievements was introducing an independent and open process to appoint SABC board members with as much popular participation as possible (Phamodi, 2016). Within both policy-making forums and broadcasting institutions in South Africa, understanding of the relations between the media and democracy became tied closely to the rhetoric of nation-building (Barnett, 2004). This core objective was defined by the African National Congress (ANC), a black-led mass liberation movement that claimed leadership power in 1994 (Masenyama, 2005). Mistry (2001) notes that as the new hegemony in the post-apartheid era, the ANC has sought to ensure that all population factions can identify with a new sense of liberation coupled with solidarity, nation formation, and nation-building ideologies.

These policies resulted in a SABC committed to innovative and broadly conceived educational uses of its radio and television services (Barnett, 2004). Regarding its news and current affairs programming and entertainment content, the SABC has an influential role in shaping South African political debates and imaginings of post-apartheid nationhood (Wasserman, 2020). As such, genres such as soap operas have significantly educated and shaped public perception. Knoetze (2018) writes that soap operas often form a substantial part of local productions in a specific country and, as such, become possible contributors to identity formation and the perpetuation of ideologies. The storylines in *Generations* were devised to reflect these mandates

to provide educational, diverse, and entertaining programming that shapes public perception (Knoetze, 2018).

The SABC mandate to perform an educative function is visible in many of *Generations'* storylines. For example, during the 21st season of *Generations* in 2013, the character Khethiwe Dhlomo slides into alcohol addiction to deal with the battles she faces, and this issue would lead to her demise if she does not seek help (Bambalele, 2013). At the end of each episode (during credits), a helpline number and contact information are provided for those seeking help dealing with alcohol abuse.

The SABC 3 soapie, *Isidingo*, had a character with a similar storyline named Frank, who was a drunk and an obstreperous lout who did not have much regard for practicing safe sex due to his alcohol problem (Owen, 2013). It is possible to ascertain Pumla Hopa's intention regarding the addiction storyline. As the *Isidingo* executive producer, she intended to positively influence the SABC 3 soapie viewing community. Underlying this was the hope that families experiencing or those affected by addiction would start having meaningful conversations with Alcoholics Anonymous fellowships near them, which would inspire and encourage individuals affected by addiction to embark on a journey of recovery and healing (Owen, 2013).

LGBTQ+ characters also became visible in soap operas and many South African television soapies and drama series. The SABC 1 drama series *Yizo Yizo* is known to have paved the way for exploring homosexual themes in its storylines (Gallagher, 2019). *Yizo Yizo* is a South African television teen drama series that aired from 1999 to 2004 on SABC. The main objective for *Yizo Yizo* was to create awareness of and stimulate debate about the state of learning and teaching in South African schools and educate youth about crime and violence (Pitout & Ndlovu, 2001). In 2001, it aired a scene where one of the male characters, Chester, was raped by a fellow male inmate in prison. Though not directly depicting homosexuality, it was enough to cause some national controversy. Several Members of Parliament (MPs) even called for it to be banned due to its suggestions of homosexuality (Modisane, 2017). This episode records one of the first instances of the public reception of homosexual storylines in local dramas and soapies.

In 2006, just five days after same-sex marriage became legal in South Africa, *Isidingo* aired an episode showing a marriage between homosexual men, Steve and Luke, where they sealed their on-screen union with a kiss (Gallagher. 2019). The drama series *Society* also had a storyline depicting intimacy between two women in 2007 (Modisane, 2017). These depictions would restart conversations about homosexuality in the context of a maturing “rainbow nation” (Gallagher, 2019).

However, in 2009, almost a decade after the first depiction of LGBTQ+ characters in popular local drama series and soap operas, there were still hostile receptions to homosexual storylines. *Generations* had its first homosexual storyline of Senzo and Jason around this time (2009). This resulted in a public uproar, especially when the homosexual couple shared a kiss on screen (Khumalo, 2015). From these moments of representation, we can note that, since they were happening years apart, they were inconsistent, sparse, and episodic rather than offering substantively diverse normalising representations of LGBTQ+ people.

In addition, these representations were monolithic in that they focused on single traits or stereotypes rather than diverse representations. Many of them, even to this day, focused on stereotypical representations such as gay flamboyant characters and common themes of “coming out” and “conflict” while lacking intersectionality and diversity (Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002; Botha, 2012). These could be witnessed in early representations of LGBTQ+ people in shows such as *Society* in 2006, where a lesbian character named Beth had to deal with the pressure of coming out to her friends (Modisane, 2017).

After almost two decades of these sparse and monolithic representations of LGBTQ+ people, *Generations* introduced a more controversial storyline when rebranded to *Generations: The Legacy* in 2014. The rebranding resulted from some controversies that the soap opera faced. The soap opera experienced a hiatus after terminating the contracts of 16 of the show’s cast members, who went on a strike demanding an increase in salaries (Marshall, 2014). All the episodes containing the old cast would air until October 2014 before an entirely new cast would be hired to form part of the new season (BBC, 2014). The soapie returned in December 2014 with a new name, *Generations: The Legacy*, and a new plot.

## **The Rebranded Soap Opera, *Generations: The Legacy***

This new installment, currently running on SABC 1 at 8 pm on weekdays, is set against the backdrop of the advertising industry in Johannesburg. *Generations: The Legacy* is set in the fictional town of Newtown and primarily revolves around the Phakade family, who own the successful conglomerate Ezweni Communications (SABC, 2023). The show explores various characters' personal and professional lives, highlighting their struggles, ambitions, and relationships. Themes such as love, betrayal, power, and social issues are central to the storyline. The soap opera “celebrates the hopes and dreams of black South Africans who aspire to a better future” (SABC, 2023). These challenges fuel rivalry, blackmail, and betrayal between families, friends, and foes. The popular soapie has over four million viewers, making it one of the most-watched television programmes in South Africa (Jabulani, 2022).

The rebranded version of the soap opera presented a transgender character named Wandile Radebe. This transgender storyline would be different from the homosexual storyline played by Senzo and Jason in the original version of the soap opera. The homosexual plot explored themes of romance and homophobia (Seid, 2014). The transgender plot explored more complex themes like gender identity, gender transitioning, sexual identity, transphobia, and more. Until Wandile’s storyline, South African television programming had not explored a transgender storyline, and Wandile's storyline presented new approaches to understanding gender identity. Wandile's storyline, even though several years old today, presents an interesting case that we can use to inquire about how transgender people, and LGBTQ+ people at large, are perceived by contemporary audiences, including in rural societies today.

Transgender women, also sometimes referred to as trans women, are people who identify as female but were assigned male at birth (Green and Maurer, 2015). Wandile is a male heterosexual character who wants to transition as a transgender woman and then become an activist and a model. Wandile Radebe is introduced as one of three sons of Zola Radebe, a character who gets into a polyandrous marriage with Karabo Moroka and Tau Moroka. In the early episodes of Wandile’s character trajectory, he is known as a heterosexual man whose love interests are heterosexual women. We later learn that secretly, Wandile may be sexually and romantically attracted to gay

men. Wandile's character goes through phases of denial before coming to terms with his sexuality. One of Wandile's first homosexual encounters happens when a gay character named Elam starts showing a love interest in Wandile.

However, Wandile's response to this interest is anger and denial. He lashes out at Elam for expressing his attraction to him. Eventually, Wandile and Elam get into a relationship, and Wandile faces the challenge of "coming out" to his family. Wandile gets tired of pretending to be something he is not and eventually reveals his sexuality, but the reception is not pleasant. As the narrative progresses, Wandile is determined to get in touch with his feminine side. During this time, he becomes violent towards other characters and makes poor decisions that often land him in trouble. After facing many hardships, he then accepts his new gender identity as a transgender woman.

Wandile reveals her transgender identity and finds herself navigating various challenges that limit her ability to achieve her dreams due to her gender identity and sexual orientation, which some fellow characters oppose. Wandile navigates her trajectory amongst other lead characters, including Jack Mabaso, a wealthy and influential businessman with a complex and often villainous personality; Lucy Diale, a clever and resourceful businesswoman who is determined to succeed; Tau Mogale, a charismatic and ambitious businessman who is involved in various intrigues and relationships; and Gog'Flo the matriarch of the Diale family and a robust and wise character, amongst others.

The anecdotal evidence suggests that the audience's reception of Wandile's character was characterised by shock at witnessing that the person who played this character was a cisgender woman (a person whose gender identity corresponds with the female sex designation they were assigned at birth) in real life (Drum Digital, 2022). However, not enough responses are publicly available (e.g., on social media, newspapers, and scholarly materials) to evaluate South Africa's reception of this transgender storyline. Through a reception analysis, this research revisits this particular storyline and examines some of its responses within the rural setting of Ndakane. In the context of ongoing hate crimes against non-heterosexual people LGBTQI+ (unpacked in the next section), a study on the reception of transgender storylines in a South African rural community is a timeous task.

## **1.2. Research problem**

### **1.2.1. Hate Crimes against LGBTQ+ People**

This study is conducted against the oppression and “othering” of LGBTQ+ people in the media. Globally, LGBTQ+ people are harassed, discriminated against, and attacked because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. According to the United Nations (UN), gender-diverse and transgender people worldwide are subjected to violence and discrimination. As recently as 2018, 21 states in the USA passed some restrictions on transgender people, limiting their participation in sports while making it illegal for healthcare professionals to provide healthcare for those under 18 (Allès et al., 2018). Laws banning gender-transition care for minors have been enacted in 20 states; Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Arizona enacted bans before 2023 (Hassan, 2023). Research indicates that homosexuality is legal in 63% of countries worldwide while penalised in 37% with punishments ranging from prison to death (Allès et al., 2018). Certain parts of the world, including Europe and South America, have recognition and protection of LGBTQI+ rights (Allès et al., 2018).

These rights are less comprehensive and protected in other parts of the world, including Africa. For instance, research has indicated that people sexually attracted to the same sex are criminalised in more than two-thirds of African countries (Allès et al., 2018). In 2023, Uganda passed an Anti-Homosexuality Bill, one of Africa's harshest laws. The 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill confirms an existing punishment of life imprisonment for same-sex conduct while increasing it to 10 years for an attempt at same-sex behavior. The bill re-introduces the death penalty for “aggravated homosexuality”- a broad term used in the legislation to describe sex acts committed without consent (Madowo, 2023). This further suggests that African communities are among the least accepting of non-heterosexuality globally (Mushone & Mushuwana, 2021).

The case is substantially different in South Africa. South Africa’s post-apartheid Constitution was the first in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation (Mushone & Mushuwana, 2021). In addition, South Africa was the fifth country in the world, and the only

government in Africa, to legalise same-sex marriage (Mushone & Mushuwana, 2021). Yet, despite South Africa having a democratic constitution holistically inclusive of non-heterosexual rights, there still exists high levels of violence against gender-nonconforming people (Mbwana, 2019). Mbwana (2019:10) writes that,

The gendered dynamics of violence concerning LGBTQIA+ persons in South Africa are based on discriminatory behaviours and attitudes, the idea that homosexuality is un-African, and the perception that these individuals are taking up ‘non-traditional’ gender roles.

These ideals have resulted in hostile - sometimes even fatal - discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people, especially those who occupy rural and township communities.

This research suggests that these forms of discrimination occur against a particular social context of cultural norms and values, to be further discussed in Chapter Two, which reinforces unequal gender and sexual identities. These cultural norms and values reinforce certain social hierarchies and dynamics of interactions and interrelations within traditional institutions, as witnessed in specific rural communities in the Eastern Cape.

### **1.2.2. LGBTQ+ Representation in Media**

This study is also conducted against concerns about the representation of LGBTQ+ people in mass media that may negatively influence how LGBTQ+ people are perceived. Shah and Khurshid (2017) write that television is a social educator that helps to shape social, emotional, and physical development. Thus, television representation of any marginalised group such as women remains essential in contemporary society as it attracts a lot of viewership. Even though South African television dramas and series have had prominent representations of LGBTQ+, it has been argued that most representations of LGBTQ+ people in television today tend towards stereotypical and monolithic representations of non-heterosexual characters (Raymond, 2003; Harris, 2017). McInroy and Craig (2016) argue that there needs to be more diverse representations regarding numerous identity markers.

The cultivation theory perspective provides a framework for understanding the impact of mass media on people's beliefs, ideas, and values (Gerbner, 1998; Mosharafa, 2015; Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018). For many years, mass media has been a secondary source of information with great potential power in establishing and reinforcing value systems and suggesting how people should act in certain situations (Katzman, 1972). Television platforms, for instance, communicate messages through various programming techniques, including news, drama, and soap operas. Programming such as this can determine what to talk about and care about. Most importantly, they have become the primary source of socialisation and everyday information (Gerbner, 1998).

According to Moshorafa (2015), the cultivation theory proposes that the danger of television lies in its ability to shape people's moral values and general beliefs about the world. People with high exposure to television tend to receive more messages from the broadcasts on television. Therefore, they gradually adapt their views and beliefs on issues around them based on these constant messages (Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018). South African television soap operas have portrayed LGBTQ+ characters for over two decades. However, over the years, LGBTQ+ characters and storylines portrayed in television programs have had little evolution or complexity.

Repeated patterns of depictions have had an impact on how LGBTQ+ people are perceived. For instance, a study by Fisher et al. (2007) assessed LGBTQ+ content on American television comparing it with that of heterosexual content. The findings suggested that portrayals or discussions of sexual situations related to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were relatively infrequent, especially compared with the prevalence of sexual content on television associated with heterosexuals (Fisher et al., 2007). Thus, according to cultivation theory, Fisher's study concluded that television viewers were likely to believe that nonheterosexual behaviour is extremely unusual or deviant (Fisher et al. 2007).

Locally, there is some recognition and reporting on LGBTQ+ people in the news. Still, the reporting is often poorly informed, is not frequent, and does not build an understanding of the community (Bradley, 2023). Bradley (2023) writes that LGBTQ+ people are victims of stereotypes and stigmas and have been for centuries. Local television programs have had predominant stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ+ people. For instance, the casting of flamboyant LGBTQ+ characters with shallow storylines in shows like *Black Tax* on *BET* and *The Queen* on *Mzansi Magic*, and the use of queer characters as comic reliefs in shows like *Uzalo*, demonstrates how

South African mainstream television programming repeatedly reproduces one-dimensional portrayals of non-heterosexual people (de Wee, 2020). While representations of feminine-presenting homosexual people may be necessary, relying on one-dimensional portrayals takes away from the diverse identities that exist within the LGBTQ+ community.

### **1.3. Significance of Study**

Increasing research in media reception has focused on homosexual (i.e., gay and lesbian) identities and how these representations have been received by various media audiences (Dhaenens, 2011; Khumalo, 2015). Dhaenens (2011) used a reception study to inquire how television viewers deal with articulations of queer resistance in Flemish contemporary television fiction, and one of the findings regarding gay representation was that participants described gay characters in terms of gender roles and stereotypes (Dhaenens, 2011). Khumalo (2015) investigated how television audiences in Zimbabwe's Bulawayo negotiated the homosexual storyline between Senzo and Jason in *Generations: The Legacy*. Among other things, Khumalo (2015) discovered that television audiences in Bulawayo have an essentialist understanding of homosexuality.

While this growing body of work has provided valuable insights into the reception of homosexual identities in media, there remains a significant gap in research on the reception of transgender identities, particularly within the South African context, more specifically, in rural communities. The focus on homosexual studies often overlooks the unique experiences, challenges, and cultural perceptions surrounding transgender individuals, who face distinct forms of marginalisation and whose representation in media remains comparatively sparse. Transgender characters are relatively rare in mainstream media and when portrayed, they are often played by cisgender actors, which perpetuates harmful stereotypes and erases the authentic experiences of transgender individuals.

Existing scholarship has yet to adequately address how audiences, especially those in rural South African communities, interpret and engage with transgender representations. Rural communities often have distinct social and cultural norms that shape their understanding of gender and sexuality, making these contexts particularly significant for studying the reception of transgender narratives.

By failing to explore these perspectives, the academic discourse risks presenting an incomplete understanding of how LGBTQ+ identities are perceived across diverse social and cultural settings.

This thesis sought to address this knowledge gap by investigating the reception of transgender representations in *Generations: The Legacy* among audiences in Ndakane, a rural community in South Africa. Unlike urban contexts, where exposure to diverse discourses on gender and sexuality may be more prevalent, rural areas often have limited access to such narratives, and societal views may be more conservative. Therefore, this study intended to understand how transgender representations in media are perceived in rural contexts. With this, I aimed to discover the meanings that people from this part of society make from transgender representations within the context of their social realities and lived experiences.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on LGBTQ+ media representation and audience reception by introducing a specific focus on transgender identities, a subject that remains underexplored. Additionally, it highlights the sociocultural factors that influence how rural audiences engage with and interpret media narratives, with the broader aim of informing the development of more nuanced, inclusive, and culturally sensitive portrayals of LGBTQ+ people in local media. Ultimately, this research aspires to provide more actionable insights that may encourage more equitable and accurate representations of transgender individuals in South African media, thereby fostering greater understanding and acceptance of diverse identities across the country.

#### **1.4. Research purpose**

This study investigates how audiences in Ndakane's rural society interpret Wandile Radebe's (Chiedza Mhende) transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy*. This aims to unpack what these interpretations reveal about how LGBTQ+ people are understood in specific rural areas in the Eastern Cape. This research seeks to respond to the following research questions:

1. What reading positions do Ndakane viewers adopt concerning the transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy*?
2. What sociocultural factors shape the meanings they make of this narrative?

3. What do these reading positions reveal about how specific rural Eastern Cape Xhosa audiences understand LGBTQ+ people today?

### **1.5. The general structure of the thesis**

This thesis is arranged into six chapters. The first chapter outlines the background of the study, states the research problem, and sets out the significance of the research. It also states the research purpose and the thesis's general structure.

Chapter Two describes the social context of the study. It explores gender and sexual identity issues within the context of a highly heteronormative and patriarchal society and the role of the media in addressing these issues.

Chapter three focuses on the theoretical framework of the research, citing relevant literature in cultural studies and audience studies.

Chapter Four describes and justifies the research approach and methods employed.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings and analyses data concerning the outlined theories.

Chapter six concludes and summarises the study regarding what has been achieved.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Social Context**

#### **2. Introduction**

This chapter examines the social context of the study. It begins by describing the geographical area of study, Ndakane. It outlines this context's cultural norms and values while examining the gender and sexual dynamics within contemporary gender relations. It analyses sexual norms from a lens of African traditions and beliefs.

#### **2.1. Gender and Sexual Dynamics in Ndakane, Eastern Cape**

##### **2.1.1. Legacy of Missionaries**

Ndakane is a rural community in Nqamakwe, a town in Amatole District Municipality in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The Eastern Cape is the second largest province in the country, covering an area close to 169,000 sqkm (StatsSA, 2023). The Eastern Cape as a province came into existence in 1994. It incorporated areas from the former Xhosa homelands of the Transkei and Ciskei, together with what was previously part of the Cape Province (Hamann and Tuidier, 2012). The central and eastern part of the province is the traditional home of the indigenous Xhosa people. In 1820, this area, known as the Xhosa Kingdom, began to be settled by Europeans who originally came from England and some from Scotland and Ireland, leading to what was known as the Cape Frontier Wars (Hamann and Tuidier, 2012). The final blow of these wars came in 1856 when the 'cattle-killing' led to the starvation and death of thousands of Xhosa people, reducing their number from 105,000 to 37,200 persons within six months (Cawe, 2021).

The British occupation also came with the arrival of missionaries who significantly promoted Christian ideals among Black natives in the Cape. Missionaries arrived in Southern Africa and other British Colonies and began finding new strategies to engage with Natives so they could convert them to Christianity (Maseko, 2017). Tisani (1992) writes that missionary stations were

set in the Cape Colony among *amaXhosa-Gqunukhwebe* to nurture the young church that missionaries established among the Xhosa people. By the middle of the 19th century, the valleys of the Nxuba (Fish), Tyhume, Keiskamal Xesi, and Qonce (Buffalo) Rivers were dotted with Christian centres (*iimishini*, as *amaXhosa*<sup>1</sup> called them) which signalled the dawn of a new era (Tisani, 1992).

One of the most significant impacts of these missionary activities is their contribution to shaping Western patriarchal gender norms amongst Indigenous people. Missionaries imported what was called Euro-Western patriarchy (Tisani, 1992). The prevailing Euro-Christian construction of gender relations indisputably endorsed the power and influence of males (Tisani, 1992). As Maseko (2017) argues, this would mean that Xhosa men would be targeted over women to join and convert to different interpretations of Christianity. This was also due to an overpowering male presence in missionary stations (Tisani, 1992). Although the Euro-Christian was an imported form of patriarchy, it found other forms of patriarchy (indigenous among Africans) already in place (Tisani, 1992). These patriarchal ideals were then promoted through various institutions outside of the church. For instance, schools established a sex-differentiated curriculum, emphasising girls in domestic training rather than academic instruction (Tisani, 1992).

Nqamakwe also became a carrier for these norms, which are predominant today. The village of Nqamakwe was established in 1876 as the seat of a new colonial agent to the *amaMfengu*<sup>2</sup>, refugees from the Mfecane (massive migrations of Nguni peoples from Natal) wars (Britannica, 2017). The British agent opened a school called Blythswood in 1877 on a site located a short distance outside Nqamakwe (Britannica, 2017). It was named Blythswood in honour of Captain MT Blyth, the Government Agent to Fingoland. The school would be central to providing missionary education to Mfengu people. Some rural societies forming part of Nqamakwe would be formulated around this time. One of these communities was Ndakane, which consists of locations such as Hili-hili, Mathafeni, Ncora, Diphini, and Gisi (Mavuso, 2012). They are

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<sup>1</sup> *AmaXhosa* are one of the largest ethnic groups in South Africa. They form part of the Nguni-speaking groups and primarily inhabit the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> *AmaMfengu* are a subgroup within the broader Xhosa people of South Africa. They have a unique history that distinguishes them from other Xhosa clans, primarily due to their origins and the circumstances that led to their intergration into the Xhosa society.

approximately twenty kilometres from the rural town of Nqamakwe in the Amathole District (Mavuso, 2012).

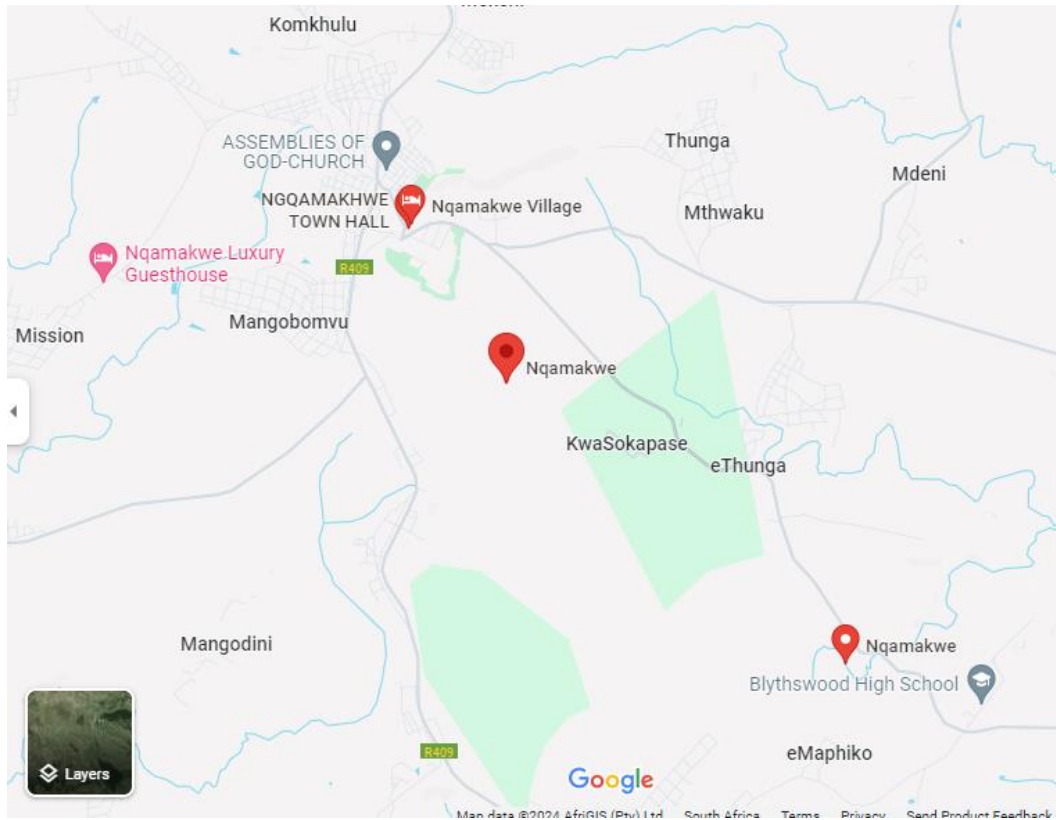


Figure 1: A topographic map of Nqamakwe and a few surrounding rural areas.

Source: Google Maps (2024)

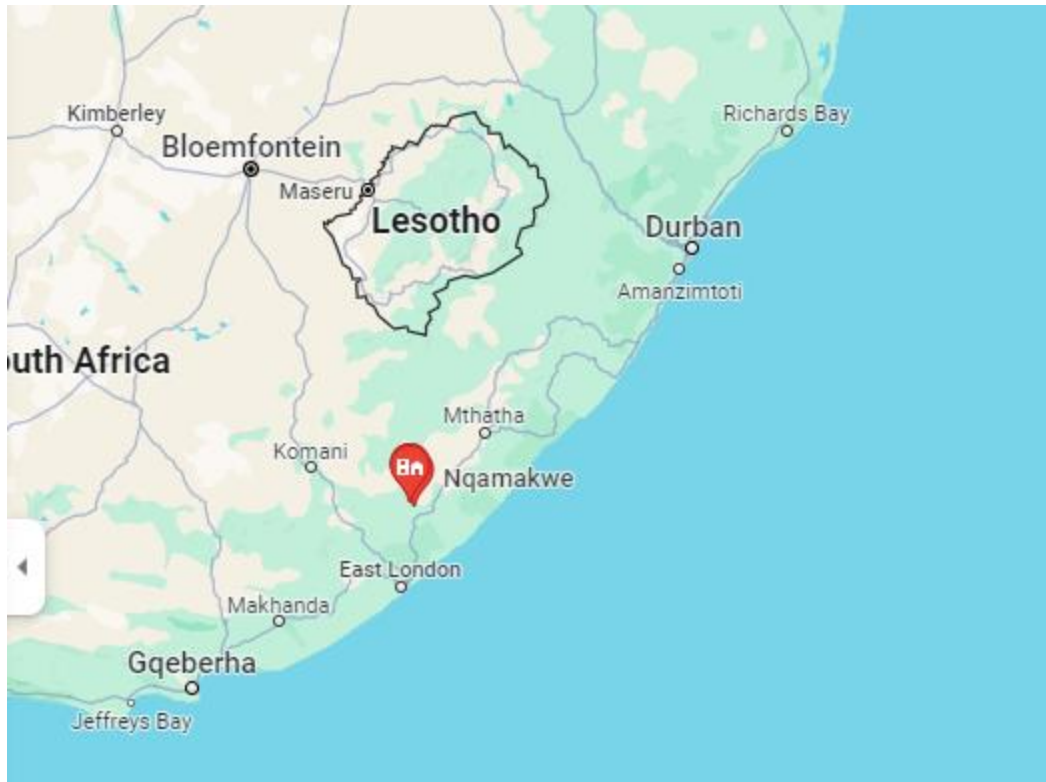


Figure 2: A map showing where Nqamakwe is situated in South Africa.

Source: Google Maps (2024)

Ndakane widely consists of Mfengu people, a Xhosa ethnic group situated in parts of the former Transkei regions of the Eastern Cape (Mtumane, 2017). The Mfengu were receptive from an early date to Christianity and Western education. In the 19th century, many became wealthy peasant farmers, providing some of the first Western-type political leaders among Cape Africans (Britannica, 2017). From the 20th century until now, Mfengu people occupied most of the lands in Nqamakwe, a ‘Bantustan’ they demanded from the British (Britannica, 2017). Today, various cultural and religious-based communities that have existed for centuries and others that are modern and established in recent years surround the Ndakane village. Some Mfengu still follow traditional ways of life, with the men herding cattle and the women raising crops. Other Mfengu, however, are a part of the modern economy, employed as businessmen, civil servants, lawyers, and teachers in large cities (Britannica, 2017).

### 2.2.2. Malume's Experience

To better describe the gender norms that characterise this specific social space and make them meaningful for the reader, I have chosen to share the experiences of *Malume* - a gay-identifying man navigating life in a rural area. His experiences illustrate some of the sexual and gender debates that may arise in the heteronormative social spaces that he occupies. This section identifies some of the gender norms that define certain rural areas in the Eastern Cape by analysing various traditional stakeholders that exist in these populations. These stakeholders consist of people from rural societies who hold multiple positions of authority. The description indicates how they relate and interact with one another from a gender perspective. *Malume's* lived experience of interacting with other gender identities in a rural space exemplifies how gender and sexual identity may impact one's occupation in such a community. Malume is an ordinary person who is older than me. He lives as an openly gay man in one of the rural societies within Nqamakwe. He is essential to this study because he exemplifies some of the dynamics that openly gay men navigate, from my observation, in heteronormative societies.

*Malume (referring to uncle)* is a nickname I use to refer to him instead of his real name to protect his identity. Thus "*Malume*" is to be understood within this context and not that of family. With this, I intend to situate the social context in which this study is located. From a Xhosa cultural perspective, Malume is a man. He has gone through the rite of passage of *Ulwaluko*, a Xhosa word that refers to an initiation ritual to transform boys into men (Magodyo, Andipatin, Jackson, 2016). This ceremony is necessary to establish and assert his manhood culturally. As a rite of passage, *Ulwaluko* admits him to the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of manhood as demanded by Xhosa customary practice. From a cultural perspective, going through the Xhosa initiation practice automatically positions *Malume* as a man who has embraced the cultural codes and beliefs required from a Xhosa man.

Even though Malume has established his manhood culturally, because of his sexual identity, he does not carry the socially revered symbols of manhood. For instance, marriage and establishing a household with a wife and children form part of these beliefs. These socially validated behaviours confirm the person's status as a "man." As Mfecane (2020) also writes, in the Xhosa culture,

"*indoda yindoda ngezenzo zayo, hayi ngokwaluka qha*", meaning to demonstrate one's worth as a man, one has to display symbols consistent with one's worth as a man, not with just circumcision. In this regard, Malume may be deficient since he does not meet other expectations of being a man.

The most important thing to highlight is that *Malume's* sexual identity continues to diminish his ability to interact socially amongst other Xhosa men and thus relate with the heteronormative identifying patriarchs of his community. This can be attributed to the interaction dynamics and interrelation in traditional ceremonies. For this research, interrelation dynamics are hierarchical, systemic, and deeply embedded among members of rural communities, particularly the Ndakane community. The dynamics of social interactions and relationships in Ndakane become visible during traditional gatherings and cultural engagements. For instance, interactions found *ebuhlanti* (Kraal) and *egoqweni* (a collected pile of firewood usually used by women for cooking) are good examples of how gender is linked to structured social interactions and spaces. During traditional ceremonies like *umgidi* (a general term to refer to a celebration or feast marking male circumcision), it is customary for women to occupy *igoqo* (the area of firewood) to perform activities such as cooking and preparing meals for attendees.

In contrast, men occupy *ubuhlanti* to slaughter (a ritual of killing livestock) and handle other traditional masculine duties. This is where Malume would be present, considering that traditionally, he is a man. However, during traditional proceedings in *Ubuhlanti*, one will realise that Malume's voice is minimal and sometimes even non-existent. In specific decision-making moments within the kraal, you would find that his opinion is often skipped while other older men, who are as old as him manhood-wise, are allowed to comment. It is usually not because he has no opinions on a particular matter but because he does not carry the same authority and validity within the traditional sphere. His experiences of being marginalised and a deep understanding of his positionality play an essential role in establishing the dynamics of his interaction and interrelation with the traditional heteronormative patriarchs during ceremonies and gatherings. From a patriarchal standpoint, his role and significance are diminished due to his sexual orientation. We may conclude that he is assumed to be unable to reason and make meaningful contributions during discussions of pertinent issues regarding the conducting of the ceremony.

Thus, specific hierarchical dynamics of interrelation emerge when *Malume* has to engage with heterosexual Xhosa masculinities, and they place him in an inferior position. These gender dynamics also manifest outside the institutions of *ubuhlanti* and *igoqo*. They become prevalent in people's everyday lives and how they relate to one another. In “stallions” (usually, a van/bakkie used as a mode of transport popular in this society), for instance, the person who occupies the front seat will be *ixhego* (an older man in the community) or a man who holds a respectable position like *usibonda welali* (traditional leader) in the community. The same usually does not apply to women.

Women (usually senior women) are only considered for the front seat when no man of importance is available to occupy the front seat. It should be noted that these dynamics are a norm; thus, no active negotiation occurs before these dynamics manifest. This can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of the gender order prevalent in this rural space. This research argues that gender dynamics within this social context discriminate against and discredit subordinated masculinities through tacit everyday social and cultural conventions. These conventions can be traced back to a precolonial and colonial past and remain prevalent in modern societies. These customary understandings will unavoidably inform how audiences understand and interpret various media codes and conventions in these environments.

## **2.2. Homosexuality in Africa**

This research finds it essential to analyse African cultural conventions from a colonial lens to contextualise how such events may have shaped how African societies understand gender and sexuality today. This is also to contextualise the resistance towards homosexuality that may exist in rural and township spaces. Some scholars in postcolonial Africa argue that *Ubungqingili* (homosexuality, as coined by the Xhosa culture) is incompatible with African culture (Dlamini, 2006). Mokhobo (1989), as cited in Dlamini (2006), argued that homosexuality is non-existent in African tradition and that the concept is abhorrent. The claim is that homosexuality is a colonial or “Western import,” as Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni once said.

Scholars have argued that these perceptions are attributable to the legacy of colonialism in African societies (Summers, 1995; Morrell, 1998; Dlamini, 2006). As Morrell (1998) observed, such opinions have to do with what came along with the colonial rule, in particular, the masculinity of British settlers, governors, and missionaries. Colonialism transformed existing masculinities and racialised gender relations, reorganising positions of supremacy and subservience along the lines of colonial racial differences (Morrell, 1998).

Before colonisation, African societies displayed various gender relations, including matrilineality, in which women enjoyed more authority and varied social roles and responsibilities. Matrilineality is a system of social organisation in which descent, inheritance, and kinship are traced through the mother's line (Stone, 2006). Some African societies have historically viewed power and gender roles through matrilineal structures that granted women significant power within their communities (Taiwo, 2010). For example, the Bemba people of Zambia traditionally practiced matrilineality, where the mother's lineage determined inheritance and clan membership, and a man would often live with his wife's family after marriage (Hensen, 1992).

However, the impact of colonialism on African gender relations often imposed patriarchical systems that disrupted existing power structures, marginalising women and reducing their influence in both public and private spheres (Taiwo, 2010). Colonial rule influenced African masculinities with notions of toughness and superiority, which were white forms of hegemonic masculinities (Morrell, 1998). Ratele (2021) notes that the colonised and enslaved men were not regarded as full men, implying they were not quite men in the way the ruling men were regarded as men. Thus, in British colonies like South Africa, masculinity was shaped by the settlers through sets of colonial institutions, such as churches and schools (Morrell, 1998). In this process, settler masculinity became hegemonic, binding white men to a set of gender values that were class and race-specific (Morrell, 1998).

While recognising that colonial features of hegemonic masculinity prevail in African societies today, it is worth noting that African societies were not outside of patriarchy before colonial oppression. For instance, Guy's (2018) arguments that the colonial administration of Shepstone, in Natal, was established through an alliance of patriarchs demonstrates that leading Africans (i.e.,

chiefs) negotiated their claims to political authority with colonisers on common grounds of patriarchy, which strengthened the power of African men over women and subordinated masculinities.

Guy (2018) writes that the nature of African participation in the colonial system was a system founded on a compromise between coloniser and colonised on an accommodation amongst patriarchs. Thus, the colonised, or, more precisely, African masculinities, were not powerless, and patriarchy existed before colonial oppression among African societies (Morrell, 1998). It became evident how these masculinities united and empowered each other to position themselves as dominant socially, culturally, and economically over women and other subordinate masculinities (Guy, 2018). The outcome, as explained through Connell's gender theory (discussed further in Chapter 3), is a single gender that dominates another socially, politically, and economically (Zajdow, 2011).

In post-colonial Africa, these patriarchal norms have become embedded in a customary social system that determines gender and sexual norms. Among Africans who ascribe to such a customary identity, patriarchal legacies have influenced the understanding that homosexuality is un-African and of Western culture (Kiguwa & Siswana, 2018). The National House of Traditional Leaders in South Africa called homosexuality "un-African" and has stated their opposition to same-sex marriage, arguing that same-sex practices are incompatible with "African culture" (Reid, 2010). Livermon (2012:301) argues that African political leaders such as former president Jacob Zuma have also discussed non-heterosexuality, stating that "gays would not have dared to make themselves visible in front of him." Recently, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has referred to homosexual people as "deviations from normal" in support of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill (Madowo, 2023).

Furthermore, Mushone & Mushuwana (2021) note that African communities are profoundly homophobic and unaccepting of gender diversities. There have also been the worst cases of prejudice against homosexual people across South African rural areas due to a lack of recognition and tolerance for sameness (Morris, 2017). A 2016 survey that examined people's attitudes towards non-heterosexual people in South Africa revealed that 72 percent of the total respondents believed

that same-sex relationships are wrong, while 27 percent believed that non-heterosexual people should have the same human rights as all other citizens (Sutherland et al., 2016). LGBTQ+ people in rural areas are discriminated against as they are considered to be deviating from societal values and beliefs (Lee & Quam, 2013). Black homosexual people may be marginalised, assaulted, and rejected for their sexual orientation. Matlebyane (2017) writes that it is apparent that black sexuality is always viewed from a heterosexual lens. After all, in all that is assumed to be black, homosexuality is an undesired identity (Matlebyane, 2017).

However, various scholars have refuted the claim that homosexuality in Africa is a colonial import. Dlamini (2006) argues that homosexuality has existed since ‘traditional Africa,’ condemning the idea that homosexuality is un-African. Firstly, as claimed by Taiwo (2023), the terms ‘pre-colonial,’ ‘traditional Africa,’ and other similar words to describe Africa before colonialism hold a misrepresentation of Africa that obscures and hides true African history. So, the idea that non-heterosexuality is a colonial import often contributes to the views that Africa was simple, homogenous, and uncomplicated (Taiwo, 2023). While precolonial African societies may not have been homophobic, they were at least censorious towards same-sex relationships (Morrell, 1998), suggesting that homosexuality existed in precolonial times and was not a “Western import” (Dlamini, 2006). Morrell (1998) has also argued that colonialism brought Victorian prejudices to bear on dealing with and reporting on matters involving deviant sexual acts, introducing legal sanctions against same-sex relations.

Buckle (2020) also claims that a tomb from as far back as 2400 BC was excavated in Egypt, and two men’s bodies, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, embraced each other as lovers. In accepting same-sex relationships, Egyptians, similar to other civilisations at the time, not only acknowledged a third gender but venerated it (Buckle, 2020). Such findings suggest that before European colonisation, throughout the African continent, there were far different, more relaxed attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity to what we encounter today (Buckle, 2020).

Ironically, rather than an innate intolerance of homosexuality and gender nonconformity, the evidence suggests that homophobia is a colonial import into Africa. De Vos (1996) maintains that colonists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather an intolerant of it, together with

systems of surveillance and the social regulation of its expression. De Vos (1996) also speculates that missionaries were not interested in what was of value to Africans; instead, a common goal was to gentrify African values through primary education by instilling Christian standards of behaviour, including prohibitions against homosexuality (Dlamini, 2006). The impact of imperialism and missionary influence is still visible in contemporary Africa. As argued by Buckle (2020), generations later, many Africans now believe that an anti-homosexual attitude is a part of their culture.

Even though South African television dramas and series have had prominent representations of LGBTQ+, as previously highlighted, it has been argued that most representations of LGBTQ+ people in television today tend to have stereotypical and monolithic representations of LGBTQ+ people (Raymond, 2010; Harris, 2017). Against the above social context, this study seeks to explore the extent to which Wandile's transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy* has provided its audience with an opportunity to interrogate their understanding of gender and sexual diversity, given that the transgender storyline offered a portrayal of queerness that was somewhat different from dominant 'stereotypical,' and previously portrayed non-heterosexual characters in local television programming at that time. This would provide us with a way to measure how the provision of diverse representations of LGBTQ+ identities could help establish effective and relevant ways to redress issues faced by marginalised people.

### **2.3. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the social context of the study to examine the broader social environment in which the research is premised. It has explored the intersection of cultural, historical, and sociological dimensions that shape perceptions of gender and sexuality in South African communities, specifically within the context of Ndakane village. I discussed the geographical area of study to highlight the sociocultural norms pertaining to gender and sexuality. I highlighted *Malume's* experience to exemplify how "unconventional" gender and sexual identities navigate these social environments. I also discussed African cultural conventions from a colonial lens to contextualise how such events have shaped African societies' understanding of gender and sexuality in the post-colonial context.

These discussions highlight how norms within rural contexts inform how individuals like Malume navigate their lives. They also demonstrate how traditional patriarchal norms- reinforced by colonial legacies- continue to structure social interactions, spaces, and hierarchies within rural communities. Furthermore, these norms influence how audiences in this social context decode and interpret media representations of gender and sexual diversity, such as the transgender storyline of Wandile in *Generations: The Legacy*. Thus, by situating this analysis within the unique sociocultural factors of Ndakane, it offers a pathway toward reinforcing South African media as a tool for social change, promoting equity and understanding in a rapidly evolving society.

The next chapter will present the literature review, which evaluates existing research within cultural studies and situates this study within the broader academic discourse.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

#### 3. Introduction

This chapter reviews the scholarship on gender, sexuality, and media representation. I highlight some key concepts in gender studies to understand how gender operates in our culture and society. In doing so, I establish a foundation to understand the social and cultural conditions under which the transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy* has been produced and how it might be received. I then discuss how media representation can be viewed as a tool to resist and deconstruct acceptable or “normal” gender and sexual norms. Lastly, I discuss theories concerning interpreting meaning in media texts by readers within specific socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts.

#### 3.1. Exploring LGBTQ+ Identities, Heteronormativity, and Resistance in South African Contexts

The examination of LGBTQI+ identities must be contextualised within the persistent inequalities among different races, genders, and sexualities in South African society. These inequalities form the foundation of what Judge (2021) describes as "engendered cultures of violence." In these cultures, dominant sexual norms are maintained through the assertion of power over subordinate, gendered bodies (Judge, 2021). These engendered cultures rest on a societal belief system rooted in heteronormativity, a critical pillar of patriarchy.

Heteronormativity perpetuates a sociocultural hierarchy, privileging those who conform to heterosexual ideals over those who do not or cannot (Dhaenens, 2012). Epprecht (2008) argues that the silence and marginalisation of same-sex sexualities are intricately linked to the dominance of heteronormativity and its dependence on restrictive representations of African sexuality.

Heteronormativity reinforces the notion that heterosexuality is the default and normative sexual orientation, thereby marginalising and stigmatising non-heteronormative identities (Foucault, 1976; Robinson, 2016). It functions as a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that positions heterosexuality as natural and superior to other expressions of sexuality (Robinson,

2016). Foucault (1978) contends that sexuality is a social construct historically regulated by institutions such as religion and family, which establish norms influencing how individuals perceive, experience, and express their sexual identities and behaviours (Foucault, 1978).

While much of the scholarship critiques heteronormativity and patriarchy, some authors have explicitly or implicitly defended these systems as natural, necessary, or beneficial. Goldberg (1993) posits that patriarchy is a universal and biologically determined system, an argument that complements Finnis's (1994) defence of heteronormativity through natural law. Finnis (1994) asserts that heterosexual marriage is the only natural and moral context for sexual activity, thereby rendering non-heterosexual relationships morally impermissible. Similarly, Mansfield (2006) defends traditional masculinity and gender roles, arguing that critiques of masculinity undermine natural differences between men and women, which he claims underpin traditional gender roles. Like those of Finnis and Goldberg, Mansfield's stance is rooted in traditionalist, functionalist, and essentialist perspectives on gender and sexuality.

Nonetheless, this research adopts a contrasting position, aligning with feminist, queer, and postmodern critiques of heteronormativity. Foucault's (1978) work on sexuality offers a theoretical framework for analysing these arguments. He frames sexuality as a social construct regulated by institutions like religion and family, and his concept of "biopower" elucidates how societies regulate sexuality to control populations, positioning heterosexuality as the normative standard. This macro-level understanding of heteronormativity highlights its role as a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices.

Queer studies have increasingly scrutinised the nature of heteronormativity as the "standard" for sexuality. Queer theory critiques heteronormativity while advocating for the recognition of diverse gender and sexual identities (Gamson, 2000; Hall, 2003; Watson, 2005). Watson (2005) argues that queer theory examines how categories like "heterosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" became perceived as stable identities, revealing them as fragile constructs reliant on the performance of gender. This approach was foundationally established by Judith Butler's (1993) work on gender, wherein she maintains a stance against using labels to categorise sexuality.

Butler (1993) notes that "queer" was traditionally used as an insult against those adhering to constructed gender norms. While activists and scholars have reclaimed the term, Butler questions its inclusiveness. She suggests that "queer" can serve as a "site of collective contestation," enabling

subordinate masculinities, specifically LGBTQ+ individuals and transgender people, to resist dominant masculinities. From this perspective, representations of LGBTQ+ people on television offer resistance against heteronormativity's regulation of sexuality (Dhaenens, 2012).

### **3.2. Heteronormativity, Patriarchy, and the Intersectionality of Gender and Sexual Identity in South Africa**

The pervasive influence of heteronormativity significantly shapes various aspects of human life, particularly in the normalisation of gender and sexual discrimination through hyper-masculinity. Zaitchik and Mosher (1993) define hyper-masculinity as an extreme form of masculine ideology comprising beliefs that include toughness, violence, dangerousness, and calloused attitudes towards subordinate masculinities. One effect of this ideology is the perpetuation of gender-based violence and hatred toward LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, Gqola (2007) provides a South African lens to this issue, arguing that gender-based violence is deeply embedded in the country's history of patriarchy and violent masculinities. Gqola (2007:115) argues that,

The discourses of gender in the South African public sphere are very conservative in the main: they speak of women's empowerment in ways that are not transformative, and as a consequence, they exist very comfortably alongside overwhelming evidence that South African women are not empowered; the rape and other gender-based violence statistics, the rampant sexual harassment at work and public spaces, the siege on Black lesbians and raging homophobia, the very public and relentless circulation of misogynist imagery, metaphors, and language (Gqola, 2007).

This argument succinctly sets out the context within which women and marginalised (i.e., LGBTQ+ people) groups exist in South Africa today. In South Africa, gender violence continues to be a social and public health concern as well as a human rights issue due to patriarchal values, amongst other things, which perpetuate heteronormative dominance (Meyiwa, Williamson, Ntabanyane, 2017). Since gender identity and sexual orientation intersect, LGBTQ+ individuals may experience unique challenges and discrimination based on the intersection of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, heteronormative dominance presents ongoing challenges related to discrimination, stigma, and unequal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals due to their gender and sexual identities. The challenges can manifest in various forms, including social exclusion, verbal abuse, and institutional discrimination (Herek, 2009).

The history of institutionalised discrimination under apartheid and colonialism forms the backdrop to engendered cultures of violence in South Africa. Judge (2021) argues that South Africa's past is characterised by a regime of categorisation, discrimination, and prejudice. Apartheid, a system of institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination enforced in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s, continues to impact gender and sexual dynamics. Meyiwa et al. (2017) argue that, like most social factors, such as unemployment and poverty, gender inequalities cannot be detached from the apartheid system, which has had an enormous impact on the lives of South African citizens. Under the apartheid state, patriarchy co-existed with colonialism to create a racial and gendered hierarchy that resulted in differentiated employment locations for each group in society (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010).

Colonialism also significantly and complexly impacted gender roles, identities, and relations in the colonised regions. This was made possible through a colonial arrangement referred to as a bifurcated state. According to Mamdani (1996), the social order established under minority rule has survived the political transition in South Africa because the 'bifurcated state' built by colonialism, including apartheid, lives on. The bifurcated state consists of civil society for the elites (citizens) and state-controlled tribalism for the indigenous majority (subjects) (Mamdani, 1996). Central to this inherited state is the patriarchal nature of civil law, where gender power relations are still demarcated along the lines of the gender order (Mamdani, 1996). The bifurcated state rested on the 'dualism of power,' exercised differently in towns and rural areas where traditional male leaders were the assigned rulers (Mamdani, 1996). Such a division enabled colonisers and traditional leaders to assert and sustain patriarchal authority over women through the construction and reinforcement of "customary law" and "traditional authority" (Hodgson, 2001:3-4).

Connell's (2009: 73) constructivist model of the "gender order" explains the dynamics of gender and sexual identity that emerge due to racial classification and social segregation. It also provides insights into how societal structures shape gender relations and sexuality. The gender order model explains "how institutional structures (known as gender regimes) and individual identities intersect to produce the social arrangements that mean one gender can dominate another politically, socially, and economically" (Zajdow, 2011: 258). The model highlights how gender is not an individual attribute but a system of power relations and social structures that shape and reproduce gender

roles, identities, and inequalities (Connell, 2009). Connell (2009) argues that the gender order is not a fixed and universal system but varies across different societies and historical periods.

This gender order persuades the subordinated to accept the dominant ideology as a regular part of experience and consciousness (Lull, 2013). Connell (1995) has argued that the gender order constructs hierarchies of power between dominant and subordinated masculinities through hegemony and emphasised femininity, which has its foundations in heteronormativity. This gender structure influences sexuality, so the social constructions of masculinity and femininity impact sexual norms (Connell, 2002). The intersection of sexuality and gender highlights the interconnected nature of these identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Individuals may experience unique challenges and discrimination based on the intersection of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Crenshaw, 1989).

Understanding the disadvantages of the apartheid regime and colonialism regarding gender and sexual identity requires understanding the intersectional lens. This framework is essential for understanding the unique challenges individuals who navigate multiple dimensions of identity face. Through this, we can realise that apartheid and colonial effects on gender were complex and interconnected with the broader racial discrimination that characterised these eras. Jaga et al. (2017) write that intersectionality refers to the multiple dimensions of difference (e.g., race, sexuality, and gender) that intersect and interact to give rise to distinct forms of injustice and discrimination that shape people's social and material lives. It is helpful as a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning constituting everyday life and the relations central to it (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). The concept has been expanded to include other minority groups (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and people of colour) and social differences such as sexual orientation, nationality, and disability (Jaga et al., 2017).

As a dominant discourse, patriarchy prescribes certain viewpoints of the world that perpetuate the gender order, while those who reject this notion are presumed to be deviant (Boshoff and Prinsloo, 2019). In the African context, patriarchy supports the view that the LGBTQ+ person is a deviant and a colonial import (Dlamini, 2006). Judge (2021:123) argues that “the regime of heterosexuality with which the colonialists were preoccupied remains central to contemporary fiction that heterosexuality is ‘normatively African,’ while homosexuality is ‘deviant and Western.’” This

discourse rejects the queer person as forming part of the “African” citizenry and has led to various forms of oppression against marginalised persons (Livermon, 2012).

These forms of oppression result from gendered violence, which played a formative role in shaping colonial and postcolonial societies (Connell, 2014). Connell (2014:556) writes, "The colonial state was built as a power structure operated by men, based on continuing force." The notions and strategies of colonial domination are used by patriarchy to continue hegemonic dominance over subordinated genders (Kanuha, 2002). Since colonial power has maintained ubiquity in postcolonial states through patriarchy, gender analysis from the global South, therefore, poses the question of diversity and multiplicity of gender forms at the level of the gender order and the dynamic of gender relations on a societal scale (Connell, 2014).

Patriarchal norms can be made visible through poststructuralist and postcolonialist critiques. Both poststructuralism and postcolonialism offer valuable critiques of existing power structures and knowledge systems. For instance, Michel Foucault’s concepts of power and knowledge form part of the critical aspects of poststructuralist critiques. According to Foucault, knowledge is not neutral or separate from power but is deeply embedded in power relations (Leckie, Given, and Buschman, 2010). Those in power can produce and control knowledge, shaping how people understand and perceive reality (Leckie et al., 2010). These approaches are appropriate when considering the media representation of gender and sexuality in postcolonial spaces (Boshoff and Prinsloo, 2019). They reveal the ideological workings and the power relations that the media often normalise but occasionally contest (Boshoff and Prinsloo, 2019). Patriarchal discourses have also been contested in the media to introduce views that challenge the dominant gender order.

### **3.3. LGBTQ+ Resistance in Media**

Resistant discourses offer alternatives to resistant dominant ideologies. LGBTQ+ resistance has emerged in the media as a “site of collective contestation” against dominant gender and sexual norms (Butler, 1993). Thus, representation becomes central to this argument as it is the point of departure for resistant discourses in media to challenge, subvert, and offer alternatives to dominant heteronormative ideologies. Scholars have discussed media representation extensively to critically analyse and interrogate how media shapes our understanding of the world, its impact on social

identities and power structures, and the potential for more inclusive and equitable representations in the media landscape (Hooks, 1996; Hall, 1997).

Representation is one of the concepts within cultural studies that is used in various discourses concerning media studies. Hall (1997) offers a complex and influential framework for analysing how media representations operate and shape meaning. Hall (1997) defines media representation as producing, circulating, and interpreting images, signs, and discourses within media texts. These processes allow us to look at the use of language, signs, and images in various media texts to critically evaluate how they construct meaning (Hall, 1997). Representation is deemed necessary as culture is formed through language and meaning; in this case, language is a symbolic form of representation (Nugroho, 2020). As a system of representation, culture shapes individuals, drawing out and cultivating their potentialities and capacities for speech, action, and creativity, and media culture is involved in these processes (Kellner, 2003).

As a secondary form of socialisation, the mass media contributes significantly to the world around us. The mass media represents ways to understand the world through images, sounds, and writings (Gripsrud, 2017). As argued by Kellner (2003), contemporary media culture provides forms of ideological domination that help to reproduce the current relations of power while also providing resources for the construction of identities and empowerment, resistance, and struggle. As much as this is the case, Hall (1997) has posited that circulating meaning also reveals power disparities. Hall (1997) emphasises that power relations and ideologies deeply influence media representations. Hall (1997) argues that representations can reinforce or challenge dominant discourses and social norms, particularly about race, ethnicity, class, and gender. In the context of LGBTQ+ media texts, it thus allows us to ask critical questions about the role of media in depicting LGBTQ+ people and how it can challenge or reinforce dominant discourses.

Raymond (2003) relates representation to power by arguing that invisibility or lack of representation relates to the powerless. Harris (2017) has claimed that media can transform how people perceive others while simultaneously validating those it represents. This contributes, amongst other things, to a more nuanced understanding of diverse LGBTQ+ experiences and the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people (Harris, 2017). Some research has revealed that specific

populations have had positive attitudinal changes amongst younger people towards LGBTQ+ people due to their exposure to LGBTQ+ representations in media (Ayoub and Garretson, 2016).

In a study by Ayoub and Garretson (2016), they compare earlier generations to younger people to argue that younger people have more positive perceptions of LGBTQ+ people than older generations. They say that younger cohorts are in a unique position (as opposed to earlier generations) to evaluate homosexuality according to several sources of information during their formative years. Not only are they exposed to positive portrayals of LGBTQ+ people and discourse on gay rights through electronic media and film, but they are also generally less exposed to past models of the etiology of homosexuality that stressed sickness, poor mental health, criminality, and poor parenting, which earlier generations were likely exposed to (Ayoub and Garretson, 2016).

However, power structures can negatively impact depictions of the 'powerless.' Spivak (1988) writes about two modes of representation: *vertreten*, which means 'speaking for,' and *darstellen*, which means 'representing.' Spivak (1988) argues that the *vertreten-darstellen* modes of representation reproduce othering, which is embedded in the unequal power relations associated with the Western representation of the 'Other.' On this point, Hooks (1990:155) has also argued that the images of the oppressed subjects are not represented as they are but instead represent the image as "seen through the lens of the oppressor group." Representation operates within a more extensive system of power relations, with dominant groups often controlling and shaping the narratives and images circulating in media and popular culture (Hooks, 2015).

For instance, Craig (2017) has argued that most gay characters represented in South African television tend to be conflated with femininity, while lesbians are associated with masculinity. While this visibility alone may be necessary, some representations recycle one-sided conceptions of LGBTQ+ people while perpetuating certain stereotypes (Ndlovu, 2006). Lack of diverse representation results in young people having fewer role models, negatively impacting identity validation and potentially increasing isolation and alienation (Craig et al., 2017). Good representation is when LGBTQ+ characters can express their sexuality freely and complexly (Harris, 2017). Thus, the focus should be on including diversity in TV programs' casting, production, and writing to allow inclusivity for marginalised people (Craig, 2017).

### **3.4. Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses theories concerning readers' interpretation of meaning in media texts within specific socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts. It analyses the approaches and findings of the leading research traditions in cultural studies that have explored the relationship between the mass media and their audiences. The audience reception and the encoding and decoding theories explain how audiences interpret and make meaning from media texts. These theories emphasise that audiences are active participants in the communication process and that their social, cultural, and individual contexts influence their reception of media messages.

#### **3.4.1. Audience Reception Theory**

As a reception analysis, this dissertation analyses some of the leading media reception theories in cultural studies that have explored the relationship between the mass media and their audiences. The audience reception theory is a form of reader response theory that has explored these relationships. It was developed in the 1970s due to the limitations and problems discovered in the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Models. The U&G theory was developed in early communication research. It aimed to understand how, why, and with what purpose people use the media in their everyday lives (Weiyang, 2015). However, one of its critiques was that its focus on individual motivations and needs did not accurately predict specific media choices (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). Thus, it overlooked how external factors like social context and media availability can shape media use (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972).

On the other hand, audience reception theory is a critical framework examining how audiences interpret and make sense of media messages based on their experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds (Hall, 1980). It considers power, ideology, and the circulation of meaning within a specific context, emphasising the negotiation between texts and readers within specific socio-cultural socio-historical contexts (Hall, 1980; Strelitz, 2000). One of the foundational scholars in reception theory is Stuart Hall. Hall's (1980) work has greatly influenced the understanding of media reception and its implications. Hall first introduced the concept of encoding and decoding in 1973, highlighting that producers encode media messages with intended meanings. At the same time, audiences decode these meanings differently based on their social context and cultural positioning.

### **3.4.2. Encoding/decoding**

Encoding and decoding media messages are fundamental processes in communication studies, focusing on how messages are constructed by senders (encoding) and interpreted by receivers (decoding). This model explores how meaning is negotiated and constructed within a cultural context. These concepts involve transforming information from one representation to another and the subsequent reverse process. Hall's (1980) model offers a theoretical approach to producing, disseminating, and interpreting media messages. This process involves encoding and decoding, which creates "cultures of circulation" important for how media creates and attains meaning (Bodker, 2016).

In the encoding process, media producers construct the message within the situated relations of production and knowledge frameworks that characterise the production structures (Hall, 1980). These production structures draw the message from the other discursive formations within the broader socio-cultural and political dispensation (Hall, 1980). In decoding, media audiences interpret the dominant meanings encoded by media producers. These messages are interpreted differently amongst audiences depending on an individual's cultural background, economic standing, and personal experiences.

Hall (1980) describes three ways audiences can decode the texts circulated by the media producers. There is a dominant reading whereby audiences decode the text exactly as the producer intended, suggesting they share the same cultural and ideological positions (Hall, 1980). Then, there is a negotiated reading where viewers do not necessarily accept the dominant reading but adapt it to fit their beliefs and experiences (Hall, 1980). The audience rejects the producer's message or meaning in the oppositional reading. Hall posits that social inequality, mainly in terms of class position, shapes these reading positions as those who are relatively disempowered vis-a-vis those who control the media are the ones who tend to reject the dominant meanings of the text (Shaw, 2017).

Hall's encoding and decoding model has been used extensively to analyse media reception across various cultural contexts and media forms. According to Schronidler (2016), a reception analysis is a form of audience research that explores the meanings and experiences people produce due to

their contextualised encounters with media products. It is driven by the urge to understand how media texts contribute to forming people's knowledge, identities, values, and beliefs (Schronkler, 2016). Reception analysis helps answer questions about how a particular media is received and makes sense (Jensen, 1988). According to Aminudin (2018), reception analysis understands that contextual factors influence how audiences view or read media, such as films or television shows. Media texts construct reality; speaking to audiences helps understand texts' impact on viewers (Jensen, 1991).

Scholars have embarked on various studies to uncover how various members of societies receive certain narratives of marginalised people through a reception analysis to understand the impact of representations on certain societies (Dhaenens, 2011; Khumalo, 2015). For instance, a reception study by Dhaenens (2011) has shown how television viewers deal with queer resistance in a Flemish contemporary television fiction series. Findings suggest that participants had an essentialist view of gender and sexuality and described gay characters in terms of gender roles and stereotypes (Dhaenens, 2011). Closer to the South African context, Khumalo (2015) investigated how television audiences in Zimbabwe's Bulawayo negotiated the homosexual storyline between Senzo and Jason in *Generations: The Legacy*. Among other things, Khumalo (2015) discovered that television audiences in Bulawayo have an essentialist understanding of homosexuality. This dissertation embarks on a similar study to find out how producers and writers of storylines in *Generations: The Legacy* embed meaning, values, and ideologies into the content they produce. But also how audiences in specific societies interpret LGBTQ+ representations in *Generations: The Legacy*.

However, reception theory has been critiqued for oversimplifying the complexity of audience responses and for assuming a clear separation between producers and audiences (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1996). These critiques reflect the multidimensional nature of reception theory and the ongoing debates within media studies about the role of audiences in shaping meaning. Morley (1980) points out that reception theory emphasises the audience's active role in decoding media messages, which often overlooks the power dynamics and constraints that shape interpretation. Thus, audiences are not always as active or free to interpret as the theory implies (Morley, 1980). Ien Ang (1996) argues that the reception theory can homogenise the audience, treating them as a

unified group rather than recognising the diversity of interpretations and cultural backgrounds within audiences.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed gender literature to acknowledge contextual factors influencing gender relations in postcolonial society. It outlined how colonial and apartheid authorities have contributed to gender disparities and violence. It analysed the literature on the existing debates and research around LGBTQ+ representation. These debates recognise the importance of mass media representation to empower and uplift marginalised people. However, they also uncover how representation may result in harm due to the power dynamics that emerge in representing. This chapter has also examined different approaches and the findings of research traditions focusing on the relationship between the mass media and their audiences. It outlined how scholars have theorised the relationship between media and the society in which they function.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology

#### 4. Introduction

This chapter explains, evaluates, and justifies the methodological approaches used in conducting this research. It will discuss in detail the qualitative approach and the specific techniques used for data collection. It further discusses the sampling procedure, and the modes of data analysis employed. The researcher's role as the moderator and use of the focus group and interview guide are also examined.

#### 4.1. The Qualitative Methodology Approach

This study is an audience reception analysis, part of the qualitative research approaches. Qualitative research is a methodological approach used to explore and understand complex phenomena from the perspective of those experiencing them. Creswell and Poth (2017) argue that such an approach aims to gain a deep understanding of social, cultural, psychological, or behavioral phenomena within their natural contexts. Researchers seek to explore participants' subjective meanings and interpretations, acknowledging context's influence on human experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Qualitative research assumes an interpretive tradition (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Interpretive inquiry can be described as phenomenological, hermeneutical, experiential, and dialectic (Hathaway, 1995). It focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The phenomenologists emphasise that all human beings are involved in creating knowledge about themselves. Interpretive frameworks assume emic perspectives that seek to understand and describe rather than explain human action (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). They presume a naturalist position where the attitudes and behaviours of participants are studied within their natural (as opposed to a laboratory) setting. For instance, in a study by Strelitz (2002) which looks at media consumption and identity formation, the author attends homeland viewing sessions

with homeland students to study the experiences and behaviours of these students in this particular setting.

Researchers involve themselves directly in the setting under study to appreciate organisational phenomena in light of the context in which they occur and from the participants' point of view (Hathaway, 1997). For instance, as a reception analysis, this study will conduct focus group interviews with Ndakane audiences who watch *Generations: The Legacy* to understand the meanings they make of certain representations in this soap opera. Davis (2011) argues that interviews are helpful as a research method for accessing an individual's attitudes and values.

Interpretive research yields knowledge connected to the participant's definition or perspective of the situation (Hathaway, 1997). Thus, interviewing viewers of *Generations: The Legacy* in Ndakane will help me gain perspective on how they understand transgender representations. Bryman (1988) argues that the semi-structured interviewing method is helpful, as it requires the researcher to show minimal guidance and allows considerable latitude for interviewees to express themselves freely.

#### **4.2 Qualitative Reception Analysis**

A reception analysis enables the researcher to understand how media texts inform people's knowledge, identities, values, and beliefs (Jankowski & Jensen, 1991; Schroder, 2003). Reception analysis also helps to answer questions about how a particular media is received and makes sense (Jensen, 1986). It explores the practices, behaviors, and interactions through which audiences engage with media content (Hall, 1980). This may include reading, viewing, sharing, discussing, and appropriating media texts in various contexts. In the digital media age, reception analysis also emphasises the active role of digital and social media environments (Livingstone, 2018). Platforms like *Twitter*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube* have become key sites for audience interaction and interpretation (Jenkins, 2020).

Schroder et al. (2003:147) describe the reception analysis method as “heavily reliant on data about the media product and its consumption.” It interrogates media experiences through the medium of extended talk. It emerged as a response to the limitations of earlier media effects models, such as

the hypodermic needle model, which depicted audiences as passive recipients of media messages, and the uses and gratification theory, which assumes that individuals make rational decisions when selecting media to fulfil their needs, neglecting the unconscious processes that may influence people's consumption of media content (Katz et al., 1973; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). Reception analysis shifted the focus to the active role of audiences in interpreting and making meaning from media texts.

Reception analysis seeks to clarify audience practices and experiences by “getting those involved to verbalise them in a non-natural but open situation of the qualitative research interview, in which informants have considerable power to influence the agenda” (Schroder et al., 2003:147). This allows for complex and nuanced ways in which individuals or groups actively engage with media content and make sense of it based on their experiences, identities, and cultural backgrounds. It investigates how people understand the media they consume and the meanings people produce when interpreting media texts (Pitout, 2007). Central to the analysis is the encoded text and the intricate signifying process of negotiating between these texts and viewers within specific social contexts (Lindlof, 1991; Livingstone, 1998; Pitout, 1998).

According to Aminudin (2018), reception analysis starts with the understanding that contextual factors influence how audiences view or read media, such as films or television shows. These factors may vary based on each individual and their experiences. For instance, social and cultural norms vary amongst people from different societies and socio-cultural backgrounds. Due to these variations, people construct diverse interpretations of specific media texts. For example, a foundational ethnographic study of television audiences in the United Kingdom (UK) conducted by Morley (1980) argued that audience interpretations of media texts are shaped by their social positions, cultural backgrounds, and everyday experiences. Morley (1980) emphasised the importance of contextual understanding of audience decoding practices.

The standard reception analysis methods include interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. These methods enable researchers to collect rich, detailed data on audience interpretations and responses (Livingstone, 2008). As Hall (1997) argues, media representations influence the construction of social reality. They shape how audiences perceive different groups and individuals. Thus, speaking to audiences helps understand the impact of media representations

on viewers (Jensen, 1986). As a reception analysis, this study employs the focus group data collection method to explore how viewers of *Generations: The Legacy* within Ndakane interpret a transgender representation in the soap opera.

### **4.3. Sampling Procedure**

I used a purposive sampling method to identify respondents for this study. This method involves selecting knowledgeable individuals about the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, 2015). I recruited 16 respondents and organised them into three different focus groups. Guest et al. (2017:5) point out that “as few as four individuals in a focus group can render accurate information with a high confidence level if they possess a high degree of knowledge concerning the domain of inquiry.”

Authors such as Sandelowski (1995) argue that sample sizes can range from as few as ten to as many as fifty participants. Tracy (2019) emphasises that sample size should be characterised by richness, depth, and the ability to achieve theoretical saturation rather than statistical representation. Similarly, Subedi (2021) suggests that sample sizes in qualitative research can vary widely, from a single participant to twenty or more, depending on the depth of information required.

These perspectives highlight that there is no one-size-fits-all answer; the key is to ensure that the sample size is sufficient to achieve data saturation and provide rich, detailed data relevant to the research question. As Braun and Clarke (2013) argue, the ideal sample size for qualitative studies is not fixed and should be determined by the specific nuances of each study.

Participants for this research were selected based on their history of viewing *Generations: The Legacy*. All participants were familiar with the programme and Wandile’s storyline, having followed the storylines over the years. A sample size of 16 participants was sufficient to achieve data saturation while avoiding repetitive data. According to Guest et al. (2017), saturation is reached when new information produces little or no change to the codebook.

The aim was to have participants who grew up in Ndakane who watched *Generations: The Legacy* and were familiar with Wandile’s transgender storyline to consolidate homogeneity. All the participants differed in age, gender, and educational level. Even though some participants have had an experience of urban/city life due to various reasons such as getting an education and

employment/seeking employment, some still live in Ndakane and have not had to relocate to urban areas. There was also an age difference between 18 and 45 and a gender difference among participants who identified as either male or female. The participants were conversant in isiXhosa and had an understanding of English, though others could not fluently speak the English language. Though some had not completed school, with some only completing matric, a few others had a tertiary qualification, with some being working professionals.

Explanation of the key characteristics:

**Age:**

**Definition:** The study focuses on individuals within the age bracket of 18 to 45 years. This range includes younger adults with different life experiences.

**Rationale:** By including a wide age range, the study aims to capture a variety of perspectives and experiences related to the television series, ensuring that the findings are comprehensive and reflective of the broader community.

**Educational Background:**

**Definition:** The target population includes individuals with varying levels of educational attainment, ranging from those with primary and secondary education to those with higher education degrees.

**Rationale:** By considering a range of educational backgrounds, the study aims to explore how education influences viewers' understanding and interpretation of the television series.

**Gender:**

**Definition:** The population includes male and female-identifying individuals, ensuring gender representation in the study.

**Rationale:** Including both genders allows the study to examine potential differences in viewing habits, preferences, and interpretations of the series between men and women.

**Familiarity with Generations: The Legacy:**

Definition: Participants are individuals who have watched and are familiar with the television series *Generations: The Legacy*.

**Rationale:** Familiarity with the series is essential for providing informed and relevant responses to the research questions.

By selecting this diverse and representative target population, the study aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of how *Generations: The Legacy* is perceived and its impact on the residents of Ndakane. The inclusion of various demographic factors such as age, culture, education, and gender ensures that the findings are robust and reflective of the community's diversity.

**Table 4.1: Pseudonyms of Respondents in Each Focus Group**

<b>Focus Group 1</b>
Lizi Riro Imani Lee Minqosi
<b>Focus Group 2</b>
Bizizi Nalo Bhele Siya
<b>Focus Group 3</b>
Liqua Khanda Mabhuti Khanda Chuma Nana Sisa

#### **4.4. Data Collection Methods**

##### **4.4.1. Focus group interviewing**

Since a reception analysis is a form of audience research that explores the meanings and experiences people produce due to their contextualised encounters with media products

(Schronder, 2016), employing focus group techniques as one of the data collection methods is highly useful. Macgregor and Morrison (1995) argue that focus groups have long formed an essential tool for media research to understand audience response. Focus groups are compatible with reception analysis because they investigate the social construction of meaning during the decoding process (Morley, 1980; Jensen, 1998). Powell (1996, cited within Gibbs 1997) describes a focus group as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research.

Rabiee (2004:655) writes that it is "...a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are purposive, although not necessarily representative sampling of a specific population, this group being focused on a given topic." I use focus group interviews because, as Davis (2011) also points out, the interactive nature of their practice means that interviewing is a highly flexible, dynamic form of social research. The focus group interviews take a more interactive and conversational route while also gathering various views and debates from respondents. They rely on group interaction based on topics supplied by the researcher (Gibbs, 1997). This type of interview will yield a more diversified array of responses regarding the knowledge and understanding of transgender representation and afford a more extended basis for designing systematic research into the situation (Lewis, 2000).

To run a focus group interview, a group of appropriate and qualified chosen respondents is purposely invited and assembled at a neutral location (Abumere, 2014). Before the focus group discussion, the 16 recruited participants were asked to watch episodes 241, 244, 248, and 254 of season 25 of *Generations: The Legacy*. A brief discussion about the episodes at the start of each interview session was held to ensure that participants had watched the episodes. The episodes aired between July and November 2016. They contain some of the pivotal moments in the trajectory of the transgender character. After watching the episodes, the participants participated in a guided conversation led by the researcher to share their reactions and explore the meanings they made of the storyline. I conducted three focus groups. The first focus group had five participants, the second one had four, and the third had seven participants. All the participants were randomly assigned to certain focus groups based on availability.

The focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom's videotelephony software throughout January 2024. Stewart and Williams (2005) write that virtual focus group interviews or in-depth interviews involve gathering participants in an online space, such as a video conferencing platform, to conduct group interviews remotely. This approach is advantageous when participants are geographically dispersed (Stewart & Williams, 2005). An effort was made to have physical interviews for this thesis. However, constraints beyond the researcher's control, like geographical differences, finances, and conflicting time schedules, prevented a physical focus group discussion. Thus, conducting virtual interviews was an option that most participants were most comfortable with, considering the constraints. Although access to information and communication technologies varies with location and literacy, all people participating in this research had some form of digital device that they could use to attend the session. Mobile data was provided so that participants who did not have an internet connection could attend the sessions.

#### **4.4.2. Qualitative Content Analysis of *Generations: The Legacy***

Qualitative content analysis is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278). Unlike quantitative content analysis, which is deductive and aimed at testing hypotheses, qualitative content analysis is mainly inductive. This approach grounds the examination of topics and themes and the inferences drawn from them within the data (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2005). During the analysis, categories and themes are constructed as researchers identify patterns and connections within the data, leading to the development of overarching themes that capture the essence of the content (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Samples for qualitative content analysis typically consist of purposively selected texts that inform the research questions being investigated (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005).

I employed qualitative content analysis as “a sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002:453). The material analysed consisted of specific episodes of *Generations: The Legacy*. Four archived video episodes aired between October and November 2016 were obtained from the SABC. These episodes, which are episodes 241, 244, 248, and 254 of season 25, explore various topics and

themes from different character trajectories relevant to this research. Extracts containing Wandile's trajectory were purposely selected and transcribed into written text before analysis.

In addition, I utilised structural narrative analysis methods to uncover the underlying structures that shape the transgender narrative. Structural narrative analysis, as defined by Riessman (2008), is a subset of narrative analysis that considers any narrative in parts. This approach is based on the idea that narratives share common elements, such as characters, plot structures, and events, which can be analysed to reveal how stories are constructed and understood (Barthes, 1977). The analysis draws on the works of theorists such as Propp (1963) and Todorov (1977), who explored the deep structures of narratives and their functions.

Propp (1968) identified that the narrative structure of folktales could be organised as a quest, involving either a hero/villain quest where the hero defeats the villain and "rescues the princess," or a "victim hero" journey of self-discovery, encountering the villain and a series of setbacks before "ascending the throne." Propp also described the roles of a "donor" who prepares the hero and gives them a "magical object," and a "helper" who assists, rescues, and guides the hero. These character types or "spheres of action" are associated with specific functions within the narrative (Propp, 1968).

Todorov's narrative structure, on the other hand, provides a framework for analysing transformation within narratives. It emphasises how stories move from one state of equilibrium to another through disruption and resolution (Prinsloo, 2017). Todorov (1971) describes the narrative as a five-step causal transformation:

1. The state of equilibrium, which implies harmony or order.
2. The disruption of equilibrium, where the equilibrium is disrupted by some action, which can be initiated by a person, group of people, or a creature.
3. The recognition of the disruption, where characters become aware of the disruption and the need to restore order.
4. The attempt to restore order or deal with the disruption and its effects.
5. The restoration of the disequilibrium, marking a new state of equilibrium.

Thus, Propp's (1968) and Todorov's (1971) syntagmatic narrative models are valuable tools for dissecting and understanding the structure of the transgender narrative in *Generations: The Legacy* and how the function of each role helps drive the narrative.

#### **4.5. Data Analysis**

The data generated from the focus group interviews are words used by the discussants during the recorded interview sessions. The recorded discussions were then transcribed for analysis. Adjotey, Saragih, and Ridwan (2021) argued that the interview transcripts may provide relevant units for analysis. Unlike the deductive approach, which involves using pre-existing categories or theories to guide the analysis, I use the inductive approach, which allows themes and patterns to emerge from the data without predefined categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The focus is on the discourse of the respondents about their interpretations of specific representations in media content. A coding schema for delineating the 'meaning units' may help analyse the interview transcripts (Adjotey et al., 2021).

As Lederman (1990) argued, content analysis categories are one of the most reliable data analysis methods. The best way to illustrate these categories is to use citations from focus group interviews (Lederman, 1990). Approaches similar to Lederman's analytical approaches were adopted for this research. Lederman (1990) mentions various techniques for analysing data from focus group interviews. One approach is to code the data into predetermined categories; another is to interpret the data through some intensive analytic technique. The goal is to identify patterns and connections within the data, leading to the development of overarching themes that capture the essence of the content (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

In the study of Ndakane people's perceptions, the focus group interviews yielded preliminary data about their interpretations of transgender representations in *Generations: The Legacy*. After the interviews, the recordings were reviewed and analysed. The interviewer listened to each recording and created transcripts for each interview. Codes were systematically generated from the transcripts, and information was categorised to unveil underlying meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coded responses were used as an organising frame to report the information generated by the interviews; and to classify responses to summarise them (Lederman, 1990).

#### **4.6. Ethical considerations**

The Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC) granted ethical clearance for this study. The approval number for the research is 2023-5558-8245. In a qualitative study, ethical considerations hold particular significance due to the in-depth and often personal nature of the research process. Arifin (2018) underscores that ethics in qualitative research are primarily centred on procedural issues, with the principle of informed consent being paramount (Ali and Kelly, 2004). According to Bless et al. (2013), research ethics play a crucial role in preventing research abuses and aiding researchers in comprehending their responsibilities as ethical scholars. They stress that ethics emphasise the humane and sensitive treatment of research participants. Ali and Kelly (2004) further assert that researchers must balance the imposition of research on individuals with the overall benefit of advancing knowledge for societal improvement.

Warusznski (2002:152) notes that “the relationship and intimacy that is established between the researchers and participants in qualitative studies can raise various ethical concerns...” Consequently, researchers often face numerous ethical dilemmas, including respecting privacy, establishing honest and open interactions, and avoiding misinterpretations (Warusznski, 2002:152).

In recognition of these challenges, this study adheres to stringent ethical guidelines to prevent harm and ensure the integrity of the research process. To minimise potential harm, I created a safe environment for exchanging thoughts and opinions during discussions, ensuring that all participants' views were respected.

During the interviews, I made it clear to participants that they were not obliged to engage in any line of questioning that caused them discomfort. They were informed that the interview could be paused or stopped at any point if they felt overwhelmed. Additionally, participants were instructed to privately message me in the Zoom chat box if they felt uncomfortable at any time during the discussion. This approach ensured that participants were comfortable with the questions and felt secure in participating. Those who were uncomfortable with specific questions chose not to engage yet remained interested in contributing to other parts of the discussion.

Arifin (2018) also highlights that informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality are key ethical issues that researchers must consider. This study took the necessary steps to thoroughly inform participants about the aims and objectives of the research, allowing them to make an informed decision about whether to participate (Arifin, 2018). Participants were provided with comprehensive information and the freedom to choose their level of involvement.

To protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants, their names were not disclosed during data collection, analysis, or in the reporting of the study's findings. Pseudonyms were used to present the results, ensuring that individual identities were safeguarded. This study recognises the importance of these ethical considerations, as noted by Orb et al. (2001), and remains vigilant about the ethical implications of involving people in research.

In summary, this study's adherence to ethical guidelines ensures the humane treatment of participants and the integrity of the research process. By prioritising informed consent, voluntary participation, and the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, the study upholds the highest ethical standards and contributes to the responsible conduct of qualitative research.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The chapter focused on the research design of the study. The study employs qualitative research methods. The chapter discussed the data collection methods, including thematic content analysis and focus group discussions to facilitate data analysis and the write-up of findings. It also addressed the sampling procedure undertaken to recruit the participants for the research. The chapter also outlined that ethical clearance, which ensured that this research adhered to ethical guidelines, was granted by the RU-HREC.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion of Findings

#### 5. Introduction

This chapter summarises primary data obtained through semi-structured focus group interviews. The analysis is informed by theoretical considerations that align with the study's objectives and validated by interview data. A qualitative thematic/content analysis of four episodes of the soap opera under consideration is presented to highlight the main themes of the soapie, particularly its choices of transgender representation. Foucault's (1980) concept of discourse will be used to examine the positioning of the transgender character concerning dominant gender norms in soap operas. Propp's (1968) and Todorov's (1971) syntagmatic narrative approaches will be used to explore the sequential arrangement of Wandile's transgender storyline. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model will help provide insight into how the viewers interpret transgender storyline in the soap opera.

This chapter has four main sections. In the first section, I discuss the central themes that emerged from analysing the transgender storyline. I then provide an overview of the general TV consumption habits of the people of Ndakane, emphasising the main attractions of the shows they watch. The third section discusses factors contributing to the attraction to *Generations: The Legacy*. At the same time, the fourth evaluates the respondents' readings and the socio-cultural influences of those readings.

#### 5.1 Analysis of the Transgender Representation in *Generations: The Legacy*

The broader context within which Wandile is portrayed is in the vibrant city of Johannesburg, where a diverse cast of characters navigate the complexities of urban life, each with their dreams, desires, conflicts, and secrets. Central to the plot are three families: the Morokas, the Diales, the Mabasos and the Phakades. These families are powerful dynasties with intertwined destinies and are often involved in rivalries amongst each other. *Generations: The Legacy* explores themes such

as class, identity, and social justice through these families and other supporting characters. Thus, Wandile Radebe's transgender character forms part of the storylines that drive the themes that the programme explores.

Wadile's transgender character is portrayed by an actress named Chi Mhende. As described in earlier chapters, a transgender storyline had not been explored in South Africa on public television before Wandile's storyline appeared. Its introduction brought about new ways to view and understand sexual and gender identity compared to previously explore homosexual storylines. In an interview with *Mamba Online*, the writer of the storyline, Fezekile Cokile, expressed the importance of portraying the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community to help the greater audience understand its diversity (Ntsabo, 2019). Cokile explains that:

It is essential [to include LGBTQ+ characters in my writing], especially as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, because I share experiences with them. It also helps the greater audience understand how diverse the community is. I think we should have more of those characters to also shift from the typical narrative of the gay – sometimes closeted – character. It really does help show how diverse the community is.

It should be noted that the producer's intention with the storyline is to promote diverse representations of LGBTQ+ people in media. As mentioned in earlier chapters, representations of LGBTQ+ people tend to be monolithic; thus, storylines such as the transgender storyline on *Generations: The Legacy* are attempts at addressing these concerns.

The textual analysis of the episodes examines the positioning of the transgender character concerning dominant gender norms. Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse posits that no discourse exists in isolation; while a discourse may be dominant or hegemonic, there is always an opposing one in circulation. Relevant to this analysis, Foucault (1972) notes that power and knowledge are intertwined and that discourses are mechanisms through which power is exercised. The transgender narrative we encounter in *Generations: The Legacy* exemplifies how dominant discourses in South Africa (e.g., heteronormativity) operate and how subjects are formed.

*Wandile's Gender Discovery: An Optimistic and Cheerful Disposition (episode 241)*

Set in Alexandra (Alex) township in Johannesburg, we witness an optimistic start to the protagonist's journey. We first meet Wandile Radebe, a young homosexual man, as he begins to rebuild his life after escaping home and facing homelessness. Wandile escaped home as a result of his father, Zola Radebe, who was intolerant of his sexuality. The protagonist (victim hero in Propp's terms) is welcomed into the Diale family's home, a starting point for Wandile's journey to independence. In this episode, we are introduced to a scene with Wandile in the kitchen of the Diale family preparing food with Lucy. Lucy is an ambitious businesswoman of the Diale family who owns a *shebeen* (A South African slang for local bars and taverns where mostly working-class urban males unwind and socialise) and is often involved in disreputable business dealings. At this stage of the narrative, she is Wandile's helper because she, along with the Diale family, has rescued Wandile from homelessness.

Also present in the scene is GogFlo, the family's matriarch and a Christian woman who often preaches the word of God. She is frequently portrayed as the voice of reason during conflict or crisis, bringing stability and unity to the Diale household. GogFlo and Lucy act as helpers to Wandile at this stage as they provide the hero (Wandile) with a place to stay and a job at the shebeen. This way, Wandile feels more optimistic about the future and is happy to be accepted by the Diales as he articulates, "*I feel closer to you guys [the Diales] than with my own family.*" In Todorov's terms, this peaceful domestic scene establishes the initial equilibrium for Wandile's narrative.

Wandile's gender framing at this point of equilibrium is that of a typical man; his clothing acts as a form of narrative code to emphasise this. The narrative codes of clothing become central to the narrative as they develop, as they contribute towards disrupting the equilibrium later on. In this episode, Wandile is wearing a grey casual shirt over a green t-shirt with a baggy pair of black jeans and a chain necklace around his neck. He has dreadlocks neatly tied up on his head. He helps GogFlo prepare dinner by peeling carrots on the table.



*Figure 3: Wandile peeling carrots in the Diale kitchen with Lucy (behind Wandile) and GogFlo at the table next to Wandile.*

Even though Wandile identifies as homosexual, his clothes do not stereotypically categorise him as gay. Most media representations of gay people witnessed in South African television show effeminate qualities through dress (feminine), grooming, and exaggerated gestures, among other things (Rahman and Jackson, 2010). However, Wandile's are that of a typical 'man' who acts in an unassuming manner. It may be argued that these narrative codes are not controversial to avoid disruption. Wandile's depiction concerning his physical appearance follows the norms of what a typical man should look like, which are primarily heteronormative. Thus, it does not warrant a reaction from dominant gender norms in the narrative.

Wandile's narrative moves on to hint that his gender identity might differ from the gender he was assigned at birth. The first hint comes from Wandile's sudden confusion about his gender identity. In Todorov's terms, this would be an event that disrupts the equilibrium. This constitutes the primary disruption in Wandile's storyline that introduces a problem or conflict that needs to be

addressed (Cobley, 2005). This narrative occurs at Dr. Watson's office. Dr. Watson is the show's mental healthcare professional in the hospital setting. She serves as Wandile's therapist. Dr. Watson is a white woman who appears to be middle-aged. She presents an intellectual demeanour as someone who can guide the issues offered to her. The eyeglasses she wears somewhat elevate this persona of an earnest person.

Dr Watson is the helper and donor of the victim hero in the narrative. She is pivotal in the victim hero's journey as she provides support, advice, or aid in overcoming obstacles. The helper's actions facilitate the hero's progress (Dundes, 1997). In this scene, Wandile arrives in distress at Dr Watson's office without setting an appointment. It is revealed that Wandile had taken some illegal drugs that made him "*see things*," and that is the reason for his visit. Wandile confesses to Dr Watson that he took drugs to suppress feeling like a woman. The drugs instead did the opposite; they made him see the "*real him*" and, for the first time, felt like his authentic true self. When Dr Watson asks about those feelings, Wandile articulates in a panicked voice, "*I feel... I know that I am a woman.*"

It is depicted in the therapy sessions how the privileging of certain gender norms affects Wandile's ability to come to terms with his feelings and reveal to others his true self. As someone raised in a heteronormative household under his father's unwavering beliefs in traditional gender norms and relations, Wandile reveals to Dr Watson that he fears judgement and scrutiny from his family. This fear applies especially to his father, who is already not accepting of his sexuality as a gay man. In Propp's model, Wandile's father would be understood as one of the narrative's villains. Through this, we become aware that the power that Wandile is subject to is that of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is defined as the presumption and privilege of gender conformity, heterosexuality, and nuclear families over all other "deviant" forms of gender expression, sexuality, and families (Oswald et al., 2009).

It can be argued that Wandile's battle with self-acceptance, as depicted in the scene with Dr Watson, results from the struggle for ascendancy between opposed gender ideologies. Foucault (1980) argues that knowledge production is always an exercise of power, and power relations continually shape what is accepted as knowledge. Due to power dynamics between gender ideals,

Wandile is not freely able to express himself and his feelings because the more powerful gender ideology controls what is “normal.” However, as a result of therapy, Wandile can navigate those constraints. Seeking counselling to understand his feelings, Wandile finally comes to terms with the fact that he might be a transgender woman.

It may also be noted that the therapy sessions that Wandile attends become pivotal in his journey as they influence most of the decisions he makes going forward, and Dr Watson is both a Helper and a Donor. The narrative emphasises that counselling/therapy is vital for people going through a change of gender to assist those seeking to transition to make informed decisions. During the session with Dr Watson, Wandile makes a breakthrough, *“I think that I am...I know that I am transgender.”* Wandile accepts for the first time that he is transgender and wants to commit to living as a transgender woman. As a result, Wandile’s pronouns become “she” instead of “he” and would like to be addressed as such. Following this, it is revealed to Wandile that people seeking to transition usually choose between three options: the first one is a minor transition, which is to dress as the opposite sex; the second one is taking hormones to promote the change; and the third one is a surgical change. If Wandile were to choose one of these options, it would be a way that Wandile’s narrative presents its opposition to the dominant discourse of heteronormativity.

Dr. Watson’s role as a Helper to the protagonist is further emphasised in guiding Wandile to the next steps of his journey. Wandile is adamant about going for the surgical change to transition to a woman and is impatient about it. However, Dr Watson warns Wandile that transitioning is a long process. *“It involves many risks; it is not a decision that can be rushed. Once done, there is no going back,”* says Dr Watson. Before Wandile can transition, he must go through RLE (Real Life Experience), which is to commit to living as a woman before he can be prescribed hormones or even go through the surgical transition. This is a representation of the complex barriers that transgender people face before they can achieve success with transitioning. The counselling that Wandile receives helps him navigate some of the most difficult choices he has to make about his life while receiving the necessary assistance to navigate these decisions. It is plausible to infer that, through this storyline, the program’s producers are attempting to educate the viewership on the importance of accessing and effectively using these services.

Wandile's narrative in episode 241 ends at stage two of Todorov's five-stage narrative structure. Even though Wandile has made a breakthrough with his gender identity, it has not been revealed to other characters. We have not witnessed other characters' reactions towards Wandile's revelations at this narrative stage. Thus, the following episodes will reveal how the narrative progresses to other stages once Wandile reveals to other characters that he wants to identify and live as a transgender woman.

However, the program's approach to therapy and therapists represents the systemic barriers and cultural factors that affect the perception of therapy between people from different racial backgrounds. Historically, there have been perceptions that counselling is meant for white people (Office of Minority Health, 2018). Several factors, including accessibility issues, cultural attitudes towards mental health, and economic barriers, have contributed to how people of certain race groups view therapy (Cited at Office of Minority Health, 2018). Shidhaye & Lund (2016) have also argued that in South Africa, the mental health workforce is not fully representative of the country's diverse population. Thus, the program's choice to have a white woman provide mental health services to a black person may be deep-rooted in these factors, which reflect broader socio-economic and historical inequalities.

In summation, episode 241 portrays Wandile's battle with the acceptance of self, which may be influenced by a wider heteronormal social plot that Wandile must navigate. Wandile's values as a man in this setting are challenged, and we witness that through the counselling he seeks. As much as this is a challenge to the self, we can argue that it would become a challenge to the broader social setting of *Generations: The Legacy* and ultimately to the soap opera's audiences. By introducing a subordinated gender identity, the soap opera delves into gender diversity in a way that would disrupt dominant gender norms.

#### *Wandile's Confession: A Second Disruption (episode 244)*

Following the visit to Dr Watson, Wandile was left with difficult decisions to make to begin his journey as a transgender woman. At this point, Wandile is certain of the decision to be a transgender woman and is advised by Dr Watson to seek a support system by confessing to a close

family member, and that includes changing his pronouns from ‘him’ to ‘her’. In the first scene of episode 244, Wandile is at work at the shebeen and starts making a phone call to one of her relatives in an attempt to confess. Wandile nervously articulates in the voicemail that she is “making some personal changes” in her life. However, Wandile is reluctant to admit everything and hesitates, only saying, “*I have discovered that I am...I...that family is important to me*”.

Even though Wandile cannot bring herself to confess to any of her family members, there is at least one person he is comfortable sharing her secret with outside of Dr Watson. Elam, another helper and donor to the protagonist, is Wandile’s friend and former boyfriend. Elam enters the scene after Wandile ends the call with the family relative to check on how Wandile is holding up. Elam is aware that Wandile has been struggling with her gender identity. Wandile eagerly reveals, in a soft voice, to Elam that she has been seeing a therapist and has committed to living as a woman. Elam advises Wandile to confess to the Diale family since he stays with them. Elam also fears that what Wandile is about to do “*will bring out the worst in people.*” Thus, she needs all the support she can get.

Through these interactions, the idea of confession is fostered in Wandile. Foucault (1978, cited in Carr, 2013) argued that confession is a ritual discourse central to making the modern, Western subject. Foucault (1978, as cited in Carr, 2013) argues that confession is a power mechanism because it produces knowledge about individuals, which can be used to control and govern them. By confessing, individuals reveal their innermost secrets and subject themselves to the authority and judgement of the confessor (Carr, 2013). Thus, it can be argued that Wandile’s pressure to confess exemplifies this notion of confession where ‘truth’ is produced and validated by those in positions of power, reinforcing existing power structures.

We then arrive at the scene where Wandile confesses. This provokes a second, more public disruption to the narrative’s equilibrium. Wandile sceptically enters the door of the Diale kitchen with fear and hesitation. She still wears her regular masculine-affirming clothes: an oversized blue shirt and black pants. All the family members are preparing supper in the kitchen of the Diale family in Alex. Everyone is in high spirits and does not anticipate what Wandile will confess. The family comprises five members, including Lucy Diale, who runs the tavern alongside her brother,

Cosmo. They are both ambitious business people and often involved in disreputable business dealings. Lucy has a daughter named Namhla, considered the most intelligent and open-minded in the family, completing a tertiary degree. Then there is Lesedi, the youngest and immature in the family. Lastly, there's Gog'Flo.

Gog'Flo notices Wandile standing quietly by the door and asks her to come in. She then asked her what she wanted to share with the family. Everyone in the kitchen immediately becomes curious about what is so crucial that Wandile requests a meeting to share. It becomes clear that Wandile is anxious and sceptical of revealing from his stuttered words. And then, after much contemplation, Wandile makes the brave decision to tell the Diales. "*I am a transgender woman*" are the words that Wandile utters before everyone in the kitchen erupts into responses of varied feelings and confusion. This revelation positions Wandile as a subject open to judgement and scrutiny from the authority, in other words, the Diales whose beliefs are rooted in heteronormative ideals.

The various responses from the family members reveal the positioning of transgender identity concerning heteronormative ideologies in the narrative. Some of the notable responses from Lucy, Gog'Flo, and Cosmo suggest that some of the Diales turn into Wandile's villains in the narrative. Lucy's first response to Wandile's confession is sarcastic laughter, followed by "*You amaze me, Wandile,*" emphasising her disbelief. Lesedi immediately asks what a transgender person is, and Lucy responds that it is '*isitabane*'. The response provided by Lucy to this question portrays signs of ignorance and inferior knowledge of the topic of transgender identities. This may be representative of some barriers that transgender people face in real life. Luvuno, Ncama, and Mchunu (2019) write that systemic barriers to transsexual people include erasure through failure to acknowledge the existence of the transgender population as patients within the health system. The erasure can be passive through a lack of knowledge, data, policies, and practice guidelines relating to the transgender population (Luvuno, Ncama, and Mchunu, 2019).

We also witness the immediate regulation and dismissal of Wandile's "deviant" gender identity through religion. Since the Diales are misinformed about what a transsexual person is, Wandile takes the liberty to explain that "*it means that I was born in the wrong gender... I am a woman*

*trapped in a man's body.*” The Diales express some form of shock and disbelief in light of this. GogFlo places her hands to her mouth in shock, shouting, “*Oh, Nkosiyami! Mthethelele Thixo (oh my God! Forgive him Lord).*” GogFlo goes on to further preach to Wandile that “*God does not make mistakes.*”

We can argue that in this instance, GogFlo takes on the role of a villain in the narrative. Her response exemplifies how certain societies use religion to reinforce certain gender norms. Nkosi and Masson (2017) write that, traditionally, Christianity promotes heterosexuality and does not advocate for acceptance of homosexuality or bisexuality. The debate about whether homosexuality is a sinful act in the eyes of the Lord has been continuing for centuries – a discussion that does not appear to be drawing any definitive conclusion shortly (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). Thus, the stigma faced by transsexual individuals, as represented in Wandile’s narrative in *Generations: The Legacy*, is often derived from socio-cultural factors that reinforce a specific gender order.

It soon became evident that most of the Diales did not understand Wandile’s gender identity. Amidst all the havoc happening in the kitchen, Namhla seemed to be the only person who did not express shock and disappointment. Namhla recalls a transsexual person in her university who was constantly harassed and bullied and how she empathised with them. However, Lucy’s older brother, Cosmo, supported harassment of transsexual people when he responded, “*Do you blame people for bullying them...*” As Wandile runs out of the Diale kitchen in light of the backlash, Lucy threatens Wandile with violence. She urges him to “*get that out of your head. We don’t live like that in the township.*” We can argue that characters like Cosmo, GogFlo, and Lucy exemplify people who do not embrace “difference.” Instead, we witness in action how they exercise the power of knowledge to regulate and control “deviant” behaviours (Foucault, 1982).

#### *Resilience in the Face of Adversity (episode 248)*

The narrative reaches a stage where the victim hero recognises the disruption, which marks the start of the attempt to set right the disequilibrium. Wandile acknowledges that the transphobic actions she has experienced are an issue and is determined to fight for her identity. After being rejected by the Diale family, Wandile decides she will not allow their reactions to discourage her

from transitioning. Wandile's narrative in episode 248 seems to rebel against the judgement of her desired gender identity. Her act of rebellion encourages her to continue with her therapist's advice of RLE, which is to "experience life as a woman." Thus, Wandile must dress like a woman and do typical things that women do to qualify for the hormonal transition. Following through with this journey still comes at a cost to the victim's well-being and safety.

Episode 248 begins with Wandile at her helper's office, Dr Watson. Wandile has again hit a roadblock in her journey that has discouraged her from continuing to live as a woman. She has gone to seek counselling from Dr. Watson on a transphobic encounter she had while she was at a restaurant dressed as a woman. In this encounter, Wandile was at a restaurant with Elam. Wandile had a gender-affirming look, including full face makeup and a floral print dress. Everything was going well until the waiter learned that Wandile was a man. The waiter appears clueless about Wandile's identity until he overhears a conversation between Wandile and Elam that exposes Wandile's identity. As a result, Wandile tells Dr Watson that the waiter refused to serve her because of her gender identity.

For Wandile, being judged and scrutinised for her gender-affirming appearance seems too hard to bear. "*Of course, it's hard. That is the whole purpose of the exercise,*" says Dr. Watson to Wandile. Dr. Watson sympathises with Wandile and acknowledges her pain. She, however, advises Wandile that it was great that the waiter did not realise she was "a man" before he overheard their conversation. Dr. Watson tells Wandile that "*that is like a jackpot for a transgender woman. Usually, the broad shoulders, the height, and the voice would give it away.*" Thus, the exercise was working in Wandile's favour. Dr. Watson encouraged Wandile not to give up and continue the journey of RLE.

In light of this encouragement, Wandile appears in another gender-affirming attire at the shebeen. She arrives wearing the accouterments typically associated with femininity: a dress, long hair extensions, earrings, and black high-heel shoes. Customers are sitting by the chairs and tables enjoying their drinks in the shebeen as she arrives. Lucy and Namhla are seated by the bar area doing some work. Lucy is immediately confused when she lays her eyes on a person who seemingly looks like a female Wandile. As soon as she discovers it is Wandile dressed as a woman,

she is appalled and tells Wandile that the shebeen is not a place for “playing dress up.” This shows that Lucy cannot take Wandile seriously; “dress up” is a term usually reserved for children who “play” at an alternative identity. When Wandile tries to explain why she is dressed as a woman, Lucy refuses to understand and further insults Wandile by calling her a ‘*sis-bhuti*.’ (*A man pretending to be a woman*).

The transphobic actions towards Wandile further emphasises the hegemonic gender order norms that govern how people understand gender and sexual identity in the narrative. The waiter’s transphobic actions and Lucy’s reason to refer to Wandile as a ‘*sis-bhuti*’ exemplify how prevalent gender norms make it difficult for other genders to exist outside heteronormative norms (Connell, 1987). The hegemonic reading of Lucy’s actions is that she has a stereotypical understanding of transgender people, and, as a result, Lucy is unable to view Wandile beyond the constraints of those stereotypes.

#### *A Glimmer of Hope*

In episode 254, the narrative slowly moves towards the Todorovian attempt to repair the disruption caused and restore balance. We witness the rewards of the victim hero’s resilience towards the difficulties she has been subjected to in the narrative. Having dealt with many challenges in her journey, the victim hero is determined to regain her life after going through a phase of alcoholism. The victim hero’s helper and donor, Elam, appears again in episode 254 to visit Wandile in her shack in Alex. Elam provides Wandile with the support she needs to get back on her feet. Elam advises Wandile to relocate somewhere else to start afresh.

However, Wandile is tired of being fearful. “*I can’t run away again...that’s what I did with my dad...I’m not going to be a coward and let bigots run my life,*” says Wandile, in an authoritative and confident voice tone. As Elam toasts Wandile’s bravery, we see a mood change, and we start seeing Wandile smile again. The joyous background music also adds to this mood as the scene closes. This part of the narrative gives the viewer a hint that things are to start turning out for the better for Wandile.

Determined to rebuild her life, Wandile returns to the Diales to ask for her job back. In this scene, a few Diale family members, including Namhla, Cosmo, GogFlo, and Lucy, are in the kitchen. Amid a light conversation that the Diales are having, Wandile enters unexpectedly. Wandile arrived dressed as a woman with full face makeup and a grey top that resembles a dress. Wandile enters enthusiastically and greets, “*Good morning, everyone!*” The reception this time has shifted from when Wandile first confessed. Namhla immediately marvels at Wandile’s look and compliments her on her beauty. Cosmo does not comment and decides to leave the kitchen.



Figure 4: Wandile in the Diale kitchen

However, Lucy’s stance on Wandile remains the same. In a dismissive tone, Lucy asks Wandile the reason for her visit to the Diales. “*I came to see you about getting my job back,*” Wandile responds. Lucy still maintains that Wandile is not welcome as the shebeen is ‘not a circus’ and, in what seems to be a mockery of gender-neutral pronouns, not a place for ‘theys.’ Wandile no longer has a fear of standing up for herself. She defends herself from Lucy’s transphobia and threatens to get a lawyer for firing her on illegal terms. It becomes evident that Lucy will not take threats from

Wandile because she knows that she cannot afford a lawyer. In what seems like defeat and frustration, Wandile starts crying. The exchange intensifies as Lucy mocks Wandile for crying. *“Why are you crying? Men do not cry!”* Wandile responds furiously, *“I am not a man!”*

Through this exchange, we can argue that the narrative symbolises signs of hegemonic masculinity, evidenced by Lucy’s transphobic comments. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimises men’s dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the typical male population and women and other marginalised ways of being a man (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). As a result of hegemonic masculinity, men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and exhibit control and authority in both public and private spheres (Donaldson, 1993). We can therefore assert that Lucy’s expectations of Wandile to “not cry” and be emotionally reserved reinforces notions of hegemonic masculinity. Lucy represents a typical person in society who supports and perpetuates these ideals, thus silencing or subordinating other masculinities.

GogFlo comes in Wandile’s defense to tell Lucy to allow her job back. Even though GogFlo appears to be confused about Wandile’s gender and her preferred pronouns, GogFlo returns to being Wandile’s helper in the narrative. *“This child needs help. And we’re going to help him...her,”* says GogFlo doubtfully. GogFlo tells Wandile that she can have her job back. She reassures Wandile that she is family and the Diales will not turn their backs on her. Eventually, Lucy allows Wandile to have her job back. *“Fine, you can have your job back. But I will not treat you softly. To me, you’re just a boy who wears dresses and tights,”* says Lucy to Wandile. Even though Lucy will not respect Wandile’s gender identity, it seems that allowing her job back is progress for Wandile’s journey. The scene closes as Wandile wipes her tears, showing a sign of relief for getting her job back but seemingly unphased about Lucy’s comments.

The narrative in this episode concludes with the victim hero’s journey toward restoring balance. Wandile’s gender identity still places her in a vulnerable position to dominant gender norms in the narrative. We can argue that through the power of heteronormativity, the transgender identity still faces resistance. However, the victim hero’s persistence against this power allows her not to fall victim to it. Thus, we can see it as presenting an opposing discourse to the dominant discourses in the narrative.

## **Conclusion**

Wandile's transgender character drives a compelling narrative that informs its viewers about the lives of transgender people. The narrative attempts to represent some social realities that transgender people in the South African context experience. Many of these depicted narratives occur in the township spaces, where violence against LGBTQ+ people is said to take place the most.

Overall, the narrative is a case study of how dominant discourses operate to form subjects. Foucault (1983:212) writes that "subjectification operates as a form of power that applies itself to immediate and everyday life, which categorises individuals and attaches them to their own identity, imposes a law of truth on them that they and others must recognise in them – a form of power that makes individuals subjects – and submits them to others in this way." The positioning of the transgender character as the victim hero (Propp, 1968) who must navigate the harsh odds to fight for her identity exemplifies how dominant discourses operate to form knowledge and reinforce specific power dynamics and existing norms (Foucault, 1995). There is a constant attempt by the dominant to subjugate the subordinate.

However, the resistant discourses in the narrative present ways to challenge the dominant power structures. Foucault (1990) posited that where there is power, there is resistance. The resistance can occur as counter-discourses that challenge and subvert dominant discourses (Foucault, 1990). The victim hero's resistance and constant fight for her gender identity prevents her from falling subject to the regime of heteronormativity imposed upon her. Thus, presenting knowledge that counters the norms of the dominant gender regime.

### **5.2. Overview of the TV Viewing Habits of People in Ndakane**

The above narrative is received within Ndakane's specific cultural locale. This section presents the participants' general media consumption habits. This is to facilitate the appreciation of media consumption as part of the lived experiences of the people of Ndakane. Reception analysis takes

cognisance of the fact that the consumption of the programme is not an isolated and solitary experience but instead is one experience firmly embedded in particular socio-historical, political, and cultural circumstances that the readers subjectively experience (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1990; Barker, 2016).

### 5.2.1. Attraction to Locally Produced, Relatable Content

Participants shared their most preferred content on South African television, highlighting the channels they watch these programmes on and their reason for preferring them. Despite the differences in viewing habits, lifestyles, age, and gender, the participants in this study revealed that they are attracted to TV shows that mostly contain content relevant and relatable to them. As Strelitz (2002) points out, audiences are often attracted to programmes that seem ‘realistic’ to them when “a literal resemblance is sought between the fictional world of the text and the ‘real’ world as experienced by the audience member” (Ang in Strelitz 2002:188).

**Liqqa:** I mostly watch content on Mzansi Magic and SABC because they produce local content I can relate to. Currently, I am watching *The River* on DSTV. I love how it centres on a diamond mine, and the story speaks about the corruption that affects poor communities. I also find the main character, Lindiwe, the owner of the mine, fascinating. She is powerful and ruthless. Usually, in these shows, men are put in powerful positions. But Lindiwe is a woman who holds that power in *The River*.

**Bizizi:** I am currently watching *Skeem Saam*. I think, at the moment, I am enjoying Lizzy’s storyline, who is *uMakoti* (a daughter-in-law) abused by the mother/family of the husband. As a woman, this storyline speaks to many personal stories about new wives who experience conflict with their husbands’ mothers. It is something very familiar.

**Lizi:** I watch *House of Zwide* and *Skeem Sam*. What intrigues me in *House of Zwide* is the fashion and the personal growth of individual characters to being successful and big in the fashion industry. It is inspiring and motivating to watch. With *Skeem Saam*, I was intrigued by the depiction of the stages of development from being a teenager to being an adult. There were a lot of lessons to be learned by South African youth in how the characters’ journeys were portrayed. I feel like at some point, we all resonated with some of their journeys.

**Mabhuti:** I do not watch a lot of TV, but I do tune in to watch *Uzalo* occasionally. The show tends to have a lot of violence and crime, and I find myself going back to watch it a

lot. I feel like it represents a lot of the township life that we hear and read about, especially in KZN—the guns, the hijacking of cars, the gangs... all those things.

Bizizi is particularly drawn to the *umakoti* (daughter-in-law) storyline in *Skeem Saam*. This narrative resonates deeply for her as it mirrors experiences she has encountered in her own life. Lizi, on the other hand, highlights the portrayal of teenage life and the various challenges young people face in *Skeem Saam* as a key attraction to the show. Lizi finds these narratives relatable, not only to herself but to many young South Africans. Mabhuti is captivated by the depiction of township violence in *Uzalo*, believing that it accurately represents the harsh realities many individuals living in South African townships face. These responses align with Lopez's (2015) assertion that soap operas often reflect the cultural values, traditions, and social issues of the societies in which they are produced, making them culturally relevant to viewers. Consequently, the respondents' connection to these shows is strengthened by reflecting their lives and communities in the storylines, enhancing the authenticity and relevance of the narratives (Lopez, 2015).

It was also evident from other responses that there is an appreciation for content that departs from fictional genres and delves more into real-life content.

**Chuma:** I have been watching a lot of reality shows on Moja Love. I'm more into reality shows because I want to understand other people's lives and gain perspective on their lives. Reality shows have a way of showing the raw, unfiltered stories of our people. I learn a lot about our society from such shows. The content is authentic, relatable, and entertaining overall.

Chuma appreciates reality shows' ability to portray South African people's stories genuinely and authentically. This genre preference departs from soap operas and telenovelas regarding content style and narrative structure. Reality shows often cater to the desire for authentic and relatable entertainment. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) argue that reality television features ordinary people or celebrities in unscripted situations, which allows viewers to see aspects of themselves. As a result, viewers often find reality shows appealing due to the identification with participants and the relatable scenarios presented (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004). Even though Chuma's genre preference

differs from the other respondents, the relatability factor still plays a role in the content she prefers to consume. In addition to relatability, she is fond of the authenticity of the stories.

### 5.2.2. Attraction to Digital Media Content

Some respondents expressed that they have witnessed considerable interest in content produced for digital platforms such as Netflix and Showmax. They expressed that digital platforms provide them with unique viewing experiences that differ from regular public service television. This is primarily influenced by media convergence caused by the rise in information and communication technologies (ICTs). Convergence is described as the development of media and communication through several overlapping eras – in which newer forms of technology disrupt and modify older forms (Anim, 2013). This allows media consumers a multitude of platforms to consume their content compared to when traditional media platforms like television and radio held the monopoly for content consumption (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

Even though access to digital technology has specific barriers and happens at unequal levels in developing countries, South Africa's digital population has grown significantly in recent years (Kuroda et al., 2019). StatsSA figures reveal that, in 2023, almost 44 million people were connected to the Internet, up from around 25 million in 2013 (Cowling, 2024). Local legacy media platforms have also converged to incorporate digital media platforms where they can make content accessible to their viewers. Notably, the SABC has developed streaming platforms that allow for the streaming of certain shows. They also have digital platforms where they upload news through digital applications like YouTube. This way, people can access news easily through their desktops and mobile phones anytime, anywhere. The rise in South Africa's digital population is also evidenced by the people of Ndakane, who prefer to consume media content on digital platforms.

**Bizizi:** There are so many platforms where we can watch and consume audio-visual content in our time. Everything is very digital and technological; you can be on your cellphone and watch an entire episode of a drama being played at a particular time on TV on SABC. So, that has removed that sense of loyalty of saying at 8 pm, I would be watching *Generations* because I can almost access it at any time.

**Nana:** Most of us have revealed that we do not watch TV like we used to before and prefer digital platforms. The storylines on SABC have become boring, and something needs to be done. More storylines need to be created that can evoke thought and conversation. Back then, we gathered around the television with our families to watch *Generations* and engage. Today, this is even more necessary because we witness the prevalence of different topics that we need to tackle with our families, like the topics of sex and gender identity. And the conversations are needed now more than ever.

**Riro:** We no longer watch TV. We are always on our phones and social media. So, television has become boring, and it could have been more interesting. We opt for things like Netflix and Showmax because they produce more interesting content.

Nana, Riro, and Bizizi prefer digital platforms for content consumption. Digital media offers unparalleled convenience, meaning it can be accessed anywhere and anytime. The access to a vast array of content types and genres that cater to diverse interests allows users to find and consume niche content that caters to their preferences (Jenkins, 2006). Thus, the respondents' claims support the idea that, as argued by Lethlaku (2010), the rise of the Internet has inspired unique consumption habits, such as a desire for convenience, accessibility, engagement, variety, and diversity of content. Interestingly, the respondents also mention this shift away from the ritual of family time of watching TV shows together at certain times. This is a massive change from what was noted by the research on South African soaps in the early 2000s when communal (family) viewing was considered an essential facet of the social reception of these programmes (Havens, 2003; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003).

Generally, people from Ndakane appreciate locally produced and relatable content, which is evident in the type of shows they watch and the reasons they watch them. The soap opera and telenovela genres are the most preferred content style because, as Lopez (2015) argues, they somehow reflect or represent their cultural values, traditions, and social issues. It is also noteworthy that the rise of information and communication technologies has inspired unique consumption habits compared to television consumption. As such, some have expressed an appreciation for content on digital platforms. Interestingly, the preference for relatable local content persists despite the plethora of global content available on digital platforms.

### 5.3. Popularity of *Generations: The Legacy* in Ndakane

All discussants cited *Generations: The Legacy* as a soap opera they have watched, including when the transsexual storyline aired. They shared a range of reasons for its popularity, especially when they were younger and before the popularity of digital media platforms.

#### 5.3.1. Educational and Inspirational Content as Attractions

Firstly, respondents highlighted educational and inspirational content in *Generations: The Legacy* as a reason for their attraction to this soap opera.

**Liqha:** Growing up in a rural area, as a young girl, I watched *Generations* and was inspired by the city life displayed on screen. I saw Johannesburg and the skyscraper buildings, the successful black people who ran successful businesses, and that was inspirational to watch as someone who wanted to be successful one day.

**Mabhuti:** I watch soopies like *Generations* because of the courageous storytelling. You get to be challenged about your views of the world. I watched precisely when Wandile's storyline was shown, as it happened a few years back. I also remember the homosexual characters before, Senzo and Jason. It was brave for the soap opera to show these people and these stories. I learned a lot about gay people through these types of stories.

**Lizi:** From what MaBhuti is saying, I thought of the specific scene where Senzo and Jason shared a kiss and the controversy it stirred. As controversial as it was then, I think it was one of the educational storylines that helped people understand homosexuality.

Liqha's reflections indicate that her exposure to *Generations: The Legacy* ignited a desire for personal success and the aspiration to escape the socio-economic conditions of her upbringing. As discussed in earlier chapters, *Generations: The Legacy* was conceived as a medium to counteract the apartheid-era stereotypes that depicted Black characters as impoverished, uncivilized, and unprofessional (Aiseng, 2022). This shift in representation offers a transformative narrative that challenges these historical portrayals. It can be argued that, by witnessing the successful representations of Black individuals within the programme, Liqha was inspired to reimagine her potential and perceive new possibilities for her future. The portrayal of Black people as capable of

running successful businesses allowed her to develop a distinctive and empowered vision of herself and her aspirations.

Moreover, the narratives presented in *Generations: The Legacy* have allowed Lizi and Mabhuti to engage with identities and sexualities that differ from their prior experiences and understanding. Their exposure to the programme has not only broadened their awareness of LGBTQ+ identities but has also prompted them to examine and reassess their perceptions of these communities critically. As scholars noted, soap operas are a significant medium for educating audiences about gender and sexuality (Geraghty, 2007; Couldry, 2018). Geraghty (2007) posits that soap operas, by portraying a diverse range of sexual behaviors and orientations, contribute to public discourse on sexuality, thereby enhancing knowledge and understanding of non-normative sexualities. Consequently, the exposure to LGBTQ+ storylines in soap operas such as *Generations: The Legacy* enables viewers like Lizi and Mabhuti to encounter alternative ideologies related to sexualities while simultaneously interrogating and potentially evolving their beliefs.

Thompson's (1995) seminal work on the relationship between media and modernity provides a critical perspective to examine the media's influence on certain identity formations. Thompson (1995) writes that the development of modern societies cannot be understood without considering the impact of media on social, political, and economic life. People in Ndakane, like most rural places in South Africa, live in poorer social conditions than people in urban areas. The rural communities bear the brunt of inequality, which keeps the population in extreme poverty and lacking access to essential services such as electricity (DBSA, 2024). These socioeconomic conditions are attributed to colonial and apartheid legacies, which resulted in policies of segregation and dispossession. The policies of segregation and land dispossession have left deep scars, affecting how rural communities perceive themselves and their place in the broader society (Hart, 2002).

However, due to the far-reaching impact of communication and media, identity formation and forms of action and interaction are no longer linked to sharing a familiar locale. Thompson (1995) argues that contemporary media provide unprecedented symbolic resources through symbolic distancing. Consumers use these resources to add to, complement, or re-think the identities that

otherwise appear "given" by customary relationships in specific "traditional" locales. Soap operas, for instance, provide a form of escapism for viewers. They offer a break from daily stress and problems by immersing viewers in dramatic and often glamorous storylines (Couldry, 2004). For viewers like Liqha, the program's representations of modern city life - "the skyscraper buildings" and "the successful black people who ran successful businesses" allowed her to experience a world she was not accustomed to. Thus, the media she consumed exposed her to a life beyond her immediate locale, and she saw the possibility of being successful one day.

Moreover, television can present to audiences identities that contradict what they are accustomed to. As Thompson (1995) argues, television challenges audiences to interrogate their worldviews and understanding of life. Ramos (2014) similarly argues that soap operas offer insights into different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles, helping viewers gain a broader understanding of the world. For viewers like Lizi and Mabhuti, the educational storylines in *Generations: The Legacy* allows them to learn about identities and sexualities that differ from what they know. Thus, Lizi and Mabhuti's exposure to television has allowed them to learn about and interrogate their perceptions of LGBTQ+ people.

### **5.3.2. Viewing as Part of a Family Watching Routine/Process**

Watching soapies with family is a common pastime for viewers in different households because it offers bonding, entertainment, and discussion (Harrington & Brothers, 2010). This argument is supported by evidence from some participants' responses, who revealed that watching *Generations: The Legacy* was part of their family's routine or tradition during childhood.

**Nalo:** *Generations* is a soapie I've watched with my family since childhood. I remember a kiss shared by a homosexual couple, Senzo and Jason, on this soapie back in the day, and it was a big thing at that time. It was a reasonable and necessary storyline. And I think it played a role in helping people understand homosexual people.

**Khaka:** I watch *Generations* because my parents always preferred to watch it when I was growing up. Even now, when I go home, it is still a routine. It is always something we enjoy as a family when having dinner.

**Nana:** We always gathered around the television at 8 pm with my family to watch *Generations*. We always did it together as a family, starting with the prime-time news. We bonded over these prime-time shows a lot. I love how *Generations* would spark conversations amongst us about things we would not necessarily talk about, for instance, conversations centering on homosexuality and polyandry.

For Nalo and Khaka, watching *Generations: The Legacy* with their family is a norm. They have been socialised from a young age to watch the soapie to follow a family tradition. Havens (2003) argues that soap operas enable the creation of new cultural practices - such as instituting rituals of communal family viewing and the discussions that arise from this shared practice. In many cultures and societies, watching TV programmes with the family has become a tradition used to connect and bond as a family (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003). Thus, consciously or unconsciously, Nalo and Khaka watch *Generations: The Legacy* as part of a family tradition over which they bond.

For Nana, beyond opportunities for bonding, watching *Generations: The Legacy* provided an opportunity for discussion on the central themes of the TV show. This echoes Greenberg's (2010) argument that watching soap operas with family members can spark meaningful conversations about the story's central themes, allowing family members to share their perspectives and insights.

This section has provided evidence of the popularity of *Generations: The Legacy* amongst the participants from Ndakane. The section points out that various factors contribute to Ndakane people's consumption of this soap opera. As already noted, the attraction to this soap opera, mainly, is its messages, including educational and inspirational messages. For others, their viewing of *Generations: The Legacy* is part of a family tradition.

#### **5.4. Ndakane Viewers' Readings and Perceptions of the Transgender Storyline**

I will now delve into the diverse perspectives of the respondents towards this representation. I will underscore the variety of viewers' backgrounds that intricately shape their reading of the transgender storyline. Subsequently, I will portray the respondents' preferred readings of transgender representation. Direct quotes from the raw data will vividly capture the respondents' sentiments, and supporting literature from relevant scholars will underscore audience interpretations.

#### 5.4.1. Sociocultural Influences of the Transgender Reading

The interpretations of the transgender storyline may be influenced by various factors such as culture, religion, and educational background. These factors are critical in shaping attitudes towards gender and sexuality (Hofstede, 2001). Morley (1980) argues that the reception theory considers how the active audience role brings their experience and cultural context to the decoding process. Therefore, when interviewing the respondents, I sought to uncover sociocultural factors' impact on how they interpret transgender representation in *Generations: The Legacy*.

Bizizi's education and her exposure to transgender people during her time at university have impacted her reading of the transgender storyline. Bizizi studied up to the postgraduate level at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and lived in Cape Town for up to seven years. As a student, she was exposed to different lifestyles and cultures, which positioned her to be exposed to LGBTQ+ people.

*I feel like at the time when I was watching Wandile's storyline and other gay storylines before; I was immature in my outlook on life. It was very complex, and I did not have the grounded understanding I have now. I feel like the storyline was ahead of its time. It was not until I went to UCT that I started understanding and learning more about gay and transgender people. During my time at university, I had a first-hand experience with a transgender person who dared to say out loud that they were transgender. I also developed friendships with gay people who are still my friends today who, in a way, challenged my views on gender and sexuality. Thus, reflecting on Wandile's storyline, for instance, now that I have had the privilege of being exposed to transgender people and learning about their identities and lifestyles, I developed a different appreciation for it.*

Bizizi speaks cordially of this experience and that it allowed her to interrogate her personal beliefs about gender and sexuality. Her experience allowed her to understand transgender people and the LGBTQ+ community at large in a way she did not before.

Bizizi is now a working professional who has a different understanding of gender and sexuality than she did when she was in Ndakane as a younger person. This experience has also allowed her to interrogate her initial thoughts on Wandile's character, primarily influenced by her family and cultural values. Initially, Bizizi thought that gay people were "deviant" in society. Growing up in

a household that held strong values for heteronormative standards in the sense that, she says, “*indoda mayibe yindoda, umfazi abe ngumfazi (a man should act like a man, and a woman should act like a woman).*” influenced her to view gay people as abnormal. However, due to her tertiary school experience, she believes that “*people should have the freedom to be whoever they want to be without any judgement no matter the sex or gender.*”

On the other hand, religion plays a massive role in Lee’s life. Lee is a frequent churchgoer and a believer in God. Her values and beliefs are influenced by what the Bible preaches. Even though this is the case, Liya believes in allowing people to live however they want without discrimination or judgement.

*I am Christian, and I believe in the Bible. I live according to it. I know that we, as Christians, can be judgemental of others, and we are known for that. However, my approach is that I am not at liberty to judge anyone. That is my approach to viewing LGBTQ+ people. I may disagree with their lifestyles, but I don’t have the power to make judgements. I have come to understand this as I have experienced different people in different places, such as universities and the workplace. Such experiences have opened my mind to knowing that we all do not hold the same beliefs and should not judge or discriminate against others and their beliefs. I think what is most important when we get to these situations is to respect people's decisions.*

Lee acknowledges that education and other experiences in life have impacted her views on LGBTQ+ people, even though her values are primarily Christian. Her experiences in university and the workplace have allowed her to question and critique the values of the Christian community against other people’s beliefs. In her critique of Christian beliefs, based on her personal experience, she insinuates that “*Christians tend to nitpick certain verses in the Bible to speak against LGBTQ+ people.*”

On the other hand, Minqosi holds conflicted views on LGBTQ+ people as a result of cultural influences. Minqosi was raised in a household that upholds Xhosa traditional beliefs. According to Minqosi, his culture is not very accepting of LGBTQ+ people because they go against the heteronormative values of the culture. But exposure to LGBTQ+ people has left him in a conflicted place.

*Culturally, there is a manner in which men and women should behave. Men are masculine, and women are feminine. But this is changing, as witnessed in the transgender storyline. The Xhosa culture was instilled in our forefathers and fathers and passed down to us. And from what I know, it is not accepting of gay people. Culturally, we do not talk much about these things, and sometimes, I do not even know where my culture stands. This is to say it is a long-standing tradition that may not be easily transformed. We had a particular understanding of society where men were men and women were women. Building proper family units requires men's and women's fulfillment - that is how I was raised. However, we cannot deny that gay people are everywhere now. I see them on TV and social media, and that has challenged how culture has made me view gays. I am not sure where I stand with this community yet because that's not how I was raised, but I am open to learning regardless.*

Minqosi acknowledges that the cultural values he was raised with reject LGBTQ+ lifestyles. As Connell (2002) argues, the family is a primary phase for the socialisation of gender roles. From early stages, children are socialised about societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity within the family context (Connell, 2002). According to Minqosi's values that she was raised with, genders and sexualities should adhere to heteronormative standards. Thus, these values are not cognisant of other genders or sexualities outside the heterosexual ideal; they reject them. However, his experience of LGBTQ+ people through his exposure to television and social media has challenged his cultural views of gender and sexuality. He admits that exposure to LGBTQ+ people in the media has enlightened him about the LGBTQ+ community. Thus, the pull effect between what the values he was raised with say about LGBTQ+ people and what the media portrays about them has led to conflicted sentiments.

Nana is another person who was raised on traditional and religious beliefs. She asserts that as a result of these values, she rejected homosexuality and LGBTQ+ people in general.

*My knowledge as a Xhosa woman from Nqamakwe, Ndakane brought up under my grandmother's Christian religious beliefs and on the periphery under my mother's strict African traditions where culturally the idea of a person's gender is either male or female, and no in-between or other is that my culture does not have tolerance for homosexuality. I remember watching Wandile's story with my family for the first time; it was an abomination and came as a shock. Why were we seeing such a sinful narrative on our TV screens? Based on my understanding then, it [the transgender storyline] was wrong, and was questioning everything I was taught about gender. As a result, we stopped watching the show in my home due to the pressure it put my family under. It went against everything my family knew and valued about the traditional/cultural knowledge of gender. It*

*introduced a blurry line my family's culture did not want to comprehend or grapple with. However, as a working professional now, I tend to hold different values from how I grew up. I have come to realise that no one should be discriminated against because of how they identify.*

Nana's response alludes to the structural influence of family in shaping belief systems and values. The reaction to Wandile's storyline suggests that sexual orientation and gender identity are highly misunderstood in most conservative contexts. These beliefs further the arguments made in earlier chapters about African beliefs as perceiving LGBTQ+ identities as unnatural, unbiblical, and a Western culture import (Dlamini, 2006). Thus, at the core of these belief systems are family institutions and parenting, which reinforce prejudice and misunderstanding of LGBTQ+ people.

I noted that most respondents had cultural and religious influences on their understanding of LGBTQ+ people. The responses provided infer that the power of culture and religion determine Ndakane people's everyday lives and interactions with others. The finding is cultural customs and beliefs are constraining. Bizizi brought in an example of gender relations between heterosexual people and how women are always treated as inferior to men. She also noted how these norms are deeply embedded in culture to a point where culture and religion seem static and fixed even as the world evolves and many ideologies transform.

Some of the arguments among participants went on to further note how cultural and religious norms manifest in their daily lives concerning their perception of LGBTQ+ people. These arguments point out that, more often than not, Christianity and African cultural norms are used as a benchmark for gender and sexuality. Meaning that anything other than heteronormative is questioned or judged by the standard of this benchmark. Participants indicate that Christian and African cultural norms are often used as tools to promote stigma and discrimination towards non-heteronormative sex and gender identities. These assertions reflect Smith's (2004) claims that LGBTQ+ people from African communities, and black lesbian women in particular, are disproportionately at risk for discrimination perpetuated by dominant norms prevalent in these areas.

Although African beliefs and religion seem to shape all of the participants' understanding of gender and sexuality, the social constructionist theory emphasises that these beliefs are not

unchangeable. Social constructionism views knowledge as a socially constructed product. It views the idea of truth as dependent on consensus within a given society or community but not on any universal or absolute definition (Gergen, 1985). Even though most participants grew up on the values of African tradition and religion, those who had external influences, like going to university, migrating to the city, or even watching a TV program, hold a slightly different worldview than they did when they were growing up. Thus, exposure to other ways of life outside their social bubble poses a chance to challenge dominant norms, which, according to Foucault (1980), often marginalised alternative perspectives due to power.

#### **5.4.2. Views of the Transgender Representation in *Generations: The Legacy***

In trying to assess what people from Ndakane thought about transgender representation in *Generations: The Legacy*, most seemed to agree with the same observations. They indicated that the program played an “educative” role in introducing transgender people to people who were not knowledgeable of them or those who did not understand what it meant to identify as transgender.

**Bhele:** The storyline was necessary. If it is not the first, I think it is one of the first transgender storylines I have seen on TV. We did not see much information provided about transgender people before this storyline. So, it was important because it introduced me to them.

**Minqosi:** I first learned about transgender people through *Generations: The Legacy*. Before then, culturally and religiously, the topic was too taboo for me. Most of us, even in my family, did not know that there are such people who identify as transgender. At home, we are taught that people who go through these things are just going through a passing phase. So, for me, I just understood them as people who were just copying or imitating women, crossdressers, or gay people who wanted to look like women but eventually would grow out of it. But now, I understand that they exist and are real people who want to be identified as women.

**Nana:** I was very happy they finally showed transgender people on TV. This is because, as a society, especially where we are from, we don't want to accept these lifestyles because of our cultures and beliefs. But with these storylines, we get to see what our culture does not teach us or make us think is not a good thing.

Bhele, Nana, and Minqosi's views on transgender representation in *Generations: The Legacy* suggest a negotiated reading of the text. Hall's (1980) concept of negotiated reading occurs when the audience understands and accepts the dominant or preferred meaning encoded in a media text by its creators but also interprets it in such a way as to accommodate their own experiences, beliefs, and social contexts. This type of reading involves a blend of acceptance and adaptation of the encoded message (Hall, 1980). For Bhele, even though his cultural values differ from those of the producer, he found the storyline "necessary" because it exposed him to transgender people.

Minqosi mentions that she was taught that LGBTQ+ people go through a passing phase. This appears to accord with Caitlin's (2019) arguments that many assume that being gay is a passing phase that youths will grow out of as they grow older. Some think that youths may decide to be gay as a result of the influence of their friends or if they read or hear about homosexuality from others. The inclusion of transgender representation in the soap opera allowed her to denounce myths and misinformation about the non-existence of transgender people. These sentiments affirm the producer's intentions for creating the storyline, which was to provide a platform to spread awareness about transgender people.

It is also important to note how the influence of sociocultural beliefs, as already discussed above, dictates the understanding of transgender people or LGBTQ+ people in general among participants. As pointed out by Nana and Minqosi, customary understandings of gender and associated gender roles seem to be the leading cause of discrimination and rejection of LGBTQ+ people in Ndakane. As Meyer (2003) argues, cultural norms and traditions in many societies reinforce heteronormative and gender-binary frameworks, marginalising and promoting stigma towards persons who do not conform to these norms. Nana accedes to Meyer's (2003) views when he cites culture as the most significant reason he will not accept LGBTQ+ lifestyles even though the representation of LGBTQ+ persons in the program has, in a way, allowed him to challenge those notions.

Although the above reactions may suggest signs of acceptance of the overall transgender representation, some reactions have shown signs of contesting and rejection of the storyline. A few believed that the storyline was taboo and spoke against their beliefs. One participant expressed

that the storyline did not make sense to them but is still open to getting to a point of understanding. While another one believes people should not change how they were born.

**Imani:** Personally, I did not understand the need for the storyline. I did not think such things were possible. Even now, I do not know how someone could transition from male to female. It is still confusing to me. But with the transgender storyline, I would not say I am against it; I am still open to learning and trying to understand it even though I choose not to pay too much attention.

**Sisa:** I didn't quite get the storyline. Listening to what other participants said, I could see why it was important to them. However, I still maintain that it is unnecessary to go through the process of changing how you were born. I could understand wanting to be gay, but changing your whole gender seems a little too much for me to process. Thus, I did not really see the value of this storyline.

Imani's position on Wandile's representation in *Generations: The Legacy* is fairly neutral. Imani's views suggest that he is oblivious about including Wandile's representation as he does not understand its value. However, even though that is the case, he shows signs of willingness to stay open-minded to such storylines. Hall's (1980) negotiated reading process suggests that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages but actively engage with and interpret texts based on their lived experiences and values. We can see how this manifests with Imani's position in that Imani's sociocultural beliefs are challenged, thus contesting the message. However, his willingness to continue trying to learn suggests that he does not entirely reject the message. This supports Morley's (1980) arguments that the negotiation process involves a dynamic interaction between the encoded message and the audience's cultural and ideological positions.

On the other hand, Sisa's views suggest signs of complete rejection of the transgender storyline. Sisa offers alternative beliefs and perspectives on transgender portrayal. He stands by the belief that people should live by the gender they were born in, thereby opposing the messages of the transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy*. This is an example of Hall's (1980) oppositional reading of the text, in which the reader actively challenges, reinterprets, or rejects the dominant ideologies constructed by the text, offering alternative perspectives that diverge from the intended messages of the producers.

### 5.4.3. Readings of Wandile's Trajectory as a Transgender Woman

Wandile's journey provided respondents with educational messages about what it means to be transgender. The conversation among the participants emphasised that they appreciated the messages that focused on the personal struggles that trans people face and the journey to transition.

**Khanda:** This program was my first time seeing transgender people on TV. I love that the story goes a lot into the township and how Wandile is viewed from that perspective because, as people who grew up in rural areas, we can relate to the mentality of people in townships regarding these things. So, it relates to the mindset of our people here in the Eastern Cape. Here, we have that old-fashioned way of thinking and do not want to adapt to new ways. There is still that mentality of 'a man should be a man' and a girl should be a girl.' I see many Eastern Cape people in Lucy's character, for instance. A lot of people here hold Lucy's attitude and beliefs regarding LGBTQ+ people. Therefore, witnessing Wandile's journey and what she goes through was great because it encourages conversations we should have as a society, especially in rural areas.

**Siya:** Watching the soapie, I could not help but notice the amount of discrimination that was portrayed. However, I was more focused on how it affected Wandile because we do not always get to see that. For instance, the negative reactions from Lucy, which reminded me a lot of the responses I have seen in real life, drove Wandile to a very dark place. Wandile started becoming an alcoholic and careless. She was not in a good mental state as a result of the transphobic people's actions. I felt sympathetic for her, even for the little support she got. It made me reflect on our society and how we never really provide support for the LGBTQ community. We become bystanders as they suffer.

**Nana:** I appreciated the portrayal of therapy and its role in Wandile's journey. Witnessing this, though, just seems like the whole process is expensive. I just think of those who would not have access to certain facilities; how does it affect their journey, do public healthcare facilities offer such? I just wonder.

**Bizizi:** I was impressed with the storyline and its representation of transgender people. I was drawn mainly by one of the episodes in which Wandile is seeing a therapist. Wandile expresses that she wants to transition immediately, but the therapist tells her that it takes some time to get there. I witnessed this in real life in the sense that a transgender person I know had to wait years before they were fully transitioned. Reflecting back, I realise the storyline was brilliant and amplified their struggles.

Khanda found Lucy's reaction to be a typical response towards LGBTQ+ people. As Lucy is constructed as a hegemonic and culturally rooted character, he sees many similarities to how people from where he grew up usually react. Some people in conservation contexts, such as rural

areas, are deeply entrenched in traditional cultural and religious beliefs, where non-conforming sexual identities are not typical and discriminated against (Ntuli and Ngcobo, 2022). Therefore, it is no surprise that Khanda finds Lucy's discriminatory responses similar to those of people from his cultural context. Khanda's interpretation thus suggests a dominant reading because he sees Wandile's representation as vital in sparking conversations around gender identity and sexuality in conservative contexts.

According to Siya, the representation of the effects of transphobia on transgender people was more pertinent for him. His interpretation is influenced by the understanding that transphobic actions are normal in society, and thus, a focus on how these actions affect the victims is more interesting. We cannot deny that transphobia or any form of phobia against LGBTQ+ people is a common occurrence. As argued by Meyer (2003), in many cultures, LGBTQ+ people are seen as deviant or abnormal, leading to social ostracism and discrimination. Thus Siya's sentiments suggest that discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people is prevalent where he comes from, even though he does not often witness how it impacts the victims of the discrimination.

Nana and Bizizi asserted that the representation of the therapy sessions highlighted the importance of access to healthcare facilities for transgender people. Nana believes that Wandile's storyline has given insight into the economic barriers against transgender people, especially regarding therapy and private healthcare. Nana's sentiments suggest a negotiated reading in that, as Morley (1980) argues, audience members may partially accept elements of the preferred meaning encoded by producers while incorporating their interpretations and perspectives. Although adopting the dominant reading of the representation of therapy, Nana's interpretation of the program brings in another aspect of therapy that pertains to economic inequality and unequal access to healthcare facilities. In this sense, he shifts subtly from the dominant text, bringing in a question of financial access.

Riro was more intrigued by the physical transition process and how it is achieved by those who go through it.

**Riro:** For me, I always wondered how transgenders physically changed their genders or even if that was really a possibility. Watching Wandile's story, I realised there was a lot I

did not know. Firstly, I saw with Wandile that they have to drink hormone pills to be able to change to women. But also, there were difficulties because they were expensive, and Wandile could not afford them. There is a point where Wandile cannot raise funds for her transition. With that, I saw that this journey must be scary if one is alone; hence, I think support is needed for people who go through it.

Riro displayed a dominant reading of Wandile's struggles with transitioning. For Riro, the whole representation of the process of transitioning was enlightening as she was curious about how the process went. The enlightenment she gets from this representation allows her to see the importance of providing support for transgender people. Beyond the education provided, Riro is more concerned about the financial efforts it must take to be able to afford things such as hormone pills, thus allowing her to understand the complexities that are associated with being transgender.

Other negotiated responses pointed out that Wandile's trajectory lacked depth and longevity. The participants felt inconsistencies and a lack of innovation and character development in Wandile's character trajectory, which they felt are some issues with portraying LGBTQ+ people in public television in general.

**Lizi:** I felt they did not go deeper into the journey when I watched this storyline. I wished to have seen more or see it continue. But they discontinued the storyline. It was as if they quickly wanted to do and be done with it. It felt rushed.

**Bhele:** I feel more could have been shown in Wandile's story. In one of the episodes, Wandile says, "I am a woman trapped inside a man's body." We saw how her family treated her, and everyone rejected her as if he was crazy. For me, the storyline did not fully educate us on how one lives with people who are going/have done the transition. All we saw was rejection. But what about the families who are willing to accept? Where do they find a way to deal with these issues?

**Minqosi:** I loved this storyline and learned a lot about what goes on in transitioning. However, they could have done more. It felt too fast so, I might have missed or misunderstood things in the process.

**Imani:** It is important to have these storylines on television constantly. It is essential that we accept each other as people and how we live. If we cannot accept each other, we should be able to tolerate each other through understanding. When I watched this storyline about Wandile, I felt they did not go as far as I wanted. The topic was rushed. People never got to see and understand the entire process of being transgender and what it entails. Certain people seeking this type of transition will not have the entire idea.

The respondents argue that Wandile's character hesitates to go in-depth to provide more insight into the daily lives of transgender people. For Bhele, Wandile's representation missed some educational aspects that did not address the information he sought. Bhele asserts that the program focused on the representation of rejection and discrimination and less on acceptance and ways to live with a transgender person.

Lizi, Minqosi, and Imani felt the rushed storyline could have had more depth. They believe the storyline was discontinued prematurely before they could fully understand the programme's lessons. As expressed by the participants, Wandile's transgender storyline was the first and last storyline they said to have witnessed on public television programs. This storyline was discontinued in 2018, and there has not been another transgender representation since. Gross (2001) writes that LGBTQ+ individuals have historically been underrepresented in the media or portrayed using stereotypes. Even though there has been an effort to include diverse portrayals of LGBTQ+ people in *Generations: The Legacy*, the seemingly staccato portrayals of this group reflect the inconsistencies prevalent in these representations.

These readings infer Hall's (1980) idea of polysemy. Polysemy means a single media text can have multiple meanings and interpretations (Hall, 1980). This polysemy makes texts "open" to various readings and interpretations (Fiske, 1987). Different audiences can decode the exact text differently based on their cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and social contexts (Hall, 1980). The data presented in this section reveals that the readings of Wandile's transgender storyline by people in Ndakane vary with each participant and the factors that influence these positions.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the data gathered from the research was presented and analysed. This study has demonstrated that the reception of transgender representation in *Generations: The Legacy* among Ndakane viewers is deeply influenced by sociocultural factors such as religion, traditional beliefs, and educational exposure. While some respondents upheld rigid cultural and religious

interpretations of gender, others, particularly those with greater exposure to diverse perspectives, expressed a shift in their understanding and attitudes. These findings align with existing literature on the role of socialisation in shaping gender perceptions (Connell, 2002) and confirm Hall's (1980) theory of negotiated and oppositional readings, wherein audiences actively interpret media messages based on their lived experiences.

A key insight from this research is that television can serve as a catalyst for critical engagement with gender identities that are otherwise marginalised in traditional African contexts. However, resistance to such narratives remains, particularly where rigid cultural and religious structures persist. This suggests that while media representation fosters dialogue, it does not automatically translate into acceptance.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

#### 6. Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive evaluation and conclusion of the key issues uncovered in this research. The primary aim of this study was to explore how individuals from Ndakane in the Eastern Cape interpret transgender representations in the SABC television programme, *Generations: The Legacy*. Guided by Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, the research sought to understand the meanings that viewers derived from watching the soap opera, particularly in light of the reported violence towards LGBTQ+ individuals in rural and township communities.

#### 6.1. Overview of the Study

This thesis commenced by establishing a contextual framework regarding the history of LGBTQ+ media representations. Critical analyses of past portrayals have underscored the reliance on stereotypes that often oversimplify and generalise the characteristics of LGBTQ+ characters. Such stereotypes have been argued to reinforce social biases and prejudices against marginalized groups (Entman, 2012). Furthermore, the thesis identified the sporadic and inconsistent representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in local television, where portrayals tend to be seasonal and lack sustained visibility.

However, this thesis posits that the transgender representation in *Generations: The Legacy* offers a unique opportunity to foster new understandings of gender and sexuality. Given the potential for such representations to challenge traditional perceptions, it became essential to explore how this transgender narrative, with its distinctive opportunities for gender and sexual exploration, was interpreted by the population of Ndakane.

The study subsequently explored the dynamics and construction of gender and sexuality within rural contexts, focusing on the community of Ndakane in Nqamakwe. To provide a comprehensive

understanding, modern African cultural conventions were analysed through a colonial lens, which helped to contextualise how historical events have shaped contemporary African societies' perceptions and interpretations of gender and sexuality. This approach was instrumental in identifying and contextualising the sociocultural factors prevalent in Ndakane that could influence how the community interprets LGBTQ+ storylines in media.

The research was designed to illuminate the subjective experiences of the people in Ndakane and their engagement with LGBTQ+ storylines in local media. A qualitative reception analysis approach was employed to explore participants' subjective interpretations of the media narratives they consumed. Thematic content analysis was used as the primary research tool to gather data, facilitating an exploration of the personal interpretations of Ndakane viewers, their attractions to the media content they consume, the sociocultural factors influencing their interpretations of LGBTQ+ storylines, and their understanding of transgender narratives. Qualitative reception analysis was particularly pertinent for gaining a nuanced understanding of how sociocultural factors shape the Ndakane population's interpretation of the transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy*.

## **6.2. Summary of Findings**

The analysis of episodes in *Generations: The Legacy* indicates that the transgender narrative is a powerful tool for educating viewers about the lived experiences of transgender individuals. By employing Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse, the study has uncovered that the transgender character is portrayed as inferior and vulnerable when juxtaposed against dominant gender norms within the narrative. This representation illustrates for viewers the challenges transgender individuals face while navigating heteronormative spaces, and it demonstrates the process by which subjects are socially constructed.

This portrayal stands out as one of the few instances in recent years where South African public television has presented a more nuanced and diverse depiction of LGBTQ+ individuals. Rather than relying on stereotypical depictions of homosexual characters, *Generations: The Legacy* attempts to broaden the scope of LGBTQ+ representation by including transgender identities. This

effort provides viewers with alternative perspectives on gender and sexuality, contributing to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of these concepts in South African media.

Concerning the participants' general TV viewing habits, the findings revealed that the authenticity and relatability of the content largely drove the preference for local television shows among the people of Ndakane. Many participants' attraction to certain TV shows, particularly local ones, stemmed from the ability to see reflections of their own lives within the narratives. Moreover, the rise of information and communication technologies has fostered unique media consumption habits, particularly in how television content is accessed. Although there is an appreciation for the flexibility and personalised nature of digital platforms, the preference for relatable local content remains strong despite the availability of global content. This underscores the significant role that culturally resonant media plays in maintaining audience engagement. The persistent preference for local content, even in an age of global media expansion, highlights the importance of producing authentic and relatable television that speaks directly to the viewers' own experiences. For media producers and broadcasters, this means that understanding and integrating local cultural elements into programming could be key to sustaining and growing their audience base in regions like Ndakane.

Participants' attraction to *Generations: The Legacy* stemmed primarily from its educational and inspirational content. Some participants particularly appreciated the portrayal of homosexual representation, which provided them with an opportunity to reassess their initial understandings of gender and sexuality critically. This response underscores the influence of media representation, as media shapes how audiences perceive various groups and individuals, thereby influencing societal attitudes and behaviors (Hall, 1982). For other participants, the programme held additional significance as a longstanding family tradition sustained since childhood.

Drawing on Thompson's (1995) seminal work on the relationship between media and modernity, the research further examined how viewing this television show impacted identity formation among the people of Ndakane. The findings indicate that due to the pervasive reach of media, identity formation and the modes of action and interaction are increasingly detached from the constraints of localised, familiar settings. Thus, through their exposure to television soap operas,

the people of Ndakane could complement, reconsider, or even redefine identities that might otherwise appear "given" by customary relationships within specific "traditional" locales.

Through the lens of Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory, the study found that many viewers appreciated the educational messages conveyed through the transgender storyline and the effort to promote visibility for these identities. Consistent with Hall's (1980) concept of a negotiated reading, many respondents valued the educational aspect of the transgender narrative, which helped them learn about the experiences of transgender individuals, the process of transitioning, and the associated challenges.

This engagement also prompted viewers to reflect on and question their sociocultural beliefs, particularly those rooted in Christian and African cultural standpoints. This led to a reassessment of their understanding of gender and sexuality. However, the study also uncovered resistance to the transgender storyline among some viewers, who viewed it as taboo and contrary to their beliefs. This suggests that traditional, to some extent, heteronormative sociocultural norms continue to exert significant influence over how gender and sexuality are understood in these communities.

Additionally, the research revealed a lack of consistency and innovation in the portrayal of LGBTQ+ people on South African television, which contributes to underrepresentation that fails to capture the diversity and complexity of LGBTQ+ experiences. This further supports the concerns raised in earlier chapters about stereotypical and staccato representations of LGBTQ+ people in media. Participants desired more in-depth exploration of the transgender storyline to enhance their knowledge and understanding. The discontinuation of the transgender storyline contributed to the perception that such representations are seasonal and inconsistent, reflecting broader inconsistencies in the portrayal of transgender people.

While the findings are based on a small sample and may not be generalisable to the entire population of Ndakane, they do align with Hall's (1980) concept of polysemy, indicating that the Ndakane society had varied interpretations of the transgender storyline. For some viewers, the narrative opened up new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality, while others negotiated the meanings, accepting certain aspects of the storyline while rejecting others. Some viewers were

persuaded that this was a possible or acceptable narrative, while others resisted the intended meaning entirely.

Hall (1982) posits that media representations are pivotal in shaping social reality, profoundly influencing how audiences perceive various groups and individuals and impacting societal attitudes and behaviors. The findings of this research substantiate this argument, demonstrating the significant influence of media portrayals on audience perceptions. Despite the varied responses among participants, the majority did not exhibit signs of intolerance or transphobia towards the transgender narrative presented in *Generations: The Legacy*. Instead, many respondents expressed a willingness to learn more about transgender identities and lifestyles, indicating an openness to embracing the progressive values depicted in the program. This exposure to transgender representation in the media has facilitated the emergence of new perspectives on gender and sexuality, contributing to a broader and more inclusive understanding within the audience.

## **6.2. Scope for Further Research**

While this study sought to establish the meanings that people in Ndakane derive from watching LGBTQ+ storylines in *Generations: The Legacy*, further research is necessary to explore how these interpretations evolve, particularly in response to changing sociocultural dynamics and the increasing visibility of LGBTQ+ identities in digital media. Additionally, future research could examine the broader implications of inconsistent representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in local media and explore strategies for ensuring more comprehensive and sustained visibility for these identities in South African television.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Guide

This research explored how individuals from Ndakane in the Eastern Cape interpret transgender representations in the SABC television programme, *Generations: The Legacy*.

This research sought to respond to the following research questions:

1. What reading positions do Ndakane viewers adopt concerning the transgender storyline in *Generations: The Legacy*?
2. What sociocultural factors shape the meanings they make of this narrative?
3. What do these reading positions reveal about how specific rural Eastern Cape Xhosa audiences understand LGBTQ+ people today?

#### Categories for questions:

1. Demographics
2. Popularity of South African Television and *Generations: The Legacy*
3. Transgender Representation in *Generations: The Legacy*
4. Sociocultural practices
5. Value of the transgender storyline

#### Procedure

The researcher will send the episodes for participants to watch before the start of the interview. The researcher will then start with focus group discussions. The researcher will introduce himself and:

- a. Explain the purpose of the research exercise.
- b. Inform participants that the interviews will be recorded and data recorded. Views expressed and the identity of participants will be treated as confidential records.
- c. Assure participants who may not feel comfortable using their names that they can use pseudonyms.

The researcher will then start the recording tape and conduct the preliminary interview to establish the respondent's demographics, as discussed below.

## Questions

### 1. Demographics

- Kindly introduce yourself, your age and your pronouns.
- What is your highest educational level?
- What do you do for a living?

The researcher will then engage the participants briefly about the episodes to ensure that everyone was able to watch them.

### 2. Popularity of South African Television and *Generations: The Legacy*

- Do you watch South African television? How often?
- What appeals you to it?
- How often do you watch soap operas, specifically *Generations: The Legacy*?
- What attracts you to *Generations: The Legacy*?

### 3. Transgender Representation in *Generations: The Legacy*

- When the transgender storyline was introduced, what were your sentiments?
- Did you find the storyline relevant?

### 4. Sociocultural influences

- What are the attitudes and sociocultural beliefs and practices that influence your understanding of LGBTQ+ storylines?

### 5. Value of the transgender storyline

- What is the educational and information value did you derive from watching the transgender representation? What did you learn from the themes explored?
-

## Appendix B: Transcript of the Episodes Under Review (Extracts from Wandile's scenes)

### 1. Episode 241

*Wandile makes a discovery*

#### Scene One

*Wandile is with Lucy and Gog'Flo in the kitchen preparing food at Lucy's home in Alex*

**Wandile:** It's about an hour's drive from here. Beautiful place. In fact we should all go sometime. Have a picnic.

**Gog'Flo:** That sounds lovely!

**Lucy:** Why are you all smiles today? What's going on?

**Gog'Flo:** Lucy, it's wonderful to see him smiling.

**Lucy:** Okay. But I want to know what brought it on.

**Gog'Flo:** No!

**Wandile:** I'm just feeling happy, sis Lucy. I woke up like that. I don't know what the future holds, but I feel for the first time in a while, it will all be okay.

**Gog'Flo:** It's because you're now part of a family. Being on your own in a shack and not talking to people would've made anyone depressed.

**Wandile:** Thanks for taking me in, Gogo. I feel closer to you guys than I do my own family.

**Gog'Flo:** You will give him his job back, right Lucy? It's so good to be busy.

**Lucy:** Honestly, I could use some help in the shebeen. But, Wandile don't come with your funny business. Please! Do you here?

**Wandile:** (jumps in excitement while hugging Lucy) Thanks, sis Lucy!

**Lucy:** Okay! Before you break me, calm down.

#### Scene Two

*Wandile visits Dr. Watson's Office*

*\*Wandile enters Dr. Watson's office unannounced, panicking.*

**Dr Watson:** Wandile!

**Wandile:** There was no one in Reception, so I just came through, I hope that's okay.

**Dr Watson:** I just got here.

**Wandile:** I'm sorry. I know we don't have an appointment, but I really need to talk.

**Dr Watson:** Have a seat.

**Wandile:** I took drugs.

**Dr Watson:** Okay.

**Wandile:** This guy I know offered them to me and I guess I just wanted an escape. Something to just take my mind off things.

**Dr Watson:** You can't escape the real Wandile.

**Wandile:** That's exactly it! I didn't! Being high was like I'd turned up the volume. Like everything became more intense. I started seeing things. I even saw myself as a woman. It's weird, I mean, I was hallucinating. But, I don't know. When I looked into the mirror, it was like... I was almost seeing the real me. I know that if I carry on pretending something really bad is going to happen. Like, I'm going to hurt myself again or even worse, Doctor.

**Dr Watson:** You said it felt like you saw the real you. Who is that person? It's okay this is a safe space remember?

**Wandile:** I... I think I... infact I know that I'm a woman trapped in a man's body. You were right. I'm a transsexual.

### **Scene Three**

*Wandile still at Dr Watson's office.*

**Wandile:** So now that I've reached a breakthrough as you've said it, what happens next?

**Dr Watson:** I'm just here to guide you. You are the only one who can answer that. It depends on the individual. some people do nothing.

**Wandile:** So, they just carry on living like this? A stranger in their own body?

**Dr Watson:** Not everyone's ready to make drastic changes. It's a huge adjustment.

**Wandile:** So they keep faking it?

**Dr Watson:** Some people make minor transitions – dressing as the opposite sex. Others take hormones to promote the change. Others make partial a complete surgical changes.

**Wandile:** As in a sex change?

**Dr Watson:** *Nods\**

**Wandile:** That's what I want.

**Dr Watson:** This isn't a decision that can be made likely. There are risks involved.

**Wandile:** I don't care! I've never felt comfortable in this body anyway!

**Dr Watson:** That doesn't mean you are ready to make a change! You need to do research and I'm talking proper research so you know what options are available.

**Wandile:** I don't care about other options! I want to be a woman! End of story!

**Dr Watson:** this isn't a decision that can be rushed. It's important that you take your time dash think it through. Because once you decide there is no going back.

**Wandile:** I'm tired of feeling stuck doctor. I just want this thing done so I can move on with my life.

**Dr Watson:** You haven't even gone through RLE.

Wandile: What's RLE?

**Dr Watson:** Real life experience. You first need to live as a woman. If you can commit to that, then I can get a doctor to prescribe hormones in the meantime.

**Wandile:** How long will that take?

**Dr Watson:** It's at my discretion – anything from a few months to a year.

**Wandile:** A year? Forget it! That's way too long.

**Dr Watson:** You don't realize what a major decision this is...

**Wandile:** I do! And I'm ready for it. There's no reason to wait!

**Dr Watson:** A transition like this takes time no matter how ready you think you are..

**Wandile:** How Long?

**Dr Watson:** I'm not gonna lie to you. you say you feel stuck. Well, get used to it because even in the best case scenario, we're talking years.

## 2. EPISODE 244

*Wandile Confesses to the Diales*

### Scene One

*Wandile is at work at the shebeen and makes a phone call to confess to a family member.*

**Wandile:** Hey Siya, it's Wandi. I uh...I'm good. Great, actually. A lot has happened and I've decided to make some changes in my life. Personal changes. I've been going to therapy. I've discovered that um uh...That family is important to me. So, I hope you're good, brother. Say hi to Angela. I have to go. Speak soon.

*Elam walks in*

**Elam:** Holding up?

**Wandile:** Getting there. I've discussed it with Dr Watson and I've committed to living as a woman.

**Elam:** Wow. Good on you.

**Wandile:** Thanks. The thing is Dr Watson insists that I have a support system and Since my family is not around and they don't know anything about ... you know... I wondered if you'd...

**Elam:** Be your support system? Ofcourse I will.

**Wandile:** Thanks.

**Elam:** You have to talk to the Diales though.

**Wandile:** I doubt they'd understand. Besides I'm not up for being judged.

**Elam:** Well you have to decide. Because what you are about to do will bring out the worst in people.

## Scene Two

*The Diales are in the kitchen preparing food, Wandile enters.*

**Cosmo:** Beer?

**Lucy:** You don't even have to ask. Not the fancy serviettes. do you think money grows on trees?

**Gog'Flo:** Lucy leave them alone, they want to... Wandile! come in my child. What did you want to talk to us about?

**Lucy:** I hope you are not here for a raise.

**Wandile:** No, I just... I've been going to therapy and I've realized that I'm... that I'm...I'm transgender.

**Lucy:** Yoh!( *Laughs\**) You amaze me. Tell me, Why do you want me to laugh?

**Lesedi:** What is transgender?

**Lucy:** It means that Wandile is gay.

**Wandile:** No. It means that I was born in the wrong gender.

**Gog'Flo:** Oh, my God! Forgive him.

**Wandile:** I'm a woman trapped in a man's body .

**Gog'Flo:** Hey, God doesn't make mistakes, my boy!

**Namhla:** There was a trans man in varsity. People harassed him all the time.

**Cosmo:** Do you blame them? Hell!

**Wandile:** I know that this must be a shock to all of you...

**Getty:** (*Crys and storms out of the kitchen in disbelief*)

**Lucy:** Getz... Getty! See what you've done! I could slap you! Punch you in the face! Wandile wandile get that out of your head! We don't live like that in the township!

*Wandile storms out*

**Namhla:** Wandile wait!

**Lucy:** Leave him! We don't need people like him around here. Go!

### 3. Episode 248

*Wandile visits Dr Watson's office*

**Dr Watson:** Laundry day? Last time we spoke you committed to living as a woman - fulltime.

**Wandile:** It's too hard doctor.

**Dr Watson:** Of course it's hard. That's the whole purpose of the exercise.

**Wandile:** I thought I was ready.

**Dr Watson:** So did I.

**Wandile:** Well, I wasn't, okay?

**Dr Watson:** What makes you say that?

**Wandile:** So I'm at a restaurant the other day. the waiter is all cool- calling me ma'am and everything. Elam and I Uh having a really good time. no unsendts to notice that, you know... I'm a 'man'. I'm totally passing.

**Dr Watson:** Perfect!

**Wandile:** Until the waiter clicks and realises what's going on. I think he overheard me talking to Elam. Anyway, suddenly, he doesn't want to serve me anymore. You should have seen the way he looked at me. Like I was an abomination or something. I don't think this is going to work.

**Dr Watson:** Hang on a minute. You say the waiter overheard you talking and that's how he clicked, not by your appearance?

*Wandile nods*

**Dr Watson:** That's like winning but jackpot for a trans woman. Normally, their shoulders or their voice gives them away. But you passed. That is a big achievement!

**Wandile:** So, what - I'm supposed to just keep my mouth shut next time? Then I'm still hiding.

**Dr Watson:** This journey you are starting is hide enough already. There's no need to rush into sharing it with the world.

**Wandile:** I don't think I can take it. Maybe I'm not strong enough .

**Dr Watson:** Would it be easier to keep living the lie?

**Wandile:** No. I can't go on like this.

**Dr Watson:** So you think you can try again?

**Wandile:** It's better than lying.

## **Scene Two**

*Wandile pitches up to work at the shebeen dressed as a woman for the first time*

**Wandile:** Hi, Lucy.

*Lucy is busy at the counter with some paperwork. She does not look up to see who she is talking to.*

**Lucy:** Hello. What can I get you?

*Wandile walks behind the counter*

**Lucy:** Woah! Where are you going?

**Wandile:** Starting my shift.

*Lucy looks up, and she is shocked by what she sees*

**Lucy:** Wandile? Hey, you know what? Don't bring a craziness into my shebeen. We are working here, not playing dress-up.

**Wandile:** I'm not playing. This is who I am. I'm a woman.

**Lucy:** Wo.. wo..? Listen, when you come to work, you act normal. You can be gay somewhere else.

**Namhla:** She's not gay, she's transsexual. Big difference, mom.

**Lucy:** Don't get any funny ideas, Namhla!

**Namhla:** Well, it's not contagious.

**Lucy:** Tell me, Namhla, When did you become an expert? And you, Wandile. No she-males here!

**Wandile:** No, Lucy! I'm a girl! I won't let you bully me into living a lie!

**Lucy:** How about living unemployed?

**Wandile:** You can't fire me for wearing a dress!

**Lucy:** Do you really want to try me? It's either the job or the dress. Choose!

*Wandile walks out in disappointment*

## 4. Episode 254

### Scene One

*Wandile is in his shack and has just woken up to a hangover. Also in the room is Elam.*

**Wandile:** Morning.

**Elam:** Well, morning beautiful.

**Wandile:** Well, I don't feel so beautiful. Feels like my head is going to explode.

**Elam:** Here. This should fix you right up.

*Elam hands Wandile a cup of coffee*

**Wandile:** Thanks. Thanks for staying over last night.

**Elam:** No worries. I wanted to make sure that you were okay.

**Wandile:** I did lose the plot a bit last night, didn't I? I'm sorry. I'm just feeling so overwhelmed at the moment.

**Elam:** Don't sweat it. You're right. I don't know what your going is through. I have no idea how hard this must be for you. Just know that I'm going to be here for you no matter what. Even if you move away to start over somewhere else.

**Wandile:** My life has done a complete 360 in a matter of weeks. It's exciting but scary at the same time. I'm feeling so much all at once. But one thing that I know for sure is that I can't run away again. That's why I did with my dad and look where that got me. I'm not going to be a coward and let bigots run my life.

**Elam:** Well you are the bravest person I know. Cheers.

## Scene Two

*Wandile goes to the Diales dressed as a woman*

**Cosmo:** Are the books balancing alright there?

**Lucy:** Yes! Look business is booming!

*Wandile knocks on the kitchen door and enters*

**Wandile:** Morning, everyone.

**Namhla:** Wow. You look nice!

**Wandile:** The top fits perfectly. Thanks.

**Cosmo:** I need to go open up at the shebeen.

**Lucy:** Tell me, what are you doing here?

**Wandile:** Actually, I came to see you about getting my job back.

**Lucy:** No! The shebeen is my business, not some circus or something.

**Wandile:** You can't fire me for being transsexual. It's illegal.

**Lucy:** What will you do about it?

**Wandile:** I could get a lawyer.

*Lucy:* With what money? Oh I forgot – you will ask your brother and what would you say it's for?

*Wandile doesn't respond*

*Lucy:* Exactly. Because you know this whole thing is madness!

*Wandile:* Please, sis Lucy. I have nowhere else to go. This is all I know. The shebeen and you guys are all I have.

*Gog'Flo:* Oh, shame. Lucy!

*Lucy:* Look at him. Why are you crying? Men don't cry!

*Wandile:* I'm not a man!

*Gog'Flo:* Lucy, don't have such a cold heart. This child need help. And we are going to help him... her.

*Lucy:* Look, you're also confused, Grandma.

*Gog'Flo:* Don't worry, my child. You can come to work tomorrow. We will never turn our backs on you. You are like family to us. Right, Lucy?

*Lucy:* What? Okay fine. But I'm not going to treat you all soft! To me, you are just a boy in a dress and tights. It's true.

*Scene closes as Wandile wipes off her tears*

## Appendix C: List of Figures

1. Figure 1: Google Maps (2024) *Topographic image of Nqamakwe*. Available at: [https://www.google.co.za/maps/place/Nqamakwe/@-32.2193842,27.9162071,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m6!3m5!1s0x1e60e1f8f986d60f:0x56691cb02d4a2dc7!8m2!3d-32.2190338!4d27.9541894!16s%2Fm%2F0j3gn\\_g?hl=en&entry=ttu](https://www.google.co.za/maps/place/Nqamakwe/@-32.2193842,27.9162071,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m6!3m5!1s0x1e60e1f8f986d60f:0x56691cb02d4a2dc7!8m2!3d-32.2190338!4d27.9541894!16s%2Fm%2F0j3gn_g?hl=en&entry=ttu) (Accessed at 20 July 2024).
2. Figure 2: Google Maps (2024) *Topographic image of Nqamakwe*. Available at: [https://www.google.co.za/maps/place/Nqamakwe/@-32.2193842,27.9162071,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m6!3m5!1s0x1e60e1f8f986d60f:0x56691cb02d4a2dc7!8m2!3d-32.2190338!4d27.9541894!16s%2Fm%2F0j3gn\\_g?hl=en&entry=ttu](https://www.google.co.za/maps/place/Nqamakwe/@-32.2193842,27.9162071,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m6!3m5!1s0x1e60e1f8f986d60f:0x56691cb02d4a2dc7!8m2!3d-32.2190338!4d27.9541894!16s%2Fm%2F0j3gn_g?hl=en&entry=ttu) (Accessed at 20 July 2024).
3. Figure 3: *Generations: The Legacy*, directed by Dave Petzer (Morula Pictures, 2016).
4. Figure 4: *Generations: The Legacy*, directed by Dave Petzer (Morula Pictures, 2016).