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From the Camps to COVID: An Ethnographic History of *Boererate* amongst Afrikaans women

By

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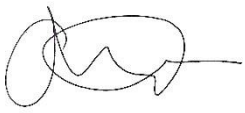
Signature: 

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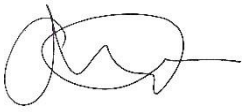
Signature: 

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Abstract

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Afrikaans women in South Africa harnessed the power of *Boererate* not only as a healing tradition but as a living, adaptive agent with the ability to connect people and subtly reshape social dynamics. This thesis traces the roots of *Boererate* back to the concentration camps during the South African War, where Boer women, due to limited resources and the ban on Dutch medicines, cultivated this enduring indigenous healing practice. Utilising a comprehensive research methodology, including digital ethnography, interviews, and post-lockdown observations, this study reveals the multifaceted nature of *Boererate*. It acts as a connecting force, safeguarding cultural identity, and providing an alternative lens to challenge – and sometimes compliment – the dominant biomedical narrative. Beyond healing, *Boererate* subtly influences individuals and communities in alignment with established cultural norms. It provides a unique perspective on the living essence of indigenous knowledge systems and their role in cultural preservation and social transformation. *Boererate* is shown to be an active agent, uniting and dividing people across generations, promoting cultural resilience. The evidence presented suggests that as people make *Boererate*, it also – at least partially – makes them.

Key Words: *Boererate*, Afrikaans women, South African War, COVID-19, biomedicine, plasticity, object agency.

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Why Poop?

My mother's kitchen table is the unsung hero of my anthropological career thus far. During my honours year, it carried countless cups of coffee and *koeksisters*[1] while women told me of their deceased loved ones' spirits visiting them at all hours of the night and knocking their cling-wrap[2] off countertops and books off their bedside tables. Ever humble, this table then graduated with me to supporting the weight of my masters and the witchcraft tomes and tarot decks that accompanied it. Coffee and *koeksisters* were replaced with elegant tea ceremonies and homemade jam tarts. Conversations lasted for hours, and tea and ink would be spilled all over it, but it stood steady as ever and saw me through to the end. I then enrolled for my doctorate, whispered sweet nothings into the splinters of the table and promised it greatness – together we would investigate *Boererate* and the women who had carried it through the years. I was never lonely during COVID lockdowns – I had Table. Late one Friday night, well past sensible hours, I took stock of where Table and I found ourselves.

My old friend was carved by my grandfather, coveted by my brother, and endlessly jumped upon by my dog. At the end of 2019, I had rewarded Table for the patience exercised during my honours and masters research with an afternoon of sanding and a fresh coat of varnish – crisp and ready for our new adventure together. Table had guided me from colouring-in homework in preschool all the way through to the peak of my educational journey – this project. I promised Table greatness, an acknowledgement or two, and, perhaps, another coat of varnish when we achieved this together. I had scattered across it scans of pages from the archives, various books about the South African War that my father had purchased for me, and an assortment of articles with margins full of notes and ideas. "How academic" I thought to myself, smugly.

I moved my thoughts back to the A3 sheet of paper at the centre of this controlled chaos, where I had begun a mind map that would ultimately become this thesis. On a main off-shoot bubble of this mind map, in neat block capitals, I had written one of my most pressing questions, one that I craved an answer to, "WHY IS THERE SO MUCH POOP".

I pressed play on the WhatsApp voicenote from my aunt, boiled the kettle, and settled into the next twelve minutes of her explaining what exactly *dassiepis* [hyraceum] is. "Sorry,

[1] A *koeksister* is a traditional Afrikaner confectionery made of fried dough infused in syrup or honey.
[2] Cling wrap refers to Cling Film – this a common colloquialism used within South Africa to refer to the thin plastic film typically used for sealing food items in containers to keep them fresh.

Table" I caught myself saying out loud. I made a mental note to buy linseed oil in the morning – a reward for enduring another evening of poop talk.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout my previous research pursuits, *Boererate* was something that kept coming up in conversations and interviews with my interlocuters. I was intimately familiar with *Boererate*, a mostly herbal system of home-based health and healing practices, which has typically been associated with Afrikaners over the years. My mother had often turned to our extended network of aunts, grandmothers, sisters-in-law, and cousins who felt like sisters, for *Boererate* and help for my eczema that just never seemed to go away. I bathed in oat milk, rooibos tea, and aqueous cream. I slept wrapped up in damp bandages that had been soaked in iodine and Vaseline, and laundry detergent was on a constant rotation to find one that would pair well with the vinegar that had replaced her fabric softener. And I found relief.

I had walked this path with my mother as biomedical doctors and treatments had failed me. Every dermatologist who we saw sold us a new concoction of ingredients that would have put many a witches brew to shame and ultimately just did more damage to my skin than good – some pulled pigment out of my skin and left it blotchy, others caused chemical burns, and one in particular smelled so foul that I immediately scrubbed it off and ended up with more irritation than when I had started. Of course, my mother and I knew that no amount of oats and aqueous cream would ever make the eczema go away completely – the doctors had explained its chronic and auto-immune nature well, but the combination of biomedical knowledge and *Boererate* proved to be a winning combination for me.

It is with this attitude that I entered into this research. During the COVID-19 Pandemic and the initial lockdown stages in South Africa, I noticed that the *Boererate* Facebook groups which I had joined a few years prior were suddenly populating my home feed and it felt as if I could not go on Facebook without seeing between 10 and 15 posts about people asking for help with their COVID symptoms as well as how they could best support their bodies in fighting this virus.

I want to take this opportunity to briefly explain what a Facebook group is as well as how it functions. A Facebook group is a space on Facebook where users can connect and communicate around shared interests or topics. It is a place where people can have discussions, share photos, videos, links, ask questions, express opinions, organise events, and more, all within a specific, self-selected community. I have found that there are primarily three types of Facebook groups. First, there are public groups. In these groups, anyone can search for it, and see members names and profiles, and their posts. These are often used for discussions on public matters or topics of broad interest. Second, there are closed groups. In

these groups, only members can see the group posts, but the group name and its members can be seen by the public. These are often used for more private communities or discussion topics. This was the format of the groups that I interacted with. Lastly there are private groups. In these groups, only members can see the group, its members, and posts. These are often used for very private or confidential discussions.

The functioning of a Facebook group largely depends on its administrators (hereafter referred to as admins as is the popular nomenclature when referring to these roles) and moderators. They create and enforce the group's rules, approve, or deny membership requests, and moderate discussions to maintain a respectful and safe environment for all members. They can also organise events, create polls, and manage the various features available within the group. Members of a Facebook group can post text, images, videos, create events, and interact with each other's posts through likes, comments, and shares. Depending on the group settings set by the admin, posts may be visible only to group members or to the public. In essence, Facebook groups function as a digital space for people to gather, share, and discuss specific topics or interests, providing a sense of community and connection among its members.

I could not help but notice a pattern in how most of these posts ended – with an anecdote about how the person who made the post could not get to a doctor, afford a doctor, or did not trust their doctor after being misdiagnosed or not taken seriously (about their COVID infection or any other malady). I admit, *Boererate* was not something that immediately sprung to mind as the first line of defence against this novel virus.

Many of the remedies that I saw – and that became exceedingly popular as the COVID-19 pandemic wore on – were a combination of over-the-counter medicines like ACC200[3], Zinc vitamin supplement tablets and home remedies focussed on herbal ingredients like a ginger tea to which turmeric and cayenne pepper would be added. This piqued my interest, and I was left with several questions.

[3] A common and popular South African cold and flu medicine. Sometimes the 600 version was also recommended (a higher dosage of active ingredients).

A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

Literature Consulted

The literature on *Boererate* and its application in the past is sparse. Much of the literature is related to the South African War[4]. A notable instance is found in J.C. de Villers' work, "Healers, Helpers and Hospitals," which primarily delves into the management of hospitals and medical affairs during the War. However, the acknowledgment of *Boererate* in this context is limited to confirming its historical usage without providing detailed insights. This example is not an isolated case but rather emblematic of the broader approach found in much of the literature consulted on *Boererate*. The available literature on the subject is notably scarce, with a predominant focus on the South African War effort and frontlines. While these historical texts contribute to the understanding of the context surrounding *Boererate*, their limitations have compelled me to cast a wider net in the literature review for this project, seeking a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective that extends beyond the immediate wartime applications of *Boererate*.

In order to understand contemporary constructions of *Boererate* I proposed to understand the history of where it came from. It proved fruitful for me to consult diaries and medical reports from the South African War (1899-1902) that were kept by concentration camp inmates and the medical personnel stationed in these camps. At the onset of the War, British forces were enacting the 'scorched earth' policy[5] and capturing Boer[6] women and children. They were taken to concentration camps where they lived in overcrowded tents with little bedding and poor hygiene.

Elizabeth van Heyningen (2013) writes in *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* that the suffering in the concentration camps, regardless of race [7], is one of South Africa's greatest national tragedies. Critically, van Heyningen emphasises that medical history cannot be separated from a broader social history. She goes on to claim that much of the Boer women's resistance to British controls took place in respect to matters of health. The clash was primarily over different cultural values. In a preindustrial and frontier society such as that of the Boers, the locus of health was the home and carers were women. This is argued

[4] This is due to many written reports emerging during the War. Prior to this, there were not many things being written down about how the Boers as a frontier society were managing medical matters and health (de Villiers, 2008)
[5] British troops routinely ransacked farms, killed livestock, and then burned down farmhouses and fields.
[6] When referring to historical settlers I take the lead from my sources and refer to these people as Boers. Any reference to settler descendants post-1900 will refer to them as Afrikaners.
[7] It is well-documented that black South Africans were forcibly segregated into distinct concentration camps, highlighting a dark chapter in shared history.

to have been in opposition to the biomedical approach of the British which was based in hospitals and was a field dominated by male medical professionals. It is clear then that for the British and the Boers, medicine was a marker of cultural and gender identity in which both had considerable investment.

The British abhorred much of the Boers' practices but were particularly critical of the 'patent medicines'[8] that were a widely employed and long-established practice of Boers. Ingredients were largely plant based and ranged from the innocuous to the nasty, while other treatments made use of "animal parts, blood or dung" (van Heyningen, 2013, p. 210). Animal-based ingredients were believed to possess magical healing qualities; however, I could not find many more historical accounts referring to magic beyond this[9]. A vestige of how these patent medicines impacted people's perception of the Boers can be found in the image that emerged of Boers of being isolated, suspicious, and backward people.

Van Heyningen's deliberate emphasis on the suffering in the concentration camps as a national tragedy, irrespective of racial distinctions, forms a pivotal foundation for a nuanced examination of the broader impact on diverse communities, specifically shedding light on the experiences of Boer women. By adopting this approach, she is able to recognise the profound social implications of the war that extend beyond racial boundaries. Rather than limiting the scope of inquiry to a singular perspective, the emphasis on suffering as a shared national tragedy encourages a more holistic understanding of the human cost of the conflict. Boer women, as integral members of the affected communities, emerge as significant actors in this narrative, allowing for a detailed examination of their roles, struggles, and contributions during this tumultuous period. The assertion that much of Boer women's resistance to British controls occurred in matters of health highlights a pivotal aspect of Boer culture and identity. By framing the clash as a conflict over different cultural values, particularly in the context of preindustrial and frontier society, van Heyningen establishes a compelling backdrop for the emergence of *Boererate*. The emphasis on the home as the locus of health, predominantly cared for by women, contrasts with the British biomedical approach dominated by male

[8] The turn of phrase "patent medicine" referred to throughout the literature is a phrase which originated in the 17th century. These medicines were issued over the counter without need for a doctor's note or prescription. The ingredients and make up of these medicines were trademarked but not patented. Patenting would have meant publicly disclosing the ingredients which promoters of these medicines sought to avoid for commercial reasons.

[9] Van Heyningen (2013) argues that this is likely due to pro-Boer sources, such as Emily Hobhouse who primarily wrote letters as the secretary of the women's branch of the South African Conciliation Committee in 1900, remaining silent in an effort not to alienate middle-class readers and would have even dismissed these stories as backward due their own beliefs. It is also possible that the testimonies of those most likely to have used such treatments would have not been collected or even published.

medical professionals. This cultural and gendered dimension becomes a crucial element in understanding the development of *Boererate.*

I use the foundation laid by van Heyningen here, later in Chapter 3: The Birth of *Boererate* to underscore how the environmental and social conditions, as experienced by Boer women and children in the South African war, led to the creation of *Boererate.* By bringing her work into conversation with others as well as numerous historical texts, I aim to examine the environmental and social conditions encountered by Boer women and children during the South African War and unravel the complex factors that contributed to the formation of *Boererate*. This approach allows for a comprehensive tracing of *Boererate*'s origins, as well as contextualising its emergence and adding depth to understanding how Boer women, within the specific historical and environmental context of the concentration camps, crafted and propagated a system of remedies that reflected both resilience and cultural adaptation. Boer women engaged in a dynamic exchange, absorbing elements of Dutch medicinal practices and integrating them into their own cultural repertoire. This process was fluid and reciprocal, with women in the camps gradually incorporating new ingredients and remedies into their daily practices. Through this process of osmosis, Boer women demonstrated an adaptive resilience, blending external influences with their existing cultural framework to create what we now recognise as *Boererate*. This adaptation is embodied in the Afrikaans metaphor "*'n Boer maak 'n* plan" which was often echoed throughout my interviews – and will be elaborated upon in later chapters. This metaphor underscores the interactive and transformative nature of cultural adaptation, illustrating how women in the concentration camps shaped a distinct and culturally embedded system of healing.

Charles van Onselen's (1990) work on cultural osmosis[10] constitutes a pivotal foundation for investigating not only the processes that took place in the South African War concentration camps, but also contemporary constructions of Afrikaner identities[11]. By scrutinizing the monolithic, Calvinist portrayal of Afrikaners, it becomes imperative to unveil the diversity

[10] Socio-cultural osmosis refers to the diffusion of knowledge between groups of people through direct or indirect contact. For example, through immigration groups of people come into contact with each other and interact and adapt to the other thereby transferring knowledge (van Onselen, 1990).
[11] While the plural form of identities recognises diverse human identity facets, including cultural and gender affiliations, fostering a nuanced understanding and adaptability to changing social contexts, I want to acknowledge that there is a risk of oversimplification (essentialisation), and potential limitations due to an overly relativistic approach.

and secular perspectives inherent among them. The cultural exchanges that Apartheid sought to stifle were precisely those that could challenge the constructed image of an 'authentic Afrikaner culture' – one that had been deemed morally untarnished and 'pure.' This sense of moral rectitude finds reinforcement in both historical and contemporary *Boererate* compendiums that have come under my scrutiny. These compendiums serve as conduits for socially sanctioned definitions of illness, delineating who is susceptible and prescribing appropriate treatments. Notably, certain afflictions such as sexual impotency or infertility are conspicuously absent from these texts, but they find new life in private ladies or men's only *Boererate* Facebook groups[12]. Thus, this confluence of historical and contemporary perspectives illuminates the sustained influence of moral considerations on shaping notions of health and propriety within the Afrikaner community.

The earliest version of such a book that I could find written in Afrikaans[13] is titled *Die Afrikaanse Huisdokter: Handeling vir die aanwending van Homeopatiese en Biogemiese Geneesmiddels* [The Afrikaans General Practitioner: Application of Homeopathic and Biochemical Medicines] written by D. J. Smal. The introduction claims that Afrikaners needed remedies suited to their constitution written for them in their own language[14]. Smal (1921) explains that the books that did exist before his own were intensely difficult for lay people to read and understand. He states this is because Afrikaners have their own words for ailments and that if they were to look up a treatment for *aambeie* [piles] they would not find anything because this is what doctors called *haemorroïde* [haemorrhoids]. He argues that knowledge needs to be shared and that *Boerekennis* [Boer knowledge] cannot be misplaced in the hands of the general population of Afrikaners – sharing it will not spoil it. This book marks a pivotal moment in Afrikaner home-based healthcare because it emphasised that Afrikaners were now 'a different people' to their Dutch, German and French Huguenot[15] predecessors. Remedies in these books were now coded by and for Afrikaners and the sharing of knowledge could take place within Afrikaner communities. Smal (1921) argues that sharing knowledge would result in a stronger and healthier nation.

[12] I was informed by some male participants that much like there were ladies only groups, there were men's only groups. They told me that much of the discussion was similar to topics covered in the ladies' groups – sexual health and concerns associated with it. While I was not privy to the details of these conversations, male participants felt comfortable enough to share some stories.
[13] By this I mean the language that was recognised as its own and not the amalgamation of German, Dutch and French that was used before.
[14] The author is credited as being the first to write such a book for Afrikaners.
[15] Huguenots were French Protestants during the 16th and 17th centuries, followers of John Calvin. Facing persecution in Catholic France, many Huguenots fled seeking religious freedom. They contributed significantly to various countries after their diaspora, making impacts in commerce and intellectual pursuits. The term Huguenot signifies a historical group shaped by religious conflicts and migration.

Smal (1921) provides a list of ingredients right at the very start of his book which he makes reference to throughout when prescribing treatments. This list is important as it is clear after a perusal of other *Boererate* books and sources[16] that many, if not all, of these ingredients are repeatedly referred to. There are other *Boererate* books which are assemblages of treatments collected from Afrikaners all over the world. These books speak to the Afrikaner diaspora and how, even when scattered all across the globe, community is fostered by projects such as these.

The inclusion of this book in this literature review serves as a crucial anthropological artefact, representing a seminal text that not only initiated my exploration but also acted as a catalyst for the formation of my own private collection of *Boererate* literature. Positioned as a pioneering work within the genre, this text encapsulates the initial codification and articulation of indigenous knowledge surrounding traditional Afrikaner remedies. This study seeks to elucidate the ontological shifts and epistemological transformations evident in the discourse of *Boererate* literature and trace its evolution. By delving into the pre-digital era representation of *Boererate*, prior to the prevalence of online forums like Facebook groups, I aim to unravel the social dynamics, cultural meanings, and symbolic capital embedded in the dissemination of *Boererate*. Examining how this text is framed and presents traditional practices allows for a nuanced understanding of the historical trajectory and the persistence of certain elements within the dynamic landscape of *Boererate* knowledge.

As an inquiry into the malleability of this knowledge, I want to posit that while the discourse surrounding *Boererate* may exhibit shifts influenced by contemporary mediums, the core elements and practices endure as cultural constants. By critically engaging with this Afrikaans home remedies book, and many others like it, and contextualising it within the broader landscape of *Boererate* literature, I seek to contribute to the anthropological understanding of knowledge transmission, adaptation, and continuity. Through the analysis of linguistic, symbolic, and cultural markers, I want to unveil the underlying structures that have shaped and sustained traditional Afrikaner healing practices. The exploration of this early text offers a valuable entry point for examining not only the historical articulation of *Boererate* but also the anthropological implications of knowledge preservation, transformation, and resilience in the face of contemporary information dynamics.

One of these underlying structures lies in the observed relationship between the oral transmission of home remedies among women and the written documentation by men in

[16] See Thomas & Rieck (2005) and Smuts (2015)

Boererate books. A subtle connection unravels, revealing the intricate interweaving of nature and culture. This inherent quality within historical documents offers a valuable starting point for exploring not just the historical articulation of *Boererate* but also the anthropological implications of preserving, transforming, and resiliently adapting knowledge in response to contemporary information dynamics.

This dichotomy raises pertinent inquiries into gendered power dynamics and the commodification of traditional knowledge. The act of committing these remedies to writing may inadvertently introduce a level of detachment from their roots, transitioning them from a dynamic, nature-inspired practice to a controlled and static cultural artefact. This transformation highlights a tension between the preservation of cultural heritage and the imposition of a more structured, male-dominated narrative on traditional healing practices. The written documentation may signify not only a shift in the medium of transmission but also a potential shift in the power and gendered dynamics surrounding the control and dissemination of this valuable cultural knowledge.

Research into contemporary framings of Afrikaner identities and gendered dynamics has gained considerable traction over the years and absolutely critical to these kinds of studies of whiteness in South Africa is the article “Anthropology and Whites in South Africa: Response to an Unreasonable Critique” written by Isak Niehaus. In it, Niehaus (2013) challenges the idea that white people in South Africa are escaping anthropological analysis and goes about listing and discusses various authors who have made contributions to this body of knowledge. Within the context of researching Afrikaner women, there is an inherent acknowledgment of privilege and a conscious recognition of the opportunities this privilege affords in accessing and studying aspects that may have eluded comprehensive analysis. As a woman of Afrikaner descent engaged in this research, the utilisation of privilege becomes a tool for delving into underexplored narratives, providing a unique perspective on experiences that have often been overlooked. This approach seeks to unravel layers of complexity within the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and power, aiming to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Afrikaner women's everyday lives in the broader discourse on whiteness in South Africa. The conscientious use of privilege, in this case, becomes a means of amplifying voices and shedding light on facets of Afrikaner female experiences that have been historically underrepresented in critical studies.

One such critical study is that of Christi van der Westhuizen, who explores identities and experiences of white Afrikaans-speaking women within the context of post-apartheid South

Africa. Her book stands as a significant contribution to the understanding of how historical, racial, and gender dynamics continue to shape contemporary society. One of the central themes that van der Westhuizen (2017) engages with is the constructed image of Afrikaans-speaking white women and its implications. She elaborates on the concept of *ordentlikheid*, or decency, which operates as a form of ethnic respectability within white Afrikaner communities. This notion weaves into the identities of white Afrikaner women and further complicates their positioning within post-apartheid South Africa.

In my exploration of Afrikaner identities, I find Christi van der Westhuizen's work to be a valuable entry point. As a sociologist, she adeptly navigates societal structures and power dynamics, providing insights that complement the anthropological lens. Van der Westhuizen's perspective allows for a broader understanding of how Afrikaner identities are shaped by collective behaviours and structural forces. Her work becomes particularly useful due to its nuanced examination of the complexities inherent in Afrikaner identities. Van der Westhuizen's sociological insights serve as a stepping stone, helping to bridge the gap between overarching societal dynamics and the intricate details of everyday life. This perspective enables a deeper exploration of how Afrikaner identities are negotiated, constructed, and maintained in the face of various social influences.

However, I recognise that her work represents only a starting point. Christi van der Westhuizen's work, while undoubtedly contributing to the discourse on ethnicised respectability among Afrikaner women, serves as a foundational point for further exploration rather than a definitive analysis. Recognising the notable gap in the existing literature, her research offers an initial framework to examine the complex interplay of cultural identity and societal expectations within the context of Afrikaner women's behaviour. However, it is crucial to approach her findings critically, acknowledging that the concept of ethnicised respectability is more nuanced and adaptable than her portrayal suggests. Engaging with her research becomes a necessary step in addressing this scholarly void and serves as a starting point for a more comprehensive exploration of the subject.

Chapter 5 endeavours to complicate and enrich this sociological foundation with more in-depth anthropological literature, whilst examining how *Boererate* exerts socio-cultural control though its affordances of semblances of agency and authority to some individuals whilst simultaneously compelling them to adhere to its overarching impact. While van der Westhuizen's analysis provides a broader societal context, by introducing other anthropological works and bringing them into conversation with van der Westhuizen’s, I

hope to tease out a multitude of valuable outcomes. By pursuing an intertextual approach, I want to synthesise theoretical perspectives, refine my own methodologies, and enhance the conceptual underpinnings of this investigation. By critically examining research gaps, whether in the form of contradictory findings, underexplored dimensions, or emerging trends that demand further investigation, I ultimately want to ensure I have not only a sound approach but also a strong theoretical and conceptual endeavour. By amalgamating sociological and anthropological perspectives, my research aspires to offer a multi-layered understanding of Afrikaner identities that delves into both the overarching social structures and the intricate, lived experiences that define these identities within specific cultural contexts.

Megan Lewis's book, "Performing Whitely in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life," is strategically chosen to enrich the understanding of how identity is actively performed, particularly within the Afrikaner community in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. Lewis's (2016) work serves as a valuable source due to its comprehensive examination of the intricate ways in which Afrikaners engage in the performative act of expressing their identities. Lewis's approach is particularly noteworthy as it goes beyond a superficial exploration. Through her lens, the book unfolds a multifaceted analysis, revealing the strategic use of elements such as nostalgia, melodrama, queering, abjection, and kitsch. These elements, as highlighted by Lewis, become crucial components in the performative construction and reaffirmation of the distinct Afrikaner identities. Moreover, the book critically dissects the various speech acts, political gestures, and theatrical endeavours undertaken by Afrikaners within both the theatrical sphere and the public domain. In this regard, Lewis (2016) looks to the performances of Pieter-Dirk Uys and his drag alter-ego Evita Bezuidenhout, Deon Opperman’s heroic depictions of Boer history in his musical melodramas, and the purposefully kitsch musical performances of Jack Parow and Die Antwoord. This analysis not only provides insights into the performative aspects of identity but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural and political dimensions that shape Afrikaner identities in the postcolonial context.

Incorporating Lewis’s (2016) work into my research provides a valuable lens through which I can gain profound insights into the performative aspects of societal roles among Afrikaner communities. Lewis's examination of strategies employed by Afrikaners in performing their identities equips me with a nuanced understanding of how societal roles are actively constructed and enacted. This insight proved instrumental in guiding my approach to interviews and observations, allowing me to recognise and interpret the deliberate

performative elements employed by individuals within Afrikaner communities. Furthermore, Lewis's work enables me to cast an analytical lens back through time to start to unpack why certain historical events unfolded as they did. By discerning the performative dimensions of Afrikaner identities in historical contexts, I can unravel the intricate interplay between identity expression and the sociopolitical dynamics that have shaped the historical narrative, thus deepening my understanding of the broader historical forces at play.

Nostalgia is a key role-player that needs to be examined within the context of this project and how it connects to historical narrative. Van der Waal and Robbins (2011) present a comprehensive analysis of the cultural impact of an Afrikaans pop song centred around General De la Rey, a significant historical figure from the Anglo-Boer War. At its core, the song, named *De La Rey*, ignited a fervent response among white Afrikaners, evoking a powerful sense of nostalgia and, for some, rekindling their connection to Boer heritage. Van der Waal and Robins meticulously explore this rekindling process, shedding light on the intricate interplay between historical memory, cultural revival, and contemporary identity formation.

Examining how nostalgia is intricately woven into the fabric of this project, especially considering its historical dimension, is paramount. As demonstrated by Van der Waal and Robbins (2011), nostalgia emerges as a powerful force in shaping historical narratives. The song *De La Rey* is a cultural artefact deeply rooted in the historical context of the Anglo-Boer War, serves as a poignant example of how nostalgia can evoke a fervent response among a community, rekindling connections to heritage and influencing contemporary identity formation. Analysing the nuances of nostalgia in projects with a significant historical portion becomes instrumental, allowing for a more profound understanding of how individuals engage with and interpret historical narratives. By unravelling the layers of nostalgia embedded in cultural expressions, I endeavour to elucidate the intricate relationship between historical memory, cultural revival, and the ongoing construction of identity within the Afrikaner community. The role of nostalgia and how it impacts generational interactions is also a key issue that will be discussed in chapter 5.

Van der Waal and Robbins (2011) also delve into the dynamic landscape of post-apartheid Afrikaner identities, where the song's popularity serves as a vibrant reflection of a resurging sense of pride. This pride is deeply intertwined with historical roots, a fact that highlights how collective memory and historical consciousness can be channelled through popular cultural artefacts. However, the article also underscores the contentious nature of the song

due to its themes of war and the complex portrayal of General Koos de la Rey, an Afrikaner Boer war leader who famously opposed the conflict. This internal tension adds depth to the narrative of Afrikaner identity revival. In a broader context, the article places the resurgence of Afrikaner identity within the post-apartheid cultural industry. Within the post-apartheid context, the "De la Rey" phenomenon becomes a lens through which the complexities of identity, memory, and historical reconciliation are explored. Van der Waal and Robins' work resonates with broader discussions on memory studies, cultural heritage, and the intricate tapestry of identity in a society transitioning from a deeply divided past to a more inclusive present.

The phenomenon described also invites an exploration of agency of objects, contemplating how objects, such as a song, can possess or perhaps are rather imbued with the capacity to exert influence and agency comparable to that of a person. Agency used to describe here – and throughout this thesis – the capacity of an individual or a group to act independently, make choices, and exert influence or control over their actions and decisions within a wider set of structural constraints. It involves the ability to initiate and carry out purposeful actions, demonstrating a sense of autonomy and the power to shape one's own path or contribute to broader social dynamics. In this context, objects may be attributed a certain degree of influence or effectiveness in shaping outcomes, often beyond their physical properties – a concept that builds over the course of the coming chapter but which I explore and explain in chapter 6.

In this context, the song is not merely a passive entity but is imbued with the power to enact action. As people attribute significance to the song, considering it a potent rallying point, it, in turn, becomes an active force in shaping behaviours and attitudes. In this exchange, the individuals engaging with it contribute actively to the shaping of the cultural landscape, underscoring a mutual agency where neither party is relegated to a purely passive role. This exploration of how an object can be imbued with agency adds a layer of complexity to my understanding of how cultural elements can be made to participate in shaping human behaviours and societal dynamics.

Similarly, this phenomenon unfolds in the realm of *Boererate*, where the shaping influence is reciprocal, and individuals are as much architects of *Boererate* as it is a sculptor of their practices. As this argument gains momentum throughout subsequent chapters, it delves further into the intricate dynamics of contemporary theoretical considerations of plasticity and object agency in chapter 6. Within this exploration, the concept of object agency takes

centre stage, emphasising how the objects associated with *Boererate*, be they remedies, artefacts, or cultural symbols, are actively made to contribute to shaping their cultural landscapes.

This review is not intended to provide an exhaustive inventory of all the works I have consulted. Instead, it specifically highlights those that have proven sufficiently influential in shaping my research questions. The selected works represent a deliberate curation, underscoring their pivotal role in informing the direction and framing of my inquiries. The omission of certain texts in this brief overview should not diminish their significance; rather, it reflects a focused acknowledgment of the key sources that have substantially contributed to the conceptual foundations of my research.

Research Questions & Chapter Outline

What are the methodologies and strategies for conducting anthropological research during a pandemic?

My curiosity led me down the path of investigating the origins of *Boererate*. Recognising that comprehending its current forms and potential future trajectories hinged on unravelling its historical roots, I embarked on a quest to trace its evolution over time. *Boererate*, the repository of age-old folk remedies and wellness wisdom, has traversed a remarkable passage through the annals of South Africa's medical history. South Africa's medical landscape is a tapestry woven with diverse threads of indigenous healing practices, colonial influences, and the interplay of cultures. In understanding *Boererate*, one cannot disregard the deep-seated traditions that have shaped health perceptions and practices in this region. From the indigenous wisdom of traditional healers to the medical interventions introduced during colonial times, each layer contributes to the unique bricolage of health beliefs and practices that eventually converged into what we now recognise as *Boererate*.

Archival research emerges as a beacon guiding us through the intricate corridors of time. Having been granted the opportunity to delve into old manuscripts, letters, and records, at the Voortrekker Monument's *Erfenissentrum* [Heritage Centre] and the Brandt Collection, I was able to draw together many threads from the past and shed light on its adaptation to changing societal contexts and its resilient survival against the backdrop of modernisation. The digital age has ushered *Boererate* into a new realm, where Facebook groups now serve as virtual amphitheatres for the exchange of these age-old remedies. Here, the old converges with the

contemporary, and the remedies find new life in the pixels of a screen. Yet, even in this modern iteration, the essence of *Boererate* remains intertwined with the legacy of those who came before us. In essence, understanding *Boererate* demands a holistic exploration that encompasses both its historical voyage and its current virtual existence. The pages of history and the digital platforms of today have become interconnected chapters in the story of this enduring practice.

To this end, my discussion in chapter 2 is an overview of my methodology and the creative ways I had to work around the limitations imposed on me by the COVID-19 Pandemic and ensuing lockdown stages. From the project's inception, I employed innovative methods. I initially envisioned a blend of virtual, online ethnography and traditional field-based participant observation. However, the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns necessitated a reimagining of this approach even before I presented my research proposal. Reflecting on the adaptability and flexibility my research and data collection methods demanded allowed me to position my efforts within a broader body of knowledge emerging from global lockdown experiences. These experiences prompted social scientists to refine and restructure their approaches.

This framing allows me to trace my project's journey from start to finish, highlighting how anthropology's inherent flexibility was conducive to the adaptability required of a researcher in lockdown. I have divided this section into subheadings that consider ethics and approval, archival research, online forum research, and the eventual shift towards more traditional interviews and participant observation. I will tie these discussions back to a thinktank of pieces focused on lockdown research in anthropology hosted by the American Anthropological Association, as well as other sources published outside this organisation.

The aim of this discussion is to argue that traditional methods hold significant value and remain classic for good reasons and we should not hesitate to bring the likes of Malinowski, Geertz, and the Comaroffs into conversation with contemporary literature and settings. We should use these classic works as a foundation, applying the skills imparted by our lecturers and supervisors, but it is important to recognise that ‘The Field’ is not static, and its understanding has evolved since its initial exploration nearly 100 years ago on the Trobriand Islands. This discussion paves the way for the next question by highlighting the importance of archival work in this study. The circumstances I found myself in were conducive to solitary work with files at the Voortrekker Monument.

At what point in history did common remedies evolve into the recognised system of *Boererate*?

This question allows me to reflect on the literature I found relating to *Boererate*, which led me to explore the intertwining of *Boererate* with gender notions – specifically, the association of Boer women with *Boererate*. This discussion commences with a reinterpretation of historical works on South African medicine history from the previous question, and then focusing on the present-day Afrikaner home-based healing therapies. This reinterpretation illuminated how Boer women, while confined in concentration camps during the South African War, waged an ideological war.

In the context of this ideological struggle, I argue that a clear distinction existed between the creolised medicines Boer women brought into the concentration camps and the body of knowledge – *Boererate* – that emerged post-release from these camps. This argument was based on an amalgamation of archival research and interviews with interlocutors, which provided a dialogic perspective on how a knowledge system like *Boererate* has withstood time. This discourse extended to the popularity of *Boererate* in online forums and Facebook groups during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating its continued relevance and adaptability. The discussions that stem from this in chapter 3 served as the foundation for an article that I published with my PhD supervisor (Blackbeard & McNeill, 2023).

Within this framework, I provide historical background on the South African War and concentration camps. I examine the use of Dutch medicines by Boer women in the camps, explore the transformation of these medicines into *Boererate*, and discuss its significance in contemporary settings. I also discuss the transfer of knowledge and touch on hierarchies of knowledge, laying the groundwork for a more in-depth exploration of gender divisions and generational issues in the thesis.

What are the distinct roles and interactions of different age and gender groups, specifically men and women, young and old, within *Boererate* Facebook communities?

Expanding on the foundation laid in the preceding question, I draw the narrative from the concentration camps into the 21st century. I explore Facebook groups and the data that I collected from interviews with their members. I accomplished this by connecting ideas and sentiments shared with me – and those I observed within the groups – to similar concepts that emerged from my archival research.

Throughout data collection, the link between *Boererate* and femininity and domesticity frequently surfaced, being highlighted by both the men and women I interviewed. I observed intense behavioural regulation within these groups, predominantly by older women. While these women often dedicated posts to outlining unacceptable behaviours, a silent regulation came from older men. These men, who weren't group admins, rarely posted, and when they did, it typically involved a *braai* (outdoor barbeque) tip or recipe. However, they subtly regulated the behaviour of women who posted by reacting angrily to posts that they deemed inappropriate and occasionally trolling[17] the comment section. Older female admins would then enforce discipline – deleting the post, blocking the member, and making a post to correct the behaviour and caution against it. These Facebook groups have fostered environments where older women have emerged as ritual experts. Their position affords them a level of control (potentially absent from other aspects of their lives – which I discuss in relation to my data) as they are, arguably, the only trusted sources of information on *Boererate*. I also discuss the controversial but significant role Fake News played within these groups and beyond.

Considering how my interlocutors interpret this knowledge and define what constitutes *Boererate*, I delve into one of the most notable ideas that surfaced from the data and time 'in the field' – *Boererate* is often employed as resistance against the dominant biomedical system. Drawing on Peter Geschiere's reflections on virtual spaces in the context of Mbembe's lectures on plasticity within indigenous knowledge systems, which I expand upon in Chapter 6, I extend my investigation of *Boererate* into the digital realm. Jane Guyer's writing about African knowledge systems not being monopolised by small cadres offered valuable insights here. This shaping of *Boererate* and its extensive applications (as demonstrated by data regarding home care, self-care, medical care, etc.) mirrored Mbembe's notions of plasticity in pre-colonial African indigenous knowledge systems. As a repository characterised by its pre-colonial knowledge, this concept will be further developed in the next question.

How does the concept of *Boererate* demonstrate plasticity and agency?

The questions thus far actively demonstrate that *Boererate*, as a knowledge system, neither serves a singular purpose nor caters to a single user group. Its malleability has allowed it to

[17] Trolling refers to the act of intentionally provoking or harassing others on the internet, typically by posting inflammatory, offensive, or disruptive comments. Trolls seek to elicit emotional reactions and create discord within online communities. Their motivations vary, ranging from seeking attention to expressing controversial opinions or simply enjoying the disruption they cause. Trolling can occur across various online platforms, including social media, forums, and comment sections.

seamlessly integrate into people's lives as needed. In this question, I delve into the nature of this adaptability and its connection to Mbembe's recent intervention in the wider call for the decolonisation of knowledge.

Technology played a crucial role in my comprehension of *Boererate* during data collection. Facebook groups granted access to knowledge that some individuals might otherwise not have attained. These groups served as access points where communities intersected, transforming into a 'horizontal platform' (Geschiere, 2021) where local knowledge forms could be evaluated alongside the typical biomedical knowledge long considered the foundation of universal knowledge. My investigation into *Boererate* not only offered a unique perspective on it but also focused on digital subjectivities and emerging virtualities.

The wide array of forms and applications that *Boererate* assumed over the years led me to view it as a plural knowledge system and, consequently, recognise its plasticity. Technology and new media in the virtual sphere were central to Mbembe's 2016 Abiola lecture on future knowledges. Often seen as the product of digital technology, the intersection of the virtual and reality can be reframed through *Boererate*, showcasing the entanglement of humans with materiality. This way of thinking helped me see *Boererate* as a type of knowledge that both works to break away from colonial influences and also change in response to it being rediscovered and spread. It evolved beyond a nostalgic tool or a melancholic evocation of a white settler past, continuously gathering advice, evolving, and changing. To understand the agency of this non-human consequential actor, a posthuman approach was necessary.

Throughout my research, it became evident that regardless of the circumstance, *Boererate* persisted – it has never been static. As a non-human agent, *Boererate* acted as a carrier of meaning and a vehicle for ways of life, arguably interacting with people in the meaning-making process and the construction of the social world. *Boererate* is more than an inert object backdrop to social practices. While it may not dictate people's lives, it does interact with and impact upon how people behave in significant ways. They affect us both because of us and in spite of us – we use them, yet we are also at their mercy. This argument emphasises that *Boererate*, as an active non-human agent, shapes the people who use it in ways similar to the ways in which they shape it. The dynamics of this rather circular process begin to emerge towards the end of this thesis where I take a more theoretical turn having presented my ethnographic evidence in earlier chapters.

Challenges and Constraints: Navigating the limitations of this project.

Language Barriers

Language holds a profound and multifaceted role within the realm of anthropological research, simultaneously serving as a potent tool and an intricate barrier. Its intricate interplay shapes the way researchers decipher cultural nuances, social frameworks, and intricate human interactions. However, this linguistic medium can be a double-edged sword, as it possesses the capability to both illuminate and obscure the path to accurate interpretations and comprehensive understandings, thereby potentially circumscribing the scope of research endeavours.

Many pioneers in the field of anthropology have highlighted that language introduces intriguing dynamics within the discipline, impacting both the quality of data and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, often with both positive and adverse effects. Franz Boas (1920) discussed how language differences can influence our understanding of other cultures and create potential barriers, and there are similar sentiments echoed by both Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1967). While language barriers are not a novel issue in anthropology, there is much that we can continue to learn from them. The interplay of language barriers within the realm of anthropology unveils a paradoxical landscape, one where limitations are accompanied by invaluable openings for understanding. While these barriers undoubtedly pose challenges in terms of effective communication and comprehensive data collection, they concurrently unveil a realm of subtleties and nuances that often elude direct linguistic expression.

Within this complex tapestry, the very act of navigating a language barrier can be an enlightening experience. When individuals encounter linguistic hurdles, they are often prompted to seek alternative means of conveying their thoughts, resorting to nonverbal cues, gestures, and expressions that transcend words. These non-linguistic modes of communication offer a window into cultural norms, emotional undercurrents, and even unspoken hierarchies. Anthropologists, attuned to the nuances of these subtleties, can decipher layers of meaning that lie beyond the surface of spoken language.

Furthermore, the very existence of a language barrier can compel individuals to provide context and explanations that they might not have considered necessary in a seamless linguistic exchange. This phenomenon stems from a shared human inclination to bridge gaps in understanding. In the presence of linguistic obstacles, people often feel compelled to elaborate, clarify, and contextualize their statements. In doing so, they inadvertently offer

anthropologists access to insights that might have otherwise remained concealed in a fluid conversation.

While language barriers unquestionably present challenges towards data collection, they simultaneously serve as conduits to a wealth of unspoken narratives and culturally embedded messages. If one is skilled in deciphering these intricate layers of communication, one can glean profound insights into human behaviour, societal norms, and the intricate fabric of cross-cultural interactions. As such, the very obstacles that hinder linguistic transmission become catalysts for uncovering the subtle tapestry of human expression.

Setting out on this project, I carried with me the assumption that language barriers would be a negligible concern. However, I was swiftly confronted with a reality that defied my expectations. Having been raised in a bilingual home (English and Afrikaans) and possessing a confident command of Afrikaans, I had overlooked a critical aspect – the prevalence of '*suiwer* Afrikaans' or pure Afrikaans, as well as archaic versions of the language within the archival materials.

To bridge this unforeseen gap, I sought refuge in the expertise of my father, whose fluency in translating Dutch and German texts proved invaluable during our visits to the archives. Additionally, my attempts to engage with Afrikaans organisations such as Die Voortrekkers[18] and the ATKV (Afrikaanse Taal end Kultuurvereninging)[19] compelled me to lean on friends and family for assistance in translating emails. This journey was marked by a humbling sense of overwhelm, prompting me to acknowledge the stark underestimation of the challenges I would confront. This experience serves as a poignant reminder of the interplay between linguistic prowess, historical exploration, and personal heritage.

I had become anxious in my communications and thought that I would always be held at arm's length while asking interlocutors about their interactions with *Boererate,* but my anxieties were quelled fairly early on into my interviews and eventual participant observation. Many of my interlocutors viewed my position as 'the Afrikaans kid who was a little too English' as novel and endearing. As time wore on, they went to great lengths to make sure that I understood specific turns of phrase, ingredients, as well as methodologies involved in making remedies.

[18] This is an organisation similar to the scouts, but on their website is described as a "cultural movement" which is aimed at equipping the youth members with the necessary tools to live as modern Afrikaners and "consistent Christians" (Anon., 2023)
[19] This is the abbreviation for the Afrikaans language and Culture Association, which is a society aimed at promoting Afrikaans language and culture.

Engrained within this system of knowledge is a heavy reliance on Afrikaans, a language that encapsulates unique terminologies and concepts deeply interwoven with local traditions. Consequently, delving into the intricacies of *Boererate* extends beyond linguistic exploration, evolving into a profound journey into cultural dynamics. Amidst the trove of *Boererate* terminology, one uncovers a cluster of terms that defy direct translation into other languages. These lexical entities encapsulate intricate cultural ideas, beliefs, and practices intrinsic to the Afrikaans-speaking populace.

To truly grasp the essence of these culturally loaded terms, one must access emic knowledge, akin to an insider's insight into their culture. This extends beyond dictionary definitions, entailing an immersive understanding of contextual nuances and cultural connotations intertwined with the terms. Emic knowledge necessitates a profound engagement with culture, delving into its historical narratives, values, and worldviews. Nevertheless, even with emic knowledge at hand, facets of *Boererate* remain inherently untranslatable. These might encompass rituals, beliefs, or experiences that retain a singular essence intrinsically tied to the culture. Translation is a treacherous task and has its limitations when dealing with deeply culturally rooted concepts. I had spent many nights furiously translating, laughing, arguing, crying, and then laughing again with my mother as we tried to reckon with what had been written in some of my early chats with interlocutors. My obsession with codifying and translating everything distracted me, only initially, from the real important aspects of this project – connecting with people and telling their stories.

In the realm of translation, theorists like Jacques Derrida (2016) emphasised the inherent difficulties in achieving a perfect translation due to the play of language, cultural nuances, and the constant deferral of meaning. This scepticism about translation is reflective of the broader postmodernist ethos that questions the stability of meaning and challenges the notion of a single, objective truth. Building on this, the transition to posthumanism introduces a new layer to the discourse. Posthumanism, in its various forms, challenges the traditional human-centric perspectives and explores the blurring boundaries between the human and the non-human. In the context of translation, posthumanism prompts us to reconsider the act of translation not merely as a human endeavour but as a process that involves multiple agents, including technology and non-human entities. The idea that ‘theory’ might actually be an impossibility, as posited (somewhat ironically) by postmodernist theorists, can be linked to the posthumanist notion that the human is not the sole locus of agency and meaning making. In this sense, the translation process becomes a networked and distributed activity, involving not only human translators but also algorithms, machines, and cultural elements that may

transcend traditional human boundaries – like my many forays into translation attempts using my family, dictionaries, the internet etc.

Shifting gears to the realm of anthropology, the challenge of translation has been a persistent concern. The complexities and ethical dilemmas involved in representing and translating the cultural practices of others are infinite. The act of translating culture is fraught with power dynamics, potential distortions, and the risk of reinforcing stereotypes. Bringing it back to the coding of *Boererate* in obscure and archaic Afrikaans, this choice itself can be seen as a deliberate strategy to imbue the text with ritual knowledge and cultural significance. The intentional use of a less accessible language contributes to the mystification and ritualisation of the text, aligning with the arguments about the impossibility of translation within a postmodern framework. The obscurity of language serves not only as a barrier for direct translation but also as a means of establishing cultural authority and exclusivity. It reinforces the idea that certain forms of knowledge are inherently tied to specific linguistic and cultural contexts, making them resistant to easy translation or appropriation.

Given the preceding discussion, I wish to address one of my primary language issues that I faced to explain why I will refer to *Boererate* in the plural throughout this thesis. First and foremost, throughout the chapters to follow I will demonstrate that *Boererate* is a dynamic system of knowledge that has occupied many forms and continues to ebb and flow. There is a need for embracing multiple perspectives and forms of knowledge production as there are many different ways of knowing and understanding the world, all of which are valid and valuable. While it is a pluralistic knowledge system, for the sake of grammar I will use the subject-verb agreement (concord rule) that often accompanies that of a singular known. As *Boererate* is a singular concept made up of many, albeit moving, parts. I will also capitalise it to denote not only its significance, but also accord the grammatical treatment of a name – a proper noun. It is presented in italics to denote that it is a word taken from another language and presented in an English paper.

Online Ethnography

Late in 2020 I found that South Africans had been extensively Googling the terms '*Boererate*' and 'home remedies'. Not only had these search terms seen enormous activity and peaks in interest, but the phrase 'home remedies for COVID' was the top related query (Google Trends, 2021). This activity was corroborated by what I had witnessed on the various *Boererate* Facebook groups that I had joined some years ago. Many of the various group administrators had been posting that, in 2020, they had fielded enormous amounts of

member requests and posts and that 2021 was looking no different. I was in the fortunate position where, as a long time member of these groups, I was able to bear witness to not only the influx of new members but also how the nature of members' posts changed in response to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic.

The initial catalyst for my interest in delving into this issue stemmed from the surging influx of COVID-related posts. However, beyond this triggering point, it was impossible to overlook the pervasive nature of the prevailing discourse that enveloped me. As the global pandemic unraveled across the initial months of 2020, COVID-19 evolved into a topic that not only dominated conversations but also exacerbated deeply entrenched xenophobic and racist inclinations (Hardy, 2020). Furthermore, the landscape of this discourse expanded to accommodate the rapid sprouting of conspiracy theories centered around the virus, later extending their tendrils to encompass the realm of vaccines. These theories seemed to take root with an astonishing swiftness, defying what could have been anticipated. The ensuing skepticism, commonly associated with conspiracy theories, directed its gaze towards biomedical information sources, casting a cloud of doubt that appeared to gain strength due to what was perceived as a protracted delay in comprehending the virus and providing effective treatment for the afflicted.

Early in 2020, I had started a preliminary investigation into *Boererate* and was starting to come to terms with home-based healing and the treatment of maladies through the use of predominantly natural products when I came across what would be the first of thousands of COVID-19 related posts on the various Facebook groups I had joined. It was brief, a female member of the group asked if anyone had any advice for how to treat the "new virus" as her sister had been travelling through Europe and was back in South Africa and was plagued by fatigue and a cough that visibly strained her body. The *raat* [advice] flooded in – two bananas in the morning and the evening, half a raw potato, *kankerbossietee* [cancer bush tea], prayer – the list was endless. I wanted nothing more than to reach out to the commentors and set up a few interviews and pick their brains. However, due to the ban on social gatherings, I knew that I could not rely on conventional anthropological methods of face-to-face interviews and participant observation for data collection – at least not initially. At first, this seemed to present an insurmountable task, but I soon found a wealth of resources that guided me in conducting online ethnography – dubbed 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2015).

Online ethnography is the umbrella terms for contemporary research methodology tailored to investigate the intricate ways individuals engage within virtual communities. Nestled within

the broader landscape of ethnographic exploration, this subfield holds the purpose of delving into the distinct dynamics unfolding in digital spaces – critical to my framing and argument around the role that *Boererate* plays in decolonisation of virtual spaces. Central to this approach is the practice of participant observation within these virtual enclaves. Here, I had to become an active part of the digital environment, immersing myself in interactions and exchanges with community members. This participatory engagement is complemented by the analysis of digital artefacts like posts, comments, images, and videos. In many ways, embarking on online ethnography parallels the initial steps of engaging with any website or platform, eventually evolving into a deeply immersive process.

A prominent merit of online ethnography is its capacity to breach barriers that often render certain communities inaccessible due to geographical constraints. This methodology serves as a gateway to explore a diverse array of virtual collectives, spanning social media realms to online forums and beyond. Moreover, digital ethnography leverages participant-generated content, which involves participants contributing photographs, videos, and diaries explicating their behaviours and experiences, thereby furnishing the researcher with a wealth of intricate, multi-dimensional data.

However, the realm of online ethnography also harbours its own array of challenges. Ethical considerations, in particular, loom large in digital research. Negotiating the intricate territories of privacy, consent, and anonymity becomes complex as public and private boundaries converge in the digital landscape – I will discuss these further in the next section. Furthermore, while online interactions yield invaluable insights, they might not fully encapsulate the intricate nuances of in-person communication, such as the nuances of body language, tone, and other non-verbal cues.

While I do discuss this methodology in detail in the next chapter, I wish to point to it here as an avenue for comprehending the intricate tapestries of digital cultures and interactions. Its allure stems from the unique insights it provides, counterbalanced by the challenges that necessitate meticulous contemplation—particularly in terms of ethical considerations and the inherent limitations of online modes of communication.

Ethics

My greatest concern within my anthropological pursuits has always been to never to do any harm to my interlocutors, participants, nor the communities that they reside within. Throughout my studies, I have always relied on the American Anthropological Association's

globally accepted model for dynamic informed consent[20]. Through working with people's medical and health concerns that were being laid bare on Facebook groups, my primary concern was that I wanted all participants (whether they were interviewed or just surveyed) to feel safe and protected at all times. To this end, I ensured to refer to them by their gender only (for example 'a man' told me something) if they had not explicitly provided me with continuous consent to refer to them by their chosen pseudonyms. I have always asked interlocutors to come up with their own pseudonyms to give them control over how their stories are told and to reassure them that they would be protected from any epistemic harm. After asking for their permission to use their post or comment I then asked them to pick their own pseudonym for two reasons – to give them this aforementioned control over how their digital identity would be presented and for my own cataloguing needs.

I also messaged the administrators of the Facebook groups that I joined and informed them of my intent to post, observe and, potentially, interview members of the group. There were two groups whose administrators refused me, and I courteously thanked them and respected their decisions – while I did see some cross-posting from these groups, I never made use of any data that would have been collected from these posts and did not reach out to any members of those groups. For the administrators that agreed to my being present within the groups, I needed only to make accommodations that we worked out together – I would not mention the names of the groups or members (unless they had been contacted for consent – see above), and I would not use any screenshots unless I blurred the user's name and gained explicit consent from the user. I would also post on the group about my project, introduce myself, and state the rules that had been agreed to. While posting a general statement about the research may not guarantee that everyone sees or understands it, administrators always encouraged me to contact the user directly and quote this original post. It was from these initial posts that I found many of my interlocutors – people were keen to chat.

The exchanges on the groups were taking place in an easily accessible and available format and were not private in the strictest sense[21]. As such, all posts and ensuing conversation in the comments section were subject to the public gaze of all those present in the groups. On one hand, members must be approved before they can join and only those who are allowed in

[20] Anthropologists hold a responsibility to guarantee that individuals participating in research willingly provide consent, avoiding situations where consent might be coerced or uninformed. If the research evolves in a manner directly impacting participants, anthropologists must reevaluate and adjust consent agreements. The process of informed consent is ongoing, adaptable, and reflective. Its essence lies in the quality of consent rather than its specific documentation format. (American Anthropological Association, 2012)

[21] These groups were listed as private groups and only members can see posts. However, there are some 300 00+ members and I have had many of my own friends on Facebook listed in the groups as members.

have access to the posts and comments within the group. On the other hand, it is also widely open to anyone with a Facebook account, who can therefore find the group and request admission without much difficulty. This makes it easy for like-minded individuals to connect but also leaves the group vulnerable to outside intrusion from trolls or malicious actors. There are, like with most groups on Facebook, a series of questions that one must answer to join – which are all posed in Afrikaans. Setting and enforcing rules in a Facebook group is essential to ensure it is a safe and friendly space. Rules help members know what kind of content or behaviour is allowed and expected, while also offering guidelines for how to interact respectfully with one another. This was taken to heart by the groups' admins and rules were repeatedly referred to in posts about unacceptable behaviour.

Discussing medical issues within a Facebook group or similar online platform presents a unique set of ethical issues, particularly for anthropologists who might use these spaces as part of their research. These ethical considerations revolve around privacy, consent, anonymization, and the potential for harm. Privacy is a significant concern. While Facebook groups may be public, members often have expectations of privacy in these spaces. They share personal experiences, feelings, and medical histories that they may not want families and friends to know about. Also, there is the potential for harm. Discussing medical issues online can inadvertently spread misinformation, create unnecessary anxiety, or even encourage harmful behaviours. I recognised my duty to minimise harm and ensure my work and efforts did not exacerbate these kinds of issues. While Facebook groups offer rich data for anthropologists studying medical issues, they also present complex ethical challenges which I believe I have navigated to the best of my abilities. I approached this with care, respect for individual privacy, and always sought dynamic informed consent where possible, ensuring anonymisation, and ultimately minimising potential harm.

Conclusion

Investigating *Boererate* and the role that it plays in Afrikaner women's daily lives and how it has shaped them – and been shaped itself – is a project that has been in the works for the last five years, ever since it was first mentioned in my honours research interviews. Casting a wide net for literature has enabled to me situate this work within a broader discussion of historical trajectories of people and their ideas and how this can be brought into conversation with contemporary framings of identities and the dynamic interplay between age and gender. This led me to critical discussions of power and how hierarchies can be both subverted and reaffirmed within virtual spaces. These virtual spaces are absolutely critical to unpacking the nuances of decolonisation that one might not inherently link to discussions of traditional Boer

remedies, but upon inspection, reveals that a system of knowledge of this nature with its specific history is an adept tool for this kind of analysis.

While I did encounter some challenges throughout this project, I believed the experiences of them ultimately allowed me to be more reflexive than I thought I would need to be and in turn strengthened the project. Ethnography during lockdown became a popular topic of discussion over the last few years, but I believe projects like this illustrate that the more things change, the more they remain the same and data collection is a process that will march on regardless – much like *Boererate* itself. The ethical implications inherent in this process were a steep learning curve, but also a testament to how we need to protect the people who take the time to tell us their stories.

This project is directed towards addressing fundamental inquiries that, while seemingly straightforward, hold profound significance. The ensuing chapters encapsulate responses intricately interwoven in support of my overarching thesis. Within the scope of this thesis, I posit that *Boererate* emerged as a manifestation of the experiences undergone by Boer women in the concentration camps during the South African War. These women not only engendered and shaped *Boererate*, but in the process, underwent a reciprocal transformation themselves. The genesis of agency within *Boererate* is traced back to its inception, enabling its endurance and evolution in diverse manifestations until it discovered a contemporary refuge within the confines of the Facebook groups to which I became a participant. Within this virtual realm, I embarked upon an exploration delving into the multifaceted nature of *Boererate*, uncovering its role not merely as a superficially potent instrument for community establishment and perpetuation, but more profoundly as a mechanism for exerting influence and control. While *Boererate* imparts empowerment, it concurrently ensnares its participants. Possessing agency, yet subject to external forces. *Boererate*, at its core, remains resolute and predominantly unaltered since its inception approximately 120 years ago. Nevertheless, such enduring potency necessitates an adaptive quality to ensure its ongoing relevance. *Boererate* exhibits malleability and flexibility, albeit within the confines that safeguard its survival. It functions as a repository of knowledge, rooted in the South African landscape and laden with historical significance, yet consistently prioritises its own preservation above all else.

What follows in the chapters to come is detailed discussion of the methods that elicited a rich historical tapestry against which I could present contemporary framings of a centuries old practice. This story will begin in the next chapter, A Dash of Data and a Pinch of Procedure, a detailed discussion and reflection on the methods that I employed over the last few years.

This chapter will then segue into a historical analysis chapter, The Birth of *Boererate*. Once this context has been illuminated, I will then bring it into conversation with the data that I have collected in the next two chapters, namely Power Shifts and Gender Rifts, and finally Reshaping Realities. I will then conclude by reiterating the key findings from the preceding chapters and their implications.

Chapter 2: A Dash of Data and a Pinch of Procedure

In the previous chapter I highlighted how important my methodology would be and how I had to make constant adjustments due to the varying stages of lockdown during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This chapter will delve into the intricate and multifaceted methods I employed in my research, which encompassed archival research, digital ethnography, traditional anthropological interviews, and participant observation. What follows in this chapter is a survey of the works I consulted – old and new – and how I applied them to my own project as well as how "the field" reacted to it. This chapter is driven by the imperative to comprehensively grasp the ways in which researchers, specifically those within the anthropological realm, have navigated the circumstantially essential transition towards predominantly conducting ethnographic research in online environments. Central to this is the examination of the strategic preparedness that researchers, me included, embraced in response to the inevitable paradigm shift. Moreover, the chapter delves into the diverse spectrum of reactions and responses that anthropologists, like me, exhibited in the face of this transformative juncture.

Archival research formed the backbone of my historical understanding of *Boererate*, providing a tangible link to the past. I meticulously investigated records and documents, both written and visual, that offered insights into how these remedies were used, adapted, and preserved over time. This method allowed me to weave a rich tapestry of historical context, enabling me to trace the evolution of *Boererate* and understand its resilience in the face of societal changes and challenges. Complementing this, I also embraced the contemporary practice of digital ethnography. As an innovative research strategy, digital ethnography enabled me to explore the online spaces where discussions and exchanges about *Boererate* took place. This approach facilitated a deep understanding of the current state of *Boererate*, its modern adaptations, and the communities that upheld its practices in the digital age. Furthermore, I incorporated traditional anthropological methods such as interviews and participant observation. These techniques provided me with the opportunity to engage directly with practitioners and users of *Boererate*, offering firsthand insights into the lived experiences and personal perspectives that shaped this system of home remedies.

Through interviews, individuals shared their stories, knowledge, and beliefs about *Boererate*, while participant observation allowed me to immerse myself in the cultural contexts where *Boererate* was practiced. Together, these diverse methodologies created a comprehensive and

nuanced approach to studying *Boererate*. This approach integrated both historical and contemporary perspectives, bridging the gap between the macro and the micro, the general and the specific. In my study, a total of 30 participants took part in online interviews conducted via video chat platforms or other types of text-based chat platforms. Of these, 17 were interviewed in person, with an additional 8 joining at a later stage, having been referred by previous interviewees. This hybrid approach facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of *Boererate*, encompassing both digital and face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, I engaged in approximately 52 active chats, comprising informal conversations that provided additional insights into the topic. This diverse sample size allowed for a rich exploration of *Boererate* practices and beliefs, capturing a range of perspectives and experiences.

In order to accommodate for the changing landscape of research due to COVID-19, I had to pivot my research early on in my data gathering process. I had originally planned to do extensive in-person research – most notably interviews and participant observation – that would have been supported with data gleaned from online observations as well as interviews but that had to be quickly adapted and readapted in the early stages of 2020. By primarily relying on digital ethnography, I was able to first develop an in-depth understanding of potential interlocuters in their online spaces where they were already engaging with each other and collecting data through different platforms like TikTok, Tumblr, and Instagram. I was also able to use various video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Teams, and WhatsApp video calls in order to both interview individuals and groups. At other times, I was able to join what was in essence large group calls on Discord – an instant messaging platform which allows users to communicate with each other through voice calls, video calls, text messaging, as well as the sharing of media.

Later on, as COVID-19 protocols eased, and we returned to our heavily commented upon ‘new normal’, I was able to conduct in-person interviews and participant observation. This allowed me to diversify the online data that I had collected while still maintaining a safe environment for all parties involved. In the end, I was able to successfully complete my research project despite the challenges I faced along the way. As anthropologists we are certainly aware that we can never predict the field and what may happen in it, but we can at least rely on our tried and tested methods and their malleability to changing fields and situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic change in the way anthropological research had been typically conducted. In particular, the outbreak of the virus and especially its early stages made traditional methods of interviewing and observation very difficult. One method that emerged as a particular favourite of mine was observation of various websites and social platforms. This became a critical part of my project and will be discussed in more detail in the "Doom scrolling as Ethnography" section below. I had always planned on having this form of observation as a research tool and steadily became more reliant on it for constructing a context for the spaces within which I was working. Using observation in this way presented me with a number of advantages – such as being able to reach a wider audience as well as providing a more direct means of communication with participants. However, there are some disadvantages that must be acknowledged. The loss of face-to-face interaction and of being able to read a room or a participant's energy in an interview was certainly lacking. There was also a risk that I would construct algorithmic tunnels[22] with my searches and inquiries and get trapped in my own echo chamber[23] and find only that which I was purposefully looking for. Having had to augment my original methodological framework that I had planned to operate within, I consulted many of the anthropological works concerned with online research and digital ethnography that already existed and also had the opportunity to include the recommendations of contemporary scholars who were actively writing about methods during the various COVID-19 lockdowns.

Irons & Gibbon (2022) discuss a review of a few works that have addressed methodological considerations during COVID-19 lockdowns. They highlight that the pandemic elicited a global response dominated by scientific thought, as evidenced by the hegemonic focus on medical interventions and health promotion efforts. However, they discuss that it is crucial to acknowledge that some communities around the world maintained pluralistic responses and were integrating traditional knowledge and practices into their coping strategies. With this project, I am answering this call for acknowledgement of the importance of cultural sensitivity in global health responses.

Despite the dominant medical response, the ongoing effects from the pandemic and the crises that arose from it underscores the need for sustained vigilance and adaptable health strategies.

[22] Our searches on the web are specific queries that will return specific results. Google searches return results based on keywords that a user searches. This can unfortunately lead to confirmation bias as cherry-picking niche words will return results that Google deems the most relevant. By matching keywords to data that has been indexed on the web, one can develop tunnel vision as one might never encounter information that is outside one's search.

[23] An echo chamber is created when a person encounters only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own, so that their existing views are reinforced, and alternative ideas are not considered.

Within this context, Irons & Gibbon (2022) point out that individuals who were already living with illnesses and treating them with a variety of pluralistic approaches (*Boererate* comes to mind) emerge as valuable sources of insight. Their experiences of coping with uncertainty and hardship offer lessons for broader society – especially during the pandemic – and are potentially informing more inclusive and empathetic response strategies. National reactions to the pandemic varied widely, from our own stringent lockdowns to Sweden's no-lockdown policy (Irons & Gibbon, 2022). In understanding and responding to COVID-19, history and biosocial medical anthropology aimed to provide vital insights. The historical precedents of pandemics and the interconnectedness of biological and social factors in disease spread formed the foundation for the researchers that they chose to review and discuss. Irons & Gibbons (2022) also emphasised supporting those currently studying is essential, as they are the future contributors to global responses. Their education and professional development during this time may shape the world's ability to handle similar crises in the future.

Within their article, Irons & Gibbons (2022) review the works of Goralska (2020), Elliot (2020), Hasan (2020), Castro-Gomez (2013), and Babcock (2020) . These discussed works shed light on various cultural responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of recognising and understanding diverse perspectives in our global health response.

Goralska's (2020) research, conducted in Poland, explores how elderly individuals use digital communities to seek alternative medicine, offering protection against infection and potential treatment for the virus. This exploration delves into a variety of alternative medical models, from naturopathy and homemade remedies to Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). This study underscores the crucial role of digital spaces in disseminating health information and fostering community support during a pandemic. In contrast, Elliott's (2020) work in Laos reveals a population with minimal expectations of state healthcare or welfare system resources. Instead, they rely on protective bamboo talismans, herbal remedies, and traditional ceremonies to safeguard against COVID-19. This shows the resilience and resourcefulness of communities in leveraging their cultural practices to respond to a health crisis. Hasan's (2020) article provides insights into the attitudes and practices of Bangladeshis, who turn to mass prayers, sanctified water, religious hymns, cow dung, and cattle urine as potential remedies against the virus. These practices, according to Hasan, reflect the local perceptions about the virus and its impact on their bodies, offering a unique perspective on the interplay between culture, religion, and health practices. Castro-Gomez

(2013) critiques dominant medical responses in 2013 – an era we can now reflect on as being pre-pandemic – and argues that scientific thought often positions itself as the sole valid form of knowledge production. This dominance, he argues, perpetuates Europe's epistemological hegemony over other cultures, raising questions about the inclusivity and cultural sensitivity of global health responses. Babcock echoes these concerns, emphasising the dominance of the biomedical paradigm in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic despite competing "epidemiological imaginations" (Irons & Gibbon, 2022, p. 230). This dominance raises important questions about the inclusivity and effectiveness of a one-size-fits-all approach to public health emergencies.

In sum, these works offered valuable insights into the diverse ways in which different communities respond to a global health crisis, underlining the importance of cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and diversity in our global health response strategies. The concept of medical hegemony, as highlighted in the discussion above, refers to the dominance of the biomedical model in healthcare. This dominance often suppresses alternative forms of healing and health practices, leading to a global hegemony of scientific thought in medicine. However, in the context of this project and the primarily Afrikaner women with whom I interacted, I can underscore the localised response to this medical hegemony through the practice of *Boererate*. In the context of my research, I found that it challenges and sometimes compliments the dominance of the biomedical paradigm, offering an alternative approach. It highlights the importance of contextual responses to health crises, emphasising the need for culturally sensitive and inclusive health strategies. While scientific thought and biomedicine play crucial roles in healthcare, it is essential to acknowledge and validate local knowledge systems and practices. This acknowledgment can foster more holistic, inclusive, and effective health interventions, contributing to better health outcomes at both local and global levels.

Some context before the context

Miller states that digital anthropology can refer to "the consequences of the rise of digital technologies for particular populations, the use of these technologies within anthropological methodology, or the study of specific digital technologies" (2018, p. 1). The holistic methodologies around which we structure our inquiry has enabled us to look beyond digital technologies being simply framed as having good or bad consequences and into more nuanced experiences of its inherent contradictions and complexities.

Anthropologists have been interested in the intersection between people, their cultures, and digital technologies since the late 1990's (Underberg & Zorn, 2013). While digital

technologies have grown and expanded at an exponential rate, Underberg and Zorn (2013) state that anthropologists were initially slow to adopt the use of digital media and consider its effects. Anthropologists are arguably some of the best suited scholars to apply themselves to understanding the impact that digital media has had, as well as applying ethnographic methods in order to gain meaningful insights. Digital media, and by extension the variety of platforms that are hosted online, provide the public with a platform with which, and upon which, to share their stories. The "anthropologist as translator" (Underberg & Zorn, 2013, p. 7) role is critical to understanding new media[24] and how people interact with it.

We are living in an era where information can be transmitted to those not originally part of a group or community and this has opened up an interesting path of inquiry – especially in relation to my own research and the dissemination of *Boererate*. Where there once existed a barrier to access – either physically or linguistically – almost anyone with a smartphone and an account can join a Facebook group and access posts that have been made within it. It is crucial to note that access to this information is not as freely accessible like weeds in a sidewalk, but rather it is subject to privacy settings within groups and only once one has complied with those and agreed to them, can one start to access this information.

While the 'translate' function on Facebook is arguably nowhere near as accurate as it should be, people can translate posts from Afrikaans and access the recommendations being made in them as well as the discussions in the comments.

One of my initial interviews (via Zoom) was with an English woman who had grown up with some Afrikaans family but never quite grasped the intricacies of the language. She told me that while she understood more than half of the posts she saw, she would sometimes have to hit 'translate' on the post, especially if it was a long post and she started to feel overwhelmed by the language use. Language was an extraordinarily important facet of my research, and, as highlighted in the introduction, became a prominent issue. While the intricacies inherit in the barriers language can create is beyond the scope of the discussion here, it is worth noting that some barriers became porous and there was a measure of access to information. *Boererate* Facebook group members routinely encouraged other members to ask for translations or clarifications if the language or posts were not clear. I witnessed this on more than one occasion where the top comments on posts were that if the poster did not understand the recommendations, then they should inbox the commenter for a translation or a simplification.

[24] New media refers to a means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the internet.

Knowledge that was once locked behind a linguistic wall was now slowly seeping through the cracks that were developing. The main tool of this deconstruction is technology and the way in which people wield it. The sheer rate at which digital technology is expanding is dizzying but is also creating an opportunity for us to witness how cultures, medicine, people – just about anything we can imagine – responds. The popularity of digital storytelling is by no means a new advent in humanity's ever evolving relationship with new media, but it has marched itself to the fore of our lives – especially given how much of it had to take place online over the last three years.

A core focal point of my investigation pertains to the implications and ramifications of these adaptive measures for the trajectory of our methodological journeys. By probing into the strategies that researchers employed to embrace digital landscapes as their ethnographic terrain, I want to illuminate the ways in which fieldwork traditions have undergone a recalibration. It is through this scrutiny that I can unearth the nuanced intersections of tradition and innovation, shedding light on the unfolding landscape of contemporary anthropological inquiry.

Furthermore, by contextualising my personal experiences within this broader methodological narrative, the chapter situates itself as a reflective exploration rather than a sweeping assertion. The aim is not to universalise the experiences of all researchers, but rather to contribute a meaningful thread to the broader tapestry of evolving research practices. In doing so, the chapter contributes to the ongoing discourse on the adaptable nature of anthropological methodologies and raises pertinent questions about the trajectories our field is charting in this digital era.

From Parchment to Pixels

From the initial proposal stage of this project, I recognised the necessity for a substantial historical exploration, given the nature of the questions I aimed to answer through my research. I sought guidance from numerous academics and organisations, including the ATKV, in order to initiate my historical investigation. Although many individuals I connected with understood my objectives clearly, they offered limited suggestions on how to commence my research. In this section, I immerse myself in the transformative journey of navigating the archives, underscoring an unexpected connection with the digital realms I would subsequently delve into.

As a child, I had visited the Voortrekker Monument on numerous occasions. It was my nearest museum, and my parents knew they could entertain me for hours on a Sunday

afternoon by letting me loose in the corridors and passages. When the time came that I could understand how the Monument played a pivotal role in Afrikaner nationalism and mythology during apartheid, my visits doubled. I wanted to see exactly how this story was constructed and how the performance was put to stage. These visits increased again when my grandmother died, and her ashes were placed in the Wall of Remembrance at the Monument. I would often visit her on a Sunday and think about the irony in her, a Dutch immigrant who held strong opinions about apartheid and the very mythology that the Monument embodied, being laid to rest at the Monument. She was probably causing a lot of ghost fights beyond the veil.

I had decided to return to where this project had, arguably, started some twenty years ago. I emailed the *Erfenissentrum* [Heritage Centre] and was put in touch with a few researchers and archivists at the centre. They had invited me to their offices at the Monument to discuss the topic of *Boererate* and what exactly it was that I would be looking for. Upon meeting with the team at the centre and talking through what I needed, they suggested that I look into their Brandt collection. This collection was primarily an archive of Dr Louis Ernst Brandt and his forays into community upliftment, church organisation, and education initiatives. This archive had been suggested to me because his wife, Johanna Brandt, had been a prominent Boer nurse during the South African War during which she had carried out espionage on behalf of the Boers – which she reflected on in her books about the War (van der Merwe, 2004). After the War, she had also gone on to write numerous, sometimes controversial – according to doctors of the time and some of her peers – books on the subject of health and how to rid the body of disease through methods quite contrary to the predominant biomedical discourse of her time.

As I stepped into the library of the Voortrekker Monument *Erfenissentrum* Archives, the air was unnaturally cool, and my glasses instantly fogged up from my rapid breathing behind my facemask. I swore under my breath, grateful that the polite librarian could not read my lips. It was October of 2020 and while the strictest measures of lockdown had eased, we were all still wearing facemasks and furiously sanitising our hands and most surfaces. I was led down to the office of the archivist with whom I had been in touch, and he presented me with an intimidating collection of boxes which had been set aside in a reading room for me. The boxes lined the whole side wall of the room and spanned Johanna Brandt, and her husband's lives. From personal correspondence and diaries, to drafts of books and memos annotated by Hendrik Verwoerd – I had been presented with some of the most intimate musings from this

woman's life. I took out my notebook, waved the archivist off down the passage and started with the first box.

Johanna Brandt was born in the Cape Colony in 1876 and grew up in a society marked by racial tensions and British colonial rule. Her experiences as a volunteer nurse during the South African War had a profound impact on her political views and she became a fervent advocate for Afrikaner nationalism and the preservation of Afrikaans culture. After the South African War ended, Brandt published her now well-known book, 'The Petticoat Commando' in 1931. It is based on real events that took place during the War and follows a group of Boer women who, frustrated with the British occupation and their husbands' absence at the frontlines, decide to take matters into their own hands to resist the British forces. The women form a clandestine group called the "Petticoat Commando" and engage in acts of sabotage, intelligence gathering, and other forms of resistance against the British. They use their knowledge of the local terrain and their determination to outwit the enemy. Led by the protagonist, Sannie van Rensburg, these women defy, at least on the surface, traditional gender roles and expectations, showing courage, resourcefulness, and resilience in the face of adversity. Throughout the novel, the women face various challenges and risks as they fight for their homeland's independence. The story aims to highlight the contributions of women during times of conflict and sheds light on the complex dynamics of war and resistance.

'The Petticoat Commando' explores themes of gender roles, patriotism, and the strength through a lens of Afrikaner patriotism. It plays into typical framings of the notion of the *Volksmoeder*[25]. The image of the *Volksmoeder* – literally meaning mother of the nation – represents an idealised version of Afrikaner motherhood that was used to embody national identity and values. It emphasised the role of women as mothers and caregivers, not only for their own children but also for the nation as a whole (McClintock, 1993). However, this image is complicated by a certain amount of room for manoeuvring within the boundaries of what it means to be a 'good woman'. While I do go into more detail about how especially Boer women used weapons of the weak (Scott, 1985) in order to create chaos in the camps, whilst still maintaining the moniker of 'good woman' in the next chapter, it is important to note here that when Brandt wrote the Petticoat Commando, she was operating within a framework of being a 'good woman' herself. The book played a large role in contributing to the mythologising of the war, the idea of the *Volksmoeder* and noble suffering, and it cemented Brandt's status as a figure within Afrikaner nationalist circles.

[25] The word "Volk" is the cognate of the English word 'Folk', and its meaning here refers to a nation of people – within the context of its usage in this paper, it is referring to Afrikaners.

Brandt's reputation also rests on her advocacy for alternative medicine, particularly the 'Grape Cure' – a book she wrote about her experience of stomach cancer. Brandt claimed that she had cured herself of stomach cancer by consuming large quantities of grapes, grape seeds, and pure grape juice. Her rationale was based on intermittent fasting with the aim of starving the tumour of protein and animal fats. She consumed a majority raw fruit and vegetable diet while ill. While her claims were widely criticised by the biomedical community, she garnered a following and published more books advocating for her unconventional approach to health.

It was on this basis that the archivists recommend that I look into her files for any information about *Boererate*. After the war, Brandt's influence waned, but she remained a name that many whom I interviewed recognised as a war hero. As Brandt aged, she focused more on her alternative medicine practices and writing, authoring several books on health and spirituality. She ultimately passed away in 1964, leaving behind a complex legacy as both a nationalist and a promoter of unproven medical treatments.

Apart from the recommendation form the archivist to look into Brandt's life as a starting point for my research, I decided that I wanted to have someone guide me through the history of the South African War and who better to do it than someone who worked in a concentration camp and kept meticulous diaries and personal correspondence. Primary sources in a thesis like this one are of the utmost value – especially when reinterpreting the past and looking for connections. Her story provides me with critical historical context and a window into how a woman was thinking and living through the war. Even though she was not interned herself (she was a Boer volunteer nurse), her documentation of what she saw was almost anthropological. The authenticity of having her voice in my thesis as well as the longitudinal analysis that it enabled me to do have ultimately strengthened the augments herein.

Throughout my time in the archives, I developed a complicated relationship with Johanna Brandt. Every time I sat down across the table with her files, it felt as if I was sitting down to interview her. At times, she made me angry, other times I felt a deep connection to her, and every so often I was left deeply confused by her actions. Sifting through a person's personal correspondence about failed love affairs and ailing family members at first felt like an absolute violation of this woman's life. I found chapter drafts of her books and shuddered at the thought of anyone finding one of my drafts in a couple decades and using it in their research – how embarrassed I would be. But my mind suddenly changed when I took a break to have lunch with my grandmother at the Wall of Remembrance just a few steps away from

the entrance to my reading room. As I stared at my grandmother's plaque and yearned for the ashes behind it to impart upon me some divine wisdom, I suddenly realised that I had been quite harsh on Brandt. I had to make peace with the fact that she was a product of her time and doing the best with what she had. I had rifled through her shopping lists and tart recipes with very little sympathy for her principal condition – Woman.

Johanna Brandt had been bound in as many behavioural and societal expectations – perhaps even more – as the women I had been speaking to[26], at this point, for the last few months. In all her writing, she was trying to challenge hegemonic discourse about the War as well as about health and how a person could go about healing their body. Within very strict rules and standards, she was using her privileged position of minster's wife – albeit perhaps not even consciously – to test the edges of *ordentlikheid* and find room for manoeuvring and asserting her agency. I softened towards Brandt; I even considered her brave when I read of her espionage in the camps. Agency is a fickle friend in that it is, arguably, always encompassed in some way. This idea of pushing the boundaries just enough to achieve your ends whilst not sacrificing your position within society or a hierarchy is one that I saw repeated throughout my historical analysis. There is a pivotal contribution in the interplay of agency, power, and *ordentlikheid* among Boer women and their contribution to the development of *Boererate* within the camp system as well as how this was carried through and on to their descendants. This intricate connection is explored further in the upcoming chapter, titled The Birth of *Boererate*.

While perusing the archives, I would often see ingredients or ailments listed within Brandt's notes that I recognised from the Facebook groups. I looked them up on the groups and found that, relatively frequently, there was little variation in how ingredients were being prepared or consumed. One example is immersing cabbage leaves in hot water overnight to soften them for application the following day on the skin to alleviate some type of irritation. I distinctly recall sitting with my father in the reading room one afternoon in December of 2020, him translating Dutch correspondence of the Brandts', while I furiously scribbled notes of them, and him pointing out how strange the Brandts would think we are, with little devices in our pockets that have access to all kinds of knowledge and here we were using them as paper weights. In that moment, my father brought the archives into a harsh juxtaposition with the digital landscape that my cellphone housed. Sometimes, the digital is just not enough.

[26] The communication was still very much digital at this stage. It was primarily over Facebook messenger, email, WhatsApp etc.

Engaging with archives while navigating digital landscapes created a captivating juncture where historical narratives and modern dynamics converged. The process of delving into archival materials, with their tangible records and aged artefacts, seemed worlds apart from the virtual expanse of digital ethnography. Yet, as I immersed myself in both realms, I began to unravel an intricate interplay that enriched my understanding of both past and present. As I pored over faded letters, yellowed documents, and old manuscripts, I was transported back in time, gaining glimpses into the thoughts, lives, and actions of those who had come before. This tactile interaction with historical artefacts laid the foundation for informed interpretations and narratives, grounding me in the context of eras long gone.

Conversely, my engagement with the digital realm encapsulated the immediacy of the present moment, capturing the ongoing tapestry of contemporary interactions, conversations, and cultural shifts. Engaging in digital ethnography, rooted in the observation of online communities like the Facebook groups and the behaviours within them, allowed me to witness the real-time dynamics of our interconnected world. The intersection of archival research and digital ethnography unfolded as I navigated the junction where historical insights gleaned from archives informed my understanding of modern digital cultures. The echoes of the past reverberated in online dialogues, revealing continuities, resonances, and adaptations that spanned across time. Conversely, the digital age provided tools to share archival treasures widely, making history more accessible and engaging to broader audiences.

By combining the insights from archives with the exploration of digital cultures, I broadened my timeline and linked stories from the past and present. This collaboration helped me connect different time periods, promoting a more detailed comprehension of Afrikaner women's experiences throughout various generations. Through this journey through time, I concluded that the past and the digital age are not separate worlds but are instead connected strands that allowed me to link contemporary Afrikaner women’s experiences with that of their forebears. This link made it possible for me to engage critically with ideas of nostalgia and how the contemporary connects itself to the past. This connection facilitates negotiations of identity in the context of nostalgia and a longing for an idealised past – a concept that I will expand upon in the forthcoming chapters.

The archives did present a significant challenge in that many of the documents that were in the Brandt collection were written in Dutch and I struggled at first to understand them. As mentioned above, after getting help from my father (who can both speak and read Dutch), I was able to make much more sense of the documents. Over the course of three months, we

were able to work our way through the collection and get insight into Johanna Brandt's life. While the centre is busy digitising the collection, there is something to be said about holding a yellowed page from a diary and feeling the tension in the writing as it indents the page. At a stage in my project when I was unsure about the level of interaction I was able to have with people, the archives were a necessary reminder that I was dealing with people and not just profiles.

Out of the frying pan and into the Web

Anthropologists have historically committed themselves to understanding the impact of media on people and their cultures – for example see the earlier discussion of Underberg and Zorn (2013) – and this calls to our attention the much-needed recognition of the roles and considerations of power, embodiment, and identity markers in digital culture. Moore and Hennessey (2006) conducted research into how people use digital technologies for self-representation and this work resonates well within the realm of participant observation as it is consistent with the forms of social interaction and community participation that we have come to expect of our fields of inquiry. In this vein, we can investigate how the use of computer-based descriptive storytelling gives us perspective into personal experiences. This not only enables researchers to construct vast maps of interactions and exchanges of ideas, but it also allows the audiences with whom they work to move beyond simply absorbing facts about another culture, but to actually entering into the experience of that culture.

Projects such as mine can creatively exploit the immersive and interactive qualities of digital environments to simulate recognisable features of tried and tested ethnographic methodology as well as the cultural narratives that these methods probe. The idea of classic, in-person ethnography and the impenetrable monument to Malinowski that it has become is one that must be deconstructed as this mindset holds us back from engaging with digital communities. Ingold (2014) has attested to as much in his writing about the very concept of 'ethnography' and how, at a time when many feel that anthropology is under threat and being pushed to the margins, our growing inability to adapt ethnography and what it means to our projects is a source of concern. This is a potent reminder that ethnography is both a process and a product.

Miller and Slater (2001) argue that ethnographers need to resist the notion that the internet and the platforms that it hosts are placeless and cultureless. They state that we should instead be focussing on the ways in which technologies are being used by people in physical or in-person communities. This conviction is based on their own research which is focused on Trinidadians and the ways in which they have integrated and adapted the Internet into their

lives and identities. This adaptation speaks to community continuity and considerations of how cultures and identity can be embedded in virtual spaces and how we must be prepared to be shown, rather than told, the stories that we will eventually distil into our reports.

One classic example of an online investigation is that of Boellstorff's (2008) work on Second Life – a multimedia platform that allows people to create an avatar for themselves and then interact with other users and user created content within a multi-player online virtual world. In it, Boellstorff aims to study virtual worlds in their own terms. In order to achieve this, he undertook almost his entire study inside of Second Life as his avatar, Tom Bukowski. He states early on in his argument that a large concern and eventual starting point for his project was his methodology. Central to his methodology was his contention that one cannot explain inworld sociality with actual-world sociality and that one must understand the virtual in its own terms. While it is understandable why some might argue that inworld sociality, or the social interactions that occur within virtual spaces, should be understood on its own terms, I would respectfully disagree. The assertion seems to suggest a complete disconnect between the virtual and the actual world, which overlooks the significant influence and impact that actual-world sociality has on virtual realms.

It is important to note that virtual spaces are not created in a vacuum. They are designed and operated by individuals who live in the actual world, with their own set of cultural values, social norms, and personal biases. As such, these real-world factors inevitably influence the structures, rules, and dynamics of virtual spaces. The users of these virtual spaces are also inhabitants of the actual world. They bring their real-world identities, experiences, and behaviours into these virtual environments. While they may adopt new personas or engage in different behaviours within the virtual world, their actions are still rooted in their real-world understanding of social interactions. Virtual and actual world sociality often intersect and influence each other. For instance, an online social movement can lead to offline protests, or an offline friendship can be strengthened through online interactions. Therefore, to fully understand inworld sociality, one cannot disregard the impact and influence of actual-world sociality. While it is crucial to acknowledge the unique aspects of inworld sociality, it is equally important to recognise that the virtual does not exist independently of the actual world.

In Boellstorff's writing, only those events and persons that he encountered within Second Life are referred to and the 'real world' persons controlling the online events and avatars are neither described nor contacted. In doing so, he portrays online worlds as being independent

sources of information that do not need to be grounded in physical reality (Filiault, 2010). This methodology, Boellstorff (2008) argues, shows that we must pay more heed to the mundane in virtual worlds and less to the sensational.

While I used Boellstorff's (2008) work as a foundation for my own, there are certain departures between our respective works. Whereas Boellstorff worked exclusively in the virtual, the online places that I was investigating were rooted in the offline world as well as embedded in offline goings on. I made the concentrated effort to engage with the Facebook groups and the participants on their terms, but also dedicated effort to supplementing my online participation with video/in-person interviews with interlocuters about their lives off of the internet and social media platforms. Miller (2018) stated that we must understand the entanglement between people's offline and online lives so that a holistic understanding can emerge. Investigating both the online and the offline spheres of people's lives allows the observation, analysis and interpretation of the sociocultural phenomena that arise and take place in interactive spaces.

In the process of conducting my research, I delved into various resources on online ethnography to gain a comprehensive understanding of its methodologies and applications. Those who came before me provided valuable insights into how online ethnography could be applied to study virtual communities, cultures, and social interactions. They highlighted the importance of crafting a rigorous and creative approach, the potential benefits of online ethnography such as cost-effectiveness and accurate portrayal of daily activities, and the varied methods that could be utilised such as participant observation in virtual communities. However, while these insights were crucial, I recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach might not be suitable for my project or for my interlocutors' needs. As such, I decided to tailor an online ethnographic approach specific to my unique requirements.

I started by clearly defining the goals of my project and the context of the virtual community I was studying. This helped me identify the most effective methods to use, which ranged from observation of the Facebook groups to participant observation and eventually to in-depth interviews or content analysis. Next, I took into consideration the characteristics and needs of my interlocutors. I ensured to create a safe and respectful environment for them to share their experiences and views. I also made sure to adapt my communication style and techniques to suit their comfort levels and preferences, whether that meant using more casual language, incorporating visual aids, or allowing for asynchronous communication. Lastly, I remained flexible and open to adjustments throughout the process. I continually evaluated the

effectiveness of my approach and made necessary changes based on feedback from my interlocutors and the evolving dynamics of the virtual community. While the general principles and methods of online ethnography guided my research, it was the careful tailoring of this approach to my project and interlocutors' needs that truly enriched my study. By doing so, I was able to facilitate meaningful interactions, gain deeper insights, and ultimately, create a more impactful project.

In order to accomplish this, I embedded myself in a network of women from the Facebook groups by reaching out to them via direct message and asking them if they would consent to being part of my research project. They were enthusiastic and I quickly filled my weeks with online interviews as more women wanted to participate as word spread through the groups. I found my interlocuters favourably disposed to the interviews and they were eager to share their stories – the majority of the initial round of interviews occurred after South Africa's first hard lockdown in 2020, so I naturally assumed that people were keen to chat to someone other than their immediate family. These interviews allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of their personal experiences and how they made sense of the tension they were experiencing between biomedicine and *Boererate* within the context of their lives. While this tension will be explored in much more detail in the next chapter, I wish to draw brief attention to it here.

Biomedicine and *Boererate* were eventually presented to me as two sides of the same coin – both with the end goal of healing, but with different approaches. I had initially considered them to be in binary opposition, but this was before I conducted in-depth follow up interviews that I was fortunate enough to do in person. In these interviews, I was able to gain a more nuanced understanding of how my interlocuters negotiated their relationship with and between biomedicine and *Boererate*. A simple binary portrayal of these two knowledge and healing systems masks the true complex reality of their relationship and even friction that sometimes emerged between the two. While there is a noticeable tension between the two systems, the women that I engaged with bring the two into conversation in order to find the best way to meet their healthcare needs. For example, I saw many women post about how they had been struggling with adverse side effects from their cholesterol medication[27]. One side effect that had been discussed at length was the impact that these medications have on one's liver. The common solution was to take Essentiale capsules[28], dietary supplements that

[27] Side effects of cholesterol medication is a repetitive topic on the groups.
[28] Essentiale capsules are often marketed and used to support liver health and function. They are believed to help protect and regenerate liver cells, improve the overall health of the liver, and potentially aid in conditions such as fatty liver disease and liver damage caused by various factors.

contains essential phospholipids derived from soybeans which are involved in various physiological processes in the body, particularly related to liver health, in combination with beetroot juice. Beetroot juice was often discussed on the group as being high in antioxidants, containing anti-inflammatory properties, as well as having a high nitrate content – all key factors for liver support.

Binary framing therefore does not do justice to the complex reality of the health seeking behaviours of my interlocuters, but there are elements that relate to Levi-Strauss' classic contribution on binary systems and how they underpin most of our structures in society. This can be used to tease out the connections between *Boererate* and biomedicine.

Levi-Strauss (2001) argues that people have the need to classify in order to impose order on aspects of nature, people's relationships with nature, as well as relationships between people. He further stated that a universal aspect of classification is opposition or contrast and that one of the most common means of classifying is by using binary opposition, such as good and evil, black and white, young and old, female and male. This kind of analysis is helpful in understanding how societies experience tension in certain social contexts. However, it can lead one into making grand claims about how such tensions can construct universal laws. In response to this, Clifford Geertz's (1973) 'thick description' can potentially combat generalisations as it relates concepts and tensions to a specific society and seeks to understand their meaning in a unique context. I do not wish to espouse a grand theory of how all Afrikaans women relate to the world and medical systems that surrounds them and by combining the two approaches of these anthropologists, I can inspect how larger binaries function without implying that they may be universal laws.

In this vein, I turned to Hartley and Benington's (2000, p. 463) argument that we should be treating interlocuters as co-researchers and should be establishing "a dialectical process of enquiry by drawing on the complementary perspectives, interests, skills, and knowledge bases". By treating my interlocuters as co-researchers, I wanted to empower them to talk as plainly and directly as possible. The involvement of interlocuters in this way allowed me to explore nuances and root out the ways in which the specific community that I was engaging with was organising their practices and how they viewed them.

Many of my interlocuters had reported to me in our initial interviews that they were often made fun of or called backwards or dumb for using *Boererate* and I wanted them to feel safe enough to share their ideas and opinions. By employing continuous dynamic informed consent and giving them the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms, I involved them in

the research process and highlighted that as practitioners, they were the experts in this field. This dynamic worked out well and I believe is what contributed to the number of women who reached out to me after hearing about the project from other participants. One woman, Mandy, highlighted this very dynamic one afternoon during an informal interview that she consented to being recorded. She said,

> "It feels like I can tell you anything. You never judge what I do or what I take, it is really refreshing. My colleagues and some of my friends, not all, have such little time for me when I bring this up. They make me feel really dumb, but I have got more help from those women and those groups than I have from doctors. It was the group that helped me right when the doctor put me on too much sleeping tablets. I phoned his offices, and he had no time for me, let alone the fact that I was sobbing about having wet myself every night that week because I was too dead asleep to get up and go to the bathroom. Only when I posted on the group did they tell me it seemed like I was on three – THREE – different sleeping tablets and that I should query it. And when I did what did he say? Oh, you seemed really stressed out, just take one or two less. Don't think he told me which one.
>
> Interview with Mandy, 16 April 2021

In circumstances such as these, I was aware that I was dealing with not only very sensitive, often deeply personal medical information, but also women who were feeling very vulnerable. In these situations, I took care to remind them that their identities would remain protected and anonymised wherever possible and that any of the information that they were sharing with me would not be used against them in any way. Taking these steps to reassure participants went a long way to forge our relationships and build rapport. I was acutely aware that they were coming from situations where they were often unheard, and I wanted to give them as much room to share and be heard as possible.

Negotiating New Media

Early on in the project, I had decided that I wanted to understand how participants understood their online lives to their offline lives. I found Nardi's (2010) study of the World of Warcraft[29] space particularly helpful as she used thick description and participant-observation to contextualise her reporting of her own in-game and metagame experiences. Her work is a seminal contribution to the ever-growing genre of digital ethnography and is a testament to the need for us to use traditional ethnographic methods to explore virtual worlds and the techno-mediated subjects that occupy and manoeuvre within them.

Nardi's approach of playing the game and becoming involved within in-game communities (known as guilds) was highly beneficial to the kind of conclusions she was able to draw. By actively becoming involved rather than carefully exploring the boundaries of the game or

[29] This is a massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) released by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004 and is set in the fantasy universe of Azeroth.

relying purely on interview data, she managed to avoid creating a wide-eyed caricature of the game and its community. She managed this by developing active theory (Nardi, 2010) – a generalised approach which made the action in the game, rather than the actors, the centre of its approach. This approach has echoes of Actor Network Theory[30] in how it prioritises the contributions of both human and nonhuman actors, but tailors it to the specific context of the game by also looking at action and what transpires on screen. Nardi (2010) also paid particular attention to making sure to communicate that players lives inside of the game are not separate from their offline lives and that the two impact each other.

I found the overlap and tension between offline and online lives much more applicable to my research and interlocuters than the hard separation of Boellstorff's work. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, much in the vein of Nardi's work, I noticed that there was action and activity on the Facebook groups that had to be understood in tandem with the actors who were performing them. This had to be done by not only understanding their online personas but also their offline lives and how they relate to the content that they both create and consume. Secondly, in interviews with interlocuters they repeatedly mentioned how they would take what they learnt and saw on the groups and use it in their offline lives. This would be either by applying it in their own homes and lives or passing it on to friends and family during braais or dinner parties. Marianne explained it like this,

> "No, I would not really say that my online and offline lives are two separate things. I mean, I'm not pretending to be someone else. It's like we are all sitting in each other's kitchens and helping each other, explaining things. So, when I sit and have supper with my family and tell them about the things, I learnt that day, it's like I'm telling them about a friend that I was speaking to – not a stranger on the internet."
>
> Interview with Marianne, 25 April 2022

This was not a unique perspective and many others shared similar sentiments. One interlocuter, Bianca, likened the Facebook groups to a virtual bonfire that everyone was sitting around and sharing stories. The groups provide a space for people to connect with others who share their interests, and they offer a platform for discussion and debate[31]. Admins play a crucial role in managing Facebook groups – they are responsible for setting

[30]Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a theoretical and methodological approach to social theory where everything in the social and natural worlds exists in constantly shifting networks of relationships. It posits that nothing exists outside those relationships. ANT considers both objects and technological artifacts as potentially having agency, or the ability to act, within these networks. It emphasises that all the actors involved in these networks are continually influencing each other's behaviour. Thus, ANT provides a useful framework for understanding complex social interactions, particularly in the realm of technology and science. (Latour, 2005)

[31] Of which there was much. These groups were full of conflict, debate, and disagreements. Admins on the groups were quick to deescalate disagreements, but it would be irresponsible to portray groups as wholly peaceful and devoid of conflict.

and enforcing community rules, keeping conflicts from escalating, and promoting positive engagement among members. Admins can also control all aspects of the group's settings, which gives them significant influence over the group's culture and dynamics. They need to manage conflicts between members that can arise from differences of opinion, misunderstandings, or controversies. A key part of this involves promoting respectful disagreement and debate as part of a healthy community dynamic. However, the role of admins and their methods for de-escalating debates could potentially limit or shape the data gathered from online sources. For instance, admins have the ability to approve or disapprove posts, which can impact the visibility and prevalence of certain viewpoints within the group. This could result in a bias towards certain perspectives and against others. Also, the enforcement of community rules and norms can shape the nature of discussions and debates, potentially suppressing contentious or controversial topics. Therefore, while admins play a crucial role in maintaining harmony within Facebook groups, their actions can significantly influence the type and nature of data that researchers can obtain from these online communities.

Another key issue that came up relatively often in interviews was that the Facebook groups also allow members to interact with each other in real time and allowed members to share information and build relationships. The ability to connect with others that share your interests is a powerful tool that can foster a sense of community among members. Community creation was stressed in multiple interviews as being essential for the health and well-being of individuals. Community creation is not a new concept, however, the rise of the internet and the way in which people use it to create spaces for themselves has made it possible to create virtual networks and communities that are adaptable to the contexts of the people that create them. Unlike physical communities, Facebook groups are not limited by geographical boundaries and national as well as transnational communities use new media and digital technologies to not only establish, but reinforce their social norms, practices, traditions, historical narratives and associated collective memory. This is something I noticed very early on in my observation of the Facebook groups and was a recurring point of discussion in interviews. The fostering as well as creating of virtual communities with rules and boundaries is a critical issue and I want to briefly point out how it affected my methodology and the data that I was able to collect.

One tool that I was able to make use of was that of Facebook's Group Insights tool which provides demographic data about group members and identifies top contributors. This helped me to understand who was most active in the group and how different demographics interact

within the group. It also helped me to construct my discussions about ritual elders in the context of the groups (see the extended discussion of this in chapter 5) as well as gain insight into the diversity of viewpoints.

The fostering and creation of virtual communities, replete with their own distinct rules and boundaries, has indeed significantly influenced my research methodology and the data I was able to collect. My research methodology had to adapt to the sometimes-unique aspects of these virtual communities. For instance, instead of physical immersion, I had to be more intentional about immersing myself in the online environment, participating in forums and discussions to gain insights into the groups' norms. This intentional participation forced me to actively observe behaviours and interactions in a way that traditional in-person ethnography might not have always been able to foster due to the sometimes-passive participatory nature of it i.e., catching up and chatting with an interlocuter before actually formally starting an interview.

The aforementioned establishment of rules and boundaries in these virtual communities did impact the kind of data I was able to collect. Facebook group rules often dictate what types of content can be posted in the group and this has limited the range of interactions and behaviours that I was able to observe. For example, I saw numerous posts that went against the rules of the group, but before I was able to look into them, they were removed, and the user was temporarily banned from the group. Much like a heated conversation might result in an interview being abruptly ended, so do these kinds of online interactions. This is just another reminder that while we want to draw distinct differences between online and in-person ethnography, the way that we negotiate these situations stays much the same.

Both traditional and online ethnography involve researchers immersing themselves within a community to gain insights into its cultural practices, social dynamics, and power hierarchies. In physical settings, this immersion involves observing participants' behaviour, interactions, and gestures. Similarly, in virtual environments, researchers engage actively in discussions, forums, and activities within the community. The objective in both methodologies is to witness the unfolding of interactions, the progression of dialogues, and the development of relationships. Despite the difference in environment, the core principles of observation remain the same. Researchers aim to comprehend patterns of communication, power dynamics, and social hierarchies that are unique to each setting. While traditional ethnography might involve more discrete and unobtrusive observations, online ethnography often necessitates active participation due to the nature of digital interactions. However, in

both cases, researchers become an integral part of the community they are studying, contributing their insights, asking questions, and exchanging ideas. This involvement allows us to obtain a first-hand understanding of the community's values, norms, and shared experiences, regardless of whether the community exists in a physical or digital space.

One of the advantages of online ethnography is that digital platforms automatically archive interactions, which provided me with a record that I could revisit, analyse, and interpret over time. This archival feature aided me in tracing back conversations, identifying emerging themes, and tracking the progression of discussions. This capability has been particularly beneficial in capturing the aforementioned data that might be fleeting or transient in nature. However, online ethnography also has its unique challenges. The asynchronicity of online interactions can result in fragmented observations, and the lack of non-verbal cues can increase the risk of misinterpretation.

When asked about their perception of the authenticity of their digital communities, many interlocuters were reflexive in their answering. More often than not they felt that a criticism of their virtual communities would be that they were not as tangible as physical ones, but there was no doubt that they provided an important space for connection and exchange.

Connection and exchange were stressed as being essential components of the Facebook groups and many interlocuters had become friends through regular commenting and even bridged the gap from online friends to offline friends. One line of questioning that garnered much attention from interlocuters both in online, anonymous questionnaires as well as in interviews[32] was the disconnection, if any, between our online selves and representations and our offline lives and realities. I kept this question very open ended, did not provide much context and embraced the pregnant pause and silence that often followed it. This ‘breathing room’ allowed interlocuters to really ruminate and consider the question.

Out of dozens of interviews, I was told, at first, that there was absolutely no disconnect, that there was no reason for there to be a disconnect. Slowly, and then all at once, interlocuter after interlocuter, would reflect on their answer and explain that perhaps they were not absolutely the same person that they portrayed online. When I asked why, an overwhelming number of answers were significantly similar. One of the Zoom interviews I conducted heralded the most concise answer that speaks to the gist of what the majority of participants had to say,

[32] During both Zoom/WhatsApp virtual interviews as well as, at a later stage, in-person interviews (with a strict adherence to COVID protocol).

> "Why would I lie, Jeanie? Who has the time for that? [43 seconds of silence]. I mean, I don't *vloek* [swear] on the *Raat* [advice] groups – especially the ladies' one but that is only because [name redacted] would kick me off the group if I wasn't *ordentlik*. I am still a good Afrikaans woman. I think. I hope. But you know, you have to toe the line to get the help and answers that you need. I don't mind if I have to pretend a little or triple check my spelling before posting. That's not wrong, that is just respectful."
>
> Interview with Susan, 12 October 2020

This question heralded a bounty of data and was so fruitful that I managed to gather enough to base an entire chapter (chapter 5) on it. There are many ideas to unpack in Susan's response alone and the analysis of these kinds of responses helped me to draw together many threads with regard to new media and how it was specifically being framed and configured to suit a highly specific context in contemporary South African experiences of online spaces. Long (2020) argues that while online surveys and interviews give us access to a wider and more diverse array of respondents, we must embed our data in rich ethnographic narratives. A major strength of collecting data online and then contextualising it with follow-up, in-depth and in-person interviews and observation is that, even in times as unprecedented as the early days and months of the COVID-19 Pandemic, we can use the online data to provide a conceptual framework for understanding emerging social realities (Long, 2020).

While the strengths of in-person ethnography cannot be denied, the value inherent in online investigations was overlooked and relegated to the 'Break In Case of Emergency' method. I had many peers criticise my desire to use Facebook groups as a primary space for observation and while they were facing severed networks of connection, mine were growing. I was able to witness, in real time, not only how COVID-19 was traversing the globe as a microbial agent, but also as an idea. I had instant access to how themes of medical pluralism, defence against foreign bodies, and social consequences were developing and becoming interrelated and entangled as individuals were reflecting upon their significance.

Through my efforts in online, digital ethnography, I have tried my best to offset the limitations that many researchers were faced with early in 2020. By seeking out broad patterns of practice and actively soliciting multi-faceted and nuanced accounts of how people were responding to medical and social crises, I hope that the methods employed in this project can off-set the limitations and illustrate the substantive insights that I have gathered.

Doom Scrolling as Ethnography

The term 'doom scrolling' is one that became very popular as our time locked in our homes wore on. With little to no physical connection to the rest of the world, one of the only ways that we could stay in contact with each other was online, through social media. At first, in

early 2020, this was fun and light-hearted – banana bread took the world by storm and dalgona coffee[33] became an overnight sensation. However, soon March 2020 came to an end and then so did April and then May and we were all still inside. And so, we began to scroll.

Doom scrolling can be defined as "the tendency to continue to surf or scroll through bad news, even though that news is saddening, disheartening, or depressing" (Miller, 2020). With the sudden influx of brand-new information, many people – including myself – had a desire to stay up to date on every piece of information about how other countries were coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic, if their children were going back to school, how many people had died, the list goes on. Our brains – according to Miller (2020) – are hardwired to find negativity and potentially damaging, harmful situations as it helps us to avoid being subject to harm (Miller, 2020).

While it is true that research, such as the study by Miller (2020), suggests that our brains may be predisposed to focus on negative information, it is overly simplistic and potentially misleading to claim that our brains are "hardwired" to find negativity. This kind of sweeping statement can cause an undue emphasis on the negative aspects of human cognition, potentially overshadowing other important facets of our psychological makeup. The concept of the brain being 'hardwired' for specific behaviours or tendencies is a contentious one. The brain is an incredibly complex and adaptable organ, capable of learning and changing throughout our lifetimes – a quality known as neuroplasticity (Pascual-Leone, et al., 2005). Thus, even if we have a natural tendency to focus on negative experiences, this is not an immutable fact of our biology. While the negativity bias – our propensity to give more attention to negative information – is a well-documented phenomenon (Baumeister, et al., 2001) it does not account for the entirety of our cognitive processing. Human cognition is also characterised by a range of positive biases, such as optimism bias and self-serving bias, which lead us to expect positive outcomes and view ourselves in a favourable light (Sharot, 2011; Taylor & Brown, 1988). By focusing exclusively on the negativity bias, it can paint an unnecessarily pessimistic picture of human nature. It is crucial to remember that our ability to recognise and respond to negative information is just one aspect of our cognitive toolkit, evolved to help us navigate a complex and often unpredictable world. It is not a flaw or a failing, but a survival mechanism.

While it is important to acknowledge the role of negativity bias in human cognition, we should be wary of oversimplifying the complex workings of the brain. It is equally important

[33] A beverage made by whipping equal parts instant coffee powder, sugar, and hot water until it becomes creamy and then adding it to cold or hot milk.

to recognise our capacity for positivity, resilience, and change. People may set out to look up a question that they want an answer to and assume getting it will make them feel better, however they keep scrolling and scrolling and end up feeling more anxious and confused than when they started. The scrolling is both a coping mechanism as well as a search for more information about the stressor (Costopoulos, 2020).

I found myself quickly forming the habit of doom scrolling in March of 2020 as I was convinced that if I knew where COVID was and how many people were sick then I would feel better. I was sorely mistaken. Instead, I was growing ever more anxious and even though I craved time away from my phone and the news, I could not bring myself to stop. After reflecting on this with a peer of mine, she advised me to use my scrolling to my advantage and use it as an opportunity to conduct observation of the Facebook groups. I found that an inductive approach, which is data-driven and aims to build theory from exploring data, would be the best suited means for me to collect and qualitatively explore and hopefully discover patterns which I could then interpret for their meanings and impact on existing theory regarding anthropologists and new media (Bryman, et al., 2022).

In this vein, Hammelburg (2021, p. 1) proposes a "live ethnographic approach to the study of mediatized" experiences. She also encourages a combination of digital methods research, online observation, and participatory fieldwork in both online and offline environments. The blending of online observation with participant observation work on the ground enables one to alter perspectives on digital datasets as well as provide context to the people with whom you are conducting research. By referring to the works of Mark Deuze (2012) as well as Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017) – which argue that every element of our lives and the societies that we occupy are co-constructed with media – Hammelburg (2021) states that due to the ways in which we form connections with others, there is no life outside of or without media. Media – specifically social media – has become so embedded in our everyday lives that any research related to it needs to be sensitive to how these everyday practices fit into specific contexts. Ethnographic research methods allow us to investigate this embeddedness and "allows us to refigure social media as a fieldwork environment that is social, experiential and mobile" (Postil & Pink, 2012, p. 125).

I initially made use of a lot of unstructured participant observations, carried out in online spaces largely to help myself construct a solid foundation of understanding of not only the dynamics within the various Facebook groups, but to try and identify potential interlocuters. I familiarised myself with these spaces and the activities that they hosted in order to establish a

general trend of participants' use of social media. In my online observations and scrolling of the groups, I looked for the different kinds of content, questions, and answers that were being posted – which groups they were posted in, by whom and whether any locations, hashtags, tagging, or mentions of other group members were used. After observing the groups for a few weeks, I reached out to the administrators of the various groups I was observing and within a few hours, I had received the permissions required and was reminded ad nauseum that Facebook was open source and that as long as I protected all group members' personal information, they were happy for me to observe.

I began to catalogue various posts by general theme of query (chronic illness, prescribed medication query, COVID-19, sexual health etc) and then added a further layer of context by tracking the location of the poster, their gender, as well as what language they posted in. Considering the scope of this project, the analysis of these datasets is not foregrounded here, but it enabled me to create a deeply complex context and helped me to better understand the circumstances within which my potential interlocuters were operating. It is important to note here that many online observations and data collections are hampered by the very digital tools that many of us rely on to protect our online lives and interactions – privacy settings. Only public profiles can be detected and thus observed, but the strength in my project is that I was already an existing member of the Facebook groups that I set out to observe and so I had managed to circumvent this constraint. However, the safety of the private Facebook group, a hidden corner of the internet where people are like-minded and less likely to engage in keyboard-based fisticuffs did present some unique issues.

These Facebook groups, posts and comment threads/discussions are experienced by the group members as private spaces where they feel comfortable, in control, and a lot less likely to be judged for their views and practices. This is because they do not have to worry about the outside world seeing it. I had a growing concern about me having full access to this private space, and often intimate space, and worried about what impact my recording of fluid posting and interaction would have and if this would make anyone feel uncomfortable. I immediately brought my concern to a Facebook group administrator, Gert, who I had developed a wonderful working relationship with. He answered me via a Facebook Messenger DM[34] and put my mind at ease,

> "You are worried about 'solidifying' things, but don't u [sic] think that its already quite solid? this stuff is already quite solid – it is on FB, black on white".

[34] "DM" usually stands for "Direct Message." A DM is a private mode of communication between social media users.

In an effort to keep myself honest and responsible to the people with whom I wanted to investigate this enigma of *Boererate*, I used my own Facebook profile (which I have had and actively used since 2008) in order to show that while I was observing as a researcher, I was also just another (half) Afrikaans woman. In this regard, I was cautious of falling into the trap of navel-gazing or becoming defensive over certain practices or advice but was able to keep myself grounded in my research by aiming to be as reflexive as possible. I did this by continuously examining my own judgments and reactions to the posts that I saw during the data collection process. My goal was to identify any personal beliefs that may have incidentally affected my research.

At its core, both online ethnography and in-person ethnography share a fundamental objective: comprehending and interpreting human actions within specific cultural contexts. These two approaches employ analogous methodologies. For instance, participant observation, interviews, and integration into the community under scrutiny are common to both. Consider the act of participant observation – just as traditional ethnographers embed themselves in physical communities, online ethnographers involve themselves in digital communities. They meticulously observe interactions, take part in discussions, and document patterns and anomalies. Furthermore, a similar approach is seen in immersion. Comparable to their in-person counterparts, online ethnographers strive to become integral to the community they are researching. This endeavour encompasses grasping and adopting the community's language, norms, and values. Harvesting data is another parallel. Both online and in-person ethnographies entail gathering qualitative data, encompassing text, images, and, at times, videos. For example, online ethnographers might amass data from forum discussions, social media posts, or chat records, whereas in-person ethnographers could transcribe interviews or compile field notes.

Interpretation of findings is a shared aspect. In both forms of ethnography, researchers decipher their findings to extract insights into the culture, behaviour, beliefs, and social exchanges within the community. Ethical considerations also align. Ethical guidelines, such as acquiring informed consent, upholding confidentiality, and honouring participants' rights and dignity, are imperative for both online and in-person ethnography. However, it is essential to acknowledge the unique challenges of online ethnography. Addressing anonymity, managing digital data, and navigating virtual spaces lacking well-defined

geographical or temporal boundaries are some of these challenges. Consequently, online ethnographers often adapt conventional methodologies to suit the digital realm.

I brought up some of the advice I had read on Facebook while I was in conversation with friends and colleagues. I noted their reactions (sometimes disgust and sometimes genuine interest) and measured by own responses against theirs. While not a perfect system and subject to many other kinds of biases and judgements, it allowed me to foster some distance between who I am as an Afrikaans woman and what the Facebook groups – and by extension all the data that I gathered over the last 5 years – came to represent.

Ethically, I made sure to remind myself that the names on my screen were real people with real lives and real problems. They were not just datasets ripe for the picking and I made sure to reach out to each person and ask not only for their permission to screenshot their post (with a scrubbed name of course), but also for a pseudonym. One of the very first people that I reached out to for permission to screenshot their post and keep it on file for reference was so excited to pick her own pseudonym that she agonised for days over a couple of options before settling on a name from her ancestry – Magdalena. There are countless participants in this project who were never interviewed and with whom I only exchanged a few words online via direct message. Each screenshot that I took was placed in a themed folder (the aforementioned themes of chronic illness, COVID-19, sexual health etc). Within each of these themed folders was gendered folders (male, female, non-binary, prefer not to say etc). Lastly, each pseudonym had a dedicated folder within these gendered folders. This enabled me to keep track of who the big posters were and also helped me create a list of people (frequent posters) who I could potentially interview. The value of an ethnographic approach within digital studies of new media lies in making meaning and spotting subtle nuances and making them visible. Had I not categorised my data as such, it would have been dramatically more difficult to isolate focus points for my chapters. This controlled chaos was nothing new to me though, as it was the same approach I had taken when conducting interviews for previous projects. This categorisation was essential for wrangling the copious amount of digital data that I had, but also formed a solid foundation for me to use when I started building up my in-person data from interviews and observations.

In-Person back in fashion

As 2020 marched on and we all progressed through various lockdown levels (and even ended up going back through them again), I was presented with the opportunity to interview participants in person and even had the chance to conduct some participant observation and

turn back to traditional tried and tested anthropological methods. I was hindered by COVID-19 protocol early in my in-person interviews, but it was not unmanageable. The wearing of face masks did initially feel strange, and I did miss being able to read an interlocuter's face during interviews, but the feeling quickly passed as I found that people wanted to overcompensate for half their faces being covered and were very expressive with their hands and eyes. When we were able to gather in groups, I interviewed more people and was even invited to braais and coffee dates where interlocuters would exchange *Boererate*, discuss the groups and the posts on them, and help each other to acquire and mix the recommended ingredients.

There were many insights that I gained from being able to physically interact with people and see them interact with others in their own environments that they found secure and supportive. I was able to better understand why they represented themselves in a certain way online and that the opportunity to chat, without it being recorded either in text or on my phone during a structured interview, enabled them to discuss things – and people – they might never have even broached before. The structured and carefully policed and monitored spaces of the Facebook groups were very different observation spaces compared to someone's backyard and amongst friends and family that, while not part of the groups, had very strong opinions about *Boererate*.

I was also able to gain some insight into the use of language and the large role that it plays in the dissemination of *Boererate*. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, language was not only a concern of mine going into this project, but it developed into an ongoing stumbling block that I constantly needed to adjust to.

In terms of the online data, language issues were largely mitigated by the fact that I could look up plants or ingredients that I did not know or recognise, or I could rely on someone in the comments having already asked for clarification. I also spent a fairly significant amount of time calling my aunts back and forth and asking them to translate or explain some of the posts. However, in real time in the company of real people, I would trip up on words that I had never heard before – such as slang names for plants or Lennon's products[35]. I distinctly recall being at a coffee shop asking my interlocutors for assistance on what *dassiepis* was and after confessing that I thought the group was referring to the fresh urine of a dassie, I was met

[35] Lennon products are a popular brand of over-the-counter remedies in South Africa and are patent medicines aimed at relieving pain, coughs, colds, flus, and other general ailments (see website https://www.lennon.co.za/). Many are branded with colloquial names, and one would require their booklet to understand the ingredients/aims of the medicines if not previously familiar with it.

with laughter and one of the women even asked me if I was really Afrikaans. I called my aunt later that night and she informed me it was, in fact, petrified and rock-like excrement composed of both urine and faeces excreted by the Cape hyrax.

This gatekeeping was not present in the Facebook groups and was a unique dynamic that I was exposed to only in my in-person data collection processes. Perhaps these language-linked characteristics could have been subconscious, but they were significant and frequent enough to note. It highlighted that there were micropolitics at play as there were smaller physical cliques that formed out of the online groups. The amount of peer policing was astonishing and the collective mortality that emerged from the pandemic was hyperfocused into the groups. The impact that this had my data gathering was noteworthy – especially with reference to social control mechanisms, mortality perceptions, health inequalities, and changes in trust and belief systems.

One significant area of impact in terms of data collection lies in social control mechanisms and community responses to public health directives. The Facebook groups provided a rich ground for me to investigate how they were reacting and responding to crisis situations, with particular attention being paid to the dynamics between individual freedoms and collective responsibility. It is also worth noting that I observed this same dynamic offline and between people when we were allowed to mingle again. People were virtue signalling - the act of expressing opinions or sentiments that demonstrate one's good character or moral correctness in contrast to the immoral character of others. While this was incredibly interesting and indeed a performance of *ordentlikheid* (van der Westhuizen, 2017), it did mean that I was required to navigate through a substantial volume of extraneous content in order to distil the genuine opinions and ideas of individuals during the interview process. The extraneous data was important enough to be discussed in chapter 5. Simultaneously, the increased focus on mortality presented a similar impact. These insights revealed how my participants were responding to large-scale crises.

It was only once I had been to a few physical meetups that I was able to contrast the Facebook groups to the in-person gatherings and my analysis was all the richer for it. I was able to identify that the groups were a much freer space that was open to debate, discussion, and disagreement. In-person observation revealed to me that there many undercurrents regarding the groups and how some people were using them. It is important to note that just because there are a select few that use the groups for peer policing or for exercising their micropolitical power, this does not undo or make me disregard the welcoming and

informative nature of the groups. Human beings are complex and very often paradoxical and so too are the online and offline spaces that they occupy and live their realities in.

Conclusions

Digital anthropology constitutes not a novel departure within the anthropological landscape, and its emergence predates the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the adaptable approach of many researchers and anthropologists to the changing environment unquestionably led to changes in how we interacted with the people we were studying and communicating with. By combining both digital and in-person research methods, I have been able to create a more comprehensive understanding. This allowed me to gain valuable insights into the everyday lives of individuals who might not have been part of the study if I had focused solely on in-person interactions.

These insights, often limited by what people choose to share online, have been carefully compared with observations from face-to-face research. This approach has provided the opportunity to notice subtle behaviours and interpersonal dynamics. This way of conducting research not only fills the gaps left by digital-focused methods but also presents a fuller picture of how Afrikaans women engage with *Boererate*. This enriched perspective is the result of combining both approaches in a synergistic manner. Moreover, the amalgamation of online and in-person ethnographic research techniques facilitated the mitigation of inherent constraints within each methodology. Notably, digital research frequently contends with the confinement of limited scope.

By combining digital research with in-person interviews, I expanded the range of participants, resulting in a more complete collection of data. This approach not only introduced new methods of gathering and analysing information but also highlighted the value of blending digital research with traditional techniques. This combination enriched my grasp of the subject matter. Through this integration, it becomes increasingly evident that the distinction between digital and traditional ethnography is not as clear as commonly thought. The apparent differences mask a shared essence centred on uncovering nuanced sociocultural insights. Both approaches require skill in engaging participants and interpreting contextual nuances. The convergence of these methods emphasises how digital and in-person ethnography complement each other. This understanding leads to a shift in perspective, highlighting not just the coexistence of these methods but their interdependence. Ultimately,

this approach fosters a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the subject under study.

Throughout the course of this chapter, numerous ideas have been introduced, albeit briefly, that hold the promise of elaboration in the chapters to come. Notably, the forthcoming chapters will delve deeper into the intricate themes of gender dynamics, the role of peer-based oversight, gatekeeping mechanisms, and the accessibility landscape of information dissemination. These thematic threads are poised to be explored, intertwined, and anchored back to the foundational discourse established herein.

In the next chapter, The Birth of *Boererate*, I will predominantly draw upon the archival research conducted at the Voortrekker *Erfenissentrum*, as previously mentioned in the preceding sections. The next chapter is designed to trace the trajectory of *Boererate*, starting from its nascent origins in the Cape in the 17th century and extending to its contemporary presence within Facebook groups. Through this exploration, I will trace the evolution of *Boererate* over time, observing its journey.

Chapter 3: The Birth of *Boererate*

> *"Ek het by my tannie gehoor dat ons voorouers – die wat nou in die kampe was – het 'n warm maag van 'n pas geslagte skaap op die pasiënt se bors geplaas om tifus te genees. Die Engelse het natuurlik gesê dat dit alles nonsense was, maar wat anders kon daai mas doen? Die dokters wou nie help nie en hulle het al die Duitse medisyne weggevat!"*
>
> [My aunt told me that our ancestors – those who were in the camps – used to take the stomach of a freshly slaughtered sheep and place it on the chest of a patient to treat typhus. The English naturally said that it was all nonsense, but what else could those mothers do? The doctors did not want to help, and they had taken away the Dutch medicines!]
>
> Interview with Rita, 13 May 2020

My throat tightened at the mention of the South African War and the concentration camps. I had made some initial connections in the literature between the concentration camps and the Dutch medicines that would eventually become known as *Boererate*, but this was the first time I had discussed the camps with my informants. My own Afrikaner grandmother would tell me ghost stories on camping holidays about phantom women who searched old concentration camp sites looking for their children who were casualties of war and, according to her, British cruelty.

Having grown up about a ten-minute drive away from Irene Camp Memorial Graveyard, I had been made acutely aware – from a very young age – about the impact of the war and its camps. Through my studies I have become aware that concentration camps were suffered by black South Africans and that they were placed in separate camps and endured many hardships too (van Heyningen, 2013) . While this project ultimately focusses on the experiences of Boer women in the camps and not that of black South Africans of the time, I want to take this moment to acknowledge that the mythology surrounding the War and the camps has largely erased the hardships endured by black South Africans both on the frontlines of South African War and in the concentration camps. It is, however, heartening to see that there are efforts by researchers (van Heyningen (2013) and Pretorius (2010) for example) to elucidate stories from these camps.

While I reminisced about these stories, Rita continued to tell me the stories which her own grandmother had etched into her memory. Her grandmother had been in a camp and had told her daughters harrowing tales of suffering and cruelty at the hands of Lord Kitchener's policies and doctors.

> "*Ek kan dit in my eie bene voel, jy weet, hoe my ouma se mense gesukkel het. Maar, 'n boer maak 'n plan en* ***het*** *hulle toe 'n plan gemaak!".*
>
> [I can feel it in my own bones, you know, how my grandmother's people suffered. But a boer makes a plan, and **did** they make a plan!]

The concentration camps of the South African War are a controversial aspect of South African history which are ripe for reinterpretation. In this chapter, I want to look into the role which Boer women played within these camps and consider how they were entwined in forging *Boererate*. From what I have gathered from the archives as well as other historical accounts of the camps and the War, it appears that there is a distinction between the creolized European (primarily Dutch) medicines that were taken into concentration camps by Boer women and the body of knowledge that emerged from the camps. I have spent much time outside of the archival research discussed in the previous chapter, trying my best to understand what daily life was like for the women in the camps. This was never an easy topic of investigation and I found that I was significantly affected by the stories of disease, hunger and dying children. As much as I can be reflexive and attempt to pull away to get perspective on narratives and biases, at the end of the day, it was a heartbreaking connection to research.

In this section, I want to expand on previous works and bring them into conversation with the notion that Boer women were fighting their own ideological war in the camps while men waged theirs on the front lines. I feel it is important to note here that while this chapter focusses on historical framings, they are restricted to the realm of history. This discussion needs to be considered in connection with the contemporary data that I will discuss in chapter 5.

Boererate has survived, perhaps against the odds and in various forms since its emergence from the camps and still acts as a malleable and a diverse symbolic toolbox found in numerous modern Afrikaner households. Through connecting contemporary experiences to a Boer past, Afrikaner women can entrench themselves in an empowering historical narrative whilst negotiating the contours of daily life in a predominantly patriarchal society that reinforces an ideology of *ordentlikheid*, or “ethnicised respectability.” (van der Westhuizen 2017, 2). The terms ‘Boer’ and ‘Afrikaner’ here are used to refer to two groups of people throughout time. Although intertwined, the concept of 'Boer' pertains to a historical collective comprising Dutch, German, and French Huguenot individuals who established a community at the Cape during the 17th and 18th centuries. A segment of this group later splintered off as the Voortrekkers, venturing into the South African interior. Subsequently, amidst intricate political developments that delve beyond the confines of this project, a push for greater unity within the community emerged, leading to their identification as Afrikaners. This intricate political journey ultimately serves as a complex and profound point of departure, yet it is a

topic that exceeds the boundaries of this endeavour. While I engage with this notion in constructing a historical narrative, it is important to acknowledge that entire volumes have been dedicated to exploring its depths, rich with nationalistic sentiments and considerable complexity.

Medical Mosaics

It is important to understand the context in which the medical practices employed in the concentration camps were developed. The medical history of South Africa is a complex tale that many (see the works of Digby (2006), Burrows (1958), van Heyningen (2013 and 2012), and de Villiers (2008) to name a few) have sought to study and explain over the years. There were many factors at play – such as the ever-changing administrations of the Cape Colony as well as the impact of missionaries and explorers. It is important to note that while I seek to provide some context in this section, it is by no means an exhaustive report of the goings on in the early 17th and 18th centuries in South Africa. The medical histories that played out in South Africa lend themselves to the complex tales which are told today. The healing therapies and medical practices of settlers and indigenous peoples met and melted together resulting in the bricolage of healing systems and traditions found in contemporary South Africa. The historical trajectory of *Boererate* is an important part of this story.
In this section, I want to provide some context to the dynamics of health and healing which were at play in the 17th and 19th centuries – the early days of European (predominantly Dutch and then British) settlement and colonisation of South Africa. In doing so, my aim is to provide a brief overview of the medical practices from this period as discussed in various other works (as mentioned above). In this vein I have chosen to draw from Jonathan Roberts (2017), who establishes connections from the medical practices at the Cape during the 1600s through to the Boer republics in the highveld in the 1800s.

Roberts (2017, p. 3) asserts that the inception of 'Western medicine' at the Cape traces back to 1627, a time when the Dutch East India Company landed with what can only be described as a ramshackle assemblage of tents – a makeshift camp for sailors plagued by scurvy. Those who remained ashore found themselves bereft of the familiar apothecary provisions, thus compelling them to engage in trade with the Khoisan populace for essential sustenance and water to tend to their ailing comrades. Amid the canvas walls of this rudimentary hospital, a curious remedy took root – a solution born of necessity and improvisation. Sorrel leaves, steeped to concoct a vitamin-laden infusion, emerged as a potent tea intended to counteract the ravages of scurvy's causes and effects, as deftly recounted by Roberts (2017).

Upon his arrival at the Cape in 1652, Johann (Jan) van Riebeeck found himself tasked with the oversight of a tent hospital, yet his focus seemed more aligned with the comings and goings of maritime commerce than the well-being of ailing seafarers. In fact, historical accounts paint a resolute picture of this era: the Cape, while teeming with bustling activities, placed little emphasis on tending to the infirm (Roberts, 2017). This disregard left sick sailors marooned, their medical afflictions largely ignored and left unalleviated. It wasn't until the 1660's that a semblance of permanence took shape in the form of a hospital constructed by the Dutch East India Company, albeit one that offered little advancement over the preexisting tent-based establishments. However, even as the decades wore on, and the Cape became a hub of colonial endeavours, the priority given to medical care remained consistently lacklustre. The construction of a new hospital in 1780 – many years after the arrival of the initial Dutch and Huguenot settlers on the Cape's shores – marked a tardy attempt at improvement. Alas, its staffing and their capabilities remained woefully inadequate, echoing the shortcomings of its predecessors. This prolonged inertia in addressing the medical needs of the ailing sailors underscores a prevailing disinterest in fostering comprehensive medical provisions, making it a lamentable thread woven throughout the tapestry of the Cape's early history.

Roberts (2017, 3) quotes Viljoen (2014, 41-42) in describing this tent hospital as "…a ruinous place where hopeless cases were left to die…" and that "…only a handful of trained physicians [were] available to staff the building." One result of this was that in the absence of adequate European medical care, Khoikhoi healers nursed sick sailors to health with herbal remedies. The rich tapestry of healing practices woven from the extensive fauna and flora of South Africa beckoned the curious gaze of European naturalists. Drawn to the Cape's shores, these intrepid explorers embarked on journeys of discovery, captivated by the opportunity to study and depict the region's vibrant life. Among the treasures they uncovered were indigenous plants of profound medicinal value. Notably, buchu[36] and aloe emerged as stars in this verdant pharmacopeia, rapidly transitioning from local curatives to esteemed denizens of European botanical gardens.

The infusion of South African botanical knowledge into European spheres was nothing short of transformative, as these newfound remedies swiftly etched their place within early

[36] "These Rutaceous shrubs are typical of the fynbos (vegetation found in the western Cape Province of South Africa) and are particularly abundant in the mountainous areas in the Cape (Van Wyk and Gericke, 2000). The Khoi-San used the word 'Buchu' for any fragrant plant that could be dried and powdered, so in a historic sense this name does not designate a single species. Nowadays it is generally accepted that 'Buchu' refers to Agathosma betulina and Agathosma crenulata" (Moolla & Viljoen, 2008, p. 413)

pharmacopeia. The arrival of these botanical remedies acted as a compelling bridge between two continents, channelling centuries of traditional healing wisdom into the pages of early European medical texts, particularly within the annals of English medicine. This transcontinental exchange stands as a testament to the profound interplay between cultures and ecosystems, weaving a narrative of natural bounty and shared therapeutic insights across time and space. (Deacon & van Heyningen, 2004).

The tapestry of Boer healing traditions is intricately woven from the threads of both early European influences and the well-established healing systems of the Khoikhoi people. This fusion, though a pivotal facet of Boer healing practices, invites further exploration to unearth its intricate nodes and connections in comprehensive detail. This melding is emblematic of the crossroads at which cultures converged, intertwining to cultivate a distinctive healing ethos. In the canvas of early Boer households, echoes of 17th-century European medical theories and beliefs resonate through their healing therapies. These medical ideologies, tracing their origins to the humoral philosophy of the ancient Greeks, left an indelible imprint on the fabric of Boer health practices. Although the articulation of these principles had waned by the 18th century, their lingering influence shaped the contours of how Boers approached the treatment and diagnosis of ailments.

This entwined legacy reveals the dynamic interplay of cultural currents, traversing centuries and continents. The amalgamation of European medical paradigms with the healing wisdom of Khoikhoi practices manifests as a tapestry of healing wisdom that not only delineates the past but reverberates through the generations, forming a nuanced mosaic of care and remedy. This dynamic synthesis emerges as a testament to the resilience of traditions, forever moulded by the ebb and flow of history (van Heyningen, 2013). Another possible node of interest here is the use of the *Huisapotheek* (home pharmacy[37]). This is one of the most widely known early therapeutic practices attributed to Boers, and indigenous herbs that grew around homesteads steadily made their way into this body of knowledge. There is also evidence that they incorporated animal parts and excreta into early healing practices (van Heyningen, 2005) although this has not been examined in as much detail as herbal remedies developed at the time.

The mosaic of Boer medical practices, woven through the annals of history, bears the marks of fragmentation and gaps in documentation. This patchwork quilt of historical records, while

[37] Translated as 'Home Pharmacy', this was a tin box that contained various patent medicines and as well as dried herbs and tinctures that could be mixed according to recipes or one's own will in order to treat illness in the home.

frustratingly incomplete, paradoxically acts as a crucible for the proliferation of extensive myth-making that permeates modern interpretations of early Boer healing traditions. The gaps left by these fragmented accounts create fertile ground for the cultivation of imaginative narratives, altering the lenses through which contemporary observers perceive and grasp these practices. The absence of comprehensive discourse underscores the malleable nature of historical memory, where gaps become interwoven with speculative narratives, yielding a complex tapestry of interpretation. This tapestry, intricate as it may be, offers an inviting terrain for anthropologists to navigate. The act of scrutinising these myth-making processes presents an invaluable opportunity, not just to excavate historical truth, but to illuminate how individuals forge connections with their heritage. Anthropologists, equipped with the tools of ethnographic inquiry and historical exploration, can adeptly transform these myth-making mechanisms into portals for comprehending the intricate relationships humans share with their past.

At this juncture, I want to exercise care not to slip into essentialisms (see, for example Kuper, 2003). The stereotypical portrayal of ‘the Boer’ as a figure steeped in suspicion and superstition is a perception that, to some extent, continues to cast its shadow onto contemporary Afrikaners. However, it is crucial to assert that the historical evidence, as delineated above, paints a more multifaceted picture. This picture serves to counterbalance the prevalent stereotype and offers insights into the complexities of Boer medical practices. The historical mosaic reveals that, contrary to the stereotype, numerous instances show that Boers availed themselves of professional medical care when it was readily accessible. This engagement with formal medical practices underscores the pragmatic nature of many Boers, who were not tethered solely to folk remedies and superstitions. During the mid-1800s, a pivotal era marked by British governance over the Cape Colonial Government, significant strides were taken to establish a framework for medical legislation and infrastructure. This step was a testament to the evolving attitudes toward healthcare and an indication of the society's aspiration for systematic health management.

However, the historical landscape unfolds further complexities when one gazes beyond the Cape. The Boer Republics nestled deeper within the interior – namely the Transvaal and the Orange Free State – existed in a different paradigm. These territories did not bear the same impetus as the Cape to catalyse medical reform during this period. Their unique historical trajectories cast light on the regional variances that influenced medical progress and underpin the broader tapestry of Boer medical practices. This granulated exploration traverses the corridors of history, casting a web of interwoven narratives that challenge prevailing

stereotypes and offer a richer understanding of how medical care ebbed and flowed within Boer communities across different contexts (van Heyningen, 2005).

This is largely due to the considerable geographical distances that often separated different groups of people. Compounded by the inherent nature of these settlements as frontier outposts, they were characterised by their rudimentary infrastructure – a reality that hindered the feasibility of undertaking extensive medical reforms. The culmination of these factors created an environment where the utilisation of traditional or home remedies became a likely recourse. The nexus between the employment of home remedies and these circumstances can be illuminated by a confluence of factors. The geographical isolation that prevailed due to the vast expanses separating settlements engendered a sense of self-reliance, necessitating an approach to health management that relied on available local resources. Furthermore, the limited accessibility to professional medical practitioners, compounded by the remote nature of these outposts, further underscored the dependence on home-based healing practices. Financial constraints inherent to frontier societies also added another layer to this complex equation. The pursuit of medical treatment from professional practitioners might have entailed significant costs, rendering such options unfeasible for many individuals residing in these nascent settlements. Consequently, recourse to traditional or home remedies emerged not only as a matter of necessity but also as an economically prudent choice. While this course of action is not unique to South Africa, it is important to acknowledge the role it played in the legacy of *Boererate*.

Over the course of the 1800's the Cape Colony became home to European doctors who offered "novel" (Roberts 2017, 3) treatment to patients and went to great lengths to ensure that they differentiated themselves from the medical practitioners and medicines of "creolized folk" (Deacon and van Heyningen 2004, 46). It is important to highlight that formalised European medicine was seen as the exception, positioned distinctively from the more prevalent blend of alternative therapies mentioned earlier – a hybrid form of medicine crafted by culturally diverse communities.

After the British took over administration of the Cape Colony in 1806, English doctors formed the Supreme Medical Committee and began to monitor apothecary shops and registered travelling medical traders (Digby, 2006). As registered pharmacies in some areas began to stock more British medical goods, many doctors' interests in herbal medical goods began to wane and the Cape culture of healing became relatively closed off, focusing on white doctors trained in the British tradition. This exclusionary practice drove a wedge

between different groups of people and the ways in which they sought out health and healing. Whilst we can only speculate as to the extent that this was an intended outcome, it added impetus to the use of home remedies and the *Huisapotheek*. The remedies that were employed by Boers, and eventually groups of Voortrekkers, can thus be thought of in terms of van Onselen's (1990) 'cultural osmosis' as they were comprised of different bodies of knowledge spanning from seventeenth-century Europe through continuous and complex interactions with indigenous peoples and their well-established modalities of health and healing.

It could be argued, then, that during this period, a series of parallel developments were taking place. On one hand, political dynamics were driving distinct groups apart, while on the other, these same groups were influencing each other through shared ideas about health and healing. Indeed, the political landscape played a pivotal role in this process of cultural exchange. The preservation of the white British Administration's values, along with the rise of a Boer nation and the growing isolation of indigenous South African communities, all happened concurrently. These events were not isolated but rather intertwined, each contributing to the shaping of separate yet interconnected belief systems.

The effects of this cultural osmosis were far-reaching, impacting not just political and social structures, but also deeply influencing the perspectives on health and wellness. This resulted in a fascinating blend of knowledge and practices, where traditional healing methods coexisted with, influenced, and were influenced by, European medical approaches. In essence, this was a time of both division and unity, of separation and connection. Different groups, driven apart by politics, were nevertheless bound together through their shared quest for health and well-being, each contributing to a rich tapestry of healing practices.

When Boers decided to migrate into the interior of South Africa, they thus took with them a hybrid of medical practices adopted and created whilst living in the Cape. These Voortrekkers made extensive use of herbal baths, poultices, and tonics to treat their various ailments incurred during their 'Great Trek'[38] (Roberts, 2017). The terrain of the highveld in the interior was unforgiving and the Voortrekkers were faced with having to tend to their sick and wounded amidst clashes with indigenous peoples as well as encounters with wildlife.

[38] Resulting from the culmination of tensions between Boers and the British administration of the Cape Colony, the Great Trek predominantly took place due to the British wanting to outlaw slavery – which a large group of Boers did not agree with, as well as the reluctance of the British to further white settlement into, what was at that point in time, regarded as Xhosa land.

Self-sufficiency and reflexive engagement with their environment were absolutely critical for survival.

One such demonstration of how crucial the malleability of these healing practices was is to be found in their adaptation to contexts of containment in concentration camps of the South African War, to which I turn my attention to below. The concentration camps that were devised by the British would end up being even more unforgiving than the terrain and hardships that Voortrekkers faced on their travels. While Boers did not live especially long lives as a pioneer community, van Heyningen (2005) has found conclusive evidence in various British censuses that the concentration camps dealt a serious blow to life expectancy and thus, one can reasonably assume, heightened levels of associated physical and mental maladies.

After exploring the variety of healing practices and the ways in which their users interacted and borrowed from each other, I now want to transition to a discussion about how the concentration camps during the South African War became arenas where gender and health intersected. This interaction further shaped European and indigenous healing therapies into a unified yet highly adaptable body of knowledge. It appears as if it was within this unique context of confinement that what we know today as *Boererate* originated. In this process, Boer women established a knowledge system that functioned not only to cure the sick but also served as a symbolic code of resistance. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter as well as the concluding chapter, this very system continues to flourish in modern-day South Africa. Through this analysis, I aim to shed light on the enduring legacy of these healing practices and their lasting impact on South African society.

The Emergence of Concentration Camps.

Conflict between the Boers and the British was common and resulted in two major confrontations. These are sometimes referred to as the first and second Anglo-Boer Wars but have more recently been considered to be part of an ongoing conflict between the two groups deemed the ‘The South African War’ (Pretorius, 2010). The first instance of conflict between the two groups has been well documented and broke out as a result of Boers’ growing resentment of the British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. A war effort was waged in earnest from December 1880 to March 1881 and the Boers emerged victorious. Following this conflict there was a short-lived period of peace and about eight years later war broke out again.

The South African War was a battle fought between the British Empire and the independent Boer states that were established after the Voortrekkers had left the Cape Colony. The catalysts and origins of the war were multifaceted, but the discovery of diamonds and gold within the territories of the Boer states was a significant trigger. This unprecedented find led to a wave of men journeying from Britain to South Africa, lured by the promise of wealth and employment opportunities. These individuals, known as *uitlanders* or foreigners, primarily settled within Boer territories. Over time, their growing numbers began to tip the demographic scales, leading to escalated tensions within these regions. Government officials, in a bid to defuse the mounting tensions, attempted to negotiate the rights of the *uitlanders* within the Boer republics, while also addressing the contentious issue of control over the lucrative gold and diamond mines. Unfortunately, these efforts largely fell short of achieving a peaceful resolution. (Pakenham, 1991).

After various political talks and negotiations between then-president Paul Kruger and the government agents of the British Empire, Kruger realised that the British Empire would soon assume control over Boer republics through the constant influx of *uitlanders*. President Kruger issued an ultimatum in October 1899 that British troops, which had assembled at the borders of the Boer republics in an attempt to put pressure on them to accept *uitlanders*, should withdraw. His demands were rejected, and the South African Republic and the Orange Free State declared war on Britain (Pakenham, 1979).

The War had many phases and fortune often shifted between Boer and British forces. Part of the War effort was the Scorched Earth Policy which was enacted by the British. In an attempt to strand Boers and leave them without support in the field or while travelling between battles, the British troops endeavoured to burn down and destroy as many Boer homesteads as they could. The policy of establishing camps, initiated by Lord Roberts and "vigorously pursued" by Lord Kitchener was, ironically, an attempt at extending an olive branch to the Boer fighters (Pretorius, 2009). The idea – so the story goes – was that if Boers would lay down their arms, then British authorities would grant them refuge in camps. While these 'refugee' camps were established by the British in order to house displaced families and those Boers who had surrendered, British officers in the field laboured under the impression that they had approval to burn and destroy homesteads at will. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is important to note that Boers were not the only prisoners of the camps system and that many camps were established to house black South Africans who were either fighting on the side of the Boers or who had been unfortunate enough to be caught by British soldiers. Black South Africans were placed in camps separate to those of the Boers and suffered as

many hardships as can be imagined. The death toll is estimated to have been about 20 000 and it would be remiss not to mention (van Heyningen, 2013). In 1902, Lord Milner admitted that more than 30 000 homes had been destroyed and their previous occupants were being housed in the camps, which were described at the time by observers as overcrowded and underfunded (van Heyningen, 2013).

The sheer amount of homeless Boer women and children placed a strain on the camp system and the designation of these camps slid from 'refugee' camps to 'burgher' camps, but at some point, the term 'concentration' camp became the standard term of reference (Hunter, 2013, p. 639). Camps became instrumental in British efforts to "sweep the country bare of everything that could give sustenance to the guerrillas, including women and children." (Pakenham, 1979, p. 493) They functioned, ultimately, to undermine the Boer war effort and were instrumental in persuading Boer soldiers to lay down their arms in the hope of being reunited with their families.

Stille waters, diepe grond [Still waters run deep]

As the conflict between the British Empire and the independent Boer states raged on, the landscape was dramatically altered by the rise of the camps. A total of 45 tented camps were erected for Boer internees, and another 64 for black Africans (Wessels, 2010). These were places of forced displacement, where Boer families were held after being expelled from areas being systematically cleared of Boer commandos. The camps were scattered across the region in places like Aliwal North, Brandfort, Elandsfontein, Heidelberg, Howick, Kimberley, Klerksdorp, Viljoensdrift, and Waterfall North (Grobler & Grobler, 2013).

Life within these camps was marked by hardship and adversity. The conditions were poor, with inadequate shelter, sanitation, and food supply, and yet amid this grim reality, the spirit of resilience was born. It was here that *Boererate*, a system of knowledge and healing, took root, created by Boer women as a means of survival, a way to heal the sick, and a symbolic code of resistance. The farms of both Boers and Africans were destroyed, their inhabitants rounded up and held in segregated concentration camps. This was a time of turmoil and suffering, but also of endurance and defiance.

In the latter part of 1901, a significant event unfolded at the Brandfort camp. Women gathered around two camp prisoners, Mrs Viviers and Miss Miemie Els, as they confronted the camp commandant, demanding better food quality. Upon his refusal and subsequent disrespectful remarks, the women retaliated by toppling his tent. The camp police attempted

to intervene, but the women's fierce resistance resulted in one policeman needing medical attention (Grobler & Grobler, 2013). Later, Mrs Viviers and Miss Els were transferred to a jail in Bloemfontein, where they were hailed as heroes and comrades in the struggle by other incarcerated women.

In a similar act of defiance at the Orange River camp, a woman protested against the poor quality of rationed food by striking a commandant in the face with a piece of rotten meat. Consequently, she was confined to a section of the camp known as the 'bird cage', a space reserved for rebellious inmates (Grobler and Grobler 2013). As the war effort persisted, British authorities across all camps increasingly faced resistance to their systems. However, it is noteworthy that despite the high tensions, there were virtually no incidents of serious criminality within the camps - no reports of murder or assault intending to cause physical harm, arson, or wilful property damage were recorded. Boer women maintained records through letters and diaries, documenting their resolute intention to resist British encroachment on their freedoms for as long as necessary.

Kendall Franks, a British doctor, reported in a British Command paper (CD 819) that while it had been reported to him that the ‘refugees’ were mostly orderly they were nevertheless “not too obedient as to the keeping of animals and some minor points of discipline” (van Heyningen, 2012, p. 196). Oppression and resistance in the camps were in constant flux, but not always in overt ways. While there were instances of protest, the powerful forms of resistance were in the everyday non-cooperation employed by Boer women. James C. Scott (1985) writes of cultural resistance and its everyday forms that often take the shape of foot-dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotage. These ‘weapons of the weak’ are particularly prolific amongst people who perceive their structural position in society to be an unjust one – much like Boer women in camps.

Closely linked to these forms of everyday resistance are behavioural transcripts that guide ways of speaking and thinking in order to suit particular actors in specific social settings. Scott (1985, p. 137) argues that oppressed people often use their prescribed roles and language to resist domination and that “ideological resistance is disguised, muted and veiled for safety’s sake”. Boer women, having been prescribed the role of the *Volksmoeder* – a notion of idealised womanhood as the cornerstone of the household, but also a unifying force in the community – were subject to behavioural transcripts that guided the way they interacted with the British.

Ordentlikheid is a term that I have already woven through the preceding sections and chapters, and I now return to it again. As discussed, it is a term used to describe how Afrikaner women embody principles like presentability, politeness, decency, good manners and "humility with a Calvinist tenor" (van der Westhuizen, 2017, p. 23). While van der Westhuizen's work is based on contemporary research, the notion of a 'good Afrikaans woman' stems from their Boer past where many of these transcripts were cemented in popular consciousness.

As has been described, Boer women in camps resisted British systems – medical or otherwise. Male British doctors were vested in their positions as the dispensers of medicine and Boer women were rooted in their positions as caregivers and child-minders. When these two groups clashed, Boer women hid their use of *Boererate* from the powerful through deploying feigned ignorance, false compliance and many other techniques as has been described by Scott. By using these semi-visible strategies, Boer women could hide their actions from the British and while relatively powerless, managed to initiate disruption in the camps. This meant that they never had to forsake their positions as 'good Boer women' and could still be considered *ordentlik* even though they were confronting commandants and upending their tents. In fact, it could be argued that they were following the rules embedded in *ordentlik* by doing so. The more visible instances of resistance were all, it would appear from the available historical record, centred around that which was in a Boer woman's domestic realm – the quality of food they were feeding their children and the conditions under which they were being forced to live and care for their families.

Simultaneously, the most silent, often invisible and yet potent tool for resistance was the use of *Boererate*. This sentiment was evoked during an interview with one interlocuter, Marianne. When the invisible nature and symbolic power of *Boererate* came up in discussion, she had this to say,

> "You know, I always used to get very angry when I heard people say that the women were just in the camps and going about their business and not really trying to take over or *jaag* [chase] those English out. But they were spies and they made it absolute hell for the British to try and control things (laughs). It is no secret how Afrikaans women were – and maybe still are – expected to behave, you know, all that *ja en amen* [yes and amen] bull to everything your husband or father says. So actually, these women then were strong, but in their own way".
>
> Interview with Marianne, 13 June 2020

We spoke at length in the interview about the dangers of falling into a trap that many others have pointed out when writing about Boer history and Afrikaner nationalism in general.

Much of Boer history, especially their medical practices, are subject to substantial mythmaking and a mystique has blossomed around it. Jonathan Crewe (2017) writes of 'Boer Melancholia' in reference to this very tendency by relating it to the novel *Niggie* by Ingrid Winterbach. He states that 'Boer Melancholia' is a term applied to a process of grieving that many Afrikaners experienced that has been caused by a sense of cultural loss, loss of power, loss of linguistic hegemony as well as their loss of identity in the wake of the demise of apartheid (Crewe, 2017). In the novel, Winterbach writes of the War as a heroic time in Afrikaner history in order to reclaim the lost self-respect that indicates the injustices enacted against Afrikaners and their Boer ancestors. These kinds of texts serve to ingrain a revised and romanticised version of historical events in order to monumentalise them. Marianne agreed that perhaps the stories had been embellished upon as time went on, but she seemed to be torn between wanting to believe that Boer women were powerful and defiant and that this may have partially been a product of mythmaking.

While I argue that Boer women employed *Boererate* as a means of resistance against the British, I tread carefully to avoid overly glorifying or monumentalising their efforts. In this context, it is essential to consider Scott's perspective (1985), which cautions us to understand that the negotiation of social roles often transpires without conscious or explicit intent. The political existence of subordinate groups is not always black and white, but often lies in a grey area, teetering between overt defiance and total compliance to hegemonic structures. This nuanced understanding allows one to appreciate the complex dynamics at play during such resistance movements. It acknowledges that acts of rebellion can be subtle and may not always fit neatly into traditional narratives of heroism or rebellion.

Moreover, it is crucial to remember that these women operated within the constraints of their time and circumstances. Their resistance, embodied in *Boererate*, was a survival mechanism borne out of necessity rather than a calculated political strategy. Therefore, while acknowledging their courage and resilience, one must also recognise the complex socio-political landscape in which these actions were situated. *Boererate*, as I will discuss in the next section, was forged in that middle ground between resistance and compliance.

Inside the Concentration Camps

There is no doubt, then, that those who were interred in the concentration camps suffered tremendously. With many of the camps being inefficient, ineffective, and poorly administered, the high mortality rates come as no surprise. Between June 1901 and May

1902, almost 28 000 Boers died – 22 000 of those being children – and this death toll represented about 10% of the Boer population at the time.

Elizabeth van Heyningen (2013) writes that in the concentration camps, there was a clash over different cultural values between Boer women and British male doctor[39]. She reminds us that much of the tension between these two groups stemmed from the difference in locus of healing. For Boer women, their homes were where most healing took place, and they were the primary care givers. However, for the British male doctors, the hospital was the locus of their biomedical practices. As mentioned above, the Boers occupied a largely pre-industrial, frontier society which relied significantly on their own self-sufficiency and ingenuity when it came to matters of health. In this context, the conflict between Boer and Briton was embedded in their respective cultural and gendered identities, being mapped onto and expressed through conflicting ideas of health and healing between the home and the hospital.

British doctors had very little patience for the beliefs held by Boer women regarding healing practices and they openly derided and abhorred the creolised medicines that they brought with them. (van Heyningen, 2013). These largely herbal remedies were stored in the *Huissapotheek* described above – a sort of household pharmacy. The concentration camps were poorly managed and due to a certain level of ignorance on the part of the British, camps were set up in harsh environments that were ultimately detrimental to the health of prisoners. Camps would flood and become muddy quagmires that seriously impacted the health of the women and children who slept in canvas tents. If they had not brought bedding with them, families often slept directly on the ground. Between the rain, sweltering heat and the biting cold, life was miserable all year round.

According to van Heyningen (2013), Boer women and children were suddenly exposed to diseases that they had possibly never experienced before. Having lived mostly isolated lives on their homesteads, the overcrowding and lack of proper sanitation in the camps caused extraordinary health problems that neither British camp commandants nor the inexperienced medical staff had expected. Faced with these issues, Boer women turned to their tried and tested practice of creating home remedies in an attempt to keep themselves and their children alive and healthy.

British doctors and nurses were of the opinion that Boer home remedies were ridiculous caricatures of medical science and could not compete with biomedicine. But biomedicine

[39] Female nurses were also present in camps, but male doctors were the ones who were ultimately in charge of camp medical practices (van Heyningen, 2013).

was in its infancy at this stage and there was still much that needed to be discovered and corrected in their own practices. Nonetheless, faced with frighteningly high levels of mortality, British doctors applied their methods in an attempt to stem the deaths. At the same time, women were treating their children and neighbouring families with mixtures of European, indigenous, and invented remedies.

Healing in this context was an act of community and when someone was ill, women from surrounding tents would gather in the sick room – a tent that had been closed – and would share their knowledge and tend to the ill (van Heyningen, 2013). This act was heavily disparaged by the British medical staff and camp commandants and so, in order to counteract the Boers staying in their tents when they were ill, the alternative medicines of the inmates were banned. The inmates who had continued to use their own home remedies were ruthlessly dealt with – not given adequate rations and separated from families in makeshift 'prisons' (Grobler & Grobler, 2013). The domineering attitude of British medical staff only served to increase the distrust Boer women held for the British medical system being enforced in camp hospitals. While there are instances of British doctors attempting to rally against camp superintendents to increase rations, especially for children, this largely fell on deaf ears (van Heyningen, 2013)

In addition to these issues of trust, especially in the early days of the camps, was a significant language barrier. Prior to 1901, doctors and nurses were all English-speaking and communication between medical staff and inmates was strained. Smal (1921), in one of the earliest Afrikaans-language home remedy compendiums[40], emphasises that medical terms often do not translate to a layman and that important information is lost in translation between laymen and doctors. Effective communication in concentration camps was only slightly improved when young Boer women became nurses and could translate between British medical staff and Boer women. Language barriers and ineffective communication therefore exacerbated distrust between Boer women and their British captors. Imprisoned mothers did not trust British doctors to treat their children and would often hide sick children in their tent in order to prevent them being taken to the camp hospitals (Grobler & Grobler, 2013). Women who had their children taken to camp hospitals would watch on only to see as days later, their children's lifeless bodies were carried out. The hot marquee tents that served as camp hospitals were themselves a breeding ground for disease. There was a general consensus amongst women in the camps that children who were treated in the camp hospitals were more likely to die than those who were secretly nursed with whatever herbs and

[40] His book is discussed at length in chapter 2.

ingredients mothers could scrounge together to create their own medicine to treat children themselves (Grobler & Grobler, 2013).

These remedies went beyond mere attempts at healing ailing bodies. The medications utilised by Boer women in camps needed modification and adjustment due to a lack of access to reliable and familiar herbs and substances. The pursuit and development of healing therapies outside the realm of British biomedicine may suggest a connection to earlier anthropological theories of symbolism, as exemplified by Victor Turner (1969) or interpretative models proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973). These models portray social actors entangled in ever-changing webs of meaning. The evolving nature of herbal remedies, influenced by the agency of imprisoned and oppressed women, carried significant symbolic importance. The enduring expression of a Boer ‘making a plan’, quite possibly originating in the camps, encapsulated the Boer women's refusal of British biomedical care and their active reconstruction of alternatives from the surrounding environment. In doing so, they were reconstructing a sense of home, the epicentre of their healing universe and the very essence of what had been taken from them. This act served as a reaffirmation of female Boer identity in alignment with the ideology of ordentlikheid, wielding power.

Invention is the mother of necessity: The Birth of *Boererate*

Distrust of British doctors and camp hospitals only grew over time, and Boer women were continued to resist imperial domination. Following the banning of non-biomedical medicines in the camps, they did not disappear. On the contrary, they thrived having been pushed underground into networks of subterfuge and deception. The body of knowledge that persisted in uncomfortable co-existence with British medicine now took on a different set of meanings. As countless examples from history demonstrate, secrecy is equally if not more seductive than transparency (West & Sanders, 2003). The material substance of healing which was now illicit had become a source of counter-hegemonic power. The anthropological and historical records provide an abundance of examples where similar dynamics have unfolded. The banning of witchcraft accusations by colonial authorities in South Africa, for example, gave more power to witches, who were then accused of supporting and being protected by the colonial authorities (Niehaus (2001), Ashforth (2005)). The categorisation of certain music and literature by the apartheid state as ‘undesirable’ had the effect of creating a market for undesirability (McNeill (2011)). Power, it would seem, is multi-directional. By banning imprisoned women’s medicine in the camps, British authorities unwittingly forged a

nebulous set of ideas around healing into a powerful code of resistance, from which *Boererate* emerged.

Self-sufficiency had been joined by secrecy as crucial to survival. And so, women often conspired amongst each other to smuggle ingredients inside. One account speaks of how women would hide tooth powder for children and other small packages in their hair (Grobler & Grobler, 2013, p. 26). Other women who had bigger packages that needed to be hidden would dig a hole in the middle of the tent floor, place the package in it and cover the surface with dirt. Others would then distribute the medicines to their fellow inmates for safekeeping and use when required. The ban on creolised medicines in the camps aroused in Boer women the suspicion that this was done deliberately by camp administrators in order to facilitate Boer deaths. One account from D.H van Zyl – a young, educated boy in the Bloemfontein camp – stated, "Since the *tannies* [aunties] cannot buy their beloved medicines in the camp, they are constantly making plans to get hold of a supply of them" (Grobler & Grobler, 2013, p. 26).

While camp inmates were permitted to collect firewood from the surrounding bush, they were often unfamiliar with the herbs and plants growing around them and might not have known where to find the specific herbs they sought. On-site chemists, who were few and far between, offered little in the way herbal alternatives and were often described as being drunk and incompetent. In addition to this, chemists were viewed as an extension of the British medical infrastructure and so they were approached with an appropriate level of distrust.

The specific conditions in the camps, it would seem, made for an environment that leant itself easily to ingenuity and invention. British commandants praised 'good' Boers for finding ingenious ways of constructing ovens and for busying themselves with services to others in the camps – like mending and washing clothes (van Heyningen, 2012). However, this creativity also created "dangerous element[s]" in the camps (Grobler & Grobler, 2013, p. 76). Volunteer nurses in the Irene camp were, for example, dismissed and removed due to suspicions that they were telling inmates not to report to the hospital if they were ill and, if they had no choice but to go, they should not eat the food. One of the nurses, the aforementioned Johanna Brandt, responded to claims made by a British general that the home remedies were poisoning the women and children and that they were in fact the cause for the high mortality rate. She wrote:

> As to the people being poisoned by these home remedies, the idea is ridiculous. They consist of the simplest ingredients of the chemist's art and have been used since Boers became Boers. Why they should die from these remedies the first time they were used under the English flag

> is inexplicable. In my five months of work in the camp I did not attend or hear of any patient dying from home remedies (Grobler & Grobler, 2013, p. 78).

The narrative suggests that unsettling questions began to permeate the atmosphere of the camp. The British authorities were infringing on deeply ingrained Boer customs, particularly those surrounding familial care and child-rearing. Mothers, traditionally the primary caregivers, were being denied their inherent right to care for their children. This was a violation of their cultural norms and social fabric, causing deep resentment and suspicion. Moreover, it wasn't just that the children were taken away; they were returned to their families dead, exacerbating the heartbreak and suspicion. These tragic events led to the perception that the British medical treatments were not just ineffective but potentially harmful. They were seen as an assault on the Boer way of life, further deepening the chasm between the two cultures.

In this hostile environment, the traditional remedies of Boer women became more than just a means of treating illnesses. They transformed into symbols of cultural identity and resistance against the oppressive colonial regime. They were a testament to their resilience, a tool for survival in the face of adversity. These home remedies served as a lifeline, maintaining their cultural continuity and providing some semblance of control in an otherwise helpless situation. Thus, the perceived attack on Boer women did not weaken them; instead, it entrenched their resolve to survive and preserve their cultural practices, using their home remedies as a tool for both physical survival and cultural resistance.

As previously discussed, these remedies were in a state of constant evolution. They had transcended their roots as merely European or indigenous medicines. They were no longer purely composed of European elements, nor were they solely based on indigenous ideas absorbed over time through cultural osmosis. Their identity had been transformed under the specific circumstances within the camps, evolving into something markedly different from what they had originally been. In this challenging environment, adaptation was not just a strategy; it was a necessity. The ingredients and methods that once defined these remedies had to be substituted, often requiring inventive solutions. This was driven by a desperate need to protect themselves and their children from British medicine, which they perceived as harmful. This desperate situation prompted mothers in the camps to collaborate, using whatever resources were available to them to create effective treatments. It was within this historical context that these creolized medicines underwent significant changes. They were adjusted, manipulated, and adapted to suit the new environment they were forced into.

Boererate emerged as a versatile knowledge system born out of the challenging conditions of the camps, embodying the resilience and resourcefulness of Boer women. It transcended mere remedies, symbolising their steadfastness in preserving cultural health practices while adapting to their new circumstances. Amidst the physical warfare outside, these women forged Boererate as a distinct entity within the camps. Despite attempts by colonial systems to control or domesticate it, Boererate retained its agency, evolving into a comprehensive system addressing not only healing but also strategies for enduring and thriving in daily life. Its flexibility echoes Mbembe's (2001) notion of 'plasticity' in pre-colonial African knowledge systems, blurring boundaries between disciplines and bridging the material and spiritual realms, offering insights into diverse spheres of human experience.

Boererate shares several similarities with early worldviews, where the understanding of the environment was deeply intertwined with practical survival strategies and cultural practices. The creation and evolution of *Boererate* in the camps can be seen as a cyclical process, a symbiotic relationship between the women and their medical knowledge. While the imprisoned, Boer women were the architects of *Boererate*, this system of traditional remedies, in turn, shaped them. It influenced their identities, their methods of resistance, and their survival strategies within the camps. This is a profound example of the interaction between humans and their creations, where the creators are shaped by what they create.

This historical-ethnographic example blurs the line between human agency and the agency of the objects or concepts they produce. In this case, *Boererate*, although a product of human creativity and adaptation, assumed a life of its own. It impacted the lives of the women, moulding their behaviours, influencing their decisions, and shaping their experiences within the camps. The notion of agency here is not limited to the human actors but extends to the non-human entity - *Boererate*. This viewpoint challenges traditional understandings of agency, suggesting a more complex interplay between humans and their creations. It emphasises the dynamic and reciprocal nature of this relationship, where the boundaries between the creator and the creation become increasingly blurred. This characterisation of *Boererate* and its plasticity is discussed at length in the chapter 6 which is wholly dedicated to the role that this knowledge system plays in decolonisation and object agency.

Boererate revisited

Based on the testimonies from the network of interlocutors I interviewed, it is evident that *Boererate* continues to hold a strong presence in many people's lives. Its influence spans across various communication platforms, from traditional word-of-mouth exchanges to

modern online forums, demonstrating an impressive adaptability. *Boererate*'s remarkable plasticity lies in its ability to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances. It has transformed from a body of knowledge primarily passed down through generations in oral tradition, to being widely disseminated and discussed in the digital realm. This adaptability has ensured its survival and relevance, making it a staple in many contemporary Afrikaner homes.

Moreover, *Boererate* bridges the gap between the 'virtual' and the 'real', integrating traditional practices with modern modes of communication (Carrier & Miller, 1998). In the virtual world, it exists as texts, discussions, and shared experiences on online forums, connecting people across geographical distances. In the real world, it manifests as practical remedies used in households, directly impacting people's health and well-being. In this way, *Boererate* transcends the dichotomy of the virtual and the real. It exists and thrives in both realms, embodying a unique blend of tradition and modernity. This ability to blur the lines between the virtual and the real further attests to its enduring relevance and adaptability, reinforcing its status as a significant cultural practice within the Afrikaner community.

Perhaps significantly, the idea of ‘persecution’ is a recurrent theme, not only in the historical ethnographies of the camps but also in discussions with present day practitioners of *Boererate*. Many people interviewed were of the opinion that, like their ancestors, they were also under siege. Not however from the British this time, but in the context of political formations in which they perceive an immediate crisis of social reproduction through a loss of power and influence to shape the world around them.

> It just sometimes feels like it’s all coming down around you, you know. My uncle is a farmer and I worry about him with all these bloody attacks every day. And it’s ruthless. The violence. And he bought that farm, didn’t just inherit it like all every other *Jan Rap en sy maat* [Tom, Dick, and Harry]. I even worry in my bloody house, Tazers en [and] pepper spray everywhere.
>
> Interview with Astrid, 4 January 2020

The post-apartheid era in South Africa has been marked by a pervasive sense of vulnerability, which has found expression in tangible forms. In this climate of uncertainty, virtual spaces have emerged as important platforms for providing reassurance and stability. They offer a degree of control and predictability that may be lacking in the physical world, fostering a sense of safety and continuity.

Boererate, especially, assumes a pivotal role in this context. It provides a symbolic continuity with the past, acting as a resilient and tangible link to a heritage that has withstood the test of time. Steeped in a rich history and mythology that resonates deeply with many people, it

offers a reassuring sense of familiarity and identity. Today, perhaps more than ever, *Boererate* is not merely a body of knowledge; it is a cultural artefact that shapes identities even as it is shaped by those who uphold and practise it. It illustrates the dynamic relationship between humans and their cultural creations, highlighting how they mutually influence and transform each other. This reciprocal process of creation and influence underscores the enduring relevance and adaptability of *Boererate*, making it an integral part of many contemporary Afrikaner households..

> Everyone has their own piece that they add. It never stand still. We can always talk to each other about this andd (sic) help eachother (sic).
>
> Facebook message from Zelmonè, 20 October 2020

Boererate, a fusion of indigenous and early European healing systems, was born out of secrecy and deception during a brutal and ultimately unsuccessful struggle against the British Empire. Today, it stands as a potent symbol of resilience in times of perceived adversity. It encapsulates the historical narrative of survival amidst persecution, embodying centuries-old stories of strength and endurance. In its contemporary form, *Boererate* does not exist in concealed packages or hidden underground caches as it might have in the past. Instead, it thrives in the digital world on online forums, and physically manifests in the kitchens and living spaces of homes. The home continues to play a crucial role as a source of health and wellbeing, echoing the traditional importance of home remedies in *Boererate*.

Online communities dedicated to *Boererate* function as platforms where people share experiences about their doctors, discuss their medications, and talk about their symptoms. These virtual spaces serve as an avenue for individuals to seek reassurance and clarity about their health concerns. They provide a sense of community and support, reinforcing the enduring relevance of *Boererate* in modern society. Thus, *Boererate*, with its roots in the past, has not just survived but adapted and flourished in the present. It continues to provide a sense of continuity and connection to history, while also serving as a practical system of health and healing that resonates with many people's lived experiences and needs.

Conclusions

This chapter was aimed at developing a fresh perspective on how Boer women in concentration camps during the South African War cultivated and maintained a system of knowledge, known as *Boererate*. Drawing from scholarly work and integrating data from modern research, it traces the evolution of *Boererate* from its origins in the Cape Colony to its contemporary presence in online discussions. *Boererate* is showcased as an incredibly

adaptive body of knowledge. Building on Achille Mbembe's recent studies of precolonial knowledge systems in Africa, the preceding argument highlights the malleability of *Boererate* and how it blurs the boundaries between human agency and object agency. It also points forward to the chapter to come which will elaborate upon this malleability as well as the agency exhibited by *Boererate*. As people shape and evolve *Boererate*, it simultaneously shapes them. This reciprocal relationship has proven itself through *Boererate*'s extraordinary ability to adapt under conditions of real and perceived crises.

One such crisis was the South African War, where Boer women in concentration camps used *Boererate* not only as a survival tool but also as a form of resistance. Figures like Johanna Brandt played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting *Boererate* during this period. Despite being subjected to harsh conditions, these women managed to sustain this traditional knowledge system, passing it down to subsequent generations. The story of *Boererate* goes beyond being a mere means of healing bodies; it has morphed into a dynamic tool of resilience for those under duress. It continually presents new solutions to evolving challenges, reflecting its symbiotic relationship with the people who integrate it into their daily lives.

In the digital age, *Boererate* continues to adapt, finding a new home in online forums where people exchange information, seek reassurances and share personal experiences. This virtual space allows *Boererate* to reach a wider audience, ensuring its survival and relevance in the contemporary world. *Boererate* embodies a rich history of survival, adaptation, and resilience. It stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of the Boer women who nurtured it amidst adversity and continues to serve as a dynamic tool for those seeking healing and connection with their heritage. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the oft-mentioned contemporary context and my own experiences of learning about Boererate and the ingredients and practices that comprise it.

Chapter 4: *Raat vir 'n Doktor* [Advice for a Doctor]

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the resourcefulness of Boer women during their internment in the South African War concentration camps. Despite having access to British doctors and medicine, these women chose not to rely on them, primarily due to their lack of trust and a desire to maintain their independence in caring for themselves and their sick children. They instead turned to their tried and trusted Dutch home remedies and traditional medicines and adapted it to their unique circumstances. This adaptation process gave birth to what we now know and recognise as *Boererate* – a bricolage of traditional Dutch remedies and creative problem-solving that became the standard approach for addressing health issues within their community.

In this chapter I will be reflecting on my own experiences in the field while I was building my knowledge of Boererate as well as a circle of interlocutors who could guide me through the process of this knowledge acquisition. I will also start to introduce some theory around the anthropology of knowledge which enabled me to not only organise the information I was receiving, but also gave me the language to describe the field and what I was bearing witness to.

The significance of the process through which Boer women developed *Boererate* extends beyond historical context. This unique knowledge system has exerted a lasting impact on the interactions of contemporary Afrikaans women. The legacy of *Boererate* continues to shape how my interlocuters approach their healthcare, emphasising self-reliance, natural remedies, and a deep connection to their heritage. This historical evolution of healthcare practices highlights the enduring cultural and practical relevance of *Boererate* in the lives of many Afrikaans women today, demonstrating the profound influence of Boer women's resilience and ingenuity on contemporary healthcare choices.

From my observations of the Facebook groups as well as from my interactions with interlocuters, contemporary Afrikaans women have embraced the malleability that their forebears had woven into the very fabric of *Boererate*. The tradition of revising, updating, and editing recipes is something that is at the heart of how *Boererate* is being used – little tweaks to make sure they suit your ingredient availability and context.

I had a lengthy learning process when it came to *Boererate* – something that I had not anticipated at the outset of this project. I viewed myself as having a reasonable knowledge of it having grown up with my maternal aunts and grandmother always being the first stop for

advice for any kind of medical distress that I was experiencing. However, the more that I read about the history of this knowledge system and the more that I spoke to the women who ran the Facebook groups that I frequented, the more I realised that I was but a (wo)man on the street – I had a working knowledge and an approximate idea of how it all worked and came together, but I could not help feeling that there was a core to this knowledge that held everything – and everyone – in place with a kind of gravity. As had happened so often before, I did not have the language to explain what I was seeing nor what I was feeling. In order to address this lack of language, I returned to the basics of what I was trying to describe. What I needed to describe was the knowledge at the heart of this thing that had taken over my life – once I could do that, I could explain why I felt the things that I felt and experienced the things that I had.

Ritual knowledge

'The Anthropology of Knowledge' was something that intimidated me, I always thought that it should just be referred to as the 'Anthropology of All The Things Ever' until, after a poignant and deeply caffeinated talk with my supervisor, he recommended that I read the work of Frederik Barth and his approach to understanding ritual knowledge – which is what I believed *Boererate* was, after all.

Barth (1975), in his analysis of young men's initiation in Baktaman, writes from the point of view that there is an uneven social distribution of ritual knowledge, and its transfer happens between hierarchical social groups in a discrete manner. The manner of this distribution in turn reflects on the inherent constraints or malleability within these bodies of knowledge. Validity is also granted to this knowledge as it is passed, in secrecy, from the ancestors to the young men. It is important to note that this transfer of knowledge can take an entire lifetime and Barth likens the effects of this steady unveiling of knowledge on social organisation to that of Chinese boxes – artfully nested with multiple tiers, each systematically arranged to conceal the next. And at the centre – the corpus (McNeill, 2011). Arguably, this corpus should be rigid, however, Barth has noted instances of marginal change due to elders exhibiting lapses in memory.

In a similar fashion, Lambek (1993) looks into ritual knowledge in Mayotte and how this knowledge is disseminated throughout spheres of society. In terms of these spheres, he makes a distinction between the 'expert', the 'well-informed citizen' and the 'man in the street' (1993, p. 69). At the foundational level, the general populace, the man in the street, possesses an approximate yet broad understanding of diverse fields, contributing to the cross-

pollination of ideas across disciplines. In stark contrast, experts operate with clear and distinct knowledge confined to specific domains, enriching the knowledge landscape with specialised insights. Bridging these two extremes are well-informed citizens who actively pursue knowledge, engaging in critical evaluations that lend legitimacy to fields through their discerning scrutiny. This intermediary group plays a vital role in connecting the general public with experts, fostering a culture of informed discourse and intellectual advancement. Together, these three categories create a dynamic ecosystem wherein knowledge is not only disseminated but also refined and validated through a continuous interplay of awareness, specialisation, and critical evaluation.

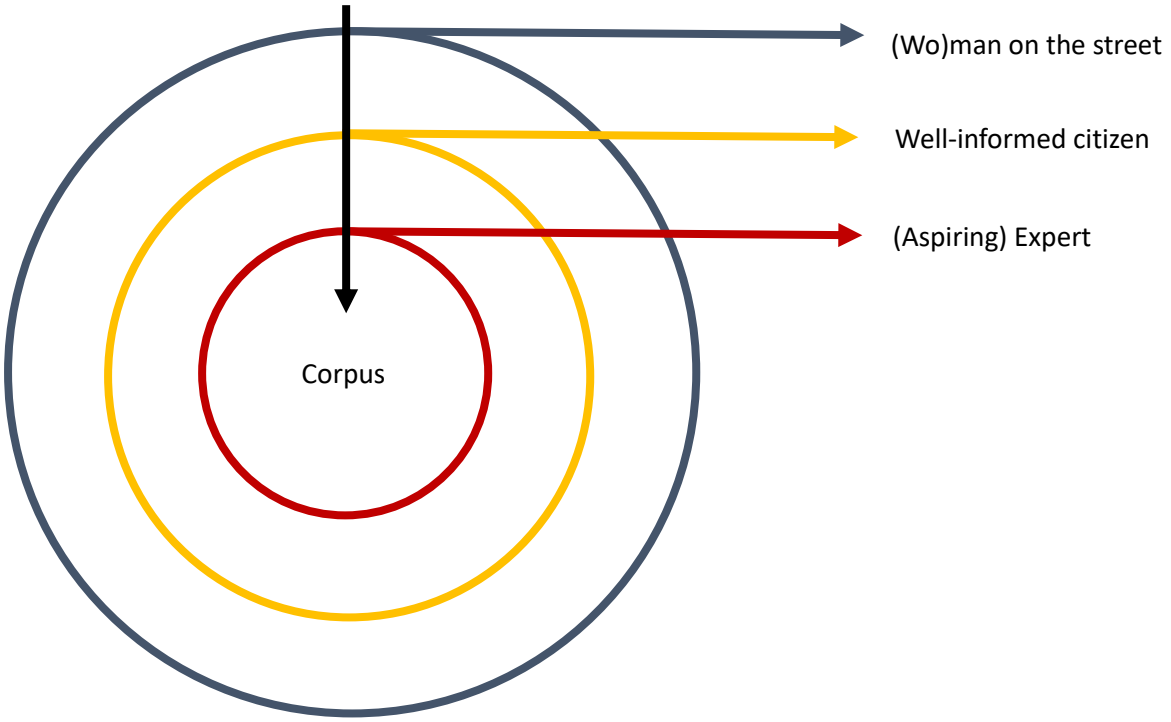
In the intricate tapestry of disseminating knowledge across society, Victor Turner's (1969) concepts of liminality and rites of passage offer a nuanced perspective here. The general populace, existing in a liminal state according to Turner's framework, embodies a transitional understanding, navigating between various fields without specialised expertise. This liminality reflects a fluid and open receptivity to diverse ideas, forming the foundational awareness of the broader community. Moving towards expertise, Turner's focus on initiation and rites of passage finds resonance in the specialised knowledge of experts who have undergone a transformative journey within their respective disciplines. The rituals of learning and mastery align with Turner's notion of transitioning from one social status to another, symbolising the initiation into a specific field. In this dynamic process, well-informed citizens emerge as ritual performers, embodying Turner's (1969) concept of communitas as they engage in intellectual pursuits. Serving as intermediaries, they traverse the liminal space between general awareness and specialised expertise, contributing to a collective and evolving intellectual landscape.

In adopting a lens rooted in classic anthropological theories such as those of Turner, Lambek, and Barth, I aim to bridge the temporal gap between old, foundational concepts and contemporary ethnography. Much like the reinterpretation of historical events, such as the South African War concentration camps discussed in the preceding chapter, classic anthropological theories offer a valuable framework for exploring the complexities of present-day dynamics. This juxtaposition is not merely an exercise in historical nostalgia; rather, it serves as a methodological strategy to illuminate and decipher the intricacies of contemporary phenomena.

Drawing parallels with the reinterpretation of South African War concentration camps discussed in the previous chapter, where a careful re-examination of the dynamics at play

unearthed previously overlooked aspects, I posit that these classic anthropological theories hold the potential to reveal latent facets of what meaning *Boererate* has come to hold in people's lives. Much like the reinterpretation of historical events sheds light on previously overlooked aspects, the application of classic anthropological theories presents an opportunity to critically examine assumptions, encourage reflexivity, and foster a more comprehensive understanding of modern societal structures. It is an intellectual exercise that transcends the confines of temporal divisions, allowing for the creation of a meaningful dialogue between the past and the present. The choice to employ these theories is not a nostalgic retreat to the past but a strategic endeavour to tap into the timeless wisdom encapsulated in these theories. Through adept reinterpretation, these theories become instruments through which we can navigate and decipher the intricacies of the contemporary landscape, providing valuable analytical tools to understand, interpret, and make sense of the unfolding dynamics in the present moment.

All this to say, I found myself engaged in an initiation into the community of people who use *Boererate.* Having started this journey as a (wo)man in the streets with an approximate knowledge of the few recipes that I had grown up with, I was ready to learn but also did not know what I was ready to learn. I was unsure if recipes became more complex, if ingredients became increasingly unconventional, or if there were recipes that only ritual elders knew and kept hidden. Through this line of questioning and the subsequent learning over the years, I found myself traversing into the next sphere of well-informed citizen as I pursued more knowledge. I critiqued hierarchy and recipes and found both fault and benefit in what I was learning. Interlocuters often mused about how my questions kept them on their toes, never quite knowing what I was going to say or ask next. I was both deeply vulnerable and absolutely guarded during this phase – liminal in fact. I knew I had found my way into the corpus of this knowledge and expert stage of my education and initiation when one very important thing happened – people started asking me for knowledge. As an illustration of how one advances through these different spheres of knowledge, I have also provided a simple diagram which depicts my understanding both of the relations among them and between their parts.



The vertical black arrow denotes the direction in which one traverses through these spheres. The diagram above indicates the three stages which I have identified as having passed through myself as well as what I have understood from interlocuters' experiences. The outermost is the circle represents the (wo)man on the street, representing the more-approximate level of knowledge that one may have from cursory engagements with *Boererate*. As one nears the middle circle, we reach a point of the Well-Informed Citizen. People in this sphere actively seek information and keep up with the news; adding to a greater understanding from which they can pass judgements based on their knowledge base. Last, in the middle of this diagram are a circle of experts situated within the corpus – those who have plunged into full immersion in this knowledge system. These people – Afrikaans women – are specifically skilled, have deep experience and are actively engaged in the preservation of this knowledge. The diagram represents a fluid progression from incidental knowledge to deep understanding, with individuals moving along an educational portfolio of entry level and advancing through various levels on their way toward mastery.

In the following sections, I explore the journey from (wo)man in the street to aspiring expert with all the folly and frustration that usually accompanies such a learning arc. Scattered throughout are some of the more compelling recipes that I came across during my foray into

this field. These sections are my own compendium, an ode to all those I read at my mother's kitchen table, in my aunt's well-worn kitchen, and with cotton gloves in cold reading rooms.

(Wo)man ~~in the streets~~ at home, at her desk

COVID-19 and its ensuing lockdowns brought my research to a (temporary) grinding halt. I stared incredulously at my cellphone reading the email from the university – it was closed, classes were suspended, and libraries were shut. The first lockdown was supposedly for only 21 days until the South African government and health services could get a handle on this new virus. The Facebook groups that I had joined became flooded with ways to boost your immunity. Honey, turmeric, and ginger were enjoying their fifteen minutes of fame, and I often relayed the recipes that I had seen on the groups to friends and family members who were fearful of infection.

Some of the posts that I had seen were click-bait[41] and had headlines like 'Drug companies won't like this one getting around. Facts on Honey and Cinnamon' or 'If you have migraines just put a little bit under your tongue within minutes you will feel your migraine easing up. Do you know someone that needs this info?' and clicking on these links would lead to a barrage of never-ending ads and probably a few unsavoury emails ending up in your spam filter. After sacrificing my email to these websites, I learned that honey and cinnamon, when mixed in a paste, were great to relieve pimples, indigestion, and even freshens one breath and that the miracle cure-all for a migraine was a pinch of cream of tartar under your tongue. I have yet to test the cream of tartar because I find it hard to scratch around the back of my groceries cupboard while staring out of a pinhole of light and having a jackhammer go mad on my head, but I digress.

Very early on, I was exposed an absolute wealth of knowledge from all the different groups I had joined, and I often felt overwhelmed at the thought of trying to organise it all in my head or keep track of my screenshots. I thought about the people sharing these posts, I started to recognise a few names of those who were regular posters, and they were the ones who shared their ideas in a more matter-of-fact fashion, rather than like the rest of us rabble, desperately asking what we could use to get pineapple beer off of our ceilings. This dynamic struck me. There was a stark division between those who asked, those who answered, and those who would post *raat* [advice] without a question. I made a note of this for a later stage – dynamics were not my paramount concern when I started my research. I knew that I needed to learn as

[41] Clickbait refers to content, often online, designed to attract attention and encourage users to click on a link. It typically employs sensationalism, exaggerated headlines, or misleading information to generate curiosity and increase the likelihood of user engagement.

much as I could about the basics of recipes and ingredients so that when I could interview and observe those who were vastly more experienced and educated than myself, I could at least ask questions that made sense and not wholly lost in the ether.

Basic ingredients & recipes

There is a collection of good, run of the mill, girl next door ingredients that comprise some of the most common recipes for some of the most mundane maladies. One cannot really mess up combining lemon, honey, and ginger in a cup of hot water, but then a sore throat has never really been the talk of the town. These were the kinds of ingredients and recipes that I first encountered and with which the groups and other such forums were awash. It was *Boererate*-lite, an introduction to how someone could take care of themselves at home. Much of the narrative that accompanied these posts was that it was a waste of time and money to go to a doctor for a problem with congestion or that the doctor would unnecessarily prescribe antibiotics. I was not surprised that *Boererate* for colds and flus were the most popular and accessible – humans have always coughed and sneezed.

In this same 'basic ingredients and recipes' sub-section exist the *Boererate* that are primarily concerned with using spices, flora, and various other ingredients from around the house. The maladies that are treated are numerous and range from diarrhoea to high blood pressure. A few of my favourites that I encountered while still learning are:

> *Diaree – 2 lepels meel word gemeng met 4 bottels water end geroer totdat dit 'n melkerige kleur het. Voeg 1 t asyn daarby. Die person moet dan omtrent 2 lepels van die mengsel neem.* [Diarrhoea – 2 spoons flour mixed with 4 bottles water and stirred until it has a milky colour. Add 1 t vinegar. The person must then take about 2 spoons of this mixture].
>
> *Ekseem - Rooibos tee in die bad water.* [Eczema – Rooibos tea in the bath water].
>
> *Hoebloeddruk – Eet gerasperde rou aartappel…so paar skywe.* [High blood pressure – eat grated raw potato…a few slices].

These are all 'every man' diseases – any person can fall victim to diarrhoea, eczema, or high blood pressure. It stands to reason then that these remedies need to be the most accessible and simple - one also does not need highly specialised or expert knowledge to mix or apply these recipes. These ingredients are also readily found around the house and if not in the house, can be purchased easily enough.

Being someone who suffers with moderate to severe eczema, I gave the rooibos tea bath a try and was pleasantly surprised at how soothing it was. Baths were usually torturous, burning and leaching all the moisture from my skin. Showers were worse, hitting my skin with little impacts of pure itch over and over again. I religiously bathed in rooibos tea and did not veer until I felt confident enough to, but more on this in the next section. As my resident guinea pig, I could not convince my father to eat raw potato (a fair point in his defence) and so we trawled the groups for more options until we found another option – beetroot juice. After a day of drinking beetroot juice, we measured his blood pressure and it had dropped slightly but he could not stand another glass of the juice – he did not eat beetroot for about another month after this experiment. I tried to encourage my mother to participate in our blood pressure bonanza but at the mention of cayenne pepper she opted to rather have an armchair experience of this ethnography.

I spent weeks sifting through posts on the groups, totally blown away by just how much I did not know. I learnt how to shine a silver tea service with tomato sauce, that rosemary oil applied to the scalp would encourage hair growth and that cinnamon was excellent at preventing cockroaches from taking up residence in one's cupboards. The hours that I spent delving into Facebook groups became more than just a quest for remedies; it evolved into a profound exploration of shared knowledge and communal wisdom. As I absorbed the intricacies of *Boererate*, I found myself immersed in a vibrant tapestry of experiences, anecdotes, and practical know-how shared by individuals passionate about traditional remedies.

In my initial foray into ethnographic interviews, I focused on unravelling the personal narratives of women who had embraced *Boererate* as a key part of their lives. Conversations unfolded like chapters in a novel, each woman weaving her unique story of discovery and learning. Questions about their introduction to *Boererate* and their cherished recipes opened windows into networks of cultural heritage and personal healing journeys.

One woman went to great lengths to share with me her diary that she had kept to track her stomach cancer symptoms and how her disease progressed. We had made contact early in 2020 and we stayed in contact throughout the years and still check in on each other now. I felt so deeply privileged to be let into her life in such an intimate way. She did not pick a pseudonym at first and always joked with me that she would not be around long enough to warrant one – she said she would have been happy with being a footnote about the lady who tried to beat stomach cancer on her own. I was immediately taken with her gallows humour.

When we started talking, she had already decided that she was going to terminate her chemotherapy treatment as soon as her doctor had agreed. Shortly after our conversations began, she and her doctor came to an agreement that she would do three more sessions of chemotherapy before she called it quits – her doctor was convinced that they would shrink the tumour to the point of it becoming operable. They did not. I kept her company via WhatsApp video calls while she was receiving chemotherapy, and we worked our way through my list of questions – it was the only time she felt strong enough to talk for so long.

After she ended her treatment, she excitedly called me to say she was going to try a couple *Boererate* to manage her symptoms and coast to the end of her life. She told me that after I had mentioned the camps and Johanna Brandt, she stayed up all night reading and making notes. She had read that Brandt treated her own stomach cancer by cutting meat out of her diet and consuming mostly raw fruits and vegetables. She emphasised to me that she had no illusions of curing her cancer, her doctors had assured her that she was beyond that, but she had hope that if she followed this new eating regime, she would at least feel stronger while she faced down her end-of-life journey. She also introduced intermittent fasting and informed me that her intention was to starve the tumour. When we could meet up in person, she always insisted on preparing snacks and a light lunch for us[42] and I ate all manner of seed and drank the juices of vegetables that I was sure were never intended to be juiced. But we had such fun. We carried on like this until, after almost four years of chats and snacks, she called me out of the blue with big news from her doctor – the tumour had shrunk enough that they were considering surgery and were all feeling very positive. Several days after her surgery, she called to inform me that she needed to apologise for ruining my thesis – she needed much more than a footnote and wanted to be called Ivy.

What resonated profoundly with Ivy and through all the other interviews was the shared sentiment that learning *Boererate* was not a destination but a lifelong expedition. Each interlocutor expressed a sense of perpetual discovery, emphasising that the acquisition of knowledge was an ongoing process. This revelation added depth to my understanding, shaping my perspective on *Boererate* as not just a collection of remedies but a dynamic, ever-evolving reservoir of wisdom that intertwined seamlessly with the ebb and flow of life.

I recorded all the *Boererate* that I had tried, kept notes of ingredients and methods, if the aim was to treat symptoms or causes, who I had learnt from, and if the recipe worked. I had started cataloguing my knowledge, it no longer felt as if it was swimming haphazardly all

[42] While we could go out for meals, we were concerned that she might catch a cold or even COVID-19 from someone.

around me. I had more of a grip on the language that was used – I understood that while ingredients often had strange names, they were, more often than not, a colloquial name for a plant. The transition from (wo)man in the streets to informed citizen was not clear-cut and really only identifiable in retrospect. I started to notice ebbs and flows of questions on the groups. It was as if a new crop of 'initiates' found the groups at more or less the same time and the same, what now appeared to me as, basic questions about basic maladies would be posted. I scoffed at their confusion when they did not know what *soetoilie*[43] [sweet oil] was. Mild amusement quickly turned into frustration, however. I found myself more and more at odds with what interlocuters were telling me.

My rose-tinted glasses had come off. I was now more in need of a welding helmet – sparks were going to fly.

A Well-Informed Citizen

I drove home on an oppressively hot November evening in 2021, agitated with the way my interview had gone that day. I was no stranger to an interview gone bad, but this particular evening was going to need some serious debriefing. Earlier that week, I had been invited round to an interlocuter's home for some snacks and the opportunity to speak to her and a few friends about *Boererate*. She had insisted upon a list of questions that I had planned on raising and when the document was returned to me with more comments than a chapter draft, I should have known that it was not going to be a particularly pleasant afternoon. I set out for the highway in the late morning, thinking the quicker I could get to Lynnwood, the quicker it would all be over, and the quicker I could process the data from the day.

I was met in the driveway by a pack of Jack Russels and a wall of pastel-frocked women with stiff updos that still had an aura of Fiesta hairspray looming around them, threatening the ozone layer. I took a deep breath and looked down at my arm full of tattoos – this was going to be interesting I thought to myself. As I exited my vehicle, I remembered that it had recently started leaking oil again and shuddered at the thought of leaving a puddle behind on the pristine driveway. I made a mental note to excuse myself to the bathroom at some stage and see if there were any *Boererate* for removing oil stains from driveways – surely bicarbonate of soda would do something.

A flurry of French-manicured hands extended in a symphony of polite gestures, ushered me with hugs and introductions into a tastefully decorated sitting room, where an inviting tableau

[43] *Soetolie* is olive oil. Many of the recipes that is used in needs a high quality but relatively neutral oil. It does not exclusively refer to olive oil though. As is the nature of *Boererate*, most neutral seed oils can be used in the place of olive oil.

of snacks and drinks awaited. Settling onto an ottoman pulled closer to a coffee table laden with a delectable assortment, I retrieved my notebook, eyes filled with anticipation. I rubbed my hands together in a mock display of getting ready to ask my questions and clicked my pen. However, an unspoken tension lingered in the air, a subtle reminder that I had unwittingly committed a faux pas.

In the midst of this refined gathering, the realisation struck that I could not simply launch into my carefully prepared questions; finesse was required. It dawned on me that I should have better navigated the delicate art of social charm, a sudden discomfort welled up inside of me and I felt like I had intruded upon their elegant ladies' afternoon tea. Instead of entertaining my inquiries, they skilfully redirected the conversation, peppering me with their own line of curious questioning – what does an anthropologist do, why the interest in *Boererate*, and does your mother know about all those tattoos? The usual suspects. Over the course of the next few hours, I worked tirelessly to win them over, almost forgetting my initial purpose of research in the process. It seemed as if I were more in the midst of a potential daughter-in-law interview than a scholarly investigation. As the sun began its descent, a glimmer of hope emerged. Amidst the customary ‘please leave, you have been here long enough’ round of coffee, one of the ladies turned to me with a glint of curiosity, asking my opinion about a popular post that had recently surfaced in one of our shared groups.

The energy in the room shifted in anticipation of how I would answer this question.

The post in question was about how one could attempt to bring back their sense of taste and/or smell after being infected with COVID-19 and having lost it – a symptom that became one of the identifiers of a COVID-19 infection. The advisement was to roast an orange on an open flame until the skin was blackened with soot. One then needed to mix the charred skin as well as the fruit with brown sugar and eat it. I thought it sounded ghastly and voiced as much. I argued that while most of the *Boererate* I had encountered had ingredients that had properties that, when combined in various ways for various recipes, made sense. This burnt orange did not make sense to me. What did burning it achieve? I made an off-hand joke that perhaps the smell would be terrible enough to bring you to your senses.

The six pastel statues came to life – there were even hairs out of place. The general consensus of the evening was that I was foolish and, quite frankly, judgemental and short-sighted. The interview questions I had forwarded were brought up and absolutely decimated in front of me. I faltered a second and then responded. I calmly explained my intentions with the nature of the questions – I wanted to understand why they used *Boererate* so that I could ask more

pointed questions about experiences and favoured recipes and ingredients, I had no intentions of taking up a stance of judgement, I explained that this was the very core of how anthropology worked. But I had lost my audience. I was made to understand that the tone of my questions was threatening, as if I was trying to expose them and label them foolish or even backwards. Their ranks of knowledge and discourse were impenetrable. My passion and sentiment that I held for learning about *Boererate* had been all but unexamined and rampant until now. All I could do was apologise, graciously finish my cup of coffee and hope that it was dark enough when I left so that the oil stain would go unnoticed.

I took stock of my interactions on the way home, knowing that even when interviews go horribly wrong, there is always something valuable that can be taken away from the interaction. As I sat, waiting for a traffic light to change, the beginnings of an explanation started to come together but were really only fully formed when I considered the evening's events from the point of view of Barth and Lambek. In that moment, at the traffic light on Florence Ribeiro Avenue, I realised that my position within the spheres of knowledge that comprised *Boererate* was changing. The nature of my questions had changed from 'what' to 'why'.

In the pursuit of knowledge

The liberation from lockdown not only marked a return to in-person engagements, masked yet palpably real, but it also signified a transformative shift in my approach to the knowledge that I was pursuing. Initially, my quest was to absorb information voraciously, immersing myself in books, war diaries, articles, and all manner of Facebook posts that even remotely hinted at potential home remedies. I embraced this process unconditionally, never pausing to question or challenge the established narratives. My interactions with *Boererate* were confined to predefined roles: I was told what ingredients to use, how to use them, and what outcomes to anticipate. However, as the world emerged from isolation, so did a burgeoning realisation within me – a recognition that I needed to grapple with and question the knowledge I was exploring.

I found myself becoming more and more uncomfortable with simply just accepting a recipe without some kind of explanation or validation for the approach. I could see myself visibly irritating my interlocuters with my line of questioning. I was like a toddler, every time they gave me an answer I asked why – why did they say that, why did they think that, why did they do that etc. I was insufferable – like I imagine most serious anthropologists are, at some stage, in their fieldwork endeavours. In retrospect, I see now that I was questioning the

experts and prodding at the very corpus of this body of knowledge, the sphere usually precluded from having to explain themselves and their thinking and behaviours. Perhaps I was emboldened by my anthropological pursuit, my little purple notebook was my ultimate defence when I saw brows furrowing at me. Only a question, I would say, you do not need to answer it if you do not want to, I would reassure.

The conversations and interviews that I had at this stage of my learning were unlike any other I have had before. They were wonderfully productive and while littered with moments when tempers did rise, they usually came down as quickly when I demonstrated my knowledge and explained my thinking. I was an expert in training, a padawan trying desperately to impress the Jedi master, eager for my own seat on the Council. With guidance from the experts, I enacted more revisions and replacements than I ever did and made many, many mistakes.

One such instance, of incredible discovery but total disaster, was my attempt to make a hair tonic. I had learned from the groups that rosemary oil showed great benefits for hair growth and follicle stimulation. As an avid bleacher of my hair, anything that even hinted at hair growth or damage repair immediately held my attention. I brought it up at an informal coffee date with an interlocuter, Marileze, who found my questions charming enough that we became friendly and would have impromptu chats whenever she had a new idea or saw an interesting post. I had asked her to meet for coffee so I could pick her brain about how I could make this recipe work for me. I was not particularly keen on walking around with oily hair every day, so I needed to find a way to tweak this to suit me. Rather than revising on my own, I still deferred to the expert.

Marileze told me that instead of oiling my hair, I could try making rosemary-infused water that I could spray on my hair as a leave-in conditioner. She also said that I could then put other ingredients in it if I wanted to. I went straight to the grocery store after our coffee date wrapped up and enlisted the services of my mother, yet another expert, and her kitchen. I boiled the rosemary leaves for about a half an hour and while they leached their nutrients and natural dyes into the water, my mother suggested I put a few mint leaves into the water as mint can soothe an irritated scalp. We strained the liquid into a spray bottle, and I was keen to apply it the next time I washed my hair. Bleached hair, I learned throughout my tenure of hairdressers' chairs, is particularly porous and will absorb almost any colour that touches it due to this. Rosemary, when boiled, releases a deep maroon pigment. My hair was wonderfully soft, but also mauve. I decided that perhaps it was not a bad idea to oil my hair instead.

Seated at my mother's kitchen table, engrossed in scrolling through the Facebook groups and grappling with my confusion and frustration, I contemplated my position in this extensive research journey, which seemed so akin to initiations that I had spent years reading about in my Anthropology undergraduate classes. A call from Ivy, admonishing my behaviour in Lynnwood and urging me to mend ties with the Pastel Statues, added to the complexity. Reminded that two admins of the 'Ladies Only' group were involved, I sulked. Mid pout, my mother presented me with a jug of pungent, frothy brown liquid. I asked her if this foul brown concoction was the cure-all for my current problems, and she promptly responded with a swift whack to the back of my head, swore at me in Afrikaans and revealed that it was banana tea for her herb garden. Glancing at her flourishing basil and sage, I resolved to attempt the banana tea on my own ailing herb garden. While my mother tended to her herbs, I pondered the challenges I faced and questioned why understanding seemed elusive. In a maternal moment of wisdom, she drew a parallel between my frustrations and my long-lost driving lessons.

Learning to drive, particularly under the scrutiny of rally-driving parents, proved arduous. The ambiguity of when to change gears and deciphering the terrain left me at odds with my father, creating tension that my mother wisely avoided. She likened this to my current struggles with *Boererate*, noting that my isolation of people and recipes was hindering a holistic understanding. The analogy struck a chord, prompting me to grab my phone and make plans to return to Lynnwood as soon as they would have me.

Following my attitude adjustment and my commitment to understanding *Boererate* as holistically as I could, I noticed that it had a complimentary and contradictory nature in how it prescribed roles and denoted behaviours. While this will be discussed in much more detail in the next chapter, the way in which *Boererate* is used revealed to me that as much as it grants people certain freedoms and controls in terms of having the agency to make decisions about how to treat illness in their body, it encompasses that agency just as much by bringing them into contact with ethnicised expectations of respectability and behaviour. So many of the women whom I interviewed in this phase would talk to me at length about their power over their bodies and health but were still subject to having to be proper and have a sense of propriety in all their engagements.

Through these interactions, I found that *Boererate* exerts a form of socio-cultural control by strategically affording individuals a semblance of agency and power while simultaneously compelling them to conform to its overarching influence. This dynamic can be understood as

a nuanced interplay between perceived autonomy and the inherent constraints imposed by the system. The concept of partial agency within the framework of *Boererate* can be elucidated as a mechanism by which individuals are enticed into engagement, lured by the promise of empowerment, yet compelled to adhere to the systemic imperatives in order to unlock and sustain that agency. The object, in other words, exerts agency. This intricate dance between autonomy and subservience within the context of *Boererate* underscores the subtleties of power dynamics and control mechanisms embedded within the fabric of this socio-cultural phenomenon. This tension, which will be explored further in the coming chapters, is part of what keeps *Boererate* relevant – and alive. As people make it, it – at least to some extent – makes them.

I realised that at this stage of my research, I had entered a liminal space where the established boundaries of engagement and understanding were in flux. I was learning and unlearning, and my confusion was, in fact, to be expected. The initial allure of agency and empowerment within *Boererate* positioned me on the threshold of expertise, a liminal state where promises of autonomy were juxtaposed with the need to navigate systemic imperatives. Much like Turner's (1969) liminality, this was indeed a transitional phase, and it involved a profound reorientation of perspective. The promises of empowerment functioned as the symbolic threshold, inviting me into a state of heightened engagement. Yet, akin to the constraints of liminality, there was a recognition of the necessity to conform to certain systemic imperatives to unlock and sustain the agency promised within *Boererate*.

An apology

I made sure to fix my oil leak before I headed back to Lynnwood – I felt as if another stain would somewhat distract from my apology. As I drove up the long lollipop tree-lined driveway, I considered exactly how I was going to tackle making amends. As I pulled up to the guest parking, I noticed a faint outline of an oil stain on the driveway and could feel my face go red. The Pastel Statues were not waiting for me in front of the house like the last time. Rather, they had gathered in the garden and had put out picnic blankets and umbrellas. They beckoned me over to them and I did a little jog to show my enthusiasm. Polite hugs were replaced with warm embraces and the same French manicured hands were now pouring me a glass of wine and pulling me down to sit with them on the blankets. My head was reeling. Once again, I was deeply unsure of myself – I thought they hated me. I decided to address it immediately. My stammered apology was met with peals of laughter and it was agreed that the last time I was in their company, I was like an over curious child, *voor op die wa* [ahead on the wagon – an idiom denoting being a little too forward]. They knew I wanted

to learn, but I had to do it the **right** way – I could not expect to walk into a room with a notebook and expect them to spill everything.

I told them about how I had made my hair mauve with the rosemary water, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. They remarked that I needed to do a little hard learning. I explained that my mother had also chastised me for not looking at *Boererate* holistically and we segued into a discussion about how I came to introduce many *Boererate* remedies into my everyday life and how I altered the way I was interacting with interlocuters. I had initially approached interviews with a certain measure of cool aloofness in an attempt to communicate my professionalism and how seriously I was taking their stories. I made the conscious decision to change this and rather try embodying the way my family and I would chat and gossip at my mother's kitchen table – shoes kicked off, tart in hand, and no airs or flairs, just good Afrikaans chats.

This translated well with the group of ladies spread out across the lawn in front of me. They started to joke about what their pseudonyms would be, and my mind cast back to my notes from the last visit, when I had dubbed them the Pastel Statues. I threw caution to the wind, made myself vulnerable and told them how I had named them as a group – and what I had named them. There was a beat of silence and I scolded myself mentally, how could I have messed this up again! And then laughter. Cackling, screaming laughter. One of the ladies said she was honoured to be called a statue and that she would need to inform her doctor that her Botox was clearly very good. I laughed nervously at first, waiting for the other shoe to drop but it never did. They unanimously agreed they wanted to be referred to as the Pastel Statues. A critical lesson in how unpredictable the field can be.

Not-So-Liminal Lady

I knew that there had been another change in my position when, over time, I realised that people were coming to me and asking me for recipes, ingredient recommendations, and ideas for revisions and replacements. This transition allowed for nuances of *Boererate* and its socio-cultural control mechanisms to become increasingly apparent to me. Once merely an engaged observer navigating the landscape, I found myself uniquely positioned to dissect and scrutinise recipes and ingredient choices. Beyond being merely enticed into engagement, my evolving perspective served as a lens through which to discern the promises of empowerment that had initially captivated me. However, it also underscored the imperative to deftly navigate and, to a certain extent, adhere to the systemic imperatives for a sustained and nuanced comprehension. This shift, from a well-informed citizen to an aspiring expert, laid

bare the layers of power dynamics and control mechanisms intricately woven into the very fabric of *Boererate* as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

I first noticed this shift in roles and expectations in the first half of 2022. I chatted with my mother on a WhatsApp video call, and she mentioned that a good friend of hers had picked up a terrible sunburn and had even blistered from it. Without much thought, I said that she should advise her to bath with bicarbonate of soda, it would reduce the burning sensation. She could then cool her skin down throughout the day with a mixture of mashed cucumber, glycerine, and rose water. My mother laughed quietly and then said, "Okay, *doktor* [doctor]". I looked up from the basil plant that I was repotting and laughed with her. These anecdotes had become a (welcome) habit by now. Some days later, I received a message from my mother's friend thanking me for the advice that was passed on to her. She told me she immediately sent the message round to everyone she had been out and about in the sun with. This moment struck me, and my thoughts were cast back to the camps and the legacy that lived on in that small, supposedly insignificant, moment. A small act of sharing *Boererate* carried with it so much history and gravitas that it could never really be insignificant.

I had learnt in this process that there was a certain way to interact with certain ingredients. Ingredients were always celebrated, the best herb stems and flowers were picked, the best honey was purchased and the finest ceramicware was used. These ingredients were assembled in the name of healing your own body – why would one not use the best? My informants – ranging from named interview participants to the totally anonymous who only left me an offline message and disappeared into the ether – showed me how to take the utmost care when interacting with ingredients and recipes. Ivy showed me how to extract milks from seeds for soothing baths, Marissa showed me how to whip honey and turmeric together to create a paste for the inflammation of wounds, Adeline showed me exactly how to wrap an oil burn – after I burnt myself when she was showing me how to infuse coconut oil for various skin complaints. Anonymous Facebook users taught me how to make fertiliser from old tea bags and coffee grounds and a doctor showed me how to use animal fats as treatments for scar tissue. All of these people took such extreme care with me and invested so many small parts of themselves in me – parts that are now mine to keep forever.

The way that I was perceived by informants and groups that I frequented was also subject to significant change. I was regarded as a *goeie Afrikaans meisie* [good Afrikaans girl]. My curiosity and subsequent proficiency in applying and working with *Boererate* had marked me

as a socially acceptable woman in the circles that I was moving in. My bold, black tattoos were overlooked, and I was welcomed into the corpus with open arms.

I could only understand the centre of this body of knowledge once I was in it. Starting as a (wo)man on the street and then a well-informed citizen, I could only speculate, but now I could bear witness to the very forces and guardians of knowledge that keep *Boererate* alive. If these three spheres of knowledge can be imagined as concentric circles, the corpus is the centre of gravity that pulls on and keeps each in place. While this knowledge system has displayed a thousand times over that it is malleable, at its very core, there remains an unchanged framework of elements that serve as the backbone of this body. Yet the corpus is not simply an aggregate of fact and information. It is a breathing body, alive in each individual who makes contributions to its huge treasury of data. It is a living tapestry, woven together by the many experiences, insight, and efforts of the women who populate it. Imagine it as a lively marketplace of ideas, where people exchange not just information but also viewpoints, stories, and insights. Like traders in a busy bazaar, they offer the best things they have for sale, try other people's wares for size and bring some home to share with others. In its infinite complexity, the corpus is like a tangled web in minds are entwined one to another. The corpus mimics the way that we humans form an interconnected net; it is itself a web formed from a thread spun by countless individuals. In fact, the heart of this entire corpus is not merely an amassing of data, but these people who give it life – the women who are the architects and curators and agents of accumulation. They are caretakers of this pooled-up mind, lovingly cultivated. The corpus is of the people.

This intricate hierarchy of guardians, where women play a pivotal role as custodians, illustrates how they are able to ascend to the pinnacle of ritual elderhood. In this elevated status, they become experts responsible for guiding others through the complexities of *Boererate*. This echoes broader societal expectations, as Afrikaans women are often charged with preserving and passing down cultural and traditional foundations. As custodians, they transcend mere information possession, bearing the weighty responsibility of interpreting and applying knowledge. This entails not only ensuring factual accuracy but also safeguarding cultural nuances and rituals. This commitment harmonises with broader societal values, underscoring the significance of cultural heritage and the transmission of wisdom across generations. The dynamic and adaptive layers that surround the corpus are the parts of this knowledge system that can be modified, updated, or even expanded to accommodate new information, changes in understanding, as well as evolving perspectives.

The Four Pillars of the Corpus

The transfer of ritual knowledge is a dynamic process, overseen by the wisdom of the aforementioned female guardians. Through mentoring and leadership, they steer individuals to engage with the knowledge system reverently and in accordance with established protocols. Yet, upon reflection, these protocols which seem so central and intrinsic the functioning and continued contemporary life and use of *Boererate*, must have evolved from the concentration camps in which *Boererate* was formed. Hierarchy is plain to me now, I have participated in it and bore witness to and experienced its effects, but this brings me to wonder how this played out in the concentration camps which I discussed in chapter 3. Was there a hierarchy which was, perhaps, related to the social status of inmates? Did authority lie with the fighting generals' wives more than those of the *hensoppers* [surrenderers][44]? Or perhaps it lay with those who had the means to smuggle ingredients into the camps and confronted camp commanders about the atrocious living conditions. In reflecting on the corpus of knowledge surrounding *Boererate*, I cannot help but wonder about the architects of this body of wisdom. By delving into the historical narrative presented in chapter 3, I am brought to question the genesis of the hierarchy associated with *Boererate* and how it may have reacted to the passage of time.

In the broader context, these female guardians serve as bridges between generations, they instil not only a profound understanding of tradition but also adapt to evolving community needs, ensuring the seamless continuity of cultural wisdom in the hands of those entrusted to uphold its sanctity.

In the wake of the sudden surge in interest in *Boererate* during the COVID-19 pandemic, these women at the core assume an even more pivotal role. Serving as the custodians of tradition and cultural heritage, these individuals become essential for preserving the authenticity and integrity of the knowledge in the face of newfound curiosity. Their deep expertise and understanding already elevating them to the position of guides and experts, now make them crucial for leading newcomers through the intricate nuances of the system and preventing the spread of misinformation. As interest grows, their responsibility extends beyond factual details to include the transmission of cultural nuances and rituals associated with the knowledge. Their status as established experts grew, and as such *Boererate* was increasingly active in 'making' them. Moreover, their adeptness at adapting the system to evolving needs ensures both continuity and the accommodation of new perspectives. This

[44] Literally translated, this term means 'hands uppers". These were men who had surrendered to the British during the South African War.

sudden interest often brings about a demand for community leadership, and those at the core naturally step into roles that navigate and represent the knowledge system. In the quest for authenticity, these individuals become trusted sources of information, fostering a sense of trust among both new enthusiasts and existing practitioners. Ultimately, they serve as a vital bridge to the past, connecting the burgeoning interest with the historical roots and evolution of the knowledge system.

I recall asking Marileze, late into the winter of 2022, what it is about *Boererate* that makes it endure so. She considered this over her hot chocolate for a minute before she looked up said, "It is always accessible. Always at home. It is yours" (Interview with Marileze, 17 July 2022). It struck me that the locus of healing that van Heyningen (2012) had identified in the camps of the South African war had persisted all these years. It had been the home and was still the home now. This sentiment, too, echoes the history and roots of *Boererate*, tracing back to the resilience and enduring spirit cultivated in those challenging times, which continues to resonate through the generations, making it a perennial source of comfort and belonging.

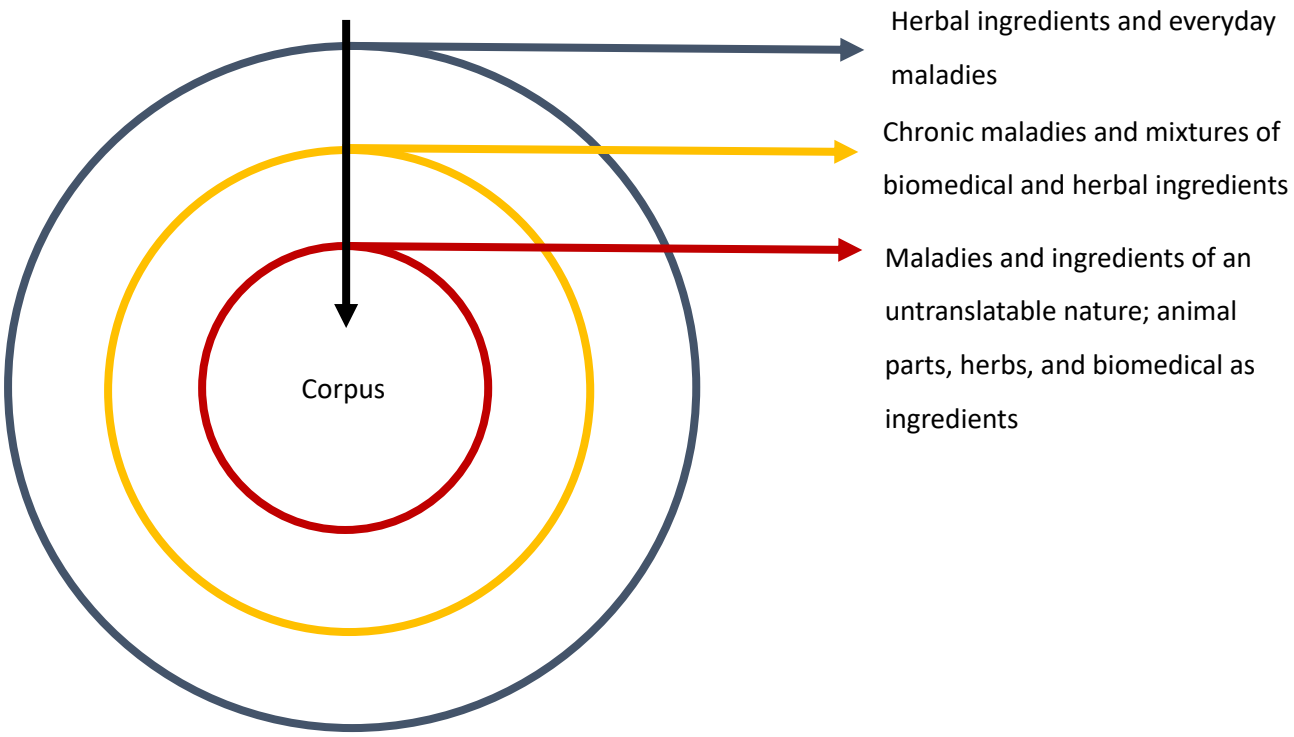
I thought about my mother's kitchen table and how pivotal it was in my education – *Boererate* or otherwise. Whenever I had presented with an illness or malady, I had to climb up onto my mother's kitchen table so she could better see me or the splinter that had made its way into one of my fingers. Like a physicians table, but much more welcoming, familiar, and warm. I knew the table was a place of nourishment, healing, and comfort. This table was the heart of our home. I thought about this in connection with all that I had learnt in the course of my interviews and observations. The home, as a locus of healing for *Boererate*, stands as a nurturing haven deeply entwined with the roles of women within classic domestic spaces. Within the familiar confines of the home, healing takes on a profound significance, with the comfort and security it provides acting as a foundational element for efficacy. Women have played pivotal roles within these healing dynamics, assuming the mantle of primary caregivers and knowledge custodians. Their contribution extends beyond mere caregiving, encompassing the transmission of generational wisdom related to *Boererate*. I often cast my mind back to my father applying a bicarbonate of soda paste to my bee stings under strict instruction from his own mother[45]. Only once my mother had given her final yay or nay were either of us released to return to the garden. This cultural inheritance, passed down through

[45] My father is a devout feminist and more of an exception than the rule when it comes to manifestations of masculinity – he would braid my hair with diesel-stained hands, teach me to ride a motorcycle while I was still in ballet slippers – his use of *Boererate* here is more a testament to feminine preservation and use.

the hands of women, not only preserves familial traditions but also reinforces the cultural significance of home-based healing practices.

One notable aspect of home-based healing is the accessibility and affordability of resources found within domestic environments. Everyday items, herbs, and spices readily available at home become the tools of healing, making these practices practical and sustainable.

I found then, that much like there are spheres of knowledge, there are too concentric circles of ingredients and information that correspond with the aforementioned spheres. As one progresses to the corpus, the ingredients become rarer and more untranslatable, methods become more involved and complex, and the recipes are more unknown.



Embracing the role of women as healers within this setting empowers them, recognising and utilising their skills in maintaining family well-being through holistic approaches. However, in the embrace of these roles, there lies the potential for undermining. Gender stereotypes and societal expectations that confine women to the domestic sphere may limit their diverse roles and contributions outside of traditional caregiving. I brought up the issue of gender

stereotypes with the Pastel Statues and the fears that I held about reinforcing them with my research. My concerns were met with slow nods as they pondered their own responses. One of them, Liesl, offered this explanation,

> "I don't think it's that simple, Jeans. If it was just a stereotype, we could fight against it a little bit. So, *ja*, it's a thing for the girls, but why can't we twist that? Okay. So. I am put in the kitchen by the male powers that be. Cool. I make it my own. If that is all they want to give us, we make it great and we make it serve us and our families. If all I can do is be a mother, I'll be the best damn mother you have ever seen. I think sometimes you see it too much as black or white. Just because I have been given this role doesn't mean I can't find power or joy in it. Is it limited? Yes! But it is mine".

Interview with Liesl, 21 August 2022

While the intricacies of gender dynamics and how they play out are discussed in further detail in the next chapter, it is important to note here that the agency being described by Liesl is quite characteristic of *Boererate* – encompassed. In the realm of *Boererate*, agency takes centre stage as women actively engage in practices that reflect a deep connection with traditional knowledge and a sense of personal empowerment – an idea I also explore in later chapters.

Individuals embracing *Boererate* are not merely passive recipients of prescribed solutions; instead, they become agents of their own health and healing. The act of choosing and applying these remedies becomes a deliberate and personal expression of agency, as people navigate their health journey in a way that aligns with their cultural heritage and personal beliefs. In this context, agency extends beyond a mere decision-making process; it encompasses a holistic approach to health that integrates cultural identity, community practices, and a sense of autonomy. *Boererate*, therefore, becomes more than just solutions to ailments – they become tools through which individuals actively shape and maintain their physical, emotional, and spiritual equilibrium. As people celebrate and preserve their cultural heritage through these remedies, they exercise agency in safeguarding both their health and the rich traditions passed down through time.

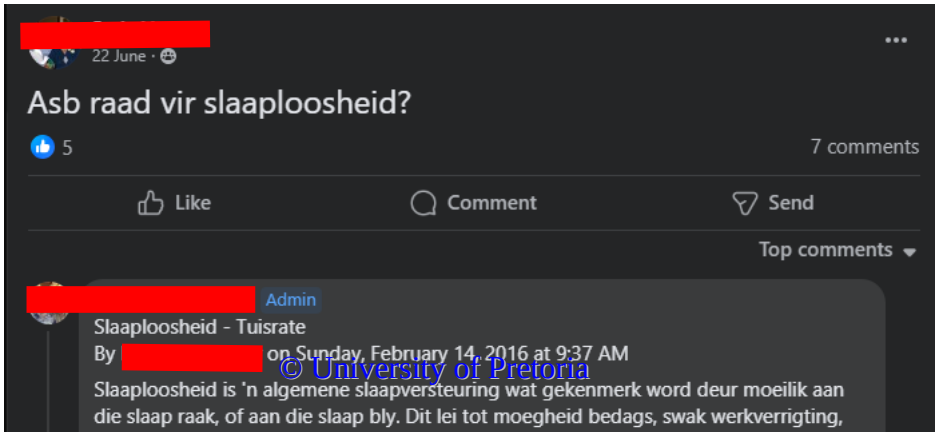
This agency extended to biomedical prescriptions and medications and the advice that I saw on the Facebook groups were unlike what I had thought I would see. At first these kinds of posts were scarce, but given the reaction by fellow members as well as admins, I started to see a few of them a day. Members of the Facebook groups began to post the medicine they had been prescribed by their doctors and asked about contraindications, side-effects, and advice about how to take the medicine. The responses were testament to another core tenet of *Boererate* – that of a holistic approach.

In response to these posts, admins frequently took proactive measures, such as locking the comment thread to maintain order, and assumed an active role in responding to the multitude of queries themselves. The deluge of questions unleashed a cascade of comprehensive insights, delving into various aspects of an individual's health beyond the immediate concern. Inquisitive administrators sought to unravel the intricate tapestry of the user's well-being by probing into their medication regimen, water consumption habits, familial medical history, dietary patterns, and sleep routines.

The depth of knowledge exhibited in these responses was vast. Admins not only addressed the primary issue at hand but also acted as virtual healthcare guides, offering nuanced advice tailored to the intricacies of each user's life. For instance, in cases where sleep disturbances were a concern, administrators did not merely advocate for holistic lifestyle adjustments. Users were encouraged to augment their water intake, and the importance of returning to healthcare providers armed with comprehensive family medical histories was underscored.

The thoroughness with which admins approached these discussions illuminated a profound understanding of the interconnected facets of health. It was a testament to their commitment to holistic well-being, as every element of an individual's life was meticulously considered. These interactions transcended mere troubleshooting; they became a collaborative exploration into the multifaceted nature of health, reflecting a community-driven ethos where knowledge exchange extended beyond the immediate concern to encompass the entirety of a person's well-being.

In the dynamic landscape of the Facebook groups, where admins take centre stage in responding to user queries, an intriguing parallel emerges with the principles of sympathetic magic as elucidated by Frazer (1922) – the concept that like produces like or the law of similarity. In Frazer's framework, sympathetic magic operates on the belief that imitating a desired outcome will influence reality. Similarly, the administrators, by seeking comprehensive details about a user's lifestyle, medical history, and habits, engage in a form of symbolic replication. The inquiries about medication, water intake, diet, and sleep align with the idea that understanding and mirroring these elements can influence the overall health outcome.



[Please advice for insomnia?]

[Insomnia - Home Remedies

By [redacted] on Sunday, February 14, 2016 at 9:37 AM

Insomnia is a common sleep disorder characterized by difficulty falling asleep, or staying asleep. This leads to daytime fatigue, poor work performance, tension headaches, irritability, depression, and various other problems.

Insomnia is generally one of two types: acute and chronic. Acute insomnia is usually more common and lasts for days or weeks. Chronic insomnia, on the other hand, lasts for months or even longer.

There are a variety of causes, including stress, anxiety, psychotic disorders, poor sleep habits, disruptions in the sleep environment, lifestyle changes, caffeine or other stimulants, chronic pain, breathing problems, and certain medical conditions such as arthritis, heart failure, acid reflux, and others.

It can also be a side effect of certain medications such as corticosteroids, alpha-blockers, beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors, and much more.

1. Nutmeg

Nutmeg has sedative properties and works as a natural sleep aid.

• Add one eighth teaspoon or just a touch of nutmeg powder to a cup of warm milk. Drink it before bedtime.

• Alternatively, you can add a quarter teaspoon of freshly ground nutmeg to a cup of warm water or any fruit juice. Drink it before bedtime.

• You can also add some nutmeg powder in one tablespoon of Indian gooseberry (Amla) juice…]

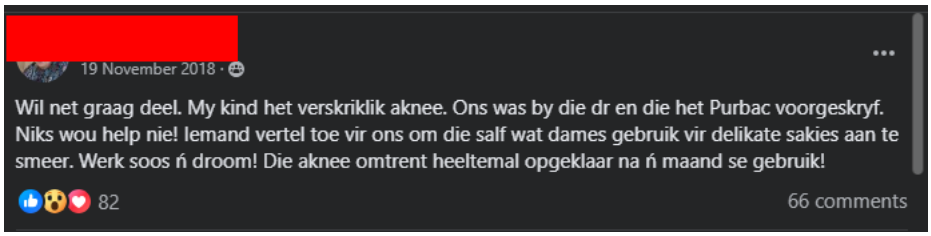
[Afternoon. I'm looking for advice for a headache that I've had for 4 days now. I drink enough water, I've eaten (so it's not hungry or thirsty) I've taken pain medication. Usually when I have a migraine I drink either a migraine mix or menograin and it helps. Nothing helps the headache I'm already at a loss.]

[Hi [redacted], I have struggled with headaches for years. Admitted to hospital and underwent 5 days of tests. They couldn't get any wise.

I went on the 28 day eating plan and for more than a I didn't know about a headache.

I get heartburn again if I eat very wrong. I think it's a combination of things, but the plan has given me an outcome and I know more about the megrains [sic] that pull me down for 4 days.

Good luck]



[Just wanted to share. My child has terrible acne. We went to the dr [sic] and he prescribed Purbac. Nothing wanted to help! Someone then told us to apply the ointment that ladies use for delicate bags[46]. Works like a dream! The acne almost completely cleared up after a month of use!

[46] In all likelihood these "delicate bags" refer to the bags under ladies' eyes. Contextual clues from the post are that the issue refers to acne-related issues.

One last interview

I became nostalgic as I busied myself with preparations to go and see an interlocuter – this was going to be one of my last interviews with one of my oldest informants. As I threw my bag over my shoulder, my boyfriend shouted down the driveway after me, "Don't forget to ask her why poop!". The burning question that sent me down this path. When I first started speaking to family about *Boererate*, an alarming amount of excrement was spoken about. I kept asking why this was, but no one really had an answer for me.

I arrived thirty minutes later at a cute, independent coffee shop tucked away in the back roads of Centurion – not far from where I grew up. I walked into the shop, and I could hear her before I could see her – Freya had a voice that carried well over the busy café. She cocooned me in a patchouli scented hug and her golden bracelets were pressed hard into my back, a familiar feeling. Freya had been my key informant during my research for my masters and had been the one to tell me that there was something special about *Boererate* that she thought warranted being investigated. When I pulled out my phone to record our conversation, she joked about how old habits die hard.

I had an entire list of questions prepared and, in that moment, I abandoned them all, and almost shouted at her, "Freya, why is there so much poop?". She considered me over her matcha latte, and a coy smile danced around the edge of her mouth. She looked at me and simply said, "You know exactly why". I shook my head and drank my espresso, "I've asked everyone, I am at a loss, I need to answer this question, not just for me and my pride at this point, but for my thesis". She sighed and told me that perhaps I needed to go and read my masters again because she felt the answer was very obvious. She started to guide me towards the answer,

> Okay. What are some *Boererate* that use even part of animals? You're getting distracted by poop.
>
> Um. There is a treatment for deafness. You fry a bat in sweet oil and then put the cooled oil on a cotton pad and then leave that in your ear overnight.
>
> Keep going. I know you know more. Come on, some of the cool ones.
>
> My favourite remedy for hiccups is to say seven times 'Me and the hiccups go over the sea; when I return, they do not come back with me
>
> Not quite poop, but it helps me make my point. Come on, Jeans, think.
>
> One that got mentioned when my brother was attacked by a dog was to put some of the dog's hair in the wound –
>
> [Freya nods and gestures for me to keep telling her *Boererate*]

Okay. An old one that I really liked came from the era of the tent hospital in the 17th century – making a tea of antelope droppings.

Great! Why? Why the tea? What was happening at the tent hospital?

Scurvy. Malnutrition.

[I pause for a beat, suddenly realising exactly why poop]

Oh my god it's like sympathetic magic. The *bokkie* is healthy, eating plants and all kinds of healthy vegetation. So, we make a tea of the excrement – which would contain all the vegetation and stuff?

Like produces like. It's the oldest trick in the book.

Interview with Freya, 16 April 2022

And suddenly, I knew exactly why poop. It dawned upon me that the historical practice of incorporating excrement into remedies was rooted in astute observations of animals manifesting health improvements. A prevailing belief emerged – one that attributed essential minerals and nutrients to waste products, positing their potential benefits when applied topically or ingested. This epiphany unveiled the historical underpinnings of this unconventional approach, shedding light on the nuanced interaction between empirical observations and enduring beliefs in the realm of traditional healing practices.

Conclusions

The four pillars discussed in the preceding section – that of women who guard and carry with them ritual knowledge, the locus of healing being the home, a holistic approach, and a fervent belief in like curing like – have stood the test of time and function today – as far as the historical records will allow us to interpret – in significantly similar ways as they did in the concentration camps, when *Boererate* was first finding its proverbial legs.

Embarking on a trajectory that spans the evolution from a woman navigating the multifaceted tapestry of societal dynamics to attaining the status of a well-informed citizen and, ultimately, an adept in the realm of *Boererate*, my narrative has unfolded as an earnest exploration of knowledge. Within the intricate folds of this chapter, the transformative nature of my journey becomes evident, revealing layers of understanding that resonate with the scholarly nuances inherent in discourse presented in my previous chapters focussed on literature and history.

Delving into the agency of *Boererate*, a nuanced interplay between bestowment and requisition of power comes to the fore. This dynamic force, encapsulated within the tenets of *Boererate*, not only imparts knowledge but intricately intertwines with a call for conscientious responsibility in its application. It emerges as a reservoir of wisdom, fiercely

guarded by the matriarchs who function as the custodians of ritual knowledge – a testament to the enduring continuity and resilience inherent in this tradition.

Central to this narrative is the unyielding constancy of the *Boererate* corpus – a repository of knowledge safeguarded by women who occupy the role of cultural gatekeepers. Their custodianship ensures the perpetuation of a tradition that transcends temporal boundaries, providing a foundational structure upon which the therapeutic practices of *Boererate* are constructed. The focal point of this healing odyssey is deeply significant, as it unfolds within the sanctified precincts of the home. The home, not confined merely to a physical space, emerges as a sacred locus where the holistic ethos of *Boererate* takes root. It acknowledges the intricate interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, permeating the fabric of daily life with its profound implications.

As I segue into subsequent chapters, the wealth of data curated within this exploration becomes the linchpin for further scholarly elucidation. The insights gleaned from our discussions surrounding *Boererate*'s agency, the nuanced dynamics of power, and the comprehensive understanding of healing as an all-encompassing endeavour lay the foundation for an unfolding narrative. The ideas introduced herein will be explored in the forthcoming two chapters, building upon the epistemological scaffold. The axiom 'like produces like' reverberates throughout this narrative, echoing the reciprocal nature of *Boererate*'s influence.

The enduring relevance of anthropological ideas, epitomized by Frazer's sympathetic magic, is particularly intriguing when considered in the context of *Boererate*. There exists a notable continuity, raising questions about the enduring significance of sympathetic magic. *Boererate*, rooted in traditional medicinal practices, incorporates elements reminiscent of sympathetic magic, suggesting a cross-cultural persistence of certain conceptual underpinnings. One is compelled to inquire why sympathetic magic, among the array of early anthropological attempts to make sense of the world, has retained its potency over time. What intrinsic qualities render sympathetic magic adaptable and transmissible across diverse cultural landscapes? Does its symbolic and ritualistic nature offer a common ground for the integration of such ideas into distinct healing traditions? These questions invite exploration into the psychological, cultural, and functional dimensions that contribute to the perennial relevance of sympathetic magic, prompting a nuanced examination of its role within the broader tapestry of anthropological thought and healing practices.

The next chapter presents an extension of the ongoing discourse surrounding gender dynamics and power relations, set within the contemporary framework of Facebook groups. The intent of the next chapter is to explicate that, notwithstanding the ostensibly divergent nature of these virtual communities, their coexistence converges upon recurrent thematic axes. The next chapter seeks to demonstrate that, beneath surface distinctions, these discrete digital ecosystems collectively articulate a narrative that resonates with enduring sociocultural motifs.

Chapter 5: Gender Shifts and Power Rifts

The previous two chapters have emphasised the wealth of data sources at my disposal over the past few years. These encompass a diverse array of repositories, including archives, Facebook groups, and interviews with individuals who graciously shared their experiences and perspectives. By immersing myself in the historical narratives of the South African War and the crucial roles women played in the concentration camps, in conjunction with insights derived from contemporary interviews, a more profound comprehension of the gendered and generational dynamics at play becomes apparent. Beyond providing a historical backdrop, the preceding chapters also elucidate the enduring impact of gendered experiences on *Boererate*. Through this interplay, the aim of this chapter is to spotlight the intricacies of *Boererate*, forging connections between the past and present while shedding light on how gendered and generational dynamics continue to shape the complex tapestry of *Boererate*.

Within this chapter, I will delve into and compare the ideas and sentiments expressed to me, as well as those observed in Facebook groups, with similar concepts encountered in my archival research. The varied data collection techniques at my disposal allowed for an in-depth exploration and questioning of various themes, including hierarchies of knowledge, gender divisions, and generational conflicts. These themes are examined in relation to their interaction with biomedical framings of medicine and illness.

The aforementioned themes have a recurring motif of power – as it pertains to who (or what) has it and how they wield it over others. Facebook groups are known for being highly interactive spaces with a wide array of users and interests represented. Yet in most cases, there is an underlying hierarchy of power that determines who is able to participate, as well as who influences the conversations and decisions made within the group. This hierarchy does not always directly reflect its members' positions in the overall hierarchical structure of society outside of the group in their offline lives, but it is often visibly evident through certain behaviours or access to exclusive information.

The hierarchies evident in these groups often mirror and, in some instances, contribute to broader gendered dynamics in contemporary South African society. Within online spaces, the distribution of power is often linked to factors such as visibility, engagement, and influence. Gender norms can significantly influence who feels empowered or comfortable participating actively in these groups. If certain qualities or areas of expertise are stereotypically associated with a specific gender – like that of *Boererate* with Afrikaans women – this impacts who garners recognition and influence within the group.

The influence wielded by Afrikaans women who serve as administrators in these groups can be likened to an invisible force, reflective of their nuanced roles in contemporary society. While these women may govern and shape the dynamics within the groups they moderate, their authority often remains inconspicuous and confined to specific domains. Much like their influence within domestic spaces, where they may hold significant sway, their impact tends to be less apparent on a broader societal scale. Although these women effectively rule over the microcosm of their Facebook groups, it is important to recognise that these groups represent only a fraction of the vast and diverse landscape of online interactions and people's digital lives. The seeming invisibility of their power within these online spaces mirrors the intricate balance they navigate in wider society, where their authority is often confined to specific realms, leaving their broader influence less visible in the larger context of people's online experiences.

Of particular note in this regard was the extreme policing of behaviour on the Facebook groups that I observed. This policing and behavioural scrutiny was most notably executed by elder Afrikaner women who were administrators on the groups. While there was commentary and critique from men (young and old), the aforementioned women frequently posted in the groups and would regularly engage with posts in the comment section. They were also recognised by other group members as authority figures – in anthropological terms as explicated in the previous chapter they might be thought of as ritual experts – and were exceptionally vocal about the behaviours and posts of others. They would often make posts dedicated to telling members exactly what kinds of behaviours they deemed unacceptable, the kinds of posts that they would not tolerate, and the punishment for transgressions. Elder female admins exercise a unique agency within *Boererate* groups, with their authoritative positions granting them the power to enforce punishments on offenders. These responses often involve deleting offending posts and blocking members, whilst also creating corrective messages that serve as warnings for others. Consequently, these women not only have the potential to shape conversations - but assert control in areas of their lives they may otherwise be excluded from. While agency is hardly ever without conditions and constraints, in the highly specific and contained environment of the Facebook groups, these women have more agency than most.

Big fish in a small pond

In the context of Facebook groups, agency emerges as a pivotal element in the dynamics of power and authority among female admins. Weber distinguished between power and authority, where power is the ability to exert influence and control over others, irrespective of whether it is legitimate or not and authority is a specific form of power that is recognised as legitimate and justified within a particular social structure (Uphoff, 1989). Weber identified three types of legitimate authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Traditional authority is based on long-standing customs and traditions, charismatic authority is derived from the personal appeal and exceptional qualities of a leader, and legal-rational authority is grounded in established rules and regulations. The legitimacy of authority, according to Weber (2009), is crucial for maintaining social order.

In applying Weber's framework to the structure of the groups and the female admins, it becomes apparent that power and authority are manifested in the ways that the groups are organised and how female admins interact with others on the groups. The way in which the groups are designed and organised by Facebook as a platform itself shapes the way the conversations play out across them. In the application of Weber's framework to the examination of power dynamics within these Facebook groups, it becomes evident that the very structure of these online communities profoundly influences the distribution of authority and agency. The Facebook platform, as an overarching structure, establishes the parameters within which group interactions unfold. The predetermined features, such as the layout, algorithms, and moderation tools, all play a role in shaping the nature of discussions. Female administrators, while holding positions of influence within these groups, operate within the confines set by the platform itself. This delineation of authority highlights a complex interplay between structure and agency.

The platform-imposed structure, with its algorithmic content distribution and moderation policies, inherently limits the degree of agency that individual members, including administrators, can exercise. While group members possess a certain level of autonomy in their contributions, the parameters set by Facebook shape the visibility, reach, and dynamics of their interactions. This nuanced relationship between structure and agency elucidates that, although individual agency is present, its expression is moulded and guided by the structural constraints imposed by the digital environment. Furthermore, the interplay between structure and agency extends beyond individual actions to encompass broader group dynamics. The design of the Facebook group, as a structured entity, influences the power dynamics among administrators and members. The visibility of posts, the hierarchy of content, and the

mechanisms of decision-making are all embedded in the platform's design, creating a system where authority is distributed and exercised within the parameters predetermined by the digital structure.

Afrikaans female admins exercise agency in steering discussions, moderating content, and influencing the group narrative, however, this agency is not unfettered; it operates within the above-mentioned predetermined parameters set by the Facebook platform. While their decisions and interactions contribute to the construction of a collective understanding of *Boererate* and its cultural significance, the visibility and reach of their posts, the management of discussions, and the overall atmosphere of the group are subject to the platform's algorithmic design and content moderation policies. While Afrikaans female admins may control aspects of the narrative, their agency is intricately interwoven with the structural limitations imposed by the platform, affecting the reception and dissemination of their contributions. Moreover, the digital structure introduces a level of democratisation and decentralisation, as individual group members also possess agency in shaping the discussions. The tension between the agency of Afrikaans female admins and the structural constraints of the Facebook platform underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of power within these virtual communities.

The discussion of power, authority, and structure within *Boererate* Facebook groups bears intriguing parallels to the historical context of Boer women in South African War concentration camps. In both instances, there is a nuanced interplay between agency and the constraints imposed by the prevailing structures, whether historical or digital. During the South African War, Boer women in concentration camps grappled with the authoritative structures implemented by colonial powers. The structural design of the camps, influenced by British authorities, dictated living conditions, access to resources, and overall agency for the Boer women. Their ability to navigate and exert influence within these constraints was circumscribed by the hierarchical structure imposed by the colonial power.

Similarly, in the contemporary digital realm of *Boererate* Facebook groups, Afrikaans female admins wield agency within the boundaries set by the Facebook platform. The digital structure shapes the visibility, reach, and dynamics of their contributions, reminiscent of how historical structures influenced the agency of Boer women in concentration camps. The Facebook algorithm and moderation policies, akin to the colonial policies of the past, impact the distribution of power and the framing of narratives within the virtual space. Recognising these parallels highlights the enduring complexities of power dynamics faced by both

historical Boer women and contemporary Afrikaans women. Whether constrained by historical circumstances or digital platforms, the negotiation between agency and structural limitations persists. Both historical and contemporary contexts reflect how power operates within structured environments, where individuals navigate and negotiate their roles, exercising agency within the confines of the prevailing structures.

The female admins, by virtue of their roles, navigate a unique blend of power and authority within the online realm. The hierarchical dynamics observed within the Facebook groups dedicated to *Boererate* may indeed mirror broader patterns of authority and influence within contemporary South African society. The interactions and power structures within these virtual spaces serve as microcosms, reflective of the socio-political landscape at large. Examining the power dynamics within Facebook groups, particularly concerning Afrikaans women, reveals a nuanced interplay between virtual influence and real-world societal constraints. In these online communities, Afrikaans female admins may wield a degree of authority and agency, but as evidenced in the previous chapter and my interactions with interlocuters, there are always checks and balances that encompass and limit said agency.

While these digital spaces predominantly reflect and perpetuate established norms, it is crucial to acknowledge instances where they become platforms for the disruption of traditional expectations, particularly in empowering women, especially young women, to assert control over their bodies and health. On the reinforcing side, these groups often function as echo chambers of culture, where the preservation of traditional gender roles is a prevailing theme. The influence of Afrikaans female admins, while offering agency in moderating discussions, can also contribute to the preservation of existing power structures and gendered expectations. However, within this cultural echo chamber, there are notable instances of disruption. The groups, by providing a digital space for discussions on health and traditional remedies, empower women to challenge conventional norms related to their bodies and well-being. Young women, in particular, utilise these platforms to explore alternative health practices, question established norms, and take control of their own health decisions. In doing so, they carve out spaces for autonomy and agency that may defy traditional expectations (Cundill & Blackbeard, 2023).

Ultimately, the agency and authority of Afrikaans female admins within *Boererate* Facebook groups are not only influenced by the visible features of the platform but are also subject to the intentions and designs of unseen figures – the engineers and software developers who work at Facebook. Their decisions, influenced by corporate strategies, cultural biases, and

technological considerations, intricately shape the structure and functionality of the Facebook platform. The power dynamics within the groups, therefore, extend beyond the immediate interactions of group members and administrators. The algorithms, driven by decisions made by these hidden figures, play a pivotal role in determining what content is prioritised, how discussions are framed, and the overall user experience. Afrikaans female admins, while exercising agency within the visible features, operate within the confines of a platform that is, in essence, a product of choices made by those who design and maintain it. The implications of this dynamic are profound, as the authority of Afrikaans female admins is not solely contingent on their decisions and actions but is intricately tied to the structural decisions made by engineers and developers. The hidden influence of these figures becomes an additional layer in the complex web of power dynamics, shaping the very landscape within which administrators navigate and assert influence.

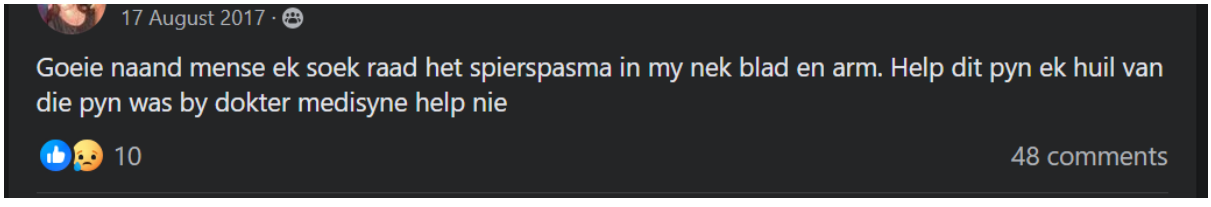
In the context of *Boererate*, where the preservation of cultural knowledge intersects with notions of femininity (McClintock, 1993), this digital environment becomes a complex terrain where traditional gender norms intersect with the virtual structure, impacting how *Boererate* knowledge is presented, accessed, and perceived by group members. In these digital spaces, where Afrikaans female admins hold influence, the power dynamics are deeply entangled with societal expectations regarding femininity and cultural identity. Afrikaans female admins, while exercising agency in moderating discussions, are also subject to the wider societal constructs of what it means to be a 'good Afrikaans woman.' This involves negotiating a delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and adhering to patriarchal norms. This in turn impacts how *Boererate* is framed, who gets to contribute, and which narratives are deemed acceptable or marginal.

Patriarchal expectations and ethnicised respectability further shape the discourse within these groups. The gendered division of labour often extends to digital realms, influencing who holds authoritative positions and whose voices are amplified. The notion of being a 'good Afrikaans woman' intersects with expectations of modesty, conformity, and adherence to cultural norms, affecting how women navigate their roles as administrators and contributors. The digital environment, shaped by both administrators and platform design, becomes a reflection of societal values, impacting the portrayal and reception of *Boererate*. The question then arises: How do these online spaces either reinforce or disrupt traditional gender roles, particularly in the context of *Boererate*?

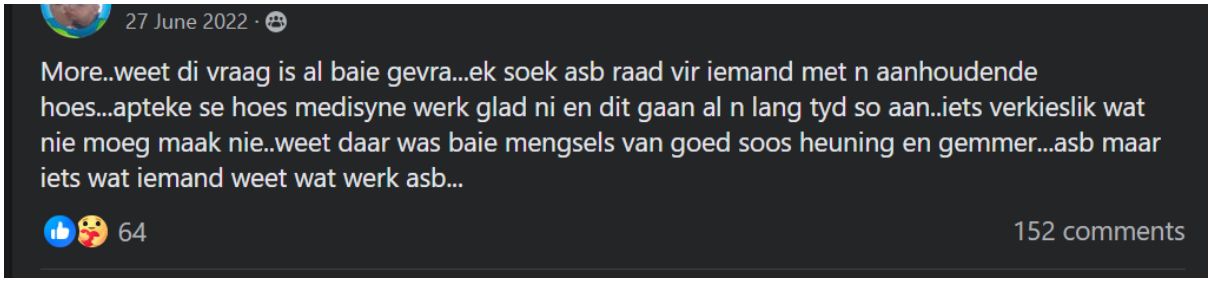
The virtual realm provides a unique space for navigating and challenging societal constraints, but the extent of this influence may still be circumscribed by the overarching dynamics of South African society. In essence, the online platform becomes a space where Afrikaans females negotiate and navigate power and authority in ways that might differ from their roles and expectations in the traditional sociocultural landscape.

Given how these elder Afrikaner women act on their knowledge and how they interact with various posts and queries in the groups from positions of legitimate authority, I will be able to pivot to another important discussion – that *Boererate* as a knowledge system is often used as resistance against a prevailing biomedical system. Furthermore, through my interviews, it became evident that *Boererate* serves also as a form of resistance against the prevailing political order in South Africa. As discussed in chapter 3, resistance was at the very root of *Boererate* and the driving force behind its birth – resistance will always be a core facet of how *Boererate* survives and thrives.

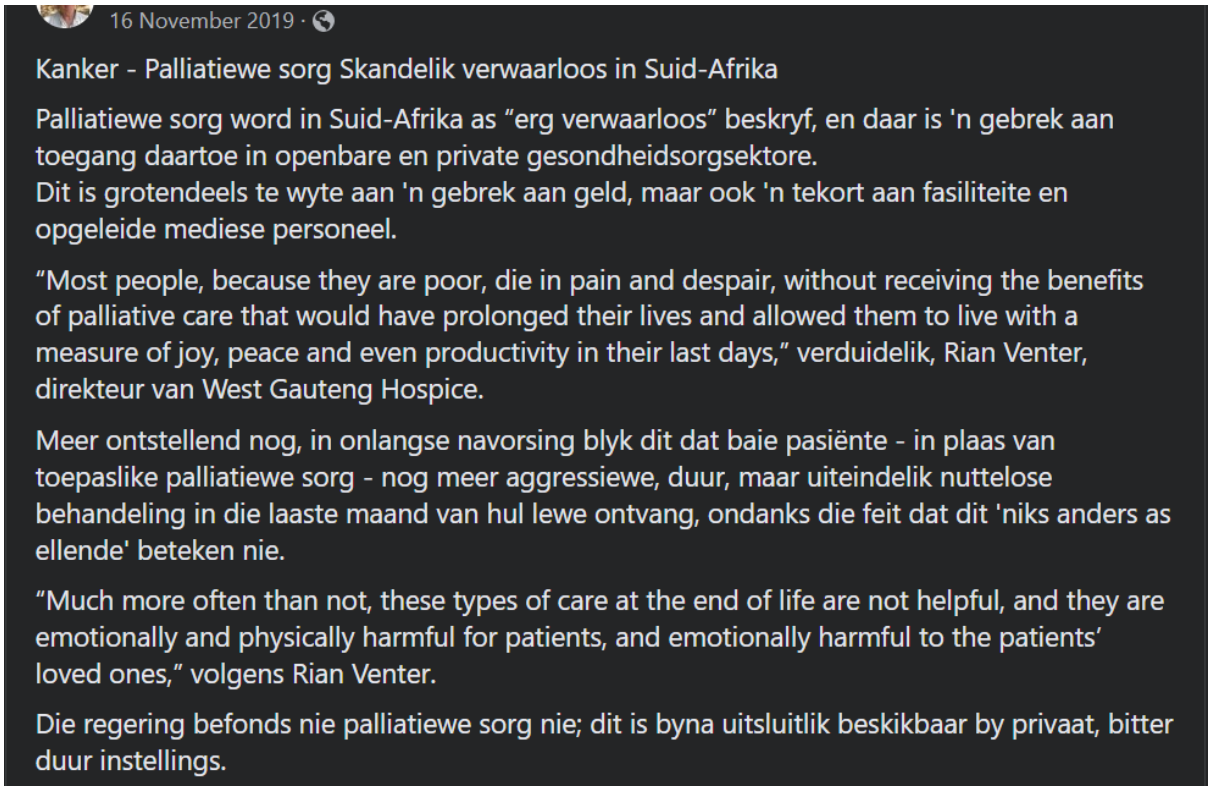
In their actions and interactions within the online groups, these women wield their knowledge with a sense of authority. This empowerment, derived from their cultural heritage and traditional practices, enables them to navigate a landscape where they perceive themselves as being at odds with the existing political structures. Many of the individuals I spoke with expressed a profound sense of disillusionment and abandonment by the current government, feeling as if they are navigating their challenges alone. This sentiment of being let down has led these elder Afrikaner women to turn to *Boererate* not just as a practical source of information but as a means of empowerment and resistance. My evidence, as seen in the screenshots below, suggests that *Boererate* has become a tool through which they resist the prevailing political and social order, finding strength in their shared knowledge and experiences. The reliance on *Boererate* becomes a deliberate choice to reclaim agency and autonomy over health and well-being, a stark contrast to the perceived shortcomings of the prevailing biomedical system.



[Good evening people I'm looking for advice I have muscle spasm in my neck shoulder and arm. Help it hurts I'm crying from the pain was at the doctor medicine doesn't help]



[Morning..I know the question has been asked a lot..I'm looking for advice please for someone with a persistent cough..pharmacies' cough medicine doesn't work because it's been going on like this for a long time...preferably something that doesn't make you tired..know there have been many mixes of things like honey and ginger..please but something that someone knows works please]



[Cancer - Palliative care Disgracefully neglected in South Africa]

[Palliative care is described as "severely neglected" in South Africa, and there is a lack of access to it in public and private health care sectors. This is largely due to a lack of money, but also a shortage of facilities and trained medical staff.]

[More disturbingly, in recent research it appears that many patients - instead of appropriate palliative care - receive even more aggressive, expensive, but ultimately useless treatment in the last month of their life, despite the fact that it is 'nothing but misery' doesn't mean]

[The government does not fund palliative care; it is available almost exclusively from private, bitterly expensive institutions.]

En vra jy jou huisdokter oor Palliatiewe sorg, loop jy jou teen 'n soliede muur vas.

Hy weet bitter min van palliatiewe sorg.

Hy skram weg van betrokkenheid by Programme.

Hy het geen idee van spesiale programme wat jou mediese fonds bied nie.

Hy verwys jou onverwyld terug na jou Onkoloog.

En as jy verduidelik dat jy nie na jou Onkoloog wil teruggaan nie, omdat jy nie meer geld het vir nog 'n laaste sarsie Chemoterapie of Bestraling nie, dan raak jou dokter verbouereerd, want hy is nie opgewasse om in te meng met Onkologie nie.

Die terminale fase van jou lewe - jou einde-van-lewe sorgfase, wat een van die mooiste fases van jou lewe kan wees, jou spesiale afskeidsfase, word jou nagmerrie fase.

> [And if you ask your family doctor about palliative care, you run into a solid wall.
>
> He knows very little about palliative care.
>
> He shies away from involvement in Programmes.
>
> He has no idea about special programs that your medical aid offers.
>
> He immediately refers you back to your Oncologist.
>
> And if you explain that you don't want to go back to your Oncologist, because you don't have the money for one last round of Chemotherapy or Radiation, then your doctor gets confused, because he is not up to interfering with Oncology.
>
> The terminal phase of your life - your end-of-life care phase, which can be one of the most beautiful phases of your life, your special farewell phase, becomes your nightmare phase.]

The utilisation of *Boererate* in lieu of conventional biomedicine and the emergence of community groups fostering transparent dialogues about governmental inadequacies underscore a resistance to a biomedical system perceived as deficient. *Boererate* serves as an alternative healthcare modality adopted by individuals disenchanted with the limitations of the prevailing biomedical paradigm. *Boererate* is valued not only for its potential efficacy but also for its cultural resonance and sense of community continuity. The adoption of *Boererate* signifies a nuanced form of resistance, suggesting that alternative, community-based solutions may offer more personalised and culturally relevant responses to health challenges – the very same conclusions that Boer women came to some 200 years ago. Moreover, the establishment of the groups provides a crucial platform for individuals to openly articulate their misgivings and concerns about the biomedical system and the government's role in healthcare. The utilisation of *Boererate* and the existence of the groups thus represent a grassroots resistance, reflecting a demand for healthcare solutions that are more attuned to the lived experiences and cultural contexts of the population.

This dual role of *Boererate*, as both a cultural resistance against a political order and a rejection of mainstream biomedical practices, underscores its multifaceted significance within the community. The interplay between traditional knowledge, cultural identity, and resistance against external systems sheds light on the complex ways in which *Boererate* operates as a dynamic force within the socio-political landscape of South Africa.

I will also bring this resistance into conversation with the controversial, but nonetheless important, role that 'fake news'[47] played in these groups and then beyond. Within these discussions, there emerges a profound shaping of *Boererate* and its applications. The malleability I witnessed mirrors Mbembe's (2016) discourse on plasticity and how knowledge systems can act as repositories of both history and culture. Central to his argument is that pre-colonial knowledge systems are ever more present in virtual worlds – an idea that I will build upon in this chapter and discuss more extensively in the next.

Boererate and the dissemination of it through these groups is a source of great strength and pride for many of the Afrikaans women who I spoke to over the past few years. They explained that it largely encompasses their ways of life, cultural beliefs, and practices and that these have been passed down through generations. Even today, these practices, and subsequently the Facebook groups and the connections made through them, remain a powerful support system for the women who use them to navigate their everyday lives. Like most knowledge systems that are repositories of guidance on how to care for families, manage resources sustainably, and heal illnesses naturally, it enables them to have some comfort in times of turmoil. My interlocutors were women who value and practice the *Boererate* that they discuss and circulate and pass it down to future generations, hoping that they will always be part of the collective wisdom.

Ooms en Tannies [Uncles and Aunties]

> No, the men don't actually post that much. They don't really have much say. If my husband wants to know something he asks that I rather post because I know the groups and I'll get a better answer than he would. Well, [redacted – the name of group member] posts often but he is a homoeopath, so he is doing it professionally I suppose. Oh, no man, what am I saying – I have seen men post. There was a big braai post the other day that got a lot of attention. Oh, and there is also that snake one that you asked about, but I quickly told that *laaitie*[48] exactly what my thoughts were about that post. *Jinne*[49], you can't be posting that stuff on our groups.
>
> Interview with Suné, 8 April 2020

[47] The term fake news refers to articles that are intentionally false and written with the intention to manipulate people's perceptions of real facts, events, and statements.
[48] This is a slang term used to refer to a young man.
[49] This word is used to denote an exclamation of shock or surprise and does not have a direct English translation.

Suné, a group admin for one of the *Boererate* Facebook groups that I belong to, is a stout woman of 63, wears bright pink spectacles and keeps her bright red hair cropped quite severely at her collar bones. I sometimes struggled to reconcile her statements about appropriate group etiquette and behaviour with her eccentric, kaftaned appearance – especially when her hands were stained red from dying her hair at home in her bathtub. She would often regale me with tales of varying success of how she attempted to maintain her hair and enhance the colour with a multitude of household products.

The 'snake post' to which she refers in the above quote was a post that I saw towards the end of 2019. It catapulted the poster and the admins into a confrontation which gripped the group for days. The controversy was surrounding a young man[50] who had posted about a snake that he had come across in his home and killed. He was mainly curious about what kind of snake it was and attached to his post a photo of the snake after he had killed it. Many members commented that the photo was deeply disturbing and that it was bordering on animal cruelty. The young man who had posted the image became deeply agitated and was hostile in his responses to the comments – he was also swearing at other members and using derogatory language. Group admins quickly became involved and removed the post and the man from the group within minutes of the post garnering all this attention. The screenshot below is a post from an admin about how the issue was handled.

[50] I have removed his name from the screenshot.

> [That snake post is now finished if [redacted – name of poster] will please just stop now. I see you are now adding your entire fb page's friends to the group. Well, everyone is being declined, because I see what you are doing now. It is against the group's rules to put things up about snakes. If you want to fight, do it with the member who put it up. Don't involve our group in your revenge. That post was deleted minutes after it was put up. I know that wasn't a nice post, but it was one person, there are 242,000 who wouldn't do such things. I also hate that animals, snakes or bugs are simply killed, that's just me.
>
> 11 NO ANIMAL CRUELTY PLEASE! If you don't have advice without saying "kick the cat to death" or "shoot it dead" or poisoning it, then stop! Such comments will be removed. Any comments about violence towards animals will have the person removed.
>
> 19 No questions about what spider, bug or snake it is.]

When I mentioned this post to Suné, some months after it had taken place, she immediately knew what I was talking about. She shook her head and proceeded to tell me that, in her experience of the group and the goings on, it was usually young men who made the kind of posts that often broke the rules and upset other members with the content. She explained her reasoning as to why to me,

> They think they are above the law – the rules of the group. Big, bad Gert thinks he doesn't need to worry about making anyone cross, but you better believe that we stop them and make them know that that behaviour is not welcome. You know, those things are *vieslik* [nasty] and they make you feel like you *sommer* [just as well] not family anymore. Because that's what we are on those groups. We look after each other and help each other and you just don't do those things to family.

Interview with Suné, 8 April 2020

Following this explanation, Suné pushed her shoulders back and filled the screen, proud of what she had just said. I was quiet for a moment, a technique that my supervisor had suggested I try. Rather than trying to fill a pause with more questions, I let Suné ruminate on what she had said. She continued,

> They just can't come into my house [referring to the group] and start shouting the odds. Men have always made fun of me and how I use *Boererate*, but they are very quick to ask for a little *raat* if they have pain. And let it just not work. Then it's *sommer* [just] all *tos* [shit]. And they want to say that I, or any of the other women, don't know what we are talking about. Please, man. My mother did this and her mother and then her mother and all the way back to when we first got here.

Interview with Suné, 8 April 2020

Suné was not the first, nor the last, informant to single out the distinct role of women and their female ancestors in her interviews. Almost all female participants did this at some point and the conversation was usually punctuated with a story about an issue that they had run into with a man in the groups, or in their own circle of friends and associates. Often, this man

would have somehow disrespected a woman or her lineage of knowledge and how she applied it to a query that had been posted. Out of the 32 female informants who had participated in structured interviews (both online and in-person), 29 of them made some mention of having had an issue with a man outright disrespecting her knowledge. I explored this perception with female interlocutors at first and then, at a later stage in my project, had a chance to speak to some male participants about how they experienced these interactions.

The general tone of the discussions that I had with women was that men had been taught by their families and communities that they were above certain "social or group rules" (Interview with Marie, 12 August 2020) and due to this, had failed to respect the authority of the women that I was interviewing. When I pressed one participant, Marie, on this point, she explained to me that it appeared to her as if the men she had been interacting with were so caught up in their own authority and dominance that they could not see that their actions and disrespect of old Afrikaans women was as bad as disrespecting their own mother. Marie went on to explain to me that,

> …all older women have knowledge that we have gathered over the years, we have struggled and been tested, and we have earned the right to expect to not be spoken to like we are dogs – especially by young men who are still wet behind the ears.
>
> Interview with Marie, 12 August 2020

The binary oppositions of female versus male and young versus old were repeatedly referred to in interviews and it quickly became apparent to me that it appeared as if there would be no compromise between these poles and their respective roles. While in many cases beyond the structuring and functioning of these groups, the boundaries of these respective roles have been blurred, there remains a power dynamic that has set in place distinct gender expectations. Afrikaner men are often assumed to take on a more dominant role, while Afrikaner women are expected to fulfil traditionally passive roles in society. This dynamic is subtle, and I observed in many of the conversations that I had with of my younger female interlocuters – those aged 20 to 29. Many of them had gone to university, completed their studies and had entered the work force. When I spoke to them about their plans for their future – idle chat before interviews began in earnest – I noticed a trend in their answers. The 'casual chat' we would have while I set up screen recording on my laptop or while we were waiting for coffees to be brought to our table became a key element of interviews with these young women.

It was frequently mentioned that when they fell pregnant, they would stop working and dedicate their time and efforts to raising children and tending to the home – just like their

mothers did. They would release their work aspirations and leave the bread and bacon bringing up to their husbands. Some of the young women who I interviewed were not even in relationships with anyone when they had made these decisions. Fearing my own bias against this kind of thinking would upset them, I jokingly asked how they thought their future partners would react and many responded that the 'right' kind of man[51] would acquiesce to their requests. I asked who the 'right kind of man' was and Stefanie provided me with a description over a steaming hot coffee on a grey Thursday afternoon,

> *'n Goeie Afrikaans man*, Jeanie! Come on, you must know what I mean. The kind of man who was taught by his mother how to look after his family. I saw it in my own family. I think my sisters and I would have turned into really shocking people if we didn't have my mum in the house with us, teaching us and helping us to be good. If us kids were just left to our own devices, we would have been real shit heads. [silence] I think you're judging me?
>
> No no, I'm not. I just want to understand something. I'm an academic, right? I've spent years and years working myself up to this point. If I had to fall pregnant now and stay home with kids, I would feel like it was a whole lot of work for what? To stay in, watch Netflix and write *Redenaars* [Afrikaans public speaking] speeches? I just can't reconcile the effort with the outcome. Can you help me understand?
>
> Okay! No, that I can do. I am a lawyer, right? Studied for 5 years, oops [laughs] and did 3 years of articles. I am now earning decent money and have a pretty good life. But I see the life my mum had – and has – and it's so beautiful and right and I want it. That's what I am working for.
>
> Interview with Stefanie, 16 June 2022

Stefanie's repeated reference to 'right' stuck in my head and I walked away from our interview thinking that the information that I had gleaned from her interview was going to be an outlying data point and it would ultimately end up an interesting anecdote or perhaps a footnote. However, the more I interviewed young Afrikaans women, the more this sentiment was repeated to me. I went on to interview eleven more young Afrikaans women and their careers varied from business analyst to high school teacher and all of them were ready to put their working lives on a semi-permanent hiatus[52] in order to fulfil the role of being a good, stay-at-home wife and mother. While the idea of a 'good Afrikaans woman' is one that has been explored at length, the idea of a 'good Afrikaans man' was one that was initially novel to me. Perhaps this was a bias of my own, but it was one that was reflected in the literature which I consulted. There are so many ideas and narrative that are taken as 'normal' due to the

[51] It is important to note that these conversations were had with heterosexual Afrikaner women and that these views are not representative of all Afrikaner women. This is but one side of the coin and not an attempt at essentialising Afrikaner women as a group without nuance and variation.
[52] With the advent of working from home, some did express that, once children were old enough to be somewhat independent in the home, they would look into part-time work from home such as legal advising or extra lessons.

specific history that South Africa has experienced, and it was a failing on my behalf to not pick up on this idea earlier in my research. Once I became aware of how I had accepted how *ordentlikheid* extended – further than just Afrikaner women, I was able to explore power relations and their subtleties with significantly more efficacy.

I decided to probe what a 'good Afrikaans man' was in my follow-up interviews and the image that I was able to construct was that of a man expected to uphold a certain set of behavioural ideals. He had to uphold traditional values of hard work, honesty, and loyalty. He had to conduct himself in such a manner as to show respect for authority figures and to demonstrate his intrinsic understanding of the social hierarchy as well as where he fit into it. Other expected behaviours were that he treats women politely and not speak out of turn or contradict and belittle others in public. While this description brings myself and Marie dangerously close to essentialisms about masculinity, I represent this description here to stay true to what she described to me.

While Afrikaner masculinities are not the focus of this research, it is important to note here that since British colonial rule in South Africa, Afrikaner masculinity has undergone intricate transformations. Initially characterised by hegemonic power, this dynamic shifted with the establishment of colonial institutions seeking to homogenise the white population. The introduction of a bureaucratic government, compulsory education, and military reforms as part of a 'modernisation' project disrupted the traditional rural production system and social structures. Economic pressures and shifting land policies favouring commercial farmers further threatened the established order. The subsequent development of a class-based society, and the advent of capitalism, further contributed to the intricate nature of Afrikaner masculinity under colonial rule. In essence, the historical narrative reveals a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors that shaped and contested traditional Afrikaner masculine identities during this transformative period (Morrell, 1998).

Once I had drawn this data and constructed this image, I compared to the experiences that I, as well as my interlocuters and participants, had had with Afrikaans men in the Facebook groups. Once again, I returned to my network of young and old Afrikaans women and hosted a small get-together in order to understand how they reconciled the men they interacted with in groups, and the men they had constructed in their minds.

> Well. I guess if this man – the make-believe one you've been mentioning – is rude and fights on the groups then he isn't a very good man.
>
> > But why are these men – who are not so 'good' – allowed to interact with women, of varying ages, the way that they do? They pick fights, belittle and even insult women

when they don't agree with what they are doing or posting? Or when they think we aren't being good and respectable?

> My dear, I can assure you, any man who doesn't respect me, or any of the other ladies who are admins, or even the *ooms* [uncles] is going to end up having a very bad time. These groups are huge. You might as well stand on the church plain and shout to all of Pretoria that you are a bastard. The long and short of is – know your place, kid.

Interview with Marie, 8 July 2022

In my exploration of gendered expectations and behaviours within the groups, a revelation emerged regarding the intricate nature of these expectations and their integration into a hierarchical structure of knowledge and authority. This observation prompted a deeper engagement with the work of Levi-Strauss once again, whose investigations were predominantly rooted in South American myths. Levi-Strauss's (2001) structuralist framework emphasised the pervasive role of binary opposition in human societies, wherein entities are classified into opposing categories. His approach was informed by the idea that people possess an inherent need to classify and bring order to various aspects of their lives and relationships.

Structuralism, as a theoretical perspective, has faced considerable criticism for its perceived oversimplification and reductionist tendencies. However, it has experienced a contemporary resurgence within the field of cognitive anthropology, particularly through the work of scholars like Maurice Bloch (2012). The revival of interest in structuralist ideas is evident in the renewed emphasis on the universal search for underlying structures in the human brain to explain a broad spectrum of human behaviours. This revival is marked by a nuanced approach that acknowledges the complexities of human cognition and behaviour while still seeking overarching patterns and structures (Bloch, 2012).

Cognitive anthropology, despite its contemporary resurgence and attempts to bridge the gap between culture and cognition, has not been immune to criticism. One notable critique revolves around the risk of overgeneralisation and the tendency to prioritise cognitive universals over cultural variation. By seeking overarching cognitive structures applicable to all human societies, cognitive anthropology oversimplifies the rich diversity of cultural expressions and variations in human thought (Tanney, 1998).

Examining binary opposition within the social fabric becomes particularly relevant when exploring tensions in specific social contexts. The dichotomies of man and woman, young and old, serve as critical points of analysis, revealing the underlying structures that shape societal expectations and interpersonal dynamics. By adopting a structuralist lens, one can

uncover the ways in which these binary oppositions contribute to the construction of social norms, hierarchies, and power dynamics within communities. Levi-Strauss's insights, despite the critiques against structuralism, continue to provide a valuable framework for understanding the intricate interplay of classifications and structures in shaping human behaviour and societal norms.

Power meets with Resistance

> I would have never questioned a doctor before all this. He could have told me to put a Panado in my ear for a headache and I would have believed him. I probably would have told everyone that they were taking Panado wrong all these years! But this. This pandemic taught me that they are actually just human too – the doctors and science people too. I do think they are working hard and trying to help us, *ne*, but I just. I just want people to also realise they don't know everything. They also are learning – like us.
>
> Interview with Natalie, 12 August 2020

> I guess what it taught me – the pandemic – is that we have become a little too reliant on the chemist and doctors and hospitals and stuff. It's like everything is a medical emergency these days, you know what I mean? Like, when I was a kid, my brother stepped on a piece of glass, cut him quite deeply. My mother took him inside, took the glass out, cleaned him up with some Germolene[53] and put a really tight fabric plaster on. She gave him a little brandy, don't judge, and rubbed and squeezed his foot while he slept. When we checked it a few days later, the skin had closed and it was fine. If that happened today – the whole family would be waiting at Unitas[54] while they amputated my brother's foot. Well, okay, not that intense. But you know what I mean.
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> Interview with Mariska, 27 September 2020

Natalie and Mariska's views that as a community – or even country – that we have become a little too reliant on biomedical assistance were not uncommon or unique and were expressed to me by more than a few interlocuters. It was, in fact, a prominent idea that I had initially relegated to an unnamed folder on my laptop and the notes I had made during these portions of interviews were stuffed into old envelopes and left to gather some dust on my desk. For most of 2020, I had largely ignored them because they felt dangerous.

One of my greatest fears when embarking on this project was that I would espouse and empower narratives of pseudoscience and 'fake news'. The 'COVID is a hoax' phenomenon is one that gained considerable traction throughout 2020 and has persisted throughout the last few years. Science denialism and conspiracy theory surrounding COVID-19 had a real 15 minutes of fame that turned into months and years of attention and controversy. While position of anthropological inquiry has never been one for advocating Truth and Law, I was concerned about the moral position of this project. I reconciled these feeling with how I had

[53] Germolene is the brand name used on a range of antiseptic product.
[54] Unitas is a private hospital located in Centurion, Gauteng.

approached my other research topics in the past – that of witchcraft and speaking with spirits of the deceased. I never set out to prove nor disprove these phenomena, I merely wanted to understand how they had respectively affected the women who experienced them as well as how they structured their daily lives around them. In using this approach, I was able to meaningfully engage on the topics of the COVID-19 Hoax and science denialism without feeling like I was doing my research – or my interlocuters – a disservice.

Pylypa (1998) explains that resistance is a form of power in disguise and that we are all vehicles of power due to it being embedded in our daily lives. She also discusses that power is a productive force as it simultaneously creates and is created by knowledge. No knowledge is neutral. It represents a particular set of perspectives, conventions, and motivations. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault (1975) explains that the medical profession gained esteem by employing scientific knowledge (such as defining disease categories) and this gave them considerable power in defining the reality that we interact with every day. Through this, medicine and the people who define it acquired the power to define what was 'normal' which in turn enabled the creation of a category of deviance. However, this power would be weak if it only repressed, censored or excluded the deviant – it produces it. This is a subtle mechanism of power, in which the definition of 'power' is not dissimilar to that of Weber discussed earlier and operates on the micro-levels of our everyday lives such as the interactions on a Facebook group that I have been discussing.

The Facebook groups have always held a space for people to connect over and discuss their interaction with biomedicine and its agents of action – doctors and pharmacists. Time and time again, I witnessed users posting photos of the medication which they had prescribed and asking for clarity on them. They wanted to know how to take them, the side-effects of them, and if there were any other options – either more effective or cheaper. I asked Natalie about this during our extended meeting while we perused the menu for dinner options.

> Oh, you saw my post about the iron tablets? Okay, let me explain it. I had some blood tests as a routine check-up. You know how Discovery[55] always wants to know every little thing about you hoping you will be sick with something so that they can cash in and say that you were never actually covered for it. Sorry. They really piss me off. So, I had the blood tests done and it came back with me being anaemic. So off I went to doctor, and we had a ten minute consult – really – and he sent me off with a script. Now. I don't doubt that he is wonderful, but he never asked me what else I take, what my lifestyle is like or anything, just a piece of paper and please get out. So, I got it, I am good like that, but I then asked on the group about this tablet and wow. Who knew.
>
> Interview with Natalie, 12 August 2020

[55] A prominent medical aid provider in South Africa.

Natalie proceeded to explain that the specific iron tablet that she had been prescribed had been subject to much controversy as it had caused major issues with people who suffered from Crohn's disease[56] - a disease which she had been diagnosed with a few years ago. She was aghast that the same doctor that had diagnosed her with Crohn's disease had prescribed the controversial iron tablet. Once she had posted the photograph and her brief medical background, she was inundated with responses from group members to not take the tablet until she had followed up with her doctor. She called him the next day and reminded him of her Crohn's diagnosis, and she was dismayed that not only did he not recall diagnosing her with Crohn's, but that he did not even remember their consultation.

> I was disgusted. Are we really just a paycheck? [becoming tearful]. What if something happened to me? What if I developed a bowel obstruction and had to be put on a bag [referring to a colostomy bag]? I felt so uncared for and like it's a *worsmasjien* [a sausage machine]. Grinding me out and getting the next one in. I tried to talk to him about me and my body, but he just wouldn't hear it. Already decided that I was probably making it up or that I was looking for attention.
>
> Interview with Natalie, 12 August 2020

Natalie and I had met for lunch, as we often did, and every time we were out, I bore witness to her nervous back and forth with waiters about her critical substitutions for gluten-free options. When we met in August of 2020, I almost knew her gluten-free request script off by heart and her laboured clarifications with waiters gave me plenty of time to consider what she had told me and what I wanted to ask her next. As I had many a time before, I took the opportunity to consider what Natalie had said about her strained relationship with her doctor while she placed her order. She had trusted her doctor to not only know her body and her case, but to provide her with medication that would enable her to return to occupying as healthy a body as possible. And yet, in Natalie's mind, her doctor had failed her. If he could not assist her in maintaining good health, then what purpose would he serve in her life? As if I had said this aloud, Natalie answered me,

> So, what is the point? Why did I go there? Why do we keep going back if they are not really helping us with the little things? We have been pushed to the point where everything is somehow something that only a doctor can treat but then they mess with us like this? My only choice is to look after myself because they all [referring to doctors] have still got a lot of learning to do.
>
> Interview with Natalie, 12 August 2020

[56] Crohn's disease is a type of inflammatory bowel disease. It causes swelling of the tissues in your digestive tract, which can lead to abdominal pain, severe diarrhea, fatigue, weight loss and malnutrition.

As our pizzas arrived, Natalie (after confirming once again that the base was gluten-free) brought our conversation back to the COVID-19 pandemic and what it had taught her. She explained that the quick intensification and rapid spread of the virus clearly illustrated to her that biomedical structures were "pretending" all these years that they knew more than what they, in reality, could have. It showed her that she "might as well throw [her] own two cents in" and if she heals herself, well then, she was right all along.

With a greater understanding of their rights, individuals are actively challenging biomedical control over healthcare and demanding more personalised options. This shift in attitude has driven an ideological resistance to medical structures which has gained considerable traction within the Facebook groups as members have pushed for increased autonomy over their health practices. Consequently, traditional ideas around what constitutes well-being would appear to be increasingly questioned with rising support for alternative treatments that allow people to gain further influence on the decisions about how they manage themselves medically.

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped fuel a trend of scepticism towards science that is concerning but is also a fruitful point of investigation for how groups respond to power emanating from structures above them. I witnessed countless individuals using the Facebook groups as platforms for doubt in relation to the virus, its source and treatments, and prevention techniques. While commentary on the morality and validity of these claims is beyond the scope of this project, they have proven to be insightful to how people have learnt to not only question that which has always seemed 'right', 'correct' and 'scientific', but also how they interact with biomedical professionals and organisations that do not always serve people in the ways they are expected to.

Natalie's earlier comment about Discovery and how often she has to motivate for the medical aid provider to cover procedures is an experience shared by many. South Africa is a land of disparity and inequality – our national healthcare system is underfunded and short-staffed and this culminates in many South Africans feeling forced to turn to private healthcare [57].

[57] The recent passing of the National Health Insurance (NHI) bill parliament will complicate this issue even further. The NHI in South Africa is proposed as a system to achieve universal health coverage, with the objective of providing fair access to healthcare services for all residents, irrespective of their socio-economic status. The NHI aims to pool funds from various sources, such as taxes, to establish a unified public health insurance fund covering essential healthcare services. Key components of the NHI proposal include the consolidation of funds, ensuring equitable access, emphasising primary healthcare, fostering collaboration between public and private healthcare providers, and enhancing quality and efficiency through standardization

Generally speaking, a single person on a basic plan can expect to pay around R3 500 per month for medical aid. For families, costs can range from R5 000 to over R10 000 per month depending on their needs[58]. In addition to the monthly premiums, medical aids usually require that you pay for certain services out-of-pocket before you receive any kind of reimbursement. This means that even if you have medical aid coverage, it may still be difficult to afford the care you need if you are not prepared financially. Having worked in the medical field while completing my research, I heard numerous patients complaining that there was no point to having medical aid beyond emergency hospitalisations. When my research came up in conversation, I was assaulted with questions about how to treat boils, stomach aches, muscle spasms, hypertension, and even erectile dysfunction. These people were desperate for solutions. When I pressed them as to why they did not see their family doctors for these kinds of issues, the general consensus was that there was no point. They would be told to try more exercise, drink more water, or be prescribed tablets that came with side-effects more unbearable than the malady itself.

> My view is, you won't help me? Fine, I help myself. I am not powerless.
>
> Interview with Natalie, 12 August 2020

The power relations being expressed not only in my interviews with Natalie, but my interviews and observations in general over the last five years illustrate that there is an ideological struggle over bodies and how they interact with biomedical systems in South Africa. In the specific context of Afrikaner women, they have chosen to arm themselves with *Boererate* in this conflict. When they have been failed and unheard, they turn to age old knowledge, ancestral practices and move the locus of healing away from the disappointment of a doctor's rooms to the well-worn familiarity of their homes. *Boererate* is the often-preferred choice for treating common ailments due to their accessibility and affordability. The ingredients discussed in the groups and treatments such as herbal teas, tinctures, pastes, compresses, and other natural remedies can be found in local supermarkets for much cheaper than conventional medication. Additionally, they have the benefit of not having the side effects associated with pharmaceuticals. There is comfort to be found in the cultural significance of some remedies and value in their holistic approach to healing.

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and monitoring measures. The NHI bill has been framed as a blow to South African taxpayers as it is an increased burden on them. There are many arguments for and against the bill (see Prinsen, 2023)

[58] This information was gathered from a popular insurance aggregator website www.hippo.co.za

The other added benefit is that these remedies play into a phenomenon identified by Crewe (2017) called 'Boer melancholia'. Boer melancholia is a term that Crewe applies to the grieving on the part of many of Afrikaners that has been caused by a profound sense of cultural loss as well as a loss of power, identity, and linguistic hegemony which was experienced after the demise of apartheid. This loss harks back to and revives the cultural memory of loss that was experienced due to the defeat of the Boers in the South African War. Crewe (2017) does not seek to suggest that all Afrikaners viewed the end of apartheid as a loss – in fact, many welcomed it – and I do not wish to espouse that narrative here either. Instead, Crewe highlights that apartheid ended with a culture shock. Afrikaner culture had become so entangled with South African politics throughout the 20th century that it was difficult to try and separate them in the wake of the demise of apartheid. Afrikaners, no matter their political associations, felt a measure of uncertainty about their culture and language.

During apartheid, the Nationalist Party wrote Boer history in such a way as to embed a memory of a nation of people whose very existence was threatened by the British and that Boer leaders were heroes, their exploits the stuff of legends. Yet at the same time that the South African War was being written of and remembered as a heroic time in Boer history, Boers were also deemed to have been victims suffering a great injustice and cruelty at the hands of the British. *Boererate* were fashioned in this atmosphere – heroic, resilient Boer women remained steadfast in the face of the oppressing British yet, were the greatest victims of all with their children dying in their arms in the camps. These stories were the foundation upon which the perceived strength and determination of Afrikaners was built. This strength only grew when the minority managed to take control of the land during the apartheid era and then, some ninety odd years later, it all came down in a stunning display of democracy all around them.

Suddenly, and with reason, the least fashionable thing to be in the world was an Afrikaner. Antjie Krog, a South African writer and academic who is best known for her Afrikaans poetry and her reporting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, claimed that after being confronted by a traumatic loss of power, many Afrikaners subsequently had problems in forming a sense of self that could coherently integrate the legendary Boer past, the apartheid past and the emerging new South African present that carried a legacy of a generation of 'guilty fathers' (Crewe, 2017).

The grappling for control over the dissemination and creation of *Boererate* therefore plays a very important role for a culture in crisis. *Boererate* panders to Afrikaner nostalgia and the desire for 'authentic' cultural commodities. It allows users to connect themselves with a past of legendary heroes and stoic mothers rather than wicked politicians. The growing popularity of *Boererate* is evidence that it not only acts as a bridge across time, but also illustrates how historical memory can be used to redefine one's position in society.

A similar sentiment is discussed by Megan Lewis in her book *Performing Whitely*. In it, she examines Afrikaner performance tactics and media, staged performances, playwrights, and performance artists. In her studies into these various aspects of modern drama, she discovered that many performances hark back to the South African War and play on Afrikaner nostalgia for this era – much in the same vein as Crewe (2017). These laments are viewed with a healthy dose of scepticism in that Afrikaner privilege is something that has thrived even though apartheid came to an end. Lewis (2016) also points out the ethnomythology' that Crewe discussed – that of the righteous *Volk* who have been wronged in the War. Anxiety and discontent of Afrikaners cannot be openly expressed and so performances, and in this context *Boererate*, become a vehicle for articulating repressed feelings. The sheer success and popularity of the Facebook groups indicates that this muted assertion of Afrikaner identity is the winning formula.

Whether comfort is found in structural position within the group, the power one can enact, the resistance one can embody, or the ability to rewrite one's history, the key is that *Boererate* is a powerful tool. Its myriad of uses informs us that it is a malleable system that twists and evolves in response to how we use it. It is in constant use, moulded to fit various settings, but in doing so, heavily affects them too. This almost organic response to the settings it finds itself in also means that *Boererate* carries with it ways of affecting and moulding its users too. This concept of malleability and object agency will be expanded upon more in the next chapter.

Power resides only where men believe it resides.

By applying binary opposition and how it affects power to what I have witnessed in *Boererate* Facebook groups, I can gain insight into how constructing power dynamics around gender and generation shape their structure organisationally - uncovering nuances that cannot be simply reduced down to universal laws. I do not want to espouse an oversimplified analysis of gendered and generational dynamics which lacks variation and overlooks subtleties and will complicate my discussion of hierarchical organisation by relating it to the

specific context in which it appears – that of Afrikaner men and women – by referring to the works of Ortner (1974) and van der Westhuizen (2017) in tandem with Descola (2013). These authors relate their respective discussions to power and its various manifestations – a central issue at play within the Facebook groups, as well as in users' offline lives.

In the examination of power manifestations, dynamic relationships among bodies, politics, and power have come to the forefront. Unveiling the intricate interplay where individual and collective bodies are interwoven into the fabric of existing political structures and power dynamics, the corporeal form transcends its role as a mere personal vessel. Instead, it emerges as a battleground where societal norms, political ideologies, and power relations engage in a continuous negotiation. This awareness is not a detached observation; it is a keen acknowledgment of the ever-shifting nature of these relationships – a perpetual ebb and flow, adaptation, and, at times, outright contestation within the ever-evolving socio-political landscape.

Pylypa's (1998) investigation deepens our understanding of how power is intricately linked to the body. The exploration reveals that our bodies are habituated to external regulation, with power dispersed throughout societies and embedded in networks of practices and institutions. Operating on the micro-levels of everyday life, power facilitates social control through individual self-discipline, leveraging not only the desire to conform but also knowledge. This dynamic gives rise to two distinct forms of deviance correction within the Facebook groups: Afrikaans men reacting to deviations from the norm, and older Afrikaans women strategically utilising the non-neutral and subjective knowledge of *Boererate* to wield influence. This insight sheds light on the nuanced ways power operates within the context of bodily practices and social dynamics.

Sherry Ortner's piece *Is Female to Male and Nature is to Culture* provides a larger and perhaps more immediately relevant framework within which to unpack and start to tease apart the gender relations that were revealed to me during the course of my research. Her article is very much representative of the era in which it was written – second-wave feminism of the 1970s. Second-wave feminism was predominantly focussed on critiquing patriarchal, male-dominated institutions as well as societal cultural practices. Her article supports the notion that male dominance is universal and makes use of Levi-Strauss's structuralist perspective of the binary opposition between male and female. This perspective is overly strident and a sweeping declaration of universal truth which carries with it the erasure of cultural and societal nuance. Ortner's piece has been heavily criticised for its lack of

inclusivity and taking of white, middle-class women as a norm, but this does not leave it without merit – especially as it pertains to my interlocuters and participants who themselves are white, middle-class, and predominantly women. In order to subvert the declaration of universal truth inherit in Ortner's (1974) article, I will discuss its relevance in tandem with Descola's (2013) reformulation of how we should be investigating relationships between nature and culture.

Both Ortner and Descola call for a more nuanced and culturally specific understanding of human-environment relationships. Ortner's focus on symbolic meanings, particularly in relation to gender, resonates with Descola's broader project of deconstructing and reconstructing ontological frameworks. Together, they contribute to a broader anthropological conversation that questions Western-centric perspectives, but Descola transcends this perspective by drawing from extensive cross-cultural examples.

Descola's work goes beyond Ortner's in the scope of his ontological exploration. Where Ortner (1974) only delineated two frameworks, namely nature and culture, Descola (2013) proposes a comprehensive typology of ontological regimes – animism, totemism, analogism, and naturalism. This framework not only encompasses gender relations but extends to how societies conceptualise their entire environment and the relationships between humans and non-human entities. While Ortner's work provides a deep dive into specific cultural practices, Descola's typology offers a more overarching and systematic way to understand the diversity of human conceptualisations.

Descola (2013) argues that the Western conceptualisation of nature and culture as separate realms has influenced the construction of gender roles in Western societies. In cultures that adhere to a naturalistic ontology, by clearly separating nature and culture, gender roles tend to be more rigidly defined, reflecting the broader distinctions between the natural and cultural domains. The conceptualisation of nature as the realm of the biological and culture as the realm of social constructions has often led to fixed expectations about masculine and feminine behaviours. These gender roles are deeply embedded in the societal fabric, influencing everything from family structures to economic and political systems.

When considering Afrikaner framings of gender, it is important to acknowledge how the influence of conservative Christian values, Afrikaner nationalism, and traditional patriarchal and masculine norms, as mentioned earlier, has contributed to distinct gender dynamics. Descola's (2013) analysis provides a theoretical lens through which one can examine how the nature-culture binary, if embraced within Afrikaner thought, might contribute to the framing

of gender roles. If Afrikaner cultural ontologies align more with a naturalistic perspective, emphasizing clear distinctions between the biological and the social, it could manifest in traditional and fixed gender roles within Afrikaner communities. The naturalistic perspective dictates that certain roles, behaviours, or expectations are predetermined by biological differences between men and women. This results in a societal structure where gender roles are perceived as inherent, unchanging, and aligned with a predefined understanding of what is considered natural for men and women. The perpetuation of this framing reinforces and thereby legitimises the behavioural standards that Afrikaans men and women are held to with very little room for flexibility.

Ortner's (1974) exploration of symbols and practices related to gender, can enrich this discussion. Ortner emphasises how symbols and practices are deeply embedded in cultural systems, influencing power dynamics and societal structures. In the context of Afrikaner framings of gender, Ortner's lens allows us to examine the symbolic meanings attached to gender roles within Afrikaner communities. The intersection of symbols, practices, and power dynamics lend themselves to how gender roles are legitimised and perpetuated within this cultural context.

Boererate, functioning as both a symbol and practice, mirrors Ortner's (1974) exploration of gender and power within cultural systems. Ortner's notion of a cultural logic of gender provides a lens through which to analyse how *Boererate* assigns specific roles to women as the keepers of culture. In this framework, women's empowerment is conditional, following established norms and expectations, reminiscent of Ortner's argument that gender roles are deeply embedded in cultural structures. Furthermore, Descola's (2013) conceptualisation of the dualism between nature and culture adds depth to the discussion. *Boererate*, as a cultural practice, reinforces a specific relationship with nature, wherein women are assigned the role of cultural preservation. Descola's idea that different cultures establish distinct ontologies to categorise nature and culture can be applied here, with *Boererate* exemplifying a cultural paradigm where women are both part of and distinct from nature, serving as cultural vessels. Women are also heavily reliant on nature for ingredients thus legitimising this connection even more.

The *Volksmoeder* archetype aligns, perhaps, more with Descola's argument about the blurring of boundaries between nature and culture. Women, as bearers of culture, simultaneously embody and transcend the cultural boundaries set by *Boererate*. The intertwining of cultural practices with gender roles illustrates the complex negotiation

between nature and culture within Afrikaner societies. In the broader context, the interplay of *Boererate* with Ortner's and Descola's ideas sheds light on the intricate ways in which cultural practices, gender roles, and relationships with nature intersect. *Boererate* appears as a cultural system where women, assigned specific roles within a cultural logic, navigate the blurred boundaries between nature and culture, embodying and challenging established norms.

During an interview I had conducted with an interlocutor, Marissa, she mentioned that a previous post of hers, which was related to a suspected bladder infection, had made her the subject of some persecution by men in the group.

> So, I wanted to know what I could do for a bladder infection, right? I think I must have not wiped correctly or used a new soap that was on sale, whatever, it actually doesn't matter. I thought this group would be the best place to ask because all the old *tannies* (aunties) would have at some stage had to go through this. The first few comments were nice, helpful even. And then it started. One man said I should go for an STD test. Another one told me I would have been better off if I just kept my legs closed. One of the comments, it was deleted but I saw it, told me to be honest with my husband – I don't have one – before I gave my disease to him. Like. Can you believe this crap? I won't leave, there is still good info on there but wow.
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> Interview with Marissa, 10 May 2021

There were – and still are – certain expectations of how a woman should behave to be seen as a 'good Afrikaans woman' by others. As I have mentioned before in the thesis, this idealised behaviour is regulated by a concept called *ordentlikheid* which Christi van der Westhuizen (2017) has explored in her book *Sitting Pretty*. Van der Westhuizen (2017, p. 22) writes that *ordentlikheid* can be understood as "ethnicised respectability" and it is a central tenet of female Afrikaner identity. *Ordentlikheid* is a concept that embodies principles like presentability, politeness, decency, good manners and "humility with a Calvinist tenor" (van der Westhuizen, 2017, p. 23). These principles collectively speak to the idea of 'respectability', and this is the primary English translation that she refers to.

The ethnicised responsibility to be *ordentlik* could be seen as a symbolic function of the gender binary that my interlocuters find themselves entangled in. By speaking out about that which has traditionally been viewed as taboo, such as intimate medical concerns, for example, women in the groups no longer abide by ethnicised values and were denounced as such. These values are deeply rooted in patriarchal values that reinforce the traditional roles of women within Afrikaner communities – like the Facebook groups. When a woman transgresses or ignores these norms, she risks being judged harshly by her peers and family members, potentially leading to ostracism. Women who wished to protect themselves from

being associated with an act of transgression would discreetly advise others that a private conversation should be held if they needed inappropriate guidance. This allowed them some measure of being able to provide support without risking their reputation publicly. However, this was not the solution that many had hoped it would be – they had made it known that they had some level of information about the experience of a particular malady.

Participating in discourse is a symbolic sign that one has acquired an understanding of the subject at hand and expresses a certain level of expertise and understanding regarding the topic (McNeill, 2015). Claiming a certain level of knowledge and understanding of a subject can, on the one hand, be empowering as it might mean taking a stand against prejudice and systemic oppression. However, it can also make us feel vulnerable and exposed to judgment. The tacit recognition of another's malady within the group not only validates one's knowledge on the subject but also indicates a wisdom that is gained through experience, rather than formal instruction or explicit communication. This type of knowledge implies a mastery of skills, perspectives, and often involves intuition, creativity, and an ability to draw meaning from various pieces of information. It also implies, in the context of the group, that the women attempting to help were themselves deviant.

These behavioural transgressions are in direct opposition to the docile, passive bodies that Afrikaner women are meant to inhabit. They now fall outside of the norm and their actions must be met with targeted disciplinary strategies in order to bring them back into the fray. One such example about disciplinary measures being enacted on a transgressor can be seen in my initial interactions with the Pastel Statues as discussed in chapter 4. When my behaviour was deemed to be inappropriate and unacceptable, I was met with stark criticism and other such measures (icing out, mockery etc) in order to correct the undesirable behaviour and bring me back into the realm of acceptable. This is also seen, again in chapter 4, when I explain how I had to tailor the way I presented myself so that I could progress through the spheres of knowledge – people who do not behave do not get to the corpus, the most sacred of knowledge that has constructed everything else around it.

Afrikaans men, regardless of age, would react badly to women's posts if they were – according to the norms promoted by the maxims of *ordentlikheid* – deemed too graphic, overly descriptive of intimate issues, or even if language use was too vulgar. They would use the 'angry' react on posts as well as comment that a particular behaviour was unacceptable for the platform of the Facebook group. Older Afrikaans women would also correct behaviour by using their knowledge of *Boererate* and the prestige and authority it afforded

them. This was enacted by talking about what the poster should or should not do and this moral discourse would associate the poster with personal irresponsibility and immorality (Pylypa, 1998). Penalties, such as the post being deleted or the poster being blocked for a certain number of days, are imposed for the explosion of inappropriate behaviour which results in an internalisation of this moral ideology and ultimately produces a flock that engages in self-surveillance.

One of the first things mentioned across my interviews was that *Boererate* is disseminated – and ultimately controlled – by older female generations. This has enabled women to play an invaluable role in structuring this knowledge and making sure that traditions and cultures are maintained. In considering how women are central to the generation as well as the maintenance of cultural identity, they are also often bound to domesticity. These ideals are maintained by the concept of the *Volksmoeder*. Afrikaner nationalism heavily emphasised the role of the *Volksmoeder*. The *Volksmoeder* image was forged in the crucible of the South African War when Afrikaans women and children were placed in concentration camps (see chapter 3 of this thesis) and had to be incredibly resilient in order to survive it. However, this image was later "muted and transformed" (McClintock, 1993, p. 73) and turned into one of a suffering, self-sacrificial and stoic mother. After the South African War, Van der Westhuizen (2017) argues that Afrikaner men began to police Afrikaner women and their behaviour. By using respectability, Afrikaner heterofemininity was reproduced and became a yardstick for measuring women's 'goodness'. This dual position of strong, but gentle is embodied by elder Afrikaner women who occupy the role of admin in the Facebook groups. They must be strong enough to correct behaviour, but still soft and pliable enough to be considered decent and respectable.

Ortner (1974) and van der Westhuizen's (2017) works dive into the patriarchal expectations of femininity that have been imposed upon women in their communities, who must abide by behavioural expectations if they wish to be deserving of male protection. This oppressive notion has caused female behaviour and cognition to become heavily monitored - amplifying already existing gender inequalities within society. By applying these concepts to the Facebook groups, I want to further elucidate these diverse understandings surrounding gender roles and their nuance by expanding on the opposing position of men. It appears then that, much in the vein of Ortner's (1974) writing of how men act to control and tame nature, they have attempted to create the same limitations around which types of healing practices can be used, and when, to maintain a sense of control. Men's posts about *Boererate* are rigid in their

applications and ingredient recommendations, while women's suggestions were more open to interpretation in the comments section.

The posts authored by men regarding *Boererate* embody a more formalised and assertive tone, reflecting a certain authority where their expressions carry weight. These contributions often feature a structured format, presenting precise applications and ingredient recommendations with an air of finality. The communication style maintains a degree of detachment, evident in the use of generic images sourced from the internet and posts meticulously formatted, possibly crafted in Microsoft Word before posting. The tone conveys a straightforward conveyance of information, leaving limited space for negotiation or compromise.

In contrast, the women's engagement with *Boererate* in the group adopts a more open and collaborative approach. Their posts lack a ceremonial air, displaying a directness that suggests a readiness to inquire, suggest, and engage in discussions with fellow group members. These contributions aim not only to share information but also to nurture a sense of community through open dialogue. Unlike the more formalised approach seen in men's posts, the women's suggestions often embrace a level of interpretation, allowing for flexibility and adaptability, particularly evident in the comments section. The screenshots below illustrate how differently posts were formatted and interacted with.

The screenshot below is of a question which was answered only by women. As indicated in the post, there are 97 comments and most take the approach of the top five which I have been able to display here. There are offers for different ingredients, different ways to apply mixtures, advice on dietary adjustments, instructions on what could be added to a bath to treat the boil, links to online clothing stores that sell linen shirts and trousers so as to not irritate the skin, and, finally, one of my all-time favourites that emerged from my time in the groups – toothpaste.

[What works for boils?]

[Make sure it is a boil and not a spider bite]

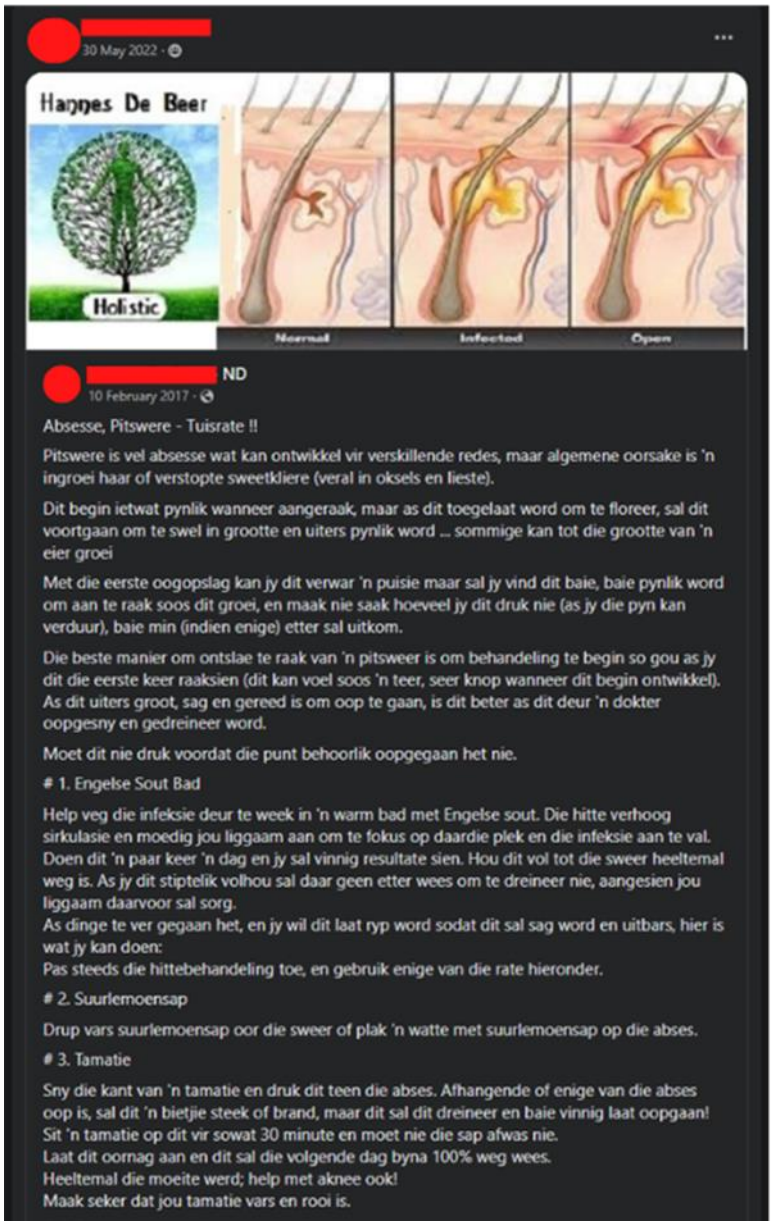
[Sunlight soap and sugar make a pasta (sic) stick plaster over it]

[Apply eye ointment in your nose it keeps it away. And not just your nose but everyone in the house as it helped us, had about twelve and that is all that helped me good luck it is sore]

[Zinc pills]

[Get nose ointment at the pharmacy, it is a germ that is in your nose]

The second screenshot is a post made by a male member of the group, not in response to a question but rather as point of just sharing information. This particular post has been reposted on the group in the exact same format since 2017 and never really garners much attention or interaction. There are usually two or three comments that thank the user, or the comments consist of only a thumbs up emoji from one of the admins.



[Abscesses, Boils - Home remedies !!

Boils are skin abscesses that can develop for various reasons, but common causes are an ingrown hair or clogged sweat glands (especially in the armpits and groin).

It starts off somewhat painful when touched, but if allowed to thrive, it will continue to swell in size and become extremely painful...some can grow to the size of an egg

At first glance you may mistake it for a pimple but you will find that it becomes very, very painful to the touch as it grows, and no matter how much you press it (if you can bear the pain), very little (if any) pus will come out.

The best way to get rid of a boil is to start treatment as soon as you first notice it (it can feel like a tender, sore lump when it starts to develop). If it is extremely large, soft and ready to open, it is better if it is cut open and drained by a doctor.

Do not press it until the tip has opened properly.

1. English Bath Salts

Help fight the infection by soaking in a warm bath with Epsom salt. The heat increases circulation and encourages your body to focus on that spot and attack the infection.

Do this several times a day and you will see results quickly. Keep it up until the ulcer is completely gone. If you keep it up promptly there will be no pus to drain as your body will take care of it.

If things have gone too far, and you want to let it ripen so that it will soften and burst, here's what you can do:

Still apply the heat treatment, and use any of the advice below.

2. Lemon juice

Drip fresh lemon juice over the ulcer or stick a cotton ball with lemon juice on the abscess.

#3. Tomato

Cut the side of a tomato and press it against the abscess. Depending on whether any of the abscesses are open, it will sting or burn a little, but it will drain and open very quickly!

Put a tomato on it for about 30 minutes and do not wash off the juice.

Leave it on overnight and it will be almost 100% gone the next day.

Totally worth it; helps with acne too!

Make sure your tomato is fresh and red.]

Homeopathy vs Home Remedies

In my investigation into *Boererate*, I began to notice that where men were actively involved in posting on the groups and answering queries, it was done from the point of view of homeopathy and not framed as *Boererate* – even though they were posting on *Boererate* Facebook groups. This divergence is notable, as it underscores a departure from the more domestic and traditionally female-associated realm of *Boererate*. While delving into the intricate history and inner workings of homeopathy exceeds the project's scope, its relevance becomes evident when considering the roles of men within the Facebook groups. A conspicuous contrast emerged in the approaches of male and female participants. Men often asserted dominance by prescribing specific solutions, while women engaged in nuanced deliberations about ingredient availability, combinations, and the broader application of treatments.

This dichotomy implies an attempt by men to limit discussions about alternative remedies, thereby maintaining control over the discourse. My research at the University of Pretoria's Special Collection revealed not only a dominance in male authorship regarding compendium-style books concerning *Boererate*, but also an attempt to regulate and limit women's access to traditional folk remedies. This type of behaviour is reflective of broader patriarchal structures which work towards entrenching gender inequality by excluding certain groups

from social participation or influence - ultimately reinforcing these oppressive power dynamics. The prevailing perception amongst male participants was that homeopathy was a scientific approach to healthcare and had been predominantly developed and practiced by men. Some male homeopaths seemed oblivious to the irony that their remedies, born out of and ostensibly based on the South African War and women's efforts to account for missing ingredients, failed to accommodate ingredient shortages – a stark contrast, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when shelves frequently stood empty for weeks.

I had the opportunity to interview one of these male homoeopaths who, insisted throughout the hour-long exchange that he was "terribly busy" and had patients he needed to return to. I was the only person in the waiting room and when I left, the corduroy couches were still vacant. He emphasised all throughout our conversations that there be no exchange nor accommodation in the application of his remedies – he was a trained professional and someone who did not have his education could not possibly anticipate how to treat various maladies. When I mentioned that the remedies that he was using were based on Boer women's ingenuity during the South African War, he argued that I was misinformed and that he had developed all the remedies completely on his own. He did not consent to be interviewed again.

> Can you tell me why you don't want there to be any accommodation or substi- (he cut me off in the middle of the word)
>
> Because you people don't know what you are doing! It could be very dangerous if you suddenly decide you want to make your own assumptions or mixtures, you don't know what you are doing!
>
> Wait, I'm confused. I thought homeopathy was not dangerous – that was part of the 'buy in' that you explained to me earlier – it is not as foreign to your body or risky as biomedicine, now you are telling me it is dangerous? Forgive me for asking what I assume is a dumb question, but can one overdose on your medication?
>
> I am not going to give away my researched and tested measurements to you. Just know, you should not mess with it.
>
> Okay, I respect that. I am sorry if I upset you. I just want to ask one more thing – for clarity. A lot of the remedies on your pamphlet look a lot like the ones I have been reading about in the archives – the ones that grew from times of desperation and lack, their essence is accommodation and revision. Is it –
>
> These are all completely my own. I don't know what you are even talking about. You do not chop and change as it suits you. Are we done here?
>
> Anonymous[59] 22 May 2021

With a long history in South Africa, Afrikaner culture has often been characterised by how the apartheid state government utilised various forms of social control in order to maintain its

[59] He declined to pick a pseudonym nor even have one for the purposes of this thesis.

oppressive regime which was preoccupied with traditional forms of social control that were used to support and perpetuate the existing power structure which was largely dominated by men. It is undeniable there can be cases where this narrative does not always apply; however, its overarching presence must still be acknowledged. The disempowerment of women was a component of this social control which perpetuated male domination within Afrikaner homes and, in doing so, affects even the smallest parts of how Afrikaner men and women interact and organise their lives around each other. This, in turn, gives rise to men attempting to, as much as they can, influence and control the discourse around *Boererate*.

One of my interlocutors, Adeline, told me a story about this interaction and her framing of it helped me to understand her frustrations,

> I have always relied on *Boererate* to care for my friends and family. My *ouma* [grandmother] taught me everything I know and even taught me how to grind herbs and smooth them into balms properly – real craftsmanship. One day, I posted on the group about how people can mix a cream to help with sore joints – I saw lots of the *oumensies* [diminutive – old people] on the group were asking for help. Out of the blue, this man sends me an inbox, *'n regte kortmannetjiesindroom* [a real Napoleon Complex] if ever I saw one. He proceeded to criticise me and my methods, saying I wasn't using the remedies properly. So, I listened and mixed some of his things into the comments on my original post and wow, I should not have done that. He was pissed. *Maar hy moet maar aangaan. Shame, so opgewonde oor hoe mense goed in hul eie huis doen.* [But he must carry on. Shame, he is so worked up about what people do in their own homes].

Interview with Adeline, 12 May 2021

Adeline went on to explain that she carried on chatting to the man who was upset that she offered alternatives to some of the oils she had recommended and even took offence that she said that the cream could be stored in a Tupperware or an old Vaseline tub. "He just hated everything I said and the options I gave", she told me.

These women's stories and the passion with which they shared them showed me that *Boererate* and the way it underpins and supports structures in their lives is an important tradition that is largely disseminated by women. While these traditions may not always offer a complete solution to health problems, they do provide Afrikaner women with a measure of control over their lives and bodies. It also offers Afrikaner women the opportunity to take care of themselves in a way that feels empowering and familiar. By using these remedies, women can tap into their ancestral wisdom and knowledge to address common health concerns, without having to rely solely on biomedical interventions. Especially when so many have felt tricked and trapped by biomedicine.

Conclusions

In the complex tapestry of Afrikaner Facebook groups, this chapter serves as a snapshot capturing a specific moment during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The examination of how these communities responded not only provides insights into the dynamics of power and authority but also reveals the resilience of older ideas and structures in the face of contemporary adversities. Ultimately, the themes and power relations discussed in this chapter are complex, constantly shifting structures that shape how group members view their lives and the world around them. Understanding these dynamics is an important step towards understanding how specific groups of people are interacting with overarching structures and systems that seek to exert control over their bodies. What has been described in this chapter is a specific point in the history of not only these Facebook groups, but a portion of Afrikaner society during a tumultuous time in world history – the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding how smaller groups of people responded to the threat of the virus helps us to understand how and why communities behave in certain ways, and how aspects of their culture are expressed. Through studying alongside with small-scale societies, we can gain insight into larger questions about human dynamics, systems of knowledge, and the structure of power that shapes our society at large.

Older Afrikaans women hold tight to the reins of medical and healing narratives, using their authority and status to preserve their positions of power over younger generations. The power dynamics between elders and the youth can be challenging, but it is also essential that these conversations take place in order to foster intentional engagement with complex ideas. These discussions are fraught with behavioural expectations as well as checks and balances and are a reminder that even in the often-idealised world of online interactions, we are still shaped and guided by the rules of our offline lives. The policing actions of older generations remind younger Afrikaners that are not beyond the reach of the proverbial wooden spoon – *ordentlikheid* is to be expected. Whilst these networks of encounters are littered with rules of engagement, they do foster dialogue and may offer innovative ways to share knowledge.

The intersection of Ortner's and Descola's ideas illuminates the complex negotiation between nature and culture within Afrikaner societies. *Boererate*, as both a symbol and practice, reinforces specific gender roles while simultaneously providing a space for women to navigate and challenge established norms. The *Volksmoeder* archetype, embodying resilience and sacrifice, intertwines with Descola's argument about the blurring of boundaries between nature and culture, illustrating the intricate ways cultural practices, gender roles, and relationships with nature intersect. Within the Facebook groups, gender expectations are

evident, and women who deviate from traditional norms face disciplinary measures. The gendered nature of these interactions underscores the ongoing negotiation between traditional expectations and evolving expressions of agency within the digital realm.

The dynamics of power, authority, and agency within Afrikaans female admin-led *Boererate* Facebook groups are intricately woven into the digital fabric shaped by the Facebook platform and the broader sociocultural context. Applying Max Weber's framework reveals the multifaceted nature of power, where the digital structure, algorithms, and moderation tools determine the parameters within which administrators and members operate. Despite wielding agency in steering discussions and moderating content, Afrikaans female admins navigate within the constraints imposed by the platform's design, illustrating the complex interplay between structure and agency.

The parallels drawn between historical Boer women in concentration camps and contemporary Afrikaans female admins underscore the enduring negotiation between agency and structural limitations. Whether constrained by historical circumstances or digital platforms, the interplay between power dynamics and structured environments persists. Afrikaans female admins, while holding unique roles in shaping narratives, operate within a cultural echo chamber that both reinforces traditional norms and allows for disruption, particularly in empowering women to challenge established expectations regarding their bodies and health. The agency and power of Afrikaans female admins extend beyond visible features to the influence of unseen figures –the engineers and developers at Facebook. The decisions made by these hidden figures shape the structural and functional aspects of the platform, adding a layer to the intricate web of power dynamics within the digital space. The digital environment, where cultural knowledge intersects with notions of femininity, becomes a complex terrain where administrators balance agency with societal expectations.

In navigating the virtual realm, Afrikaans female admins engage with *Boererate* not only as a reservoir of cultural knowledge but also as a form of resistance against the biomedical system and the prevailing political order in South Africa. The empowerment derived from cultural heritage enables them to wield knowledge as a tool of resistance, challenging existing political structures and finding strength in shared experiences. *Boererate* serves not just as a practical source of information but as a deliberate choice to reclaim agency and autonomy over health and well-being, highlighting its role as a powerful means of resistance against perceived shortcomings in the broader sociopolitical landscape.

Sherry Ortner's exploration of gender dynamics, woven into the fabric of Philippe Descola's ontological frameworks and Max Weber's concept of legitimate authority, forms a rich tapestry that unravels the nuanced complexities within these digital spaces. Weber's triad of legitimate authority – traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational – proves indispensable in dissecting the establishment and perpetuation of authority within Afrikaner Facebook groups. As users navigate the concentric spheres of knowledge, Weber's conceptualisation becomes palpable, especially as one approaches the core of *Boererate*, guarded by elder Afrikaner women. Acting as ritual experts, these women wield a unique blend of traditional and charismatic authority, drawing on long-standing customs while embodying the charisma derived from their expertise. The resilience of older ideas and structures is manifest in the authority these women command, shaping discussions and preserving cultural practices within the digital realm.

The power dynamics between generations, reminiscent of Weber's emphasis on legitimacy, unfold as older Afrikaner men and women exercise their cultural authority, particularly in controlling narratives surrounding medical and healing practices. The policing actions of older generations serve as a reminder that even within the seemingly liberated online interactions, offline norms endure, emphasising the enduring concept of *ordentlikheid*. Yet, *Boererate* disrupts conventional biomedical approaches, and the resistance it encounters echoes Weber's exploration of the struggle for legitimacy. Afrikaner women, possessing intuitive knowledge of alternative healing practices, challenge existing power structures, actively sustaining traditional methods through digital platforms. This fusion of advanced technology with precolonial healing methods creates a malleable space where cultural practices not only survive but adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring the resilience and popularity of *Boererate*.

Through utilising digital platforms like Facebook, traditional healing practices are actively being sustained in new ways. These platforms act as libraries of *Boererate* – storing and cataloguing all the remedies and recipes for anyone with access to the group to access with relative ease. They also provide a space for Afrikaner women to share their vast knowledge of herbs and treatments with others and cement their roles as experts and cultural authorities as well as, within limits, push back against men and patriarchy. The fusion between advanced technology and precolonial methods of healing has fostered a dynamic space where healing methods and remedies are constantly being remoulded and suited to a changing population and shifting group dynamic. This malleability is what ensure its survival and popularity and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Reshaping Realities

The previous chapter drew on various and recurring motifs of power in its assorted manifestations as observed in the Facebook groups and during interviews. Throughout this thesis I have made allusions to how *Boererate*, as a system of knowledge, has survived and adapted to different situations it has found itself in. The preservation of this knowledge system throughout the history that has been discussed in the preceding chapters has been shaped by a combination of coincidence and intentionality. Necessity and circumstance have had a significant influence on ways in which remedies have been passed from one generation to another, but there is also much to be said about the conscious safeguarding and maintenance of *Boererate*.

There is a complex interplay between people who interact with *Boererate* and the role that this knowledge system conversely plays in their lives. From what I have gathered from my various streams of data, my evidence would appear to suggest that *Boererate* has demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to the changing social, political and technological environments in which it exists over time. I will therefore argue in this chapter how this knowledge system and the cultural artefacts embedded within it – remedies, ingredients, printed compendiums and even the Facebook groups themselves – have become imbued with meaning and have acted as both canvas and artist throughout history. I will also argue that *Boererate* should be recognised as an example of an African indigenous knowledge system. In this chapter, I engage with the work of Mbembe which as we shall see is important and helpful in thinking through the relationship between *Boererate*, agency and people, but ultimately falls short of the critical nuance needed for my analysis. I will bring this into conversation with Lambek and Barth (as discussed in chapter 4) in order to adequately highlight how complex this knowledge system is.

As I have already demonstrated in this thesis, *Boererate* and the power dynamics with which it is entwined have a profound impact on various aspects of its users' lives – ranging from personal relationships to larger social structures. I have shown how the allure of authority through expertise in the knowledge system brings women into its orbit, whist at the same time influencing their behaviour in various ways. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that, to some extent, individuals are active shapers of *Boererate*, and reciprocally, the knowledge system shapes them. This dynamic between individuals and *Boererate,* which will be discussed in greater detail within this chapter, underscores the symbiotic relationship wherein *Boererate* both influences and is influenced by the very individuals who engage with

it. In the following discussions, I will show how this knowledge system is characterised by its malleability and how it allows for new ways of thinking and a more inclusive approach to problem-solving—a capability that was essential to its formation in South African War concentration camps as well as contemporary settings and will ensure its survival for generations to come.

While *Boererate* has undergone substantial evolution over time, its influence extends beyond its mere historical development. Notably, it exerts a reciprocal effect, actively participating in the moulding of the individuals who engage with it. This phenomenon bears remarkable significance as it imparts a substantial imprint upon the values and norms of these individuals. Furthermore, it serves as a conduit for the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage, thus perpetuating a continuum of traditions. This process, in turn, plays an instrumental role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their societal roles and positions.

Mbembe's 2016 Abiola Lecture on the plasticity of knowledge focuses on how knowledge changes over time. It argues that knowledge is constantly in flux and that it is shifting and evolving, not static and unchanging. Mbembe (2016) offers a critique of the dominant tradition in knowledge production, advocating for a reimagining of education with Africa at its core. In aligning with the philosophies of Frantz Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, he underscores the imperative of rejecting colonial ideologies, and emphasises embracing African languages and perspectives. Additionally, Mbembe discusses the significance of acknowledging the interconnections between humans and non-humans, shaping a future that is both inclusive and democratic. He advocates for a transformative and inclusive approach to decolonisation that challenges existing power structures and promotes a more equitable and diverse society, and it is within this context that he argues that knowledge systems need to be redefined. Mbembe argues that plasticity is a crucial concept in this process of redefinition and decolonisation.

Mbembe (2016) states that decolonisation is not a one-time event or a fixed destination, but rather that it is an ongoing process. While attempting to capture this nature in something as static as print may be like trying to catch lightening in a bottle, I want to use this space to highlight the importance of understanding and representing the fluidity of knowledge. Approaching *Boererate* in this way not only enables me to shift between different perspectives and frameworks, but also allows me to broaden my argument to ultimately avoid the much criticised 'butterfly collections' – a term coined by Edward Leach. He used it to refer to when anthropological inquiries were not able to move beyond only simple empirical

documentation and the resultant efforts did not amount to much more than collecting butterflies for display. He argued that when our work is without comparison and never brought into conversation with others, we are left with nothing but isolated stories that do not give us much information about the state of the world. In order to be relevant, anthropology needs to connect small, local studies to larger social processes in which they thrive and from which they emerged.

In tracing the evolution of *Boererate* throughout my thesis, I have unravelled its intricate journey from creolised medicine, originating in the challenging conditions of the South African War concentration camps, to its resilience during the apartheid era, and finally finding its way onto the internet. This indigenous knowledge system has not only endured but has seamlessly transitioned into the internet age, often converging with biomedicine in unexpected ways. What emerges is the undeniable plasticity of *Boererate*, an adaptability that allows it to navigate the complexities of historical, cultural, and technological shifts. While I have demonstrated in chapter 4 that *Boererate* has a core of knowledge – the corpus – it is subject to ebbs and flows of information and additions – much like how a dictionary maintains its contents but is regularly updated with new words.

Through this exploration, it becomes evident that *Boererate* is more than a collection of remedies – it is a dynamic and living system of knowledge. Drawing on Mbembe's ideas around indigenous African knowledge systems as characterised by remarkable plasticity, *Boererate* is positioned as an indigenous form of knowledge rooted in a specific African context. This framing is not merely an acknowledgment of its South African origins but an assertion of its status as a resilient and adaptive system that has evolved through diverse historical epochs.

Furthermore, *Boererate* reveals intriguing symbolic resonances with pre-colonial African knowledge systems. The plasticity inherent in *Boererate*, as it weaves through different historical periods and engages with contemporary biomedical practices, mirrors the adaptive qualities of African knowledge systems that Mbembe (2001) describes. This continuity, combined with its ability to integrate with modern biomedical approaches, suggests a profound interconnectedness with indigenous African ways of understanding health and healing. The roots of *Boererate*, being a hybrid form that emerged from the crucible of the South African War concentration camps, marked the initial stages of the development of *Boererate*, showcasing its inherent plasticity in absorbing and melding various healing traditions. The enduring journey of *Boererate* through the tumultuous era of apartheid serves

as a testament to its resilience and adaptability. This endurance attests to its plastic nature, constantly evolving and adjusting to the socio-political climate while maintaining its cultural roots. The digital age ushered in a new chapter for *Boererate* as it found its way onto the internet. This transition demonstrates its adaptability in flourishing on modern platforms. This migration to the digital realm highlights its ability to navigate diverse cultural landscapes and engage with a broader audience, thereby extending its reach and impact.

Crucially, *Boererate* often intersects with biomedicine, illustrating a fascinating convergence of traditional and Western medical paradigms. This intersection challenges conventional notions of a rigid dichotomy between indigenous healing practices and biomedicine, emphasising the plasticity of *Boererate* further as it negotiates its place within a complex healthcare ecosystem. In framing *Boererate* as an 'African Indigenous System of Knowledge,' the work of Mbembe becomes a valuable lens through which to interpret its significance. Mbembe's theoretical framework allows for a nuanced understanding of *Boererate*, situating it within the broader context of African knowledge systems. This characterisation positions *Boererate* as a dynamic and evolving system, rooted in indigenous wisdom yet constantly adapting to contemporary realities. Furthermore, the intriguing symbolic resonances with pre-colonial African knowledge systems add depth to the argument. *Boererate*, in its plasticity, forges a continuity that transcends colonial disruptions. This assertion aligns with Mbembe's conceptualisation, emphasising the intricate connections between *Boererate* and the rich tapestry of pre-colonial African knowledge.

There is more than one way to skin a cat

Mbembe's 2016 Abiola Lecture marked an especially important conversation in ongoing decolonisation discourse. In it, he delved into a history of evolving identities of societies and cultures as well as his own observations into politics within Africa. Drawing from his own research and personal insights, Mbembe provides an exploration of pertinent moments in history such as colonialism, postcolonialism, nationalism, and globalisation within African contexts. Mbembe (2001), in a previous publication, argues that social science has the capacity to comprehensively incorporate the temporal aspects of moments in time and their contextual relevance and thus manages to complicate them beyond being simply categories of history. Approaching these moments in time with a temporal lens of analysis enables social scientists to explore their progression over time and understand their dynamic processes and transformations. By examining moments in time through a temporal lens, it becomes apparent that the construction of knowledge plays a pivotal role in shaping our understanding of

historical events. Understanding how knowledge is ascribed to the categories of valid and invalid becomes a crucial aspect in deciphering the intricacies of these temporal contexts.

Within the framework of *Boererate*, the notion of 'moments in time' takes on a profound significance, encompassing epochal shifts that have marked its historical landscape. Epochal shifts, characterised by transformative events like colonialism, wars, and epidemics, serve as pivotal junctures that reverberate through time, exerting a discernible impact on the construction and transmission of this knowledge. Colonialism, as one of these momentous shifts, imposed new dynamics on the communities practicing what would become *Boererate*. The arrival of colonial powers introduced external influences that inevitably shaped the contours of this traditional knowledge. It prompted adaptations, amalgamations, and, at times, resistances within *Boererate*, reflecting a dynamic interplay between the traditional and the external. Wars, another influential force, brought disruptions and upheavals, compelling communities to reassess and modify their practices of *Boererate* in response to the challenges posed by conflict. The exigencies of wartime conditions led to innovative uses of available resources or alterations in the application of *Boererate* for health and well-being. Epidemics, with their far-reaching consequences, have similarly left an indelible mark on the evolution of *Boererate*. The need for effective remedies during times of health and social crises drive the refinement and adaptation of *Boererate*, showcasing the pragmatic and responsive nature of *Boererate* in the face of pressure and challenges.

This exploration, of historical evolution, societal interactions, and its ongoing dialogue with the forces that have moulded its existence sets the stage for understanding how societal constructs, norms, and values contribute to the shaping and evaluation of knowledge, as elucidated by Mbembe (2016), shedding light on the complex interplay between cultural practices and societal standards. Mbembe (2016) explains that society shapes knowledge by determining what is considered "valid" or "invalid" information. This includes social and cultural norms as well as established rules and regulations. These standards dictate what is seen as acceptable or unacceptable knowledge at any particular time and by different groups, which in turn impacts how people perceive and interpret the world around them. For example, an individual might be judged more harshly for rejecting certain accepted beliefs than they would be for embracing them. Thus, society often determines which types of knowledge are valued or devalued, creating a hierarchy of knowledge that can lead to inequities and disparities between groups.

Examining the utilisation of *Boererate* amid the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the rampant spread of 'Fake News' and conspiracy theories, offers a compelling perspective for delving into the nuances of 'valid' and 'invalid' knowledge. These occurrences underscore a more extensive societal dilemma in discerning various types of knowledge. The relevance of the concepts of valid and invalid knowledge becomes particularly pronounced when considering the proliferation of fake news and conspiracy theories during the pandemic, as detailed in the preceding chapter.

On the surface, valid knowledge, especially in academic and scientific contexts, is built on rigorous methods, empirical evidence, and reasoning. Fake news, on the other hand, often involves the dissemination of misleading or false information. The spread of fake news can undermine the validity of information, as it deviates from established standards of accuracy and reliability. In the era of digital communication, distinguishing between valid and false information becomes increasingly challenging, requiring individuals to critically evaluate sources and apply sound epistemic principles. Conspiracy theories are often classified as invalid knowledge – it lacks a solid foundation, is based on misinterpretations, or relies on flawed reasoning. While not all conspiracy theories are necessarily false, they often diverge from established evidence and rational discourse. The invalidity of certain conspiracy theories lies in their departure from well-established facts, reliance on anecdotal evidence, or endorsement of explanations that defy accepted scientific principles.

However, the acceptance or rejection of certain knowledge, whether valid or invalid, is not solely determined by its inherent qualities as delineated above. Power dynamics play a significant role in shaping what is recognised as valid or invalid within a society. In the case of fake news and conspiracy theories, the dissemination and acceptance of such information can be influenced by media outlets, social networks, and political agendas. The power to define what constitutes valid knowledge can be a contested terrain.

In his lecture, Mbembe (2016) refers to the 2016 decolonisation protests that happened across South African university campuses and highlights that the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town was a triumph in the name of deconstructing historical mythologies – especially those of whiteness. The historical mythology of whiteness is well researched and written about, especially within the South African context and how it was weaponised by a small group in order to legitimise their claims to land and labour. However, mythologies are not simply collections of grand stories and legends but rather a complex set of narratives woven together from various smaller facets. Old wives tales,

folklore, home remedies and other seemingly insignificant stories are essential building blocks that help construct the larger mythological framework. These smaller narratives help to contextualise and make relatable the grander aspects of mythology, allowing people to fully grasp and understand them. Without these small facets, the larger mythology would lack the depth and nuance necessary to truly resonate with people and capture their imagination.

The mythology surrounding *Boererate* and how it has become woven into the identities of my interlocuters and the communities they engage in is testament to how something as simple as a home remedy is charged with meaning and power beyond treating illness. The basic act of one of my interlocuters electing to treat themselves rather that attending to a family doctor or treating physician invokes – for them – a family history of suffering, weathering of storms, and triumph in the face of unimaginable adversity. It is as if one had to step through time and ask a great-great-great grandmother for some help with a rash. My interlocuters described this kind of experience in a highly romanticised way and spoke about tapping into a collective history and ways of keeping their forebears 'alive' by using their remedies that have been passed down through generations. This significance and importance that women attribute to *Boererate* represent merely the superficial layer of the profound power and meaning inherent within these remedies, as they encompass multifaceted dimensions that extend beyond initial observations.

The respect with which interlocuters spoke of their use of *Boererate*, its history, and the people who shaped it led me to understand that this knowledge system functions as so much more than a vehicle of healing. When I would introduce myself to new participants I would be heralded as a 'good and true' academic as I was finally giving this knowledge the attention that it deserved. Many of the women expressed that it was my duty to place *Boererate* on the world's stage and for everyone to finally see it for the *tour de force* it was. I realised very quickly how powerful the mythology surrounding *Boererate* was. Through my fieldwork and data collection process, I have found that *Boererate* is constantly being framed and reframed within the context of past and present as well as empowering the women who use it to navigate and actively participate in shaping their social standings by providing them with a means to access and exchange knowledge, assert agency over their health and well-being, engage in intergenerational bonding, and challenge traditional expectations of biomedical treatments.

Mbembe (2001) emphasises the need to challenge hegemonic knowledge structures and hierarchies, as well as the importance of acknowledging multiple forms of knowledge.

During interviews with my interlocuters, a recurring complaint that women had was that it appeared to them, through their interaction with doctors and biomedical spaces, that there was only ever one correct approach, method, and conclusion – regardless of the information that they continued to supply during consultations. One of my interlocuters, Tessa, told me about her recent trip to her GP and how his diagnosis "stuck to [her] like shit in Velcro".

> I had been struggling with a really quick heartrate, even when I was sitting down just reading it would feel like I had just run a marathon. I would hear my heart racing when it got quiet at night, and I always wanted to sleep and rest to calm it down. I didn't want to go to my doctor because it always felt like I was irritating him when I was there. Always a story of five minutes, in and out, and nothing ever got better. My friends finally convinced me to just try. The minute I told him what I was experiencing, he asked me how things were at home. How was my husband's job, was the house running fine, were my parents healthy. I thought it was weird but answered him honestly. He then said I was experiencing nothing more than "garden variety anxiety" – I will never forget how he framed it – and wrote me a script for anti-anxiety pills. I left, in a huff, filled the script and went home and seethed. I tried another doctor, same story. I tried just chatting to the pharmacist when I was picking up the pills and he said that the doctor would know more than anyone. I just couldn't shake this anxiety story. And my heartrate never really improved, I was still always tired, but I couldn't get help.
>
> Interview with Tessa, 10 October 2020

Tessa took her medication diligently everyday hoping that it just needed to build up in her system for it to take effect but after 3 months of consultations and referrals, she felt no better – in fact, she reported that she was feeling worse. I inquired as to whether or not she sought out a second opinion and she told me that she had visited three other doctors who all told her she was experiencing anxiety and made no changes to the medication that she was prescribed by her doctor. She then made the decision to post on a *Boererate* Facebook group to ask about the medication and if anyone was having a similar experience to her. She described her symptoms, posted her query, and began refreshing the page hoping for advice. Within an hour of the post going live, she had received twelve responses. Of those twelve, three were women who commented they were experiencing the same issues and were following the post hoping to get some answers for themselves, two men commented recommending Tessa contact their doctors who had diagnosed some kind of heart health problem from the same set of symptoms, and nine other women had tagged a female doctor in the comments urging Tessa to reach out to her.

I asked Tessa if she reached out to either of the doctors that the men had recommended, and she shook her head angrily at me. She explained that these were two of the doctors that she had already seen and both of them had diagnosed her with her anxiety. She went on to explain that neither of them had checked her blood pressure nor had they requested any blood tests.

Tessa reached out to the female doctor who had been recommended in the comments and upon arriving at the appointment, her blood pressure was taken and a form for blood tests was given to her. In the consultation, the doctor took an extensive history of Tessa's health (including that of her immediate family) and asked her about the medication that she was taking and how she felt about it. Tessa reported that she broke down crying in the consultation and told me that it felt like someone was actually listening to her for the first time in months.

It turned out that Tessa had incredibly high cholesterol and her blood pressure was also elevated – to a point of deep concern. Tessa was immediately taken off the anxiety medication, she was prescribed a round of blood pressure and cholesterol medications and she was sent to see a dietician. She told me that the rate at which suddenly everything was happening did scare her at first and she feared that it would all be too good to be true. However, within a few months, Tessa's heartrate had slowed, her blood pressure had dropped, and she had lost seven kilograms. Tessa reported these successes to the Facebook group and recommended that anyone with even the smallest of doubt should reach out to her new doctor. I asked Tessa if she would mind if I reached out to her new doctor[60] and she encouraged me to contact her.

Dr Grey[61] welcomed me into her consultation room with a cup of hibiscus tea and flicked on her 'Do Not Disturb Sign'. After some introductions and brief chat about how we found ourselves in our respective careers, she explained that after training as a medical doctor she pursued a diploma in homeopathy. She explained her motivations were initially akin to those of an atheist studying the Bible – to point out all the flaws and to look down upon the uninformed. However, she explained that the more she studied and interacted with homeopathic professionals, she started to understand that the practice was not an antithesis to biomedical knowledge, but rather a parallel system with certain touch points that enabled practitioners to better tend to their patients. She told me that,

> It was never presented to me as this way or the highway. Maybe I got lucky but the people that were teaching me were very open-minded. A homeopathic remedy was always shown to us as something that could work in tandem with our classical biomedical training and medicines. You know, it's not necessarily homeopathy as I learnt it – hell, maybe its *Boererate* [laughing] – but I know that if I am prescribing a certain class of antibiotic to patient that I just know isn't going to want a handful of pills, I tell them to go buy a big tub of yoghurt and when the antibiotics are finished, the yoghurt tub should be just about empty. It just isn't good enough for doctors to not consider their patients' needs and wants. We are so caught up in our

[60] I assured Tessa that I would keep her identity totally anonymous and not mention her nor her treatment during interviews.
[61] A pseudonym she had chosen herself to protect her identity.

> mystique around the knowledge that we have that we forget we only have about 1% of the picture. It's called practicing medicine for a reason, and I think a lot of doctors forget that.
>
> Interview with Dr Grey, 14 October 2020

Tessa's lived experience and Dr Grey's insights form a compelling narrative that directly responds to Mbembe's (2001) call to challenge hegemonic knowledge structures and hierarchies. Within the context of *Boererate*, this resistance against dominant medical paradigms not only challenges established hierarchies but also vividly illuminates the middle ground between biomedicine and homeopathy – a space where a flexible healthcare model can thrive. *Boererate*, as a form of resistance, operates at the nexus of traditional healing practices and Western biomedical frameworks. Tessa's journey with *Boererate* exemplifies a conscious effort to navigate beyond hegemonic biomedical structures, embracing an alternative system that draws from indigenous knowledge. Dr Grey's insights further underscore the subversive potential of *Boererate* in challenging the dominance of biomedicine.

The utilisation of *Boererate* as a resistance tool highlights its inherent plasticity and adaptability, crucial qualities that position it in the envisioned middle ground. By rejecting a rigid adherence to either biomedicine or homeopathy, *Boererate* creates a space where diverse healing traditions coalesce, forming a dynamic and inclusive healthcare model. This middle ground, illuminated by Tessa's experience and Dr Grey's insights, becomes a realm where individuals can engage with healthcare practices that resonate with their cultural and personal beliefs. Importantly, this discussion resonates with the gendered dynamics observed in the previous chapter regarding homeopathy and *Boererate*. The gendered division – women favouring *Boererate* and men leaning towards homeopathy – takes on a new significance in the context of resistance against hegemonic knowledge structures. *Boererate*, predominantly associated with women, becomes a site of empowerment and resistance for a demographic often marginalised within the biomedical hierarchy.

Conversely, the association of men with homeopathy reflects a nuanced interplay between traditional gender roles and medical preferences. This gendering of healing practices contributes to the complexity of the middle ground, emphasising that the flexibility in healthcare models extends beyond a mere blending of medical traditions. Instead, it encompasses a renegotiation of power dynamics and societal expectations, challenging preconceived notions about the roles of men and women in the realm of healing.

Dr Grey informed me that she always included the patient as an active participant during discussions concerning treatment. She told me that she viewed it as a dialogue between someone who knew their body better than anyone else, and someone who was desperately trying to catch up – Dr Grey describing herself as the latter. During our many consultations[62], she told me about how she incorporated her mother's home remedies into her own practice. Dr Grey had grown up with *Boererate* and revealed to me that the way in which her mother was able to treat their ailments at home was a large motivator for her to become a doctor. She told me how she would often prescribe *Boererate* in conjunction with conventional medicine. She recounted to me that when she saw a young girl struggling with eczema, she often told her to add avocado or coconut oil to her bath as well as apply the steroid cream that had been prescribed. She also told a middle-aged man struggling with hypertension to introduce a little more garlic into his diet. Dr Grey had explained to me that several clinical studies had been conducted in the United States that proved that garlic did lower blood pressure. These were *Boererate* that she had learned from her mother. As Dr Grey put it, "just a few examples of how you don't always need to get a whole lot of pharmaceuticals involved – they are not the only option. There is nothing wrong with approaching the issue from the patients' frame of reference".

By incorporating *Boererate* into her approach to treating patients, Dr Grey is playing an active role in resisting the notion that biomedical practices are the only legitimate forms of healing. While my discussion here focuses on one specific example, it is representative of a larger trend I observed in my data. Across multiple instances I found that when the women whom I was interviewing were treated by doctors who incorporated a broad and holistic approach to healthcare (often integrating natural, traditional and non-mainstream practices) alongside their biomedical ones, a space for a more inclusive healthcare practice was fostered. During interviews I was told that when doctors had a more holistic approach to healing and treatment, it made my interlocuters feel validated and empowered in their healthcare journey.

Tessa is also just one example of how the Facebook groups encouraged her to challenge traditional hierarchies within medical spaces. Multiple participants related to me that they felt as if a safe space for discussion had been created within the Facebook groups. The groups provided a supportive environment where members felt comfortable sharing their experiences

[62] Dr Grey never made me pay for consultations, but we developed a symbiotic relationship in how consultations were arranged. If she had a big gap between patients, her receptionist would normally slot me in so as to avoid a lull in the middle of the day. I would often end up being able to interview Dr Grey for an hour or two, and she would have company.

with doctors and medicines. Many interlocuters told me of how they felt safe to share both their triumphs over disease and illness as well as their frustrations with their ailing health. Another key contribution of the groups was that of the empowerment that often accompanied the sharing of information. Members of groups often linked posts to external websites such as Instagram and TikTok where a large number of medical professionals have taken to posting educational and informative content for those who might not otherwise be able to access it.

The examination of the impact and ramifications of medical education and discourse on social media platforms encompasses a vast and intricate domain that exceeds the boundaries of the current project's comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, it merits significant scrutiny and investigation in its own accord to unravel the multifaceted implications and effects it engenders. It is crucial to acknowledge the profound influence of these diverse social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Tumblr (as discussed in chapter 2), among others, as they serve as conduits for dismantling traditional biomedical rhetoric. The utilisation of these platforms not only facilitates the dissemination of alternative perspectives but also contributes to the subversion of established biomedical dogmas.

The dichotomy between traditional forms of knowledge acquisition, often associated with elitism and exclusivity, and the more contemporary, easily accessible knowledge disseminated through social media raises crucial questions about the validity and recognition of information. The resistance towards acknowledging social media as a legitimate source of knowledge stems from entrenched power dynamics and fear of losing control over the narrative. It is essential to recognise that the democratisation of information through platforms like social media challenges traditional power structures. However, it is equally important to emphasise that this democratisation does not render traditional forms of knowledge obsolete. Rather than viewing *Boererate*, or traditional knowledge, as inherently resistant to biomedicine or mainstream knowledge, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential for synergy. *Boererate* not only serves as a form of resistance to the dominance of biomedical approaches but also has the capacity to complement and work in conjunction with modern medical practices. The integration of diverse knowledge systems, whether traditional or contemporary, can contribute to a more holistic and inclusive approach to understanding and addressing complex issues.

Virtual Spaces, made up faces

In an article related to Mbembe's lecture discussed above, Geschiere's (2021) explores how the online world becomes a platform for symbolic realities. This section will look in more

detail at the pivotal role of the virtual realm in the digital dissemination of medical information within the context of South Africa. As the digital landscape continues to shape the way information is accessed and shared, it becomes increasingly necessary to examine the dynamics of virtual platforms and their impact on healthcare communication. By examining the interplay between technology, society, and medicine, this section aims to shed light on how the virtual sphere has become a crucial conduit for the dissemination of medical knowledge, bridging gaps and empowering individuals in South Africa's healthcare landscape.

For the medical professionals that are using technology and virtual spaces in this way, they are engaging in what Mbembe would frame as posthumanism. In the context of Mbembe's (2016) Abiola lecture, posthumanism refers to how humanity is being transformed and enhanced though technological improvements as well as how the boundaries between humans and machines are narrowing and have been for some time. This kind of analysis and thinking enables us to inspect the potential impact of technology on our bodies and societies. While Mbembe's Abiola lecture is aimed at focussing attention on the digital and its relationship to African subjectivities and exploring emerging virtual realms, it also lends itself to a discussion about how existing and emergent African knowledges can address the virtual as well as digital cultures. In this way, it presented me with food for thought to think through my ethnographic evidence.

While drawing on Guyer's (1996) writing on the invention of tradition, in which she writes about the active curiosity and adaptability of African knowledge systems, it becomes apparent that adaptability, plural considerations of knowledge, and the lack of boundaries between knowledges (the cultural osmosis referred to in the opening chapter of this thesis) have always been determining characteristics of understandings of and interactions with the world, people, and things within all thought. This historical cosmological framing and understanding of invention and innovation has become ever more interwoven with digital social spaces, highlighting that virtual realms and digital spaces are not the antithesis of African knowledges, but rather reimagined objects and things that act as repositories of meaning and knowledge in the same way that "animals, stones, fetishes, and spirits" have (Newell & Pype, 2021, p. 7).

While it has become apparent to most that to conceive of time and experiences as linear is short-sighted and over-simplified, the above framing illustrates that knowledges cannot be thought of as being linear progressions through time that gather and build as the years go by.

Knowledges ebb and flow, understandings of our worlds are acted upon and reshaped, sometimes moulded and then discarded completely. Newell and Pype (2021) argue that the virtual and its intersection with reality is often framed within in a North Atlantic ideal of self-representation – an ode to the prowess of digital technology – but they would rather the virtual be reframed as something that has a longstanding history and heritage within the African diaspora.

It becomes clear that in the ethnographic excerpts discussed in this thesis, the use of *Boererate* adapts with ease to changing circumstances and in so doing demonstrates a remarkable dynamism – much like the African knowledge systems that Guyer (1996) had discussed. However, she does caution us to not fall into the trap of essentialising the diverse forms of knowledge present in Africa. She critiques the tendency that some scholars have had to categorise African knowledge as being solely rooted in tradition and agriculture – an argument which Mbembe extends into his framing of the ongoing "Afro-techno-revolution" (Newell & Pype, 2021, p. 7). This is a revolution that has been induced by the prevalence of the mobile phone – a tool that has reshaped the way people relate to themselves, others, as well as how they gather and share knowledge. The mobile phone is an absolutely critical object and is owed much credit for the raging success of not only the Facebook groups that I interacted with for the purposes of this project, but for all social media platforms. It is a key tool in putting local knowledge systems on a horizontal platform with North Atlantic ones, which are, more often than not, considered to be the basis of a universal knowledge. And yet, with all this, Mbembe – and Geschiere – have concluded that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Throughout my archival research, the one sentiment that I kept seeing expressed across diary entries, letters between loved ones, and official medical documents from clinics and camps, was that those who were using *Boererate* were frustrated at the lack of acknowledgement for its validity due to it being shoehorned into the bottom of a vertical scale where North Atlantic, biomedical knowledges were placed at the top and positioning was non-negotiable. My interlocuters expressed to me that they believed the ire with which *Boererate* was oft handled was due to the fact that it jeopardised preconceived notions about what was Truth in healthcare, but more interestingly, they often described knowledge of *Boererate* in the early days of South Africa[63] as being dangerous as it was challenging who could have specific

[63] At first, my interlocuters never specified which point in time they were referring to when they spoke of old South Africa. After some time – and reworking of how I phrased my questions – I was able to pinpoint that they were referring to the years leading up to and following the Anglo-Boer War.

types of knowledge as well as where knowledge was being obtained from. It had often been described to me as something that was wild, spreading through people faster than what it could be limited or have restrictions imposed upon it. “It’s kind of always been like that though” was an off-hand remark from Frankie[64] on a brisk June morning in 2021.

Frankie, another woman from the Facebook group, agreed to meet me for a quick chat and a cappuccino to talk about all things *Boererate*. Frankie spoke at length about how *Boererate* had changed over the years was not just the “castor oil and *brandewyn* [brandy] of [her] mother’s era”. Frankie expressed her belief that *Boererate* is something that is inherently "messy" and explained that to her this meant that it was characterised by its uncontained and vibrant nature. When I asked her to visually represent her understanding of *Boererate*, Frankie reached for a felt tip pen and sketched a pot on a serviette. Within the pot, she depicted an assortment of plants, pills, and tools, symbolising a diverse range of knowledge and remedies. Describing her drawing as a "big cup" or a catch-all, Frankie viewed it as a repository for the collective wisdom accumulated over time. This simple yet earnest meaning in her drawing underscored the profound significance that *Boererate* holds in Frankie’s life. In her drawing, Frankie communicated the transformation of something that at first seems so ordinary. She revealed layers of historical context, cultural learning as well as a sincere personal connection – she signed her name across the pot. The representation of a pot holding all this knowledge showed me that this repository had absorbed learning from its surroundings and in so doing, carried with it the stories and memories that shaped it. This image draws me back to the concentric spheres of knowledge which I presented as a diagram in chapter 4 – nested within each other and both supporting and guarding the corpus.

From my interactions and time spent with both biomedical healthcare professionals and *Boererate* practitioners as demonstrated in this thesis, I have found that *Boererate* represents a challenge to the dominant biomedical paradigm of clinical disease-specific guideline-directed care. A growing critique of this paradigm is that it is reductionist – it is oriented toward body parts instead of treating the whole person in their context (Fuller, 2017). Dr Grey’s approach to her patients represents a shift towards a more holistic and patient-centred model of medicine, one that recognizes the importance of cultural diversity and the value of multiple healing traditions. Mbembe and Geschiere both emphasise the need to challenge and dismantle colonial structures and ideologies that perpetuate power imbalances and marginalise diverse cultures and knowledge systems. A holistic and patient-centred model of medicine aligns with their call for decolonisation.

[64] A pseudonym chosen by one of interlocutors.

Mbembe himself would seem to be caught up in these power dynamics, staking a claim to how knowledge can be described and limiting room for negotiation. His rigidity stands in stark contrast to the nature of the knowledges that he describes. Mbembe's work often delves into power dynamics and the politics of knowledge production. His choice to not use the word 'legitimate' is perplexing – as legitimate forms of knowledge would appear to be precisely what he is describing.

Mbembe also fails to acknowledge that while knowledge systems are absolutely malleable, there is a core of information that remains steadfast – the corpus which I discussed in chapter 4. The concentric spheres of knowledge that surround the corpus are in flux but at the very centre is that which makes the knowledge and remains largely unchanged. This is a significant oversight in terms of framings and understandings of knowledge.

By embracing cultural diversity, this model acknowledges that healing practices are not limited to a single dominant framework but rather encompass a rich tapestry of traditions and beliefs. It values the wisdom and knowledge embedded within different cultural contexts, including indigenous, alternative, and traditional healing practices. A holistic approach to medicine fosters inclusivity and respect for diverse cultural perspectives. It emphasises the importance of understanding and incorporating patients' cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and preferences into their care. This approach promotes effective communication, builds trust, and empowers individuals in their healthcare journey. Furthermore, a holistic and patient-centred model of medicine challenges the Western-centric notion of knowledge and encourages a more equitable distribution of power in doctor-patient relationships, allowing individuals and communities to reclaim agency over their health and well-being.

Object Agency

Discussions surrounding agency have long been at the forefront of scholarly inquiry, exploring the intricate interplay between individual autonomy and external structures that shape human actions. This section delves into the classic definitions of agency as they pertain to humans, relying primarily on the work of Bourdieu (1977) and examining the nuanced relationship between personal agency and societal structures. Additionally, I will explore agency within the context of *Boererate*, a unique phenomenon that challenges traditional notions of human agency.

Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualisation of agency is deeply rooted in his broader sociological framework, which emphasises the interplay between structure and agency. According to him, agency is not an isolated expression of individual will or freedom; rather, it is shaped and

constrained by social structures and conditions. In Bourdieu's theory, the term 'agency' is closely linked to the concept of habitus – referring to an internalised set of dispositions, habits, and tastes that individuals acquire through their socialisation within a particular social context. These dispositions are ingrained in individuals and influence their perceptions, behaviours, and decision-making processes. While individuals have a degree of agency, Bourdieu (1977) argues that this agency operates within the confines of the habitus. The habitus, in turn, is shaped by the social structures and institutions in which individuals are embedded. These structures include economic systems, educational institutions, cultural norms, and more. Within these dynamic relationships between structure and agency, individuals both reproduce and potentially transform social structures through their actions. This perspective encourages an analysis that considers the interdependence of individual agency and the broader social context in which it unfolds.

Examining *Boererate* through the lens of Bourdieu's framework raises intriguing questions about the nature of agency within a collective context. To what extent do individuals within *Boererate* express personal agency, and how is this intertwined with the collective habitus and social fields? Does *Boererate* challenge or reinforce existing structures? How does the collective agency within *Boererate* reconcile with individual autonomy, and to what extent does it align with classic definitions of human agency?

Boererate exemplifies a collective habitus that influences decision-making and problem-solving. The communal nature of *Boererate* involves shared knowledge, traditions, and practices, creating a social environment where individual agency is intertwined with the collective habitus. Bourdieu's framework, emphasising the role of habitus in shaping actions, helps us understand how individuals within *Boererate* navigate their decisions within a shared cultural context. While Bourdieu's perspective on agency is often human-centric, focusing on the dispositions and actions of individuals, extending this discussion to object agency prompts a consideration of the role of material culture within social structures. Objects within *Boererate*, whether tools, symbols, or artifacts, can be seen as mediators of agency. They carry cultural meanings, embody traditions, and contribute to the ways in which individuals exercise their agency within the community. These objects become symbolic extensions of the collective habitus, influencing the agency of individuals involved.

In the earlier discussion in chapter 4, I discussed, with the aid of a diagram, the progression from the layman to an expert within *Boererate* and expounded upon the notion that individuals undergo a journey through concentric spheres of comprehension. This intellectual

advancement entails not merely the acquisition of factual information but also the cultivation of a nuanced understanding of the cultural, historical, and symbolic dimensions inherent to the knowledge corpus in question. It is imperative to acknowledge that their significance is derived through human interpretation and utilisation. This brings forth the critical inquiry into the agency of objects within *Boererate*. Can an object genuinely wield agency within this cultural milieu?

The assessment of an object's agency necessitates a meticulous examination of its involvement in and influence upon the communal social practices. The ascribed symbolic meanings, its role in decision-making processes, and its contribution to the preservation or alteration of cultural practices collectively determine its agency. The object, thus, assumes a dynamic role, interfacing with and impacting the continual evolution of the collective habitus. Individuals are integral participants in the dialectic between tradition and transformation, wherein objects concurrently serve as repositories and agents within this intricate process.

Much of this thesis has pointed towards the ways in which *Boererate* seems to exhort specific forms of behaviour in the people who interact with it. In the realm of holistic healing models discussed in the preceding section, there is an aspect of agency surrounding the objects that were often mentioned by interlocuters that I had not initially recognised. It was only after I had spent a significant amount of time not only online perusing the Facebook groups[65] and translating that to spending time with interlocuters and ingratiating myself in their lives and daily healing habits that I started to uncover that the objects that they were interacting with were shaping their experiences as much as they were shaping said objects. I found that these objects, which will be discussed below, hold great potential for rethinking their roles as carriers of historical and cultural meaning.

I observed, over the course of my research, that objects were able to exert influence or have an impact on my interlocuters and the worlds that they occupy. The objects that I encountered alongside my interlocuters, like the ingredients that they used, the books that they read, as well as the knowledge that they interacted with – to name a few – were all complex assimilations of people's experiences as well as legacies of colonial power structures, framed in contemporary contexts of perceived crisis.

Ingold (2013) encourages us to prioritise understanding the entanglements and the creative agency of objects in order to shift perspective and recognise that objects are capable of

[65] As discussed in my Methods section, I dedicated a few hours every day to not only scrolling through groups but reading comments, but also to following the posting habits of the women who had consented to being part of my study.

shaping their own forms and trajectories through the interconnection and interaction between these objects and their environments. This challenges the notion that objects are passive entities, laying fallow in expectation of being formed or inscribed with meaning by humans. While he does not argue that objects possess a consciousness or intentionality in the same as humans, he does highlight the mutual shaping which occurs between humans and objects. In this way, objects become actors of consequence that impact our daily lives and the broader societal structures that we occupy.

|I often think of this cyclical process of making in terms of my running shoes. I have owned my running shoes for the better part of the last four years (bought one month before we went into our first lockdown in 2020). I have run through mud puddles that have stained the delicate mesh, the laces have been permed to fit the eyelets in exactly the right places to accommodate my high bridge, and the heel has been worn down just so that I now no longer get blisters from long runs. These shoes symbolise to me the undying love and friendship between my father and I – my first and only running buddy. He bought the shoes for me when I was down and out, lost in academia and unsure of where to go. When he gave me the shoes, he told me I would always know where to go – forwards. I love these shoes. I have left an indelible mark on them. And they have done the same with me. After every interview, I debriefed myself on a run. Come rain or shine, my shoes were ready to help me relieve pent up energy. They made me strong and healthy; they connected me to people simply by existing – the chance to point out the same shoes on another person and enjoy a coffee together after a run. They carried me to hospitals to visit friends, and through airports to visit far-flung family. And though I may wash them, they remain mine and I, theirs. We have made each other, and we are the thing that is special about the other. As much as they have made me a runner, I have made them running shoes. I have imbued them with this very special meaning and put them in a position to have an impact on me.

In this vein, I turn to the work of Appadurai (1986) to compliment my approach and consider that objects experience multiple trajectories as they move across different social, cultural, and economic contexts. His exploration of how objects can be decontextualised and then recontextualised speaks directly to the process of exchange, use, and circulation that I have witnessed in my analysis of *Boererate*. Through these processes, things that might not usually have exceptional inherent monetary value suddenly gains value based on their circulation and context (Appadurai, 1986). This circulation determines the biography of objects present within *Boererate* – the movement through people, spaces, and time changes and thus the stories of these objects are not static.

As much is evident in the journey which I undertook to learn about and understand *Boererate* – which I presented in chapter 4. The ingredients are not just thrown together without meaning. There is care and there is preparation and knowledge which must accompany them. They are not just pulled off of shelves, they are carefully selected. They are imbued with meaning, culture, femineity, masculinity, power, control – they are positively vibrating with meaning as they move through people's hands and time. There are stories that are undying, and which must be told in order to grapple with the importance of a recipe or an ingredient. One word that will never describe *Boererate* or the ingredients that make it up is static.

This is what Appadurai referred to as the 'social life' of things. As with most social processes, there is a politics of exchange which, as I will discuss in the next two sections on virtual and physical objects, illustrates that the aforementioned circulation and movement through time influences our social structures. From these complex webs of movement and circulation emerges an image of people's desires and aspirations for whatever purpose they are employing *Boererate* – health, peace of mind, agency over their bodies, connection to their family history, or even cost effectiveness. These desires have critical value to studies such as mine, as they grant me the chance to construct an image of people's contexts, motivations, identities, and the power dynamics they find themselves occupying.

The Virtual Object – Facebook Groups

In his writing about virtual spaces and decolonisation, Geschiere (2021) emphasises the need for decolonising the virtual realm and reimagining future knowledge systems in Africa. He argues that virtual worlds can serve as spaces for constructing symbolic realities that challenge existing power structures and hierarchies. By engaging with virtual platforms, individuals have the opportunity to question and redefine traditional notions of knowledge production, thus contributing to the decolonisation process. Geschiere also highlights the danger of culturalism and the celebration of Africanness in virtual spaces, emphasising the importance of avoiding essentialism and embracing the diversity of African forms of knowledge.

In order to avoid essentialisms, I want to highlight that this data and these conclusions are context-bound. I do not wish to espouse a grand theory of how all home remedies, or Facebook groups etc function, but rather I want to use the specific spaces that I uncovered illustrate that virtual spaces are not homogenous and are composed of diverse users and commentary. They are also not passive recipients of technology, but rather comprise of active agents inscribing meaning onto them. Geschiere's work encourages critical engagement with

virtual spaces as a means to challenge and transform dominant paradigms and, in so doing, fostering alternative ways of knowing and understanding. Rather than create a 'butterfly collection' of a few Facebook groups, I want to use these specific contexts to understand larger narratives at play – like that of an object's agency.

While one might think of an object being something physical like a smartphone or a book, the concept of an object's agency extends beyond the material to the immaterial – like digital objects and virtual spaces. While a Facebook group is something that is traditionally thought of as something that is intangible, it can influence social dynamics and in so doing, displays that it can have agency – a term, which having defined in this chapter (and the introduction), I use it to refer agency of the Facebook groups now. Facebook groups can shape connections, facilitate connections and, as I observed, foster communities. It can also affect people's behaviours, relationships, and how they relate to their broader societal structures. The group's rules, norms, and content all contribute to shaping the experiences that people have within the group as well the dynamics surrounding hierarchy and power – like those discussed in the preceding chapter. The groups grant power to those who administrate them, and this has tangible effects on people's behaviours.

Virtual spaces, such as Facebook groups, provide a unique platform for marginalised voices to assert their identities and represent diverse realities. These platforms have the potential to challenge dominant structures by offering alternative narratives and perspectives. The architecture of these virtual spaces plays a crucial role in shaping user interactions. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, as much as Afrikaans female admins have authority, their positions and access to this authority is ultimately determined by the true figures of power within Facebook – the structure of it which has been designed by and is subject the whims of software developers and engineers. Facebook's design encourages certain types of engagement, like liking, commenting, and reacting, while actively discouraging behaviours that violate community standards, such as spamming or off-topic posting. Therefore, while Facebook groups enable individuals to express their identities, this freedom is still shaped by the parameters set by the platform itself. This dynamic interaction between users and the platform's design underscores the agency of virtual spaces in shaping online discourse whist the people using them actively and consciously shape the virtual spaces.

Users are also presented with the opportunity to post anonymously. This was a huge drawing point for one of the women's health *Boererate* Facebook groups that I had joined. The posting on the group is largely made up of anonymous posts and when I pressed a few interlocuters

about why this was, they all had the same response. While the group offered them the opportunity to get the advice, they felt too scared to ask a doctor for, they only felt comfortable asking intimate questions when their posts were made anonymously. Returning to my discussion in chapter 2 about how intensely behaviour was policed on this group, it would appear as if this virtual space is affecting social dynamics by empowering individuals to express themselves. Yet, as is always the case with agency, it is encompassed and held within the limits of the group as well as how personally one might take the comments aimed at the anonymous user. However, I want to highlight this exchange as it is a process that is changing the way people interact and is allowing for new forms of engagement.

The Physical Objects – Compendiums and Ingredients

Boererate, as I have demonstrated, thus represents a robust knowledge system that has remarkable longevity due in part to the plasticity with which it can adapt and be adapted to fluctuating social contexts. This enduring system has ensured its preservation over several hundred years through the strategic adaptation and diversification of its storage formats. Like an organism that is constantly evolving to suit its environment and guarantee its continuity, *Boererate* has undergone many transformations and iterations to now find itself housed and home in Facebook groups.

During my research in the archives at the Voortrekker Monument *Erfenissentrum*, I was impressed by how a collection of frontier healing therapies was able to persist through time and emerge as the go-to approach for many and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I sketched out the almost biological evolution process in order to better understand the iterations through the years. *Boererate* had a primordial phase as the Dutch Medicines that came to South Africa with settlers. It was then met with the South African War and concentration camps – the reaction resulting in its evolution into *Boererate*. It was a wild and a little messy following this period as it could no longer be contained in the wooden box it crossed the sea in. It was comprised of knowledges from settlers, knowledge from indigenous South African, ingenious *Boer* women, wounded men, and compassionate medics. It needed to be contained and transcribed before it could be lost to the annals of time and so the *Boererate* compendium was born.

The books catalogued and coded all the ways in which a person could tend to their ailing bodies, livestock, or homes. And *Boererate* was safe, preserved and tangible. These compendiums functioned a bit like a dictionary. In the way that a dictionary might set the boundaries for a language but is regularly updated with new words added as the language

evolves in fluctuating social contexts, so too were Boererate books revised and republished, and the social context shifted around the pages. When the digital age started to gain momentum from the energy being injected into it, *Boererate* had to evolve again. It found itself being scanned into archives and lifted off yellowed and musty pages and inserted into databases and group chats – perpetually acted upon. The changes in its environment forced it into new configurations and it had to become complex, and very importantly, diverse. It would not be permitted to survive if it only catered to the descendants of its forebears, it had to be adapted. While it will always be a repository of cultural practices borne out of settlers, that is only a portion of it now. By adapting and finding new ways to transmit its knowledges, *Boererate* demonstrated agency in incorporating new knowledges, discarding the outdated and increasing its capacity for change.

Throughout its historical trajectory, the ingredients woven into the fabric of *Boererate* have undergone a metamorphosis in response to dynamic environmental, technological, and socio-cultural shifts. Meticulously chosen from the vast reservoirs of the natural and material realms, these ingredients carry a weighty significance within local contexts, encapsulating cultural beliefs and establishing a profound connection to the environment. This selection process, driven by human agency, imbues the chosen ingredients with a distinctive status. As *Boererate* transcends generational boundaries, these ingredients not only serve as conduits for the transmission of cultural heritage but also as keystones upholding the continuity of traditional healing practices. The evolution of ingredient selection, influenced by advancements in medical knowledge, delineates a nuanced interplay between tradition and adaptation. Some ingredients persist as unwavering cultural touchstones, while others undergo modification to align with contemporary understandings and needs.

In the intricate journey of ingredients, agency becomes a pivotal theme. The deliberate selection of specific ingredients for a remedy reflects not only their inherent characteristics or properties but also the qualities that have been ascribed to them over time. Human agency, manifest in the conscious choice of ingredients, imparts a distinct status to each element within the *Boererate* framework. This agency extends beyond mere utilitarian considerations, encompassing cultural, ecological, and social dimensions that collectively contribute to the enduring significance of *Boererate*. According to a consensus among many of my interlocutors, their commitment to and conviction in *Boererate* stem from its continuous existence across generations. The fundamental constituents – the ingredients – have persevered throughout time, unwavering in their essence. While I have pointed to the specific

experience and use of language I have observed earlier in the introduction, I want to briefly return to it here.

The ingredients used in *Boererate* can be viewed as occupying varying degrees on an incremental scale of mythology and importance. Those that are easily accessible and comprehensible – turmeric [*borrie*], garlic [*knoffel*], and Zambuk[66] – hold a lower station on the scale of ingredients as they are used to treat everyday ailments like inflammation, hypertension, or piles and find themselves placed in the outermost sphere of knowledge (see chapter 4). In comparison, an ingredient like *dassiepis* carries with it the weight and power of ambiguity that elevates it and keeps it apart from other ingredients – finding itself in the inner sphere, where one would require special knowledge to not only translate it but now how to prepare it and use it. Only through interacting with this ingredient's legacy, teasing apart its meanings and investing in a community that can give you access to it, will you uncover that it is the fossilised excreta of Cape rock hyrax which is used to treat convulsions and epilepsy. I spent many afternoons sending voice notes on WhatsApp to my aunts and interlocuters trying desperately to understand the colloquial phrasing and framing of ingredients only to find that I was not the only one who felt like this knowledge had to be earned, like it was secret. I was reaching for knowledge in the corpus while I was still in the outer spheres.

This secret knowledge, the knowledge of the corpus, by its very nature, carries profound societal implications that extend beyond the realm of individual understanding (Weiner, 1995). Embedded within the fabric of cultures and communities, secret knowledge operates as a repository of hidden wisdom, often accessible only to a select few. This exclusivity bestows upon its possessors a distinctive status and authority within their social circles, shaping power dynamics and hierarchies. The dissemination of secret knowledge can engender a sense of belonging and identity among those initiated into its depths, fostering a unique sense of community and shared purpose. It must also be acknowledged that simultaneously, the withholding of this knowledge can breed feelings of exclusion and curiosity among those outside its boundaries, sometimes sowing the seeds of distrust or generating a sense of imbalance. Imbued with mythological weight, hidden behind turns of phrase in a language that is almost unrecognisable (and possibly intentionally so), and application methodologies of years gone by, these ingredients gain a level of legitimacy and authority through their unattainability and mythology.

[66] Zambuk is a popular topical ointment used through South Africa for various purposes. It contains eucalyptus oil and camphor and provides relief from various skin related ailments like scraps, burns, chapped lips, mosquito bites and has also been used for tattoo aftercare.

The evolution of *Boererate* from its origins as a repository of only traditional knowledge to its contemporary form as a complex and diverse system within the digital age attests to its inherent adaptive nature. This metamorphosis stands as evidence of its resilience and flexibility, consistently absorbing novel insights, shedding obsolete facets, and augmenting its capacity for transformative change.

Beyond its historical trajectory, the influence of *Boererate* resonates deeply, significantly shaping the values, norms, and perceptions of those who actively engage with it. Functioning as a conduit for the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage, *Boererate* not only maintains continuity with tradition but also stimulates innovative cognitive processes. This multifaceted role underscores its remarkable ability to shape the cognitive, socio-cultural, and inventive dimensions of individuals.

The journey of the ingredients that constitute *Boererate* reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and adaptation, where these components not only signify a profound connection to the environment but also encapsulate cultural beliefs. They act as agents of cultural continuity, simultaneously aligning with contemporary imperatives and understandings.

Furthermore, the concept of secret knowledge within the realm of *Boererate* adds layers of complexity to its societal implications. This concealed wisdom, confined to a privileged few, wields a profound influence on power dynamics and hierarchical structures. It fosters a distinct sense of communal unity and shared purpose, even as it ignites curiosity and evokes feelings of exclusion among those outside its boundaries.

Ultimately, the narrative of *Boererate* embodies themes of adaptability, resilience, and influence, where object agency plays a pivotal role. As the repository evolves, its objects—the ingredients and knowledge—exert agency by shaping the dynamics of tradition and innovation, power, and exclusion. This tale transcends mere survival, as *Boererate* flourishes in the face of change, leaving an indelible impression on the individuals and communities it touches.

Conclusions

In the preceding discussion, I have explored the inherent object agency in *Boererate* and its ingredients, demonstrating how they not only serve medicinal functions but also carry cultural and historical significance. The ingredients used as well as the online spaces that they are discussed and traded in, have a degree of power and influence of their own. The ingredients impact both the environments they are experienced in but also the people who interact with them. Throughout my preceding chapters, it has become clear that people acting

on *Boererate* have shaped it and had a significant impact on the form that it takes today. This chapter has crystalized specific aspects of the ethnographic evidence so far in the thesis to shown that *Boererate* has had as much an effect on shaping people and their virtual spaces. This highlights that *Boererate* as a knowledge system as well as its comprising ingredients and combinations have had an active role in shaping in the cultural, historical, and social contexts that it finds itself in.

The agency deeply embedded within the practice of utilising *Boererate* resonates with the dynamics of virtual spaces and the ongoing and complex process of decolonisation. When considering the realm of virtual spaces, as discussed by Geschiere, it becomes apparent that these spaces have evolved into platforms that hold the potential for the sharing, preservation, reshaping, and dissemination of traditional knowledge systems, such as *Boererate*. The virtual landscape offers a unique arena where these age-old remedies can transcend geographical limitations and temporal boundaries. In this sense, the intrinsic agency found within *Boererate,* and the ingredients being used find new life and relevance in the digital age, as they can now be accessed, understood, and valued by a larger audience.

Simultaneously, the discourse surrounding decolonisation, as articulated by Mbembe and other critical thinkers, provides us with a powerful lens – and the vocabulary in terms such as 'plasticity' – through which we can critically re-evaluate and intentionally reclaim indigenous knowledge systems like *Boererate*. Decolonisation challenges us to confront historical power imbalances, cultural appropriations, and the marginalization of non-Western – or global north – perspectives that have persisted due to colonial legacies. Through this lens, the agency inherent in *Boererate* takes on a new dimension. It is no longer solely about the efficacy of healing or the cultural heritage it carries; it becomes an embodiment of resistance against the erasure of non-Western epistemologies. By examining and valuing these indigenous knowledge systems within the context of decolonisation, we acknowledge their rightful place in the narratives of human wisdom and challenge the dominant structures that have attempted to subdue them.

However, we must not slip into essentialism when describing our knowledges and we must represent them as complex as they are. The works of Lambek (1993) and Barth (1975) have enabled me to complicate Mbembe's approach and represent how the beginnings of *Boererate* have become absolutely integral to its functioning and have formed a core around which all other gathered and refined knowledges fold themselves around. Mbembe is

accurate in describing the malleability of these knowledges but falls short of truly explaining where their power and tenacity to adapt comes from.

In essence, the convergence of the agency within *Boererate*, the virtual spaces of contemporary communication, and the discourse of decolonisation creates a profound nexus of exploration and reclamation. This multidimensional perspective encourages us to not only recognise the intricate interplay between cultural practices, technology, and historical reckoning but also to celebrate the agency of *Boererate* as a living conduit of knowledge, resilience, and empowerment in a rapidly changing world.

The comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted themes encapsulated within this discourse yields far-reaching implications that enrich our comprehension of several critical dimensions—cultural heritage, digital engagement, and the intricate tapestry of post-colonial societies. Delving deeply into these themes allows us to unravel the intricate threads that connect the past, present, and future, illuminating the way cultural practices and traditions are transformed and transmitted.

At its core, this exploration underscores the profound significance of acknowledging indigenous knowledge systems like *Boererate*, especially within the context of our rapidly advancing digital age. The evolution of technology has ushered in an era where virtual spaces have transcended being mere tools for communication—they have become dynamic platforms for not only the preservation and dissemination of heritage, but also of challenging dominant narratives and dismantling colonial structures.

Moreover, the lens of decolonisation through which this discourse is examined offers a critical framework for understanding the intricate layers of power dynamics, marginalization, and identity reclamation. The process of decolonisation calls upon societies to confront the historical injustices perpetuated by colonial rule and seek avenues to rectify these imbalances. In this light, the recognition and validation of indigenous knowledge systems become acts of reclamation—acts that acknowledge the silenced voices, suppressed traditions, and invaluable insights that have been obscured by dominant narratives. *Boererate* stands as an emblem of this reclamation, an embodiment of the agency of communities to assert their rightful place in shaping their narratives and identities.

Whilst perhaps paradoxical a first – a knowledge system with an old-fashioned Afrikaans name and a history steeped in Anglo-Boer War mythology, *Boererate* from the evidence presented in this thesis would appear to be an epitome of not only a deeply African knowledge system but also of the decolonisation of the virtual. No matter how much a

portion of the population has tried to draw a laager[67] around *Boererate* and mark it as static cultural artefact, the reality is that *Boererate* has always had agency. In the vein of Newell and Pype (2021, p. 9), I want to acknowledge that my voice, like theirs, is a "less than ideal" vehicle for discussion on decolonising knowledge as I do not have first-hand experience of the struggles and nuances related to decolonisation, it is important to acknowledge that privilege can also provide platforms and resources that can be leveraged for positive change. It is crucial to approach this work with an awareness of one's positionality and the limitations it might entail. By acknowledging the historical and ongoing injustices perpetrated by colonial powers, I can use my privilege responsibly and effectively to challenge and dismantle the very systems that uphold it. The conscious decisions made by individuals, from the selection of ingredients to the interpretation of cultural symbols, actively contribute to the dialogue between tradition and change. The enduring nature of *Boererate* lies in its adaptive resilience, where human agency intertwines with cultural evolution, creating a living tradition that continues to bridge the past and the present.

The intriguing notion of whether entities like *Boererate* can possess agency, despite their lack of consciousness, prompts a profound exploration into the dynamics of power and human interaction. Could it be that the agency attributed to *Boererate* is, in fact, a reflection of the collective will and intentionality of the individuals who engage with it? Perhaps, it is the power vested in *Boererate* by the community that acts as the driving force, shaping both the practices associated with it and the very identity of the community itself. This raises a reciprocal relationship: do the objects and practices within *Boererate* shape the community, or is it the agency and belief of the community that endows *Boererate* with its perceived efficacy and significance? Unravelling these questions unveils a complex interplay between human agency, cultural dynamics, and the potential transformative power vested in objects and traditions, shedding light on the intricate mechanisms that underlie the vitality of practices like Boererate.

The intricate exploration of these themes not only provides us with a deeper understanding of the interplay between culture, technology, and historical reckoning but also underscores the pressing importance of embracing indigenous knowledge systems in an increasingly digital and interconnected world. This narrative journey encompasses not only the practical transmission of healing traditions but also the revitalisation of cultural identities and the empowerment of marginalized voices. As we continue to navigate the complex tapestry of

[67] This is an area or encampment formed by circling wagons, often to defend from enemy attacks (van der Westhuizen, 2017).

our global society, this exploration stands as a testament to the transformative potential of cultural heritage and decolonial perspectives, fostering a tapestry where diverse threads interweave harmoniously.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In bringing this anthropological investigation to a close, *Boererate*'s cultural significance and its interplay within societal contexts comes sharply into focus. The journey through this thesis has not solely uncovered the multifaceted dynamics at play but has also unearthed insights into the underlying mechanisms that both impel and are impelled by this traditional knowledge system. As the strands of analysis interlace, an understanding of *Boererate* crystallises – the inherent malleability of *Boererate* as a knowledge system finds manifestation in its dual capacity, serving as both a recipient of external influence and an agent wielding substantial influence within individuals' lives. *Boererate* thus operates as a dynamic entity, intricately weaving its presence into the very fabric of human existence, certainly for those who interact with it in any meaningful way. I have set out to make plain the complex interconnection among historical memory, cultural resurgence, and the continuous shaping of identity within the Afrikaner community underscores a nuanced relationship. *Boererate*, in this context, exercises a socio-cultural influence by strategically providing individuals with a semblance of agency and authority, all the while compelling adherence to its overarching sway.

The methods that I employed were not always perfect and while I did find myself briefly scrambling at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I ultimately found that the way I went about gathering data for this project was almost as organic as its subject matter. My methods ebbed and flowed and grew with the project and the data that I was able to gather attests to the effectiveness of my approach. An important part of my approach, especially during this project was to, as best as I could, communicate in a genuine way and not let my fears of not being 'Afrikaans enough' (as discussed in the introduction) spoil my interviews and interactions. It was only once I cast off this insecurity that I was able to actively enjoy my research and generate viable data. I believe that this is an especially important point to make given that many young, graduate anthropologists now have not yet had to opportunity to completely immerse themselves in a field and learn and grow with people as most of their studies were completed during the various lockdown phases.

The prospect of executing online ethnography and deciphering various methods to collect data from individuals without any (initial) physical interaction presented an intellectually stimulating challenge. During the preliminary stages of strategising my interview and observation techniques amidst the lockdown, I suddenly found myself inundated with technologies and software applications that would help me facilitate this. This surge was

arguably not only a reflection of the global acceleration towards digital connectivity in response to our innate desire for human interaction, but also to keep the cogs turning in businesses. Whether motives for connection were romantic or economic (or both) is ultimately not important for the case I am making in this project, it was incredibly useful that I had access to video conferencing software that I could use to speak to either one or multiple people at a time. The opportunity to record[68] these meetings and interviews also streamlined my transcription process. The silence afforded by the noise-cancelling feature on many of these platforms became my saving grace as I no longer needed to do battle with a 3 second portion of an interview trying to hear what an informant had said while a Harley Davidson roared by the restaurant or café we were sitting at.

As I journeyed through digital advancements, the archival research process, in its profound simplicity and timeless wisdom, served as a gentle reminder of humility amidst the symphony of progress. From struggling through old Dutch translations with my father to modest sandwich breaks in the gardens, my presence at the Voortrekker Monument was a stark reminder of the historical context in which I was working. The Monument stands as a symbol of the complex and often contentious history of the nation. As discussed in my methodology (chapter 2), it played a pivotal role in the political narrative shaped by the National Party and was used as a tool to perpetuate a mythologised version of Afrikaner history. While acknowledging the Monument for its architectural grandeur and historical importance, it is essential to reiterate its usage as a propaganda device.

Keeping this in mind, rather than a feeling of foreboding, I felt a heartening towards the way I was able reinterpret the stories in the archives as well as perceptions of *Boererate*. It too could have been subject to the extreme mythologising and propaganda as witnessed with the Voortrekker Monument. Much akin to the Voortrekker Monument, *Boererate* finds itself susceptible to the same process of mythologisation and nostalgia, often being portrayed through a lens of romanticism, emblematic of the enduring spirit and resourcefulness of Afrikaner people. However, the data presented in this project illustrates that *Boererate* transcends the confines of this simplistic narrative. *Boererate's* significance stretches far beyond this conventional representation, and I have been able to show that a plethora of practitioners and beneficiaries converge, each engaging with *Boererate* in distinct ways, thereby revealing its intrinsic adaptability. This practice assumes various roles: as a conduit

[68] I of course always got permission at the outset of the recording and, like I would in any other recorded interview, reminded participants that they could ask for the recording to stop at any time and that they could always withdraw their recording.

for personal well-being, a conduit connecting individuals to ancestral wisdom, a response to the constraints imposed by socio-economic factors, or even as an act of resistance against the hegemony of Western medical paradigms. The diverse tapestry of meanings attributed to *Boererate* underscores its intricate nature. This diversity serves to propel *Boererate* beyond its initial standing as a symbol of Afrikaner identity, elevating it to the stature of a multifaceted phenomenon that encapsulates the heterogeneous realities and histories of the South African populace. Thus, *Boererate* encapsulates a bricolage of interpretations, reflecting the myriad ways in which it is interwoven into the lives, aspirations, and experiences of a diverse society. From the Brandt collection, I was able to construct a narrative of an untamed knowledge that, no matter how many committees were assembled, and memos disseminated, spread out quite naturally and unrestrained.

Known from her multifaceted roles as an author and nurse, Johanna Brandt's unique experiences shaped her into a prominent figure whose impact in the archival record cannot be overstated. As a spy for the Boer forces, Brandt's narrative offered me valuable insights into the war from a rarely explored perspective. I spent many afternoons sifting through personal correspondence as well as memos to her editing staff, detailing her exploits as a camp nurse and how she committed herself to the health and survival of her patients. Brandt's diverse roles and contributions make her an influential figure in South African history. Her narratives provide a unique lens through which we can explore the historical and socio-cultural context of her time. Her work in health also presents interesting avenues for examining the history and progression of natural healing practices.

Brandt's archival record began to feel like the correspondence of a close friend – we had inadvertently spent most of lockdown together and I soon realised that I needed to take a step back from the archives and take stock of where I found myself. Reflexivity stands as an indispensable pillar within the realm of my inquiry during this project. This methodological introspection allowed me to acknowledge the impact of my own subjectivity, positioning, and cultural biases. I view embracing reflexivity as not merely an act of transparency but also an assertion of ethical integrity, which in turn allowed me to recognise that I brought with me a unique lens shaped by my personal experiences, societal norms, and own preconceptions. By critically engaging with my own role in shaping interpretations, biases, and understandings, being reflexive allowed me to safeguard against the illusion of objectivity and fostered a more nuanced comprehension of the Facebook groups as well as my interlocuters. I felt as if my reflexivity enriched the authenticity of the preceding narratives and engendered respectful engagement. This approach allowed me to have a constant 'checks and balances' system and

helped me to ensure, as best as I could, that I took a few steps back from my research and surveyed it with as critical an eye as possible.

This was especially important to me when I started to investigate historical framings and narratives as discussed in chapter 2. I had spent many nights reading about the hardships experienced in the South African War concentration camps as well as seeing photographs of emaciated and diseased children. The realities of the South African War concentration camps were that children often died and their mothers were often not present – due to machinations of British doctors and camp hospital rules. It was especially difficult to spend day after day reading about all the suffering, but I knew that these were important stories and important women. For as central as *Boererate* has become to many of the women that I interviewed, the legacy of this practice and the specific history it experienced was as important to document. Studying the South African War concentration camps as an Afrikaans woman presents a unique set of challenges and emotional complexities. The concentration camps from the South African War have been deeply ingrained in the historical consciousness of Afrikaners. This can make aspects of research difficult, as it requires navigating personal feelings, cultural biases, and societal expectations.

Much of the written material on these camps focuses on the suffering and mortality of Boer women and children, which has been emotionally taxing to study. As an Afrikaans woman, there is a deep, personal connection to these narratives which both informs and challenged my research. Additionally, there is the challenge of reconciling different narratives. Ultimately, the difficulty lies not only in confronting the harsh realities of the past but also in challenging established narratives and perspectives. However, these challenges also present an opportunity for deeper understanding and empathy, and the potential to contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive history of the South African War.

The dynamics to which people are exposed typically solidify their current position through their specific history. The concentration camps bore witness to the birth of *Boererate* as well as the ideological war being waged through their use and development of traditional healing methods. There is a distinct difference between the creolised medicines that Boer women brought into the camps and the body of knowledge – *Boererate* in its earliest form – that emerged afterward. This shows that the harsh conditions and experiences in the camps played a significant role in the evolutions and formalisation of *Boererate*. Critical to these understandings is the resilience, survival, and cultural preservation that was displayed in response to such extreme diversity.

Transitioning from these time-stained and worn archives to the crisp and cloud-based annals of the Facebook groups was a complex task. I had become so vested in the past and the moments that had built up to this one that I struggled to adjust to the versatile and virtual worlds that I spent the last few years in, but this comparison was an important and creative juxtaposition. Having definitively contributed to the knowledge on Boererate and stating that it was born in the South African War concentration camps, I found myself left with more questions about agency, authority and power.

Facebook groups, emblematic of digital social platforms, unfold as dynamic arenas where discourse, power dynamics, and gender relations interweave. These spaces serve as interactive hubs, enabling real-time communication and cultivating a sense of community that transcends geographical constraints. The immediacy and ephemerality of the content generated within these groups mirror the unfolding zeitgeist. In the digital realm, discussions around power, gender expectations, and authority play out in real-time, shaping the group's collective identity. On the contrary, archives, reminiscent of the analogue era, stand as guardians of historical information. These repositories encapsulate a static, meticulously curated collection of documents, photographs, and artefacts, forming a tangible link to the past. Unlike the transient nature of digital conversations, archives endure as stable records, capturing the intricate tapestry of power, gender dynamics, and societal norms across time. The juxtaposition of the swift, dynamic nature of digital interactions with the enduring stability of archival records encapsulates the evolving landscape where power, gender, and authority manifest within the realms of both the instantaneous and the archival.

Comparing how I interacted with the Facebook groups as opposed to the archives offered several benefits to my data collection process and ultimately the conclusions that I am able to present. Firstly, it illuminates the contrast between the mutable, participatory nature of digital spaces and the stable, authoritative nature of archival collections. This comparison underscores the shift from traditional top-down information dissemination to a more egalitarian model where users are both consumers and producers of knowledge.

Secondly, juxtaposing these two mediums highlights the tension between permanence and ephemerality in information preservation. While archives strive for long-term preservation of material, much of the content in Facebook groups is fleeting, disappearing as new posts supersede old ones. This raises important questions about the preservation of digital culture and the challenges inherent in capturing the dynamism of online communities. Moreover, comparing these two mediums has enriched my understanding of societal trends. Archives

provide a historical context, enabling me to trace the evolution of ideas over time. In contrast, Facebook groups offer a snapshot of current societal attitudes and discourses, providing valuable insights into contemporary framings of and interaction with *Boererate*.

Finally, this comparison encourages critically evaluating the strengths and limitations of each medium. While Facebook groups offer immediacy and interactivity, they may lack the depth and breadth of information found in archives. Conversely, while archives provide a wealth of detailed historical information, they may not capture the vibrancy and immediacy of digital discourse. Comparing Facebook groups to archives provides a multifaceted perspective on information generation, preservation, and consumption. It underscores the importance of integrating both digital and analogue methodologies in research to gain a comprehensive understanding of people are storing and sharing their ideas.

The use of Facebook groups in my research has not only provided me with a remarkable level of access but has also mitigated numerous geographical barriers that have historically posed challenges for anthropological observation. Traditionally, anthropologists may have faced significant obstacles when attempting to engage in firsthand observation of various communities and interactions, however, the constraints of physical distance and the limitations of time were by far and large negated by my approach. By participating in these digital groups, I have gained an unprecedented vantage point into the lives and interactions of individuals across diverse locales. Geographical boundaries that once restricted my ability to immerse myself in different social contexts have been circumvented and this has granted me the opportunity to observe and analyse real-time interactions – an opportunity that I thought the limitations of the lockdowns would have curtailed.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of Facebook groups exhibits both a complementary and contradictory relationship with authority. The platform's design not only fosters valuable discussions, debates, and exchanges among members but also underscores a complex interplay of authority dynamics. The interactive environment, while seemingly offering a space for freedom of expression, operates within the confines of prescribed ethnicised behavioural norms. Members experience a degree of authority in contributing to discussions and shaping the narrative, but this authority is contingent upon adherence to established norms. The freedom to engage comes with the implicit requirement to conform to the prescribed notions of acceptable behaviour, reflecting the complementary and contradictory nature of authority within these digital spaces.

This intricate dance of authority is particularly evident in the meticulously analysed comments, timestamps, and various forms of engagement. The systematic documentation and evaluation of online interactions unveil a nuanced relationship between the perceived freedom of expression and the constraints imposed by cultural and societal norms. The richness of the data harvested from these interactions, including textual exchanges and multimedia elements, provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between authority, cultural expectations, and individual expression. Metrics such as likes, shares, and comments, serving as quantitative measures of engagement, further illuminate the delicate balance between the sense of freedom within the interactive space and the adherence to prescribed behavioural norms.

In essence, the amalgamation of these diverse data sources within the realm of Facebook groups has woven a complex tapestry of information and context. This comprehensive dataset encompasses a wide spectrum of human expression, social dynamics, and cultural nuances. The richness and diversity of these data sources enable a more holistic and multidimensional understanding of the communities under study. The Facebook groups which I observed have imbued my research with a wealth of real-time, interactive, and multimedia-rich data.

However, this avenue of inquiry was not all sunshine and computer-generated daisies. Managing the multitude of ethical considerations and the ongoing adjustments required for dynamic informed consent posed not insurmountable challenges, but rather placed a taxing demand on the entire process. My paramount concern was to guarantee that every participant was well-informed about their rights while consistently upholding a profound respect for their dignity and anonymity. This was often compounded by the amount of people who were messaging me and sharing anecdotes and ideas, whilst also keenly opting in for an interview. This meant that while data was rich, I did sometimes feel overwhelmed and struggled at time to draw meaningful conclusions. The data that I was collecting also had an ephemeral quality to it – I learnt very early on that I needed to make detailed notes and take screenshots as posts often disappeared or become lost in the barrage of posts and content. I also found myself missing traditional non-verbal cues such as body language and tone of voice – these silent communications sometimes reveal more than what a person is saying and only being able to access this towards the end of my data collection process was frustrating.

My biggest concern with my use of Facebook groups was sample bias. While I was being exposed to a diverse range of voices and opinions, they can never be regarded as being wholly representative a community. Not every person who interacts with *Boererate* has a

Facebook account and not every person is on the groups. However, 'butterfly collections' are a common criticism of anthropology and I want to dispel that critique of this project here. I made it clear from the outset of this project – and outline it thusly in the introduction – that I was not setting out to espouse a grand theory of how all Afrikaners think about and interact with *Boererate* – I do not even want to say this of all Afrikaans women. What I have done with this project was take a sample of people, relatively like-minded, and ask them about how they use something as specific as *Boererate* within broader contexts and lived experiences. *Boererate* is but one facet of their lives that has unique interactions with all the rest. This kind of analysis enables to take something as specific and specialised as a Facebook group and use to discuss the ebbs and flows of people's lives through a pandemic and how they connect to their history.

The use of mythologising, nostalgia, and ancestral scripts is not unique and has been observed by others – as discussed in chapter 5. These emotional and narrative elements can influence both the perception and value of cultural commodities, like *Boererate*, in societies. Mythology and nostalgia have historically functioned as influential mechanisms, enriching cultural commodities with symbolic significance and emotional resonance. Mythology, encompassing a matrix of traditional narratives and beliefs, has been harnessed to elevate the status of *Boererate* and its users. Through aligning this knowledge system with a specific nationalist mythology, *Boererate* users have endowed it with emblematic connotations that strike a chord at a profound level of sentiment. These mythologies are instrumental in shaping a collective identity and they intersect with historical, social, and cultural dynamics. These kinds of mythologies often function as foundational narratives that highlight a origins, historical struggles, and exceptionalism of the *Volk*. These myths frequently revolve around key figures (concentration camp nurses or high-ranking generals), events (the South African War), or symbols (*Boererate* ingredients) that are central to identity formation.

Nationalist mythologies emphasise a sense of continuity with the past, linking the present generation to their ancestors and heritage. By invoking a historical lineage, these narratives seek to create a sense of cohesion and shared destiny among citizens. Such narratives often construct a collective memory that is selective and tailored to bolster a specific image of the nation's history – such as that of extreme suffering and triumph as discussed in chapter 3 – fostering a sense of unity and purpose. Moreover, these myths can serve to distinguish a nation from others, highlighting unique cultural traits, traditions, and values. These distinct markers contribute to a sense of pride and identity, fostering a "we versus them" mentality that demarcates national boundaries.

However, I have needed to approach my study of these mythologies with a critical eye. It is important to note how these narratives can be manipulated by those in power to serve their interests or marginalise certain groups within the nation – such as the role and suffering experienced by black South Africans during the South African War. The exclusion of these alternative perspectives, historical truths, and experiences of external communities has led to the marginalisation of these voices within the literature and has obviously contributed to social inequalities. The exploration of mythologies in the construction of identity sheds light on how the people I have connected with over the last few years create and perpetuate narratives that bind themselves to a common identity. The way that I have interacted with my interlocuters has helped me to understand the creation, dissemination, and impact of these narratives, considering their complexities and potential pitfalls in the context of constructing inclusive and diverse identities.

Nostalgia, characterised by a wistful longing for bygone times, is often intertwined with the concept of memory. My interviews have allowed me a window into seeing how memories of Voortrekkers, Boers, and the South African War are selected, constructed, and woven into narratives that reflect and reinforce a specific identity – that of enduring and suffered Afrikaner angling for a reprieve from the hardships. This very critically draws a veil over apartheid as it does not fit into the narrative of hardships that has seen resurgence over the past 25 odd years. These narratives evoke a sense of longing for a perceived simpler, harmonious, or more authentic past. Therefore, nostalgia serves as a tool for constructing continuity and a sense of belonging. This continuity reassures individuals that they are part of something enduring, even in the face of rapid societal changes. In the construction of their personal identities, my interlocuters have used nostalgia as a means of self-discovery and self-presentation. These individuals have drawn on nostalgic feelings to curate their personal narratives which align with their values, aspirations, and desires. By reflecting on and integrating elements from their past, they create a coherent self-story that helps them make sense of their journey and project a certain image of themselves to others. On a communal level within the Facebook groups, nostalgia was often used to reinforce a sense of unity and shared values. These practices have clearly fostered feelings of familiarity, comfort, and collective identity, helping members to relate to one another and preserve a sense of cultural heritage.

However, I must also acknowledge the complexity of nostalgia. While it has served as a unifying force, nostalgia has also perpetuated exclusivity by emphasising certain elements of the past while marginalizing or excluding others. These selective memory constructions have

oversimplified complex historical processes, downplayed inequalities, and ignored the diverse experiences. By examining the use of nostalgia in identity construction, my data has revealed its multifaceted role in shaping personal, and communal, identities. Nostalgia has been used to establish continuity, has created a sense of belonging, and crafted narratives that resonate with personal and collective aspirations. In the case of this project, nostalgia has harnessed to strengthen identity bonds, but has also reinforced exclusionary narratives and gloss over complex historical realities.

The preceding discussion has emphasised just how many roles and impacts *Boererate* has had. As much as it has elicited the effects and journeys through time I have discussed, it has had to perpetually react and readjust. *Boererate* defies rigidity and stasis, embodying a remarkable malleability that endows it with the capacity to adjust and transform over time. This adaptability serves as a cornerstone of its resilience and enduring pertinence in the face of evolving health challenges. Rather than remaining fixed in a static form, *Boererate* remains a living entity that actively responds to new insights and emerging issues, all while retaining the invaluable wisdom accumulated by previous generations. This perpetual cycle of adaptation and growth ensures that *Boererate* retains its efficacy and remains a nimble healthcare approach capable of addressing the ever-shifting demands of its practitioners.

Moreover, *Boererate's* existence parallels that of an organic organism. Like a living being, it experiences growth and evolution, sculpted by the interplay between tradition and innovation. Much like an organism interacts with its environment, *Boererate* engages with new scientific advancements, cultural exchanges, and societal shifts, assimilating these influences into its existing knowledge framework. Beyond merely being a passive repository of remedies, *Boererate* emerges as an active and dynamic system that consistently interacts with and adjusts to its surroundings. This organic quality imbues *Boererate* with vitality, positioning it as a vibrant cornerstone of its community's cultural heritage – a living tradition that not only embodies the ancestral sagacity of the past but also carries it forward, intact and enriched, into the uncharted territories of the future. In this way, *Boererate* stands as a testament to the enduring symbiosis between heritage and progress, adeptly weaving together the threads of bygone wisdom and contemporary insight.

This project has served as a meeting point for a variety of themes, each contributing to a rich and multifaceted understanding of *Boererate*. The South African War, for instance, has been integral in providing historical context, shedding light on how this period of conflict may have influenced the development and application of these traditional remedies. Archival

research has played a pivotal role as well, acting as a bridge connecting the past and the present. It has allowed me to delve into the historical usage of *Boererate*, uncovering trends, patterns, and shifts in its application over time, thereby reinforcing its dynamic nature. Gender dynamics have emerged as a key theme, highlighting the role of women in the transmission of *Boererate* knowledge. This aspect has elucidated the socio-cultural dimensions of this traditional system, underscoring the influential role women play as custodians and propagators of traditional knowledge. Generational relationships have provided another layer of complexity, revealing how knowledge of *Boererate* is passed down through families, evolving with each new generation. This intergenerational transfer of knowledge has been instrumental in preserving, adapting, and enhancing the body of wisdom encompassed by *Boererate.* Lastly, the adaptable nature of *Boererate* has been a focus of this project, demonstrating how this system is not static but rather fluid and responsive. It has shown an inherent capacity to adjust to new health challenges, absorb scientific advancements, and remain relevant in a changing world.

In essence, the project has enabled a convergence of these diverse themes, each shedding light on different aspects of *Boererate*. This has created an intricate and engaging landscape for interdisciplinary exploration, underscoring the value of *Boererate* as a subject of study. Through this traditional Afrikaans system of home remedies, we can gain insights into a range of interconnected elements - from historical events and research methodologies to socio-cultural dynamics and the evolution of this fascinating body of knowledge. It is my fervent hope that this thesis has both answered and raised questions of note that will drive further investigations into how people respond to medical and social crises.

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