Narrative and soap opera: a study of selected South African soap operas

By

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SUMMARY

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Summary:

This thesis is situated within the context of post-apartheid, post-1994 South Africa. Considering that South Africa only recently entered its second decade of democracy, it is not surprising that, within the context of the "New South Africa", new identities and myths are continuously being constructed. It thus follows that the construction of identities is a contentious issue within South Africa today.

The premise that serves as point of departure for this thesis is that narratives contribute to the construction of identities. It is argued that there exists no single, absolute or static identity and that both personal and collective identities are endlessly being negotiated and renegotiated. Within the context of the "New South-Africa" a variety of new voices are being heard and a variety of new narratives are being voiced. Consider as a case in point the far-reaching stories told in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The far-reaching political, economic and cultural paradigm shifts South Africa has undergone in the recent past also manifest in the production of meaning in popular visual culture and, more specifically, in the undeniably popular South African soap opera. In the scope of this thesis it is argued that South African soap opera constitute one possible South African narrative and consequently that South African soap opera may be instrumental in the construction of the new identities referred to earlier.

The first section of this thesis is devoted to a literature overview comprising an overview of seminal sources on Cultural Studies, the South African context, narrative, identity, soap opera, gender and the other. This is done in order to situate the thesis within the context of Cultural Studies and also to achieve an awareness of the literature and research relevant to this study.

Initially the thesis focuses broadly on narrative, its characteristics and the role narrative plays in the construction of identities. Here the theories of Paul Ricouer serve as a basis on which narrative is defined and analysed. Important concepts that come to bear in the relationship between narrative and identity include time, story, history and imagination. In examining narrative I come to the conclusion that narrative can be embodied and that a narrative body implies gender. It is argued that narrative may be gendered as feminine, and consequently that it constitutes some kind of other – in this case, other to the masculine. Although Edward Said's *Orientalism* is acknowledged as the unofficial origin of the concept of the Other, and mention is made of Simoné de Beauvoir, it is essentially the concept of the other as theorized by Luce Irigaray that is seminal to this thesis.

The focus is narrowed down to soap opera narrative which is again argued to be a feminine, but also female, narrative for a variety of reasons. Soap opera narrative is othered to various hegemonic orders the most important of which is western masculine narrative. An argument is made for the potential of this narrative of the other to give a voice to the other and consequently pose a site where dominant identities and hegemonic orders may be (re)negotiated.

The final part of this thesis is devoted to applying all of the above to South African soap opera narrative. Concrete examples from four South African soap operas (*Egoli – Plek van Goud/Place of Gold, Isidingo – the need, Generations* and *7de Laan*) are used to substantiate the argument that South African soap opera may be regarded as other and consequently that it creates a site where new South African identities are created and old identities are being negotiated.

Key terms: Narrative, soap opera, the other, identity, gender, hegemony, feminine, female.

Opsomming:

Hierdie tesis word gesitueer binne die konteks van post-apartheid, post 1994 Suid-Afrika. Wanneer daar in ag geneem word dat Suid-Afrika slegs onlangs sy tweede dekade van demokrasie betree het is dit nie verbasend dat daar, binne dié konteks van die "Nuwe Suid-Afrika", aanhoudend nuwe identiteite en mites gekonstrueer word nie. Dit volg dus logies dat die konstruksie van identiteit 'n kontensieuse saak is in Suid-Afrika vandag.

Die premis wat dien as aanvangspunt vir hierdie tesis is dat narratief/narratiewe bydra tot die konstruksie van identiteit. Die argument is dat daar geen enkele, absolute of statiese identiteit bestaan nie en dat sowel persoonlike as kollektiewe identiteite aanhoudend onderhandel word. Binne die konteks van die "Nuwe Suid-Afrika" word 'n verskeidenheid van nuwe stemme gehoor en sodoende kom 'n verskeidenheid van nuwe narratiewe tot stand. 'n Voorbeeld van laasgenoemde is die narratiewe wat tot stand gekom het in die verhore van die Waarheids- en Versoeningskommissie.

Die verreikende politieke, ekonomiese en kulturele paradigmaverskuiwings wat Suid-Afrika onlangs ondergaan het manifesteer ook in die produksie van betekenis in populêre visuele kultuur en, meer spesifiek, in die onmiskenbaar populêre Suid-Afrikaanse sepies.[1] Binne die bestek van hierdie tesis word daar geargumenteer dat Suid-Afrikaanse sepienarratief een moontlike Suid-Afrikaanse narratief verteenwoordig en dat dit gevolglik instrumenteel kan wees in die konstruksie van die nuwe identieite waarna vroeër verwys is.

Die eerste gedeelte van hierdie tesis is 'n literatuuroorsig wat bestaan uit 'n oorsig van sleutelbronne oor Kultuurstudies, die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks, narratief, identiteit,

[1] Dit sou ook moontlik wees om na sepies te verwys as strooisages of seepoperas maar vir die doeleindes van hierdie tesis word die term sepies gebruik.

sepies, gender en die ander. Die doel van hierdie oorsig is om die tesis te situeer binne die konteks van Kultuurstudies maar ook om ‘n bewustheid te skep van literatuur en navorsing wat relevant is tot dié studie.

Aanvanklik fokus die tesis breedweg op narratief, die eienskappe daarvan en die rol wat dit speel in die konstruksie van identiteit. Die narratiewe teorieë van Paul Ricouer vorm die basis waarvolgens narratief gedefinieër en geanaliseer word. Belangrike konsepte wat verband hou met die konstruksie van identiteit deur narratief is tyd, storie, geskiedenis en die verbeelding. In my ondersoek van narratief kom ek tot die konklusie dat narratief beliggaam kan wees en dat so ‘n narratiewe liggaam gender impliseer. Daar word geargumenteer dat die narratiewe liggaam vroulik is en dat dit gevolglik ‘n soort ander konstitueer – in dié geval, die ander van maskuliniteit.

Die fokus word vernou na sepienarratief wat weer eens as vroulik (feminine), maar ook as vrou (female) beskou word as gevolg van ‘n verskeidenheid redes. Sepienarratief word beskou as ‘n ander vir verskeie hegemoniese ordes waaronder die Westerse manlike narratief die vernaamste is. Die potensiaal van sepienarratief om ‘n stem te gee aan die ander en gevolglik ‘n ruimte te vorm waar dominante identiteite en hegemoniese ordes onderhandel kan word, word ondersoek.

Die finale deel van die tesis is ‘n toepassing van al die voorafgaande op Suid-Afrikaanse sepienarratief. Konkrete voorbeelde vanuit vier Suid-Afrikaanse sepies (*Egoli – Plek van Goud/Place of Gold, Isidingo – the need, Generations* en *7de Laan*) word gebruik om gewig te verleen aan die argument dat Suid-Afrikaanse sepies ‘n ander konstitueer en dat dit gevolglik ‘n ruimte daarstel waarin nuwe Suid-Afrikaanse identiteite geskep en oues onderhandel kan word.

Sleutelterme: Narratief, sepies (strooisages), die ander, identiteit, gender, hegemonie, vroulikheid, vrou.

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This study is dedicated to my mother, Mrs. Marelie Alida Marx.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and aims of this study

The premise that serves as point of departure for this thesis is that narrative, specifically South African soap opera narrative, serves as a site of struggle in the construction and representation of South African identity/identities.

Although almost any example of serial or segmental television productions (or narrative) can be studied in terms of the construction of identity, this study focuses on soap opera. There are numerous reasons for this decision. Firstly there is the indisputable popularity of the genre. Christine Geraghty (1996: 88) notes that "in Britain in the early 1990s the two programmemes which constantly vied for the number one place in the ratings were both soaps". The situation is very similar in South Africa today where soap operas like *7de Laan, Egoli – Place of Gold/Plek van Goud*[1]*, Generations* and *Isidingo – the Need*[2] enjoy unprecedented popularity. The second reason for the choice of soap opera is its subject matter. Soap operas supposedly deal with everyday people and situations, which encourage viewer identification. Thirdly, viewers also identify with soap opera because of its extended story plots.

South Africa recently entered its second decade of democracy but the past still affects the lives of its inhabitants. The country has undergone far-reaching shifts in its political, economic and cultural paradigms. These shifts are manifested in the production of meaning in popular visual culture, and more particularly, in soap opera.

This thesis examines the potential for popular visual culture and mass media (specifically Anglo-American soap opera) narratives to function as a site for the construction or negotiation of identity. South African soap operas bear many similarities to Anglo-American soap operas, primarily since they were created in accordance with these examples. Upon studying South African soap opera, it is clear

[1] Hereafter referred to as *Egoli.*
[2] Hereafter referred to as *Isidingo.*

that soap opera is transcultural and it encapsulates a universal appeal that fascinates members of most cultures. Carol Traynor Williams (1992: 2) states: "Soap opera is commercial, but it is also a popular art form that has grown from the wellspring of culture and folk story and therefore appeals across time, cultures, and even classes".

Although some of the inherent characteristics of the soap operas analysed in this thesis may be universal, their specifically South African context is of primary importance. Specific ideologies play a determining role in individual narratives, collective narratives and, therefore, in the representation of these narratives. South African soap narrative will accordingly be approached with the specific South African context in mind.

1.1.1 Research questions

1.1.1.1 Main Question

Do the narratives of South African soap opera constitute some kind of other identity or identities from where the possibility is created for these soap operas to serve as a site of struggle for negotiating existing South African identities?

1.1.1.2 Related sub-questions

- How do narratives come into being and what characteristics do they have?
- What is the connection between the concepts narrative, identity, the other,[3] and related concepts, for example time, memory and imagination?
- Can narrative be characterised as gendered?
- What are the characteristics of soap opera narrative?
- Does soap opera narrative constitute an other and how?
- Does soap opera have the potential to serve as a site of struggle where identities, gender roles and hegemonic orders can be negotiated?

[3] For the purpose of this thesis, due to its theoretical underpinning as well as for consistency, the term *other* will be spelt in lower case. The "other" referred to here is not the Lacanian "Other" but the Irigarian "other" as will become clear in following sections.

- What does the South African context look like in terms of its history, identities and media?
- Does South Africa constitute an other?
- Does South African soap opera constitute an other or othernesses?
- How does South African soap opera construct identities?
- Do this otherness and the construction of identities create the potential for South African soap opera to serve as a site of struggle where South African identities, gender roles and hegemonic orders can be negotiated?

1.2 Research methodology

While the research done by some quantitative authors will be employed to indicate, for instance, the number of viewers of soap opera, the main methodological framework of this thesis, however, is a qualitative one. Research methods will include contextual research, as well as content analysis. Data and sources will be gathered in a dialogical fashion and a critical analysis of the data will be regarded as a source of information. Thus, through a literature study and interpretation I will explore and substantiate the hypotheses made.

The first part of this thesis is a literature study that focuses on Cultural Studies, soap opera, narrative and the other. The aim of the literature study is to establish an understanding of the theoretical context within which this thesis is situated and to identify areas where a contribution is possible. The latter part comprises of an application of the theoretical principles in a case study. The theories that are examined in the first part of the study are applied to a number of South African soap operas, and it is the intention that this application will clarify the assumptions made in the first part of the study. The conclusions drawn in this study are based on assumptions that are qualified and critically investigated as far as possible. The interpretative and descriptive nature of this study situates it as qualitative research. All assumptions are critically examined as objectively as possible.

The parameters of this study also need clarifying. Since soap opera as a text resists complete closure, limits need to be set. South African soap opera from roughly 1998

onward will be taken into account to limit the amount of available information. A purposive sampling will be made. The four main South African soap operas that form a part of this thesis are *Egoli* (director: Franz Marx), *7de Laan* (director: Danie Odendaal), *Isidingo* (director: Will Gray Hofmeyr) and *Generations* (directed by: Mfundi Vundla and Friedrich Stark). American soap operas will also be touched upon briefly where relevant.

1.3 Theoretical approach and overview of literature

Soap opera and narrative can be approached from a variety of different viewpoints, as well as from a variety of different theoretical frameworks.

Before attempting a critical investigation of this genre, or cultural product, some clarity on its point of departure and the context to which it belongs is necessary. It was mentioned previously that according to Williams (1992: 2), soap opera appeals across culture, time and even class. It thus seems reasonable to deduce that the study of popular and mass culture, as well as culture at large, is relevant when attempting a study of soap opera. It is safe, furthermore, to state that any cultural product is ideological by nature.[4] The theoretical discourses relevant to such a study must, therefore, be concerned with the above-mentioned elements, namely ideology, culture, and, more specifically, popular culture.

This thesis is situated within the larger philosophical perspective of Cultural Studies and a post-structuralist mode of analysis. The principal goal of Cultural Studies, as applied here, is to analyse, understand, and assess mass culture.

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[4] According to Allen Bullock and Stephen Trombley (2000: 414) the word ideology has been variously used to "characterize ideas, ideals, beliefs, passions, values, weltanschauungen, religions, political philosophies, and moral justifications". From a Marxist point of view it may be employed "to deride the proposition that ideas are autonomous or the belief in the power of ideas to shape or determine reality; or to argue that all ideas are socially determined. Ideologies may be seen as justifications which mask some specific set of interests… Within contemporary sociology Mannheim identifies ideologies as different 'styles of thought' and distinguishes between 'particular' ideologies (the self interests of specific groups…) and 'total' ideologies (*Weltanschauugen* or complete commitments to a way of life)… Talcott Parsons (1902-79) defined ideology as an interpretative scheme used by social groups to make the world more intelligible to themselves" (Bullock & Trombley, 2000: 414). For the purpose of this thesis ideology will not be approached solely as a system of ideas or a specific world view but also in terms of the way in which the workings of ideology determine the structure, interpretation and use of texts.

This study has its roots in the work of the Birmingham theorists, especially the work that undermined the high culture/low culture dichotomy. It is suggested that something previously regarded as low culture and consequently of little importance, such as soap opera, can be just as culturally significant as high cultural texts. The aim is not to argue that soap opera should be regarded as "works of art", but simply that it should be acknowledged as an important carrier of cultural meaning. A text regarding Cultural Studies as a discipline that will be integral to this study is that of Ben Agger (1992), who writes about Cultural Studies as a critical discipline. Stuart Hall (1986, 1997, 2003) and authors on Hall (such as David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (1996)) are also of great importance in order to achieve a critical understanding of the discipline. John Fiske (1987, 1989, 1995, 1998) are other seminal sources since these texts do not only deal with the methodology and assumptions intrinsic to Cultural Studies, but more specifically with the relation between this field of study and television. This is important given that this study deals solely with television texts.

Fiske also points out the interdisciplinary nature of Cultural Studies and this is another reason for employing this approach. The texts relevant here include cultural, literary, and visual texts, which inevitably point to the inclusion of other disciplines such as visual culture, media studies, literary studies and sociology. To confine the study to one specific approach will limit its scope. Whereas one discourse may elicit certain nuances, another discourse may delimit those nuances. The site of this thesis will therefore be exactly in the fluid space where the above-mentioned disciplines overlap.

This study is situated in a discourse concerning the possible influence of the content of popular visual culture on consumers and the creation of identity.[5] When trying to open texts and interpret meaning, the approach will be a hermeneutic one - hermeneutics here not only understood in terms of literary, but also visual interpretation. This implies a basic understanding, in both viewer and creator, which surfaces when trying to interpret. Multiple voices come into play in such a quest. A

[5] The intention here is not to suggest that this study uses audience research but instead that the content of soap opera is analysed in order to come to an understanding about the meaning and messages created by them and the possible influence these messages may have on audiences.

number of voices play a role in the interpretation process which is followed in the scope of this thesis. These are soap opera as text, the supposed audience, various theorists (including Heywood and Sandywell (1999) and Wilson (1993)), and inevitably, the subjective viewer.

Soap opera forms an integral part of modern mass media messages and it follows that sources on mass media are valuable. The main authors on the subject of mass media, culture and society include Stuart Hall (1986, 1997, 2003), John Fiske (1978, 1989, 1995, 1998) E. Ann Kaplan (1983), Victor Burgin (1996), Ellen Seiter et al (1989) and John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (1996).

Some of the seminal texts on soap opera in the Cultural Studies discipline are those by Ien Ang. Ang's (1982, 1989, 1991, 1995, 1996) audience-based studies were pivotal to contemporary soap opera research. True to the discipline of Cultural Studies, Ang regards the viewer as an active participant in the creation of meaning. Meaning is therefore constantly negotiated between viewer and text. The goal is to investigate this interaction and the production of meaning that follows.

Apart from the work by Ang, a number of other authors on soap opera will be instrumental to this study. Robert C. Allen's (1983, 1985, 1989, 1992) research on soap opera, like that of Ang, is sometimes quantitative, audience-based research that are nevertheless relevant. Allen (1989) however, is in favour of a semiotic approach to soap opera analysis rather than a hermeneutic one. His research on soap opera and its nature is nonetheless indispensable, especially in defining soap opera as a genre. Semiotics, for the purposes of this thesis, will be regarded as a form of hermeneutics and not as oppositional. As far as the sources regarding responses to soap opera are concerned, Williams (1992) provides valuable information. Other authors on the topic of soap opera are Manuela Soares (1978), Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1988, 1989), M. G. Cantor and S. Pingree (1983), Suzanne Frentz (1992), Richard Kilborn (1992) and again Dorothy Hobson (2003).

Soap opera as such is not the only subject that needs to be researched for the purposes of this thesis. Narrative theories have to be taken into account even before soap opera narrative can be analysed. For this purpose the theories of Paul Ricoeur (1996) will be

the main source. Various authors that write on Ricoeur are also included in the section on narrative. They are: C. Bryn Pinchin (1997), Maria da Penha Villela-Petit (1989) and T. Peter Kemp and David Rasmussen (1989). Some authors with contrasting or contesting views on narrative such as Helen Buss (1997) are also consulted in order to identify shortcomings or contradictions in Ricoeur's narrative theory. Authors that contribute to an understanding of the role that narrative plays in the construction of identity include André P. Brink (1998, 2003), Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (2001), as well as Jerome Bruner (2001). In order to undertake a study of the role that narrative, specifically soap opera narrative, and other related phenomena such as memory, imagination, history and story, play in the construction of identities, authors such as Alan D. Baddeley (1999) and E.P. Monroe (1995) are relevant. As far as situating memory within the current discourse is concerned, Andreas Huyssen (1995) is regarded as the main source. Victor Burgin (1996) is instrumental in connecting memory as well as history and story to soap opera. He comments on the way in which viewers substitute instances from their own personal histories for those seen in films or on television.

Analysing the construction of identity in a South African context calls for the inclusion of experts on the construction of relevant identities. In this regard authors the like of Benedict Anderson (1983), Melissa Steyn (2004) and Zimitri Erasmus (2000) will be consulted. Regarding the role that language plays in the construction of identity Victor Webb (2005) is regarded as the main source.

The main point of critique on Ricoeur's narrative theory, as raised by Buss (1997), is that it privileges the male voice. Since it will be argued that narrative and more specifically soap opera narrative is gendered as female rather than as male, sources on feminism, gender and the gendering of genre are decisive in shaping this study. The main source in this regard is *Female stories/female bodies* by Lidia Curti (1998). Other seminal sources include Charlotte Brunsdon (1983, 2000), Rosi Braidotti (2003), John Fiske (1995), Christine Gledhill (2003), Tania Modleski (1982, 1983, 1986), Deborah Rogers (1995) and Dorothy Hobson (1989, 2003).

In the light of the above I argue in Chapters 3 and 4 that soap opera narrative, specifically South African soap opera narrative, might fulfil the role of an other to

more traditional narratives and in that way enable these narratives to create a site for the negotiating of existing ideas about identity. The post-structuralist theories of Luce Irigaray (1985, 1991) are seminal here since she does not regard the other as a negative concept but rather one filled with the potential to create differing rather than opposing identities. Authors on Irigaray such as Margaret Whitford (1991), Karen Green (2002) as well as Carolyn Burke and G. C. Gill (1993) are also considered. bell hooks's (1996) theory of the other is also influential to the argument.

Because of the inherent importance of the viewer or the intended viewer, viewers' contexts play an essential role; therefore sources on the nature and influence of ideology and hegemony are relevant. Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony is particularly important here since this study will be dealing with issues of ideological power in a postcolonial South African environment, and also with the possible disruption of that power. Specifically South African sources on the South African context include works by Sarah Nuttal and Carli Coetzee (1998) as well as Nuttal and Cheryl-Ann Michael (2000). Authors such as Elazar Barkan (2000), Anthony Holiday (1998) and Annie E. Coombes (2003) write on the history of post-apartheid South Africa and are instrumental to contextualising South Africa.

South African soap opera is a subject which has not been extensively researched. Magriet Pitout (1996, 1998) wrote several articles and a thesis pertaining to this subject matter as did Viola Milton (1996, 2005). Katie Khan (1999) also completed her Masters of Arts degree with a thesis entitled *Representations of women of colour in the soap opera Egoli.* Although Pitout and Khan's studies are largely audience based the conclusions drawn on content and audience participation are instrumental. Milton (1996, 2005) did a specific reception study on *Egoli* which informed arguments in Chapter 3 and 4 even though reception study in itself is not the theoretical area in which the present project is situated. Miki Flockeman (2000), also a South African author, contributes to the understanding of South African viewers' reaction to soap opera.

Since few South African authors have written on South African soap opera, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic analysis of soap operas within a South African context.

In the case study section of this thesis I repeatedly refer to Internet, electronic, newspaper and magazine articles as sources. Where such sources are referred to, the author has taken care to assess their reliability, quality and academic merit. The subject of soap opera lends itself towards an investigation of the mass communications media. It is therefore apt that a portion of the literature used for this study should stem from the mass communications media.

1.4 Overview of chapters

The intention of this study is to research the construction of identity through narrative and the potential for narrative - in visual culture as a whole but, more specifically, in South African soap opera - to serve as a site of struggle for contesting, deconstructing or negating existing South African identities and the former, but still current, hegemonic order.

The study consists of three sections. Chapter 2 examines the theoretical underpinning of narrative. It focuses on defining the broad term narrative and aims to come to an understanding of its characteristics, how narratives come into being and the role it plays in constructing or negotiating identity. Important concepts in this section include: narrative, identity, history, story, imagination, truth and the feminine. As a prelude to arguments made in the succeeding chapters it will be argued that there exists a strong link between narrative and the feminine.

Chapter 3 narrows the focus specifically to soap opera narrative. The overall history of the soap genre is touched upon, and the main characteristics are identified in order to facilitate the interpretation of South African soap operas in the following chapter. The second part of this chapter will be devoted to arguing that soap opera constitutes some kind of other. In order to do this soap opera narrative is differentiated from or othered to traditional narrative and negative perceptions about soap opera are investigated. In accordance with the arguments in the preceding chapter on narrative – specifically soap opera narrative – narrative is argued to be both feminine and female, constituting it as other. In the light of the fact that soap opera may constitute an other it is concluded that it may well serve as a site for struggle and negotiation.

Chapter 4 focuses specifically on South African soap opera as South African narrative. The first part of the chapter focuses on the contextualisation of South Africa and the justification of South African soap opera as South African narrative. In the second section conclusions drawn from Chapters 2 and 3, as well as the first part of Chapter 4, are substantiated with concrete examples from South African soap operas. The argument for the otherness of soap opera narrative is continued here with case specific examples from relevant South African soap opera narratives to demonstrate the inherent possibility for soap opera to serve as a site of struggle and negotiation.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 5, highlights the main areas investigated throughout this study. The conclusions drawn and the implications of these conclusions are elucidated. The value and significance of this study is made clear, while the limitations are acknowledged and further areas of inquiry that pertain to the concepts explored are suggested.

CHAPTER 2
NARRATIVE

"Narrative is a universal aspect of the human condition"
(Pellauer, 1997: xix).

Due to soap opera's continuous storyline it has an essentially narrative structure. Because of the subject matter of this study it is therefore important to establish a working definition of the term "narrative". The primary goal of this chapter is to establish such a definition.

Harriet Klein describes narrative as a story, a linking of actions, events and happenings into structures of meaning (2001: 164). According to Klein (2001: 163), the narrative "designates and systematizes". She claims that themes for narratives "are culturally determined… [and] [n]arratives tend to have core structural features such as an introduction or preamble, permission to speak, overview, main body of narration, including divisions into episodes, conclusions, and codas" (Klein 2001: 163). She (2001: 163) also points out that "for any given 'narrative'… different versions may exist… In telling and retelling of narratives, the narrator claims his or her distinctive style of narrative authority… Counter narratives are created. That narratives have a life and/or function beyond their simple essence or creation has lead to the further discussion of narratives as tokens of the discourse of the dominated". She thus identifies concepts such as narrative function, narrative structure, narrative authority, the fact that different versions of a narrative exists, as well as the functioning of narrative as possible discourse for the dominated. Klein's definition of narrative serves as a starting point for my own defining of narrative. The rest of this chapter is devoted to researching these, but also other aspects relevant to narrative in order to analyse soap opera narrative within a South African context in the rest of this thesis.

Soap opera, as a television genre, incorporates both imagery and dialogue and therefore soap opera is a combination of the visual image and the linguistic. Although narrative is usually regarded as essentially linguistic, a broader definition should be

applied here.[1] It is suggested that narrative aligns with Jens Brockmeier's[2] (2001: 248) notion namely: "[a]n understanding of narrative not primarily as a linguistic entity but, in a more general sense, as the ability 'to tell a story'… The medium can be language as well as imagery, sound, spatial construction, or a combination thereof".

Memory and identity are further pivotal concepts for the purposes of this study. It is suggested that memory plays an integral role in the construction of all narratives because when recounting an event memory is instrumental. For the purposes of this thesis, memory as it pertains to the genre of soap opera narrative is particularly important. It follows that the influence of memory on the construction of a narrative will be investigated.

Crucial to this study is the notion that both narrative and identity are constructed, or rather always 'under construction'. The way something is remembered and the way it is narrated will affect the identity that is subsequently constructed. Brockmeier (2001: 276) refers to the "genre of life and identity narrative". It is suggested by this thesis that soap opera also has a place in this genre of "life and identity narrative" as will become clear in Chapter 4. Before any of these ideas can be examined, however, a satisfactory definition or understanding of the broader term narrative needs to be established. Klein's definition will serve as starting point for this.

A few key concepts or associations will be identified and discussed in order to delimit or define narrative, its importance, and its functions. Firstly, the relationship between identity, and more specifically what Paul Ricoeur refers to as "narrative identity", and

[1] For the sake of completeness it might be necessary here to refer to the field of narratology or narrative theology. According to Bullock and Trombly (2000: 559) narrative theology is "[a] collective name for a series of developments in theology in the 1970s and 1980s, rather than a movement as such, in which the category of narrative is central. The conviction that narrative forms and sustains the identity of individuals, communities and traditions is common to contemporary thought… While much of the initial enthusiasm for 'theology as story' has evaporated, as awareness of complex issues in hermeneutics and in literary theory has increased, thinking about narrative has yielded significant results in ethics… and in some other fields. It is arguable, however, that that narrative theology has achieved greater impact through its contribution to the 'post-critical' or 'post-liberal' dimension of post-modern theology…"

[2] *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self and culture* edited by Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh had its origin in the International Research Centre for Cultural Studies Conference held in Vienna in December 1995. The subject of the conference was the importance of narrative as an expressive embodiment of experience, as a mode of communication and a form of understanding the world and ultimately ourselves.

narrative will be discussed. Other concepts that may assist in the exploration of narrative, such as time, imagination, history, story, folklore or myth and gender are also explored. In an attempt to create a logical train of thought each of these concepts will be examined in turn. It must be taken into account, however, that all the above-mentioned concepts seldom exist or function on their own but always in coexistence with each other. In other words, these concepts have a symbiotic relationship with one another. They must be understood in terms of their interaction with each other and the ways in which they overlap.

Ricoeur's philosophy does not supply an entirely satisfactory account of concepts such as gender, story and myth, but it will nonetheless provide a broader structure within which narrative can be defined or situated.

The inclusion of concepts such as imagination, memory and gender leads to the conceptualisation of narrative as embodied and gendered. In contrast to Ricoeur's theories it will be argued that narrative may be gendered as feminine. This leads to the hypothesis that a feminine narrative may point towards otherness and subsequently as Klein claims "a discourse of the dominated". Consequently, a section of this chapter will be devoted to otherness and its implications for the construction of identity.

2.1 On narrative and identity

The ultimate purpose of analysing and deconstructing South African soap opera is to establish the role of its narrative and memory in determining, representing, and influencing the construction of identity. Before examining the specifically South African soap opera, however, the concepts of narrative and identity[3] will be investigated.

The term 'identity' not only implies a personal, but also a collective or cultural identity. In fact, in many cases these two 'types' of identities are similar. This subsection explores how these identities are constructed and reconstructed.

[3] According to Bullock & Trombley (2000: 413) identity is a term used traditionally to convey the "relatively stable and enduring sense that a person has of himself". Psychoanalysis postulates that the "original source of identity is based on body image; subsequently, identification with parents and others leads to more complex and elaborate experiences of identity in a variety of contexts".

2.1.1 Narrative and personal identity

The connection between narrative and identity is one often made by theorists. Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley (2000: 559), for instance, state that "the conviction that narrative forms and sustains the identity of individuals, communities and traditions is common in contemporary thought". Other authors' views substantiate this point of view. According to Ricoeur, narrative is central when it comes to the structuring of human identity (Brown, 1997: 113). Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (2001: 1) also accept this view when they write that the "construction of self and life worlds draws on a particular genre of language usage: narration". Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001: 15) postulate that the existence of identity relies on narrative: "the very idea of human identity – perhaps… the very possibility of human identity is tied to the very notion of narrative and narrativity". The importance of narrative in relation to identity needs thus not be argued further. Exactly how narrative creates or assists in constructing identity is the issue at hand.

Ricoeur's (Brown, 1997: 113) definitions of narrative and identity are meaningful to investigating the role of narrative in constructing identity:

> Narrative is that form of discourse that represents human action in relation to given problematic situations. To follow a story is to recognise the sequence of events and actions as displaying a particular direction, in which the intentional human response to a situation 'brings the story to a conclusion'… Ricoeur contends that action is that aspect of human behaviour that can be recollected in stories whose function, in turn, is to provide an identity to the actor. Identity is established through an interpretation of who acts in the narrative.

It is important to note that Ricoeur contends that "action" functions to provide the actor with an identity. According to Brown (1997: 111), it is indeed narrative that is the "mode of discourse through which human action is interpreted as a meaningful agency". Consequently, by narrating, and structuring actions in a specific order, the narrator manages to create what Ricoeur refers to as "narrative identity". Thus, what needs to be investigated is the role of "action" and how the narrator selects a seemingly logical sequence of "actions" in structuring narrative. Bruner (2001:25) suggests that the "actions" recaptured, as well as the order in which it is done, assist in creating an individual identity. The narrator thus chooses a specific sequence of

specific events, which creates an identity. Jerome Bruner (2001: 25) refers to this "action" as the "why tell" function of narrative. Narrative, according to Bruner, is thus not simply about a sequence of events, it must contain what he refers to as "exceptionality". André P. Brink (2003) implies that any storyteller or historiographer makes a selection out of reality when narrating. The narrator thus selects from reality that which is endowed with exceptionality from a specific point of view. Bruner (2001: 31) also identifies what he calls "turning points" that narrators intentionally use in their narratives as "crucial effort[s] to individualize a life". Brown (1997: 113) postulates that "(s)ubjects recognise themselves in the stories they tell about themselves".

Thus, every individual narrator constructs a personal narrative subjectively by using that which is exceptional, and in doing so (knowingly or not) the narrator constructs identity. The suggestion that personal stories or autobiographies make use of only those parts that are "exceptional" for the narrator has implications that will be discussed in the section about narrative and truth. Narrative, and more importantly, the construction of narrative by utilising certain "actions" to individualize it, accordingly plays a vital role in establishing or constructing the identity of individuals.

2.1.2 From personal to collective identity

> "The identity of a group, culture, people, or nation, is not that of an immutable substance, not that of a fixed structure, but that, rather, of a recounted story" (Kearney, 1996: 7).

Although the previous subsection is an examination of personal identity only, the question arises as to how a narrative - like soap opera for instance - narrated not by oneself but by others, can construct one's own identity. Brown (1997: 109) posits an answer by suggesting that the "transition from personal identity ("I") to collective identity ("we") is a narrative accomplishment". He suggests that we may extend Ricoeur's previously mentioned statement to "we recognise ourselves in the stories that others tell about themselves". Brown (1997: 109) writes that "in the course of everyday interaction subjects find in the narrative accounts of others formal parallels with their own accounts". The implications of this theory are that not only personal

narratives, but also the narratives of others, construct identity. Viewers do not merely construct parallels; Ricoeur (Kearney, 1997: 3) theorises that they are "literally entangled in stories". Apart from our tendency to recognise ourselves in the stories told by ourselves, and others, this mingling of stories engenders what Ricoeur (Kearney, 1997: 3) refers to as "second order stories, which are in themselves interactions between numerous stories". It seems appropriate to state that narrative, whether told by oneself or others, or by oneself about others, plays a significant role in the creation of identity. From the above it is also clear that the narrative of a popular genre, such as soap opera, may influence the viewer's construction of identity. This comes to bear in Chapter 4.

The formal parallels that individuals find between their own narratives and those of others can be explained by looking at what Ricouer regards as the "characteristic mark of narrative" (Pellauer, 1997: xv): namely, the plot. Terms such as "direction" and "conclusion" which suggest a plot, form an important part of Ricouer's definition of narrative quoted earlier. The concept of exceptionality also points to a plot. Utilising that which is supposedly exceptional gives the narration a specific slant, which implies that it has an inherent plot, and therefore the life being narrated, also has a specific meaning. Pellauer (1997: xv) writes that "narrative emplots what it says". Since one of the fundamental human needs is to comprehend, it seems logical that humans attempt to structure their life stories into comprehensible wholes. This is done by introducing a structured plot that arguably did not have any part in the "actual reality"[4] of the life being narrated. Brockmeier (2001: 278) states that "it seems that the uncertainty and arbitrariness that prevail in our real lives first of all demand structured and closed narrative forms. Life needs plots or, it is dependant on plots – that do not make it more precarious and problematic, but more bearable, perhaps even easier to live". If we recognise ourselves in the stories told by others, it follows that the plots introduced to individual lives coincide with the plots of group narratives. Although the existence of a "real" or stable reality is arguable, what is real and stable about human identity is the need to have a structured life story that

[4] According to Lacan (Bullock & Trombley, 2000: 731) the notion of the real "is simply what is excluded from the symbolic, excluded from the network of signifiers which build up the reality of the world, and which is hence impossible to know". Although the concept "reality" will be referred to during the course of this thesis, I want to stress that the existence of a single or real reality is debatable. It is assumed that if reality exists it cannot be recaptured and consequently it is always mediated. The term is therefore used for lack of a more suitable one and its shortcomings are acknowledged.

coincides with the narratives of the broader collective group to which the narrator belongs. According to Bruner (2001: 35),

> [p]erhaps what remains most stable about the self as an enduring concept over time… is a sense of commitment to a set of beliefs and values that we are unwilling (or unable) to submit to 'radical' scrutiny. For what makes the telling 'justifiable' [or real?] is also a commitment to a certain set of presuppositions about oneself, one's relation to others, one's view of the world and one's place in it.

Individuals thus construct their life stories in the form of a meta-narrative in order to induce meaning, purpose and belonging. Bruner (2001: 29) identifies a dual function of autobiography, which can also be linked to the theory that humans recognise themselves in the narratives of others. The first function of autobiography, according to Bruner (2001: 29), is "exceptionality", which was mentioned earlier. The second function Bruner mentions is "entrenchment" and this links with the way in which humans tend to emplot their narratives. Bruner (2001: 29) contends that we "wish to present ourselves to others (and to ourselves) as typical or characteristic or 'culture conforming' in some way". To account for the manifestation of both "exceptionality" and "entrenchment", Bruner (2001: 30) writes that even though some stories do deviate from the norm they do so in a predictable way. Thus, narratives, in this case autobiography, violate the canonical but "it must be a violation of the folk-psychologically canonical that is itself canonical" (Bruner, 2001: 30). Like the theory about the tendency of narrators to introduce a plot, the theory of "entrenchment" provides proof that, on some level, narratives of different narrators share a number of structural characteristics. This explains why one can to a certain extent associate with narratives other than your own. If this is in fact the case, then it follows that soap opera narrative should also represent something of our own identities. The influence of soap opera on the construction of identity is discussed in following chapters.

Bruner is not the only theorist who supports the idea of entrenchment. Brown's (1997: 109) opinion is similar to Bruner's, but he sees collective identity in "belonging". He writes that one experiences this "belonging", "to the extent that one is able to interweave interpretations of the self with the interpretations of others through narrative discourse… Belonging, in this sense, is something more than the multiplication of personal identities – it gives us the authority to speak of we, us, ourselves". Thus once we have established what Brown (1997: 109) terms the

"commonality of our separate accounts – and therefore the commonality of our identities", it becomes easier to construct narratives of the group as a whole and thus create a collective identity. Bruner (2001: 34-35) supports this when he writes: "It becomes plain, as one observes this process of self-formation, that it is probably a mistake to conceive of the self as solo… Rather, self seems also to be intersubjective or 'distributed' in the same way that one's 'knowledge' is distributed beyond ones head to include the friends and colleagues to whom one has access". Brown's experience of "belonging" is also relevant where the medium of soap opera is concerned. When watching South African soap opera, the viewers should be able to identify the similarities between the soap narratives and their own. This could lead to association with the characters as well as with the collective groups they belong to, and then to affirmation, as Brown maintains. The possibilities for viewer identification with soap opera narratives come to bear in Chapter 4.

It follows that identity is established, not only by telling our own stories, but also by interacting with the narratives of the identity of others. Since this interaction is an ongoing process, it seems logical that Ricoeur comes to the conclusion that identity and its negotiation is not an absolute or static achievement but rather something that is always in the making. As basis of his theory Brown refers to Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics that regards individual consciousness not as a priori but rather as something that is "emergent and developmental". Brown (1997: 111) writes that "hermeneutics directs us towards a de-centred notion of the subject. It assumes a view of selfhood that entails an ongoing dialectic between subject and discourse". Ricoeur (Kearney, 1997: 7) writes that "these mobile identifications contribute to the reconfiguration of our own past and that of the past of others, by an incessant restructuring of stories that we tell, some of them about others".

This section analysed identity and its relation to narrative. The notion of identity is of great concern to the rest of this chapter as it is inevitably implied in all the other concepts discussed here. Thus, even though each of the following sections attempts to address other seemingly separate issues, the interaction between these terms and identity must be continually kept in mind. When Ricoeur, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, for example refers to the "refiguration of our own *past* and that of

the *past* of others" (emphasis added) time inevitably becomes involved in the construction of identity through narrative.

2.2 Narrative and time

According to David Pellauer (1997: xiv) Ricoeur's major thesis is that "narrative is the way we finally make sense of our temporality". Through narrating we give meaning to our lives and in so doing "we construct ourselves as *Gestalten* in time, personal and cultural beings" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001: 1). If the understanding of time or temporality is what makes identity possible it follows that some investigation on the subject of time and narrative is merited.

Pellauer (1997: xiv) writes: "narrative does not give us the missing philosophy of time. It instead resolves the problem by making use of it in order to refigure our temporal experience". A number of questions arise when one addresses time in connection with the construction of narrative and identity. One of these problematic issues is the link between the past and the present. Even though most life narratives have the past as subject matter, they are nevertheless constructed or told in the present, which also holds implications for the future. From the theories of Brink and Bruner it became apparent that narrators select from an originally chronological string of events when constructing a story. The fact that a selection is made, together with the problematic relationships between past and present, creates a complex situation. Past, present, and future are dynamically interwoven and pure linear or chronological time will be insufficient when dealing with this issue.

It may be argued that time plays both a crucial and invalid role in the construction of narrative and identity. On the one hand, as will become clear in the following paragraphs, chronological time has little or no influence on the construction of narrative. On the other hand, the temporal axes which structure narratives are quite complex, even confusing, and significant. The convoluted way in which different time frames such as past and present interact in narrative makes the concept of time in relation to narrative a problematic one. The interaction that takes place between time and narrative construction also holds implications for the blurring of the distinction between fictional (imaginary) and non-fictional (real) narratives.

For the purposes of this study I will rely on Brockmeier's theories about narrative and time. Brockmeier (2001: 255-271) reintroduces the Russian Formalist concepts of *fabula* and *sjuzet* with reference to the "life perspective". According to Brockmeier (2001: 270) the *fabula* refers to something "based on the documented life course". In other words, the linear, chronological story of a life's events. This is based on empirical evidence like documents and certificates, proof of birth, baptism, marriage and so on.

Brockmeier (2001: 269) postulates that "when people talk about what 'really mattered' the chronological story mostly does not even serve as an unanimated skeleton for their narrative". He even suggests (2001: 271) that sometimes the *fabula* is entirely disconnected "from the fabric of meaning that keeps an identity together". This is inherently connected to Bruner's "why tell" function of narrative mentioned previously because the narrator does not narrate events the way they happened chronologically, but instead events are selected according to the their importance to the plot.

It can be deduced that chronological time, or the "Newtonian framework of time" as Brockmeier (2001: 271) refers to it, makes very little, if any, contribution to the way in which human identity is constructed. According to Brockmeier (2001: 271), "[a]utobiographically important episodes… are selected and turned into 'autobiographems' – a selection that cannot but pick a few episodes out of hundreds and thousands of possible candidates. It also holds for the way autobiographems are linked together and linearized, irrespective of the temporal sequence in which they may have occurred originally". Maria Villela-Petit (1989: 35-36) also discusses this notion although she doesn't apply the same terminology. She refers to the explicit value judgements of historians: "in other words, the judgement of importance, by getting rid of the accessory, creates a continuity: that which actually took place is disconnected and torn by insignificance, the narrative is meaningful because of its continuity". This links with Brink's view mentioned in the previous section, namely that the historiographer makes a selection from reality when narrating.

What Brockmeier refers to as the *sjuzet* has more important implications for identity. Brockmeier (2001: 271) postulates that the sole function of autobiographical

narratives (be it natural or fictional) is not primarily to provide a *fabula* but rather a *sjuzet*. The *sjuzet* (Brockmeier, 2001: 271) can be described as a particular narrative composition of the *fabula*. *Sjuzet* can be translated as 'plot'. As was the case in the previous section, here too plot becomes a key to the construction of, firstly narrative, and then identity and this is where the importance of another 'type' of time, namely "narrative time", becomes unequivocal. "In contrast with the *fabula*, the *sjuzet* is defined not in terms of chronological time but of narrative time; the peculiar time that is created in the act of narrating" states Brockmeier (2001: 271). For Villela-Petit (1989: 35) narrative time is crucial because: "time is already assumed as a dispersing, spreading force and the narrative as a work of synthesis and composition, thanks to which meaning is brought out". Narrative and narrative time thus serves to simplify the "real" and make it meaningful and comprehensible. According to Ricoeur (Kemp & Rasmussen, 1989: 37) "narrative is the keeper of human time".

Narrative time is a term that Ricouer developed in order to explain his philosophical theory of the narrative fabric of time. Drawing on Ricouer's conception Brockmeier (2001: 271) understands narrative time as the "temporal order of meaning that emerges in the narrative process". Brockmeier (2001: 272) writes that the underlying temporal order of a life story is construed along two temporal axes: "One axis is linked to a coordinate directed from the present to the past, and the other one links to a coordinate from the past to the present". This sheds some light on the complex relationship between time and narrative seeing that there not only exists a complex discourse between past and present but also vice versa. Buss (1997: 95) explains this constant dynamic process between past and present:

> Trying to find it is like pretending that history and home is real and not located precisely where you are sitting. The reader's act in reading the performance of the embodied imagination must be similarly conscious of the body located precisely where one's own body is sitting, in a conception of the body that is neither brute nor passive, neither transcendable nor denied, but present and participating, enabling a signifying process which does not separate imagination and body.

Apart from chronological time and narrative time, Brockmeier (2001: 276) also writes about another time order when he writes that "narrative is always told in the exact present of the narrative discourse". According to him, the fusion of all the time orders creates "autobiographical time". The more precise term "narrative time" accounts for

the dynamic relationship between past and present whilst the term "autobiographical time" accounts for the time frame in which the narration takes place. Thus to simply speak of narrative and time seems insufficient, since the relationship between the two is clearly much more intricate.

If, as Buss (1997: 95) claims, there is no separating the body and imagination during the process of creating a narrative, and time – both past and present – is intricately involved in this process, it follows that both what is remembered and imagined must be taken into account when attempting to come to an understanding of narrative.

2.3 On narrative, memory and the imagination

One of the main areas of importance to this study is how memories are constructed in a South African context. Central to the above, more specifically, is the role of the story or narrative in the making, creation or re-creation of memory, even history, and inevitably identity. In the following section the symbiotic relationship of these terms will be investigated.

2.3.1 History, story and the imagination

"In narrative terms, in this kind of identity narrative I articulate history and memory, I also convey meaning that expresses my flesh, and I become…"
(Löyttyniemi, 2006: 259).

In order to comprehend how the concepts of history, story and imagination influence each other they will be considered individually. The inherent relationships between these concepts, and the role they play in the construction of identity, will become apparent in this section.

Traditionally, history is perceived as an (autonomous and objective) account of the past. This view, however, simplifies history.[5] Villela-Petit provides a more encompassing view of history. According to her history consists of two aspects

[5] In the preface of his book *The Guilt of the nations,* Elazar Barkan (2000: x) postulates that traditionally we treat history as "'objective' knowledge of past events" that is immune to reinterpretation. He however also states that in the recent past we have come to view history as something more elastic and open to interpretation.

(Villela-Petit, 1989: 33). The first of these is history as recorded by historians. In other words historians aim to give an account of past events. The second aspect is the actual history, that in which we, "as suffering and acting human beings, are involved".[6] Villela-Petit's recognition that history is not simply an objective account of the past is valuable here. Furthermore, not only a definition of history, but also its purposes, should to be taken into account. As Villela-Petit (1989: 35) states: "the quest for meaning is closely allied to the question of history". This is indeed the case if one views history in the context of identity. The national identity of a people, for example, largely depends on their consensual view of the past, or more accurately, their specific "history".

In his article, *Stories of history: reimagining the past in post-apartheid narrative*, André P. Brink (1999: 38) identifies three inherent characteristics of stories. The first characteristic is that stories are the outcome of a "process of internalization and personalization". Subjects internalise and personalise events or views in order to create narratives. Secondly, Brink views stories as a construction of a version of the world. By internalising views and selecting 'exceptional' events narrators inevitably construct a personalised version of reality. Finally Brink refers to story as the embodiment of an imagining or a complex of imaginings.

From the above the links between history, story, and even imagination, become clear. Even though Brink is referring categorically to stories it is arguable that the same characteristics are intrinsic to history. It may be argued that a historiographer also internalises and personalises events while writing (or constructing) a history. Furthermore, if history is a quest for meaning, does it not necessarily imply a personalised view of the world?

Brink's reference to imaginings[7] can be linked with some of the innate characteristics of memory. Although there exists a very real and vital relationship between memory

[6] It is interesting to note here that Villela-Petit also uses the term "action" that was mentioned earlier when quoting Ricoeur on the definition of narrative. Villela-Petit's writing validates the importance of action in the construction of narrative.

[7] André Brink (1998:31) defines imaginings or the imagination as the processes through which mental images are produced. Lacan (Bullock & Trombly 2000: 415) contends that the term "imaginary" refers to the way in which the subject is trapped in an illusionary ideal of completeness which pertains both to the category of image and the category of signification or communication.

and reality the two terms can under no circumstances be regarded as the same thing. The "real" is in itself not attainable; there exists no authority on defining it. Memory originates in reality but it is merely a subjective individual representation of reality, mediated by the individual's preferences and interests. Because of the mediated nature of memory, imagination becomes involved, which contributes to the fictionality of stories told as the truth. Lidia Curti (1998: viii) writes the following on the relationship between fiction, stories and imagination:

> Fiction flows between life and imagination, and it is one of the most direct links between these two worlds. As Certeau says, "Our stories order our world, providing the mimetic and mythical structures of experience". It began with myth: the bridge between history and everyday life, underlining both the simplicity and importance of its passage. The anthropological and mythical dimensions of tale telling have been with us for a long time, while the novelistic has contributed to the ordering of meanings for the individual in society.

Although an attempt was made to consider history, story and imagination separately, it seems clear that these three concepts are in fact closely related. This assumption will be considered in more detail in the following section.

2.3.2 (His)tory/(Hi)story

"Imagination contributes concretely to the epoché of ordinary reference and the projection of new possibilities of describing the world"
(Ricoeur, 1996: 91).

Ricoeur identifies two different kinds of narrative (Buss, 1997: 87). The first type is fictional narratives such as tales, romances, dramas and novels that exist or come into existence through the archive of the imagination. Archive, isolated here from its literal association, refers to "the imagination as understood in terms of its temporal complexity as the depository of oral and written traditions" (Buss, 1997: 88). The second type of narrative is an empirical narrative, which includes histories, biographies and autobiographies that have their origin in documents and archives. Ricoeur furthermore distinguishes between the different goals or functions of these two types of narrative. History, according to Ricoeur, opens us to the 'different' or individual, whilst fictional or mimetic narrative addresses the universal and therefore brings us back to what is universal. Although this thesis contends that the distinction

between story and history has deteriorated to such an extent that these two seemingly different terms are no longer clearly distinguishable, it is interesting that Ricoeur still makes a clear distinction between the two. According to Ricoeur, both story and history belong to the narrative field (Kemp & Rasmussen, 1989: 37). He contends however that "the reason why historians are not simply narrators [is because they] give reasons why they consider a particular factor rather than some other".[8]

Brink (2003) questions Ricoeur's theory when he refers to the origin of the words history and story. According to Brink, both originated from the Spanish "historia". The fact that the terms share a mutual origin suggests a close relationship between story – which is usually regarded as fictional – and history. Brink also connects the term heretic to both history and story. The term "heretic" refers to somebody that makes a choice. According to Brink, both historiographers and storytellers are heretics since they make a choice out of a vast reality; they structure choices. If in fact historiographers do provide reasons for the choices they make, as Ricoeur contends, it seems a weak argument for making a distinction between history and story.

The link between history and story can be explored even further. As already mentioned, Villela-Petit states that myth is the bridge between history and everyday life. Brink (2003) accepts this opinion and in order to explain his viewpoint he refers to Herodotus (also sometimes referred to as Halicarnassus), whom he calls the "Father of historiography" (also often referred to as "the father of history"). When Herodotus attempted to write down the history of Greece he inevitably ended up in "the earlier strings of consciousness where myth still reigned" (Brink, 2003). Brink also uses the myth of Scheherazade in which history and story become totally intermingled and operate on two different levels. The first being the actual "history" of Scheherazade and her relationship with the king – the 'real' world so to speak. The second level is that of the fictional world that Scheherazade created through stories in order to stay alive. According to Brink, both levels or layers exist although they are not clearly distinguishable and constantly constitute one other.

[8] At this point I should acknowledge that what is contested here is not Ricoeur's insistence that a distinction should be made between history and fiction. Ricoeur quite rightfully states that we have a responsibility towards the past not to fictionalize it. What is being argued here is not whether or not the distinction must be made but whether it is possible.

If the assumption that memory, story and history influence each other in the creation of narratives can be taken as a workable argument, then the task of distinguishing between these three elements becomes decidedly complex. Is every account of history not merely a subjective (hi)story? The issue of the interaction between story/history or fact/fiction has already been discussed (see section 2.2). Curti (1998: 27-28) writes the following on this subject: "[F]act and fiction are different but crucial aspects of the same reality. The debate within history studies suggests that there is more than one history, and that official histories exist in parallel with hidden ones… Fantasy becomes another way to connect with reality and history".

Increasingly, it becomes clear that separating history and story (or rather non-fictional narratives and fictional narratives) into two different categories may prove problematic. The post-structuralist notion that there can be no complete, objective and absolute final truth is not a new one. From a Derridean point of view, meaning and also truth continually escapes. If, as Curti (1998: 28) postulates, histories exist in parallel with each other, there exists no objective version of the past, every version of the past is in fact a fictionalisation thereof. The narrator already mediates the version he/she is narrating.[9] Because of differing contexts every individual has a unique view of the world and therefore everybody's view of truth differs.[10] Brink (1999: 31) argues that in the construction of memory "impressions from the outside and impulses from the inside converge in the mental machinations that produce a quite densely textured result… they undergo a distortion that render them unreliable". The past as such is forever absent, or it continues to evade, and all that we have in its place is history or rather every individual's story or account of history. According to Brink (1999: 32), we have now come to accept the fact that history "as such" is always already inaccessible. He (1999: 32) ventures to say that "Waterloo is an act of language".

It seems that not only history and imagination overlap but also the concepts of truth and lie. Curti (1998: viii) writes: "To write [or to tell?] is to find my own voice, that

[9] The existence of different versions of narrative was already referred to by Klein earlier in this chapter.
[10] It is appropriate to acknowledge that the problematic of relativism is taken into account here. It is not suggested that every version of the past is equally valid. The issue being argued here, however, is not validity as such but the blurring of terms that are traditionally regarded as separate.

of a taleteller where narrativity is stronger than the truth. In fact it is truth (though it will not survive the trial of proof)". Remembering is always inevitably more than the sum of its parts. Because of all the stories that are told, history becomes merely another story, myth or legend. Like Curti, Brink (1999: 32) stresses the value and importance of myth when he writes:

> Something may in fact have happened, but… we can never be sure of it or gain access to it, and… the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors – that is, tell stories – in which, not history, but imaginings of history are invented. Myth may have preceded history but in the long run it may well be the only guarantee for the survival of history.

Therefore, it appears reasonable to deduce that imagination plays a prominent role in the creation of histories, memories and stories and that myth is more than a fictional metaphor for some universal truth. Imagination and memory influence each other. Brink (1999: 31) writes that the "workings of the imagination are at the very least inspired by memory".

Memory becomes even more significant in the twentieth century, according to Andreas Huyssen. In his book *Twilight memories: marking time in a culture of amnesia*, Huyssen (1995: 7) proposes that twentieth-century society has a distinct obsession with memory that stems from society's obsession with amnesia and its intense interest in the future:

> [O]ur obsessions with memory function as a reaction formation against the accelerating technical processes that are transforming our *Lebenswelt* (life world) in quite distinct ways. Memory is no longer primarily a vital energizing antidote to capitalist reification via the commodity form, a rejection of the iron cage homogeneity of an earlier culture industry and its consumer markets. It rather represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to speed information networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload.

Leon de Kock (2004) writes that there exists a strong impulse for a grand concluding narrative (as was suggested in previous sections) – the potential to produce newly energetic registers, but there exists an equal potential for amnesia. Memory thus becomes connected to amnesia. In the previous section, reference was made to the relationship between memory and reality and to how the real is in itself not attainable. Even though memory originates in reality it can hardly be considered to be an

"objective" version of the real. Victor Burgin (1996: 217) writes: "Freud found that memory and fantasy [or imagination] could no longer be definitively dissociated". The interplay that exists between memory, amnesia, imagination and fantasy makes it a very relevant subject matter to study in relation to visual culture. In his book *In/different spaces. Place and memory in visual culture,* Burgin (1996: 226) refers to Taranger who writes about "an almost universal tendency for personal history to be mixed with recollections of films and other productions of media. She finds that, in all of the narratives, 'the function of film is clear: it completes life, it fills the holes'". Burgin (1996: 235) states that "memories may contain scenes from films, which may in turn be films of memory". Although Burgin refers only to films, the same may be argued about soap opera. If films influence personal histories the potential for soap opera to do the same seems even greater since it is much more accessible and available, on a regular basis. In the following chapters, the role of soap opera in the construction of personal histories will be considered.

It seems that the concepts of story, memory and imagination are entangled to such an extent that they become inseparable. Brink (1999: 32) writes that: "history, memory, and language intersect so precisely as to be almost indistinguishable: the 'origins' of history, as recovered by memory, are encoded in language, and each of these three moments becomes a condition for the others". Like de Kock, Brink thus also interlinks language and imagination in an inescapable web.

Another inherent characteristic of the story of history mentioned in the previous subsection is that it is continually changing. It is something that "becomes", rather than something that actually "is". It is cumulative rather than chronological. Brink (1999: 30) writes that individuals constitute or invent themselves by a constant editing and re-editing of memory, he describes it as a "confluence of innumerable records". Due to this confluence of innumerable records, there can be no objective version of history and also, no static identity, therefore history and story tend to overlap. Ricoeur admits that the two types of narrative (fictional and empirical narrative) both belong to the narrative matrix. Although his definition of the two different types of narrative can be instrumental in understanding narrative it is obvious that the distinction Ricoeur makes is not as distinguishable and simplistic as it initially sounds.

Buss (1997: 88) claims that the "building that houses the archive of the imagination" is the body.[11] Buss concludes that we need an embodied imagination and because every body has a history "we need to take into account… personal historical narratives". According to Ricoeur, we can no longer "maintain the artificial separation of subject and object in investigating the structures of historicity" (Buss, 1997: 88). Buss claims that we "belong to history before telling stories or writing histories". In Buss's opinion we belong to both our bodies and history and we belong to our bodies' histories even before we tell stories and follow stories. In this regard Ricoeur speaks of the "pre-narrative quality of human experience… which gives us the right to speak of life as of an incipient story and thus of life as an activity and a desire in search of narrative".

If there is one component in the interaction between story, history, imagination and memory that can be viewed as "objective" or "absolute" it is memory. Although this sounds contradictory, it is exactly this component that gives history its temporal and "true" connotations. Although memory is subjective, and subjected to imagination, it can be viewed as the absolute whereas history becomes relative. The reason for this is the fact that memory is always actual, or true in the immediate present, while history or the past can never be temporal or realised again, except through memory. Anthony Holiday (1998: 43) writes that according to Plato "all genuine knowledge was achieved through recollection…". In contrast to the popular view of history as absolute it seems that only memory can create something that may be absolute, even if only for the immediate present.[12] The interaction between story, history, imagination and memory leads to the problematic relationship between narrative and truth.

2.3.3 Narrative and truth

The interaction of story and history has obvious implications for the truth of any given narrative. The "why tell" or "action" aspect of narrative as theorised by Ricoeur

[11] Buss' theory on the body will be discussed in greater detail in a following section. The reason why it is introduced here is because it contributes to the argument that history, story and imagination inevitably overlap.
[12] Even though it is suggested that memory creates something absolute or true, truth in this context refers to something that is temporal, as opposed to the traditional view of a universal truth.

(Brown, 1997: 113) and Bruner (2001: 25) also inevitably influences the empirical nature of a narrative since a narrative constructed from a selection of chronological events can hardly be argued to be absolute. Another contributing factor is the construction of identity – both personal and collective, and the way in which individuals structure their narratives to fit into a certain cultural identity. Apart from the above-mentioned there are a number of other factors that play a role in the truth (or rather fictionality) of narrative.

A great deal has been mentioned regarding the "why tell" function of narrative and the manner in which a coherent plot is created out of the random and unorganised actual events of real life. This, of course, has implications for the truth of the content of any given narrative. Debating the issue of "truth" is very much the same as debating the issue of "reality", since it is arguable that even if both exist we only have access to them through "language".

Apart from memory and imagination another important factor that influences the fictionality (or non-fictionality?) of narrative is the context in which it is told. Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001: 7) write that "narrative self account[s] is part of life [and it is] embedded in a lived context of interaction and communication, intention and imagination, ambiguity and vagueness, there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occur different situations in which to tell it". If what Brockmeier and Carbaugh propose is valid, it suggests that there are as many different variations of the same story as there exist contexts in which it can be told. This possibility for parallel accounts was also suggested by Buss as discussed earlier (see 2.3.1). Brockmeier and Carbaugh contend that "[a]s a consequence life narrative can be treated as open – without an end – 'unfinalizable' – always open to more options" (2001: 8). If this is the case, which one of the stories told is true and which is fictional, or can one still distinguish between truth and fictionality at all?[13]

As an example of how context can influence a specific story, Jerome R. Sehulster (2001: 189) studied the diaries and letters that Richard Wagner wrote in which he

[13] The relevance of arguing here that it is difficult to distinguish between non-fictional and fictional narratives is that it contributes to the argument that (fictional) soap opera narratives may also contribute to the construction of meaning and identity in the way that (supposedly non-fictional) narratives such as history do since they inevitably include universal truths about the human condition.

described the inspirational vision he had that led to the opening scene of his monumental tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The most immediate accounts Sehulster found of the "vision" were much less fantastical than the ones eventually used in *Der Ring des Nibelungen.* The point Sehulster makes is that eventually Wagner decided against "historical truth but in favour of narrative truth" (Sehulster, 2001: 191). When terms like narrative or historical truth come into play it complicates the matter even more since the issue at stake is not only whether something is true or fictional, but also what kind of truth is involved.

Pierre Bourdieu (Vonèche, 2001: 220) suggests that "the self is contextualised to an extent that it is absorbed by its milieu and therefore so totally different in different environments that the very notion of self becomes meaningless". Jacques Vonèche (2001: 220) admits that Bourdieu's positivistic radicalism is somewhat drastic, but he continues to say that the positive aspect of his theory is the "idea of the general structure of the environment not as a mere backdrop for autobiography [or any narrative] but as a partner in the process of life". Although Bourdieu's theory may be radical, it at least emphasises the important role of context.

Another interesting point that Vonèche (2001: 220) raises is "how people use their autobiographies as a form of self-representation that varies according to the target audience in function of which they organize and re-organize the plots of their lives". Like contexts, the target audience of a specific narrative therefore also influences the fictionality or non-fictionality (or the narrative truth) of a narrative. It follows that the specific nature of soap opera and the intended audience (viewers of – and subject positions created by – soap opera is discussed in 3.2.4) will influence the plot and meaning of these narratives.

2.3.4 The body as metaphor for imagination and narrative

In the preceding section reference was made to the embodiment of imagination. Buss (1997: 94) argues that "the kind of epoché demanded by the embodied imagination is an act of reading that never leaves the experience of bodies behind, but insists on their grounding value, their foregrounding in the imaginative act". This study maintains that narrative is also always already embodied. The notion of the embodiment of

narrative will become continuously clearer as this study progresses, but perhaps it requires some explanation at this point. Because of the reference to the body, embodiment of narrative immediately suggests sex and gender. This is important on another level as well because of the subject matter of this study, namely soap opera. Soap operas are usually addressed to, and largely associated with, women.

Analysing the theories of Donna Haraway may crystallise the notion that narrative is embodied. Haraway (1990: 191) connects narrative and its inherent characteristics to the body, more specifically a cyborg body. The first important point that Haraway raises is the merging of what would previously have been regarded as dichotomies, for instance public and private, history and memory, personal and political, fact and fiction and also masculine and feminine. History is presented as not an objective version of the past (whether or not there exists such a version is debatable) but rather (as was suggested), (hi)story is a specific individual's - be it male or female[14] - version of past events. Donna Haraway (1990: 191) suggests that the "boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion". She utilizes the cyborg as a "fiction [,] mapping" our social and bodily reality. In other words Haraway problematises the existence of one truth and one version of a story. The cyborg becomes a condensed image of both imagination and material reality. For Haraway (1990: 218) cyborg politics is "the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism". Regardless of the imagery Haraway uses to substantiate her theory, she clearly agrees with the idea that no perfect communication between sender and receiver exists and therefore no conclusive truth, and that the distinction between reality and imagination is fading.

Haraway also raises the issue of the centrality of phallogocentrism. This constitutes a point of critique to the theories of Ricoeur. Although Ricoeur rightfully points out that even before stories are told, the individual is already entangled in them, he refers to this as the pre-history of the story, that which provides a background for the story and from which the story emerges. The context consists of a living, continuous overlap of

[14] The blurring of genders is important to this study, specifically with reference to soap opera. Although it will be argued that narrative and soap opera is essentially a feminine construct the fact that an increasing number of males are watching soap opera contributes to the merging of gender dichotomies.

all the lived stories. Buss (1997: 89) on the other hand, seeks a story that, as she calls it "re-e-merges" in such a way that it privileges the background. It has to be taken into account that although Ricoeur speaks of "ourselves" and "we" when referring to narrative and its effects, he hardly recognises the privileged position from which he writes. So, in order to achieve a satisfactory view of gender, race and class issues relevant to soap opera with regards to narrative, I endeavour to point out some of the shortcomings of Ricoeur's arguments. Buss (1997: 95) has the following to say on the subject:

> The passivity that Ricoeur advocates as an approach to the reference of fiction is desirable… only if the reader's position in the face of the world created by the text is an empowered one. What is missing (again) is any sense of the need to contest the text in terms of the world it constructs and offers, its subjectivity, or its politics of gender, race or class. If the reader is to be passively engaged within the text, it follows that s/he must be at home within it. Quite obviously this is not always the case. Ricoeur's presumption that the world of fiction is a comfortable one may be paralleled to the impression that he also, seemingly is always 'at home' within the traditional constructs of history. I link that complacency to his position with patriarchy.

Pinchin (1997: 141) agrees with Buss's opinion that the background of a text should be privileged, and that this doesn't happen sufficiently in Ricoeur's theories. He argues that in Ricoeur's work there is an absence of voices, and bodies, "behind, beyond and within texts". According to Pinchin (1997: 141), Ricoeur regards the process of storytelling as natural, "Ricoeur's 'great historian' is a he,… his first person is firstly singular then plural,… it seems inclusive when in fact it is not". Both Pinchin and Buss criticizes the assumptions that Ricoeur makes when he refers for instance to "mankind", and they attribute these assumptions to the unconscious or unproblematised subject position from which he writes.

Accordingly some questions need to be asked about the gender, class and race issues that are relevant in narrative theory. If the body can be applied as metaphor for the place in which the archive of the imagination resides, as Buss (1997: 88) suggests, the question arises as to what sex the body in question represents, since no body can be completely sexless. From Ricoeur's point of view, as was established above, it seems that he regards narrative as a masculinised phenomenon. Although it may seem premature and contradictory to what Ricoeur contends, I would like to suggest that

the body referred to in Buss's metaphor is in fact female.[15] According to Ricoeur, the fact that story emerges from the context implies that story guarantees man. For Buss the "re-e-merging" of story and background implies that story emerges only to point the way that it is originally merged with its background, thus in a way that "privileges background" or context. This in turn, according to Buss, does not guarantee a gendering that is masculine but one that may be socially or sexually marked as a woman. By explicitly acknowledging the context or sexual embodiment of a narrative Buss makes it possible to destabilize the authoritative position from which Ricoeur writes.[16] Buss (1997: 88-89) thus "looks for a process by which the history of a life lived in an individual body enables a signifying process that does not separate imagination [narrative] and body". The next section investigates the relationship between gender (and the sexed body) and the narrative act or process.

2.4 The association between narrative function / the narrative body and the female

Curti (1998: viii) suggests that "[f]ables and myth have always had a relation to gender". She explains that "[t]he narrative function has been associated with the feminine, commencing with Scheherazade. In the active role of storyteller, she provided the means for the continuation of life".[17]

The inherent human need to comprehend and the connection between this need to comprehend and narrative have been referred to earlier. Curti (1998: ix) connects this with curiosity and in turn connects curiosity with the female:

> Curiosity describes a desire to know something secret so strongly that it is experienced like a drive. It is a source of danger and pleasure and knowledge… In the myths of Eve and Pandora, curiosity lay behind the first woman's desire to penetrate a forbidden secret that precipitated the fall of man. These myths associate female curiosity with an active narrative function.

[15] By connecting imagination with the female and the feminine I take the risk of enforcing male/female stereotypes, which regard reason as a masculine attribute and imagination or emotion as a feminine attribute. However, my intention is not to reinforce stereotypes or dichotomies. What is employed here, rather, is what Spivak (1988, 1990) and later Seyla Benhabib refers to as "strategic essentialism".
[16] This destabilisation of Ricouer's (masculine) position by positing the female embodiment of narrative should be read as prelude to arguments made in sections to come for the potential of the other (in this case, women as other) to create a space for negotiation and challenging of hegemonic orders.
[17] Scheherazade has also been referred to earlier by Brink in connection with story and history.

Reference was also made earlier to the importance of myths. Curti (1998: ix) uses this to connect the concept of narrative or story to the female. According to Curti, although mythical stories were probably not created by women, they are of women and that "contrary to official history, women have been important motors of mythical (hi)stories. History comes from discord and discord comes from women". To authenticate this statement Curti refers to female mythological characters like Helen, Medea, Europa, Genevieve and others who were subjects of rape, kidnapping, abandonment and betrayal.

This discord does not only pertain to mythical characters however, but to women in general and particularly to their sexual identities. It has been established by now that narrative plays a crucial role in the construction of any identity. In the previous section it was pointed out that Buss and Pinchin are of the opinion that narrative is often incorrectly regarded as something that originates from an authoritative, male context. Apart from this, there are other problems surrounding the female identity. One such problem is that female identity seems to be multiple or evasive. Luce Irigaray (1977: 24-26) writes the following in *This sex which is not one:*

> Woman touches herself all the time and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress each other… no possibility of distinguishing what is touching and what is being touched… She is the mystery in a culture that enumerates everything, catalogues everything in unities: "She is neither one nor two. She cannot be counted as one person or two. She resists any adequate definition; she does not have a "proper" name. And her sex that is not *one*, is counted as a *non* sex.

Although the imagery used by Irigaray may be explicit, other theorists definitely share her opinion about the female sex being multiple, fluid or mysterious. Curti (1998: ix) refers to Gloria Anzaldúa, who writes that for women "living on borders and in margins, to keep intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element". Ironically, it is exactly through narrative that women manage to establish an identity for themselves. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes: "Tale-telling brings the impossible into reach. With it I am who It is, Whom I am seen to be, yet I can only feel myself there where I am not, *vis-á-vis*, an elsewhere I do not dwell in… Narrative is where a woman is and is not at the same time" (Curti, 1998: ix). From Minh-ha's writing it is clear that narrating is crucial to

women and their identities. If one uses the Scheherazade myth of *The Thousand and One Nights*, it is arguable that narrating or storytelling can be the difference between life and death - literally in the case of Scheherazade, but figuratively speaking when it comes to the life or death of a women's identity.

Even though she does not use the same metaphor as Curti, Donna Haraway also makes reference to this "in-between" where women seem to be finding themselves when she uses the cyborg metaphor referred to earlier. Curti (1998: xi) speaks about "hybrid selves that are translated into hybrid writing, moving on the border between memory and fantasy, fable and history, tradition and innovation: standing between essay and fiction, poetry and prose". It is possible that Haraway did not intend to suggest a monster when referring to the cyborg, but she invokes a similar multiplicity of meaning and identity as Curti. According to Curti (1998: xiii) these "displacements, ambiguities and pluralism of the female narrative texts lead to genre transgression and contamination… The monster at the end of it all is women's writing, writing as the female body, ink, milk and blood".

As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the sexing of narrative as female, and maybe also feminine, has implications for its signification as other – in this case other to the male and the masculine. The concept of the other, not only in the narrow sense of other to male and masculinity, but in a broader sense, is instrumental to arguments made in both the Chapter 3 and 4 and consequently it needs to be elucidated.

2.5 The other

> "In 'The Looking Glass, from the Other Side,' Alice says, "You've heard them dividing me up, in their own best interests. So either I don't have any 'self' or else I have a multitude of 'selves' appropriated by them, for them, according to their needs and desires" (Irigaray, 1985: 17).

The concept of the other has been formulated non-explicitly in the writings of Edward Said, more specifically in his seminal book *Orientalism.* Said (1978: 1) writes about the conceptualisation of the Orient by Europeans, or the fact that the Orient is a "European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences". Said (1978: 1) refers to

the Orient as one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the other" and writes that in addition to this "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience". According to Bullock and Trombley (2000: 617) the term Orientalism more recently has come "to describe generally the activity by which a hegemonic discourse represents the 'other'".

According to Said (1978: 2) he means several things when referring to Orientalism, all of which are interrelated. Firstly, he refers to the most accepted designation of Orientalism, namely an academic one which, according to him already, connotes colonialism. Secondly, he refers to Orientalism as a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said, 1978: 2). Thirdly - and most importantly in the conceptualisation of the other in the context of this thesis – Said refers to Orientalism as something more "historically and materially defined" than the first two. According to him (Said, 1978: 2)

> [t]aking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.

Without examining Orientalism as a discourse, according to Said (1978: 3), it is impossible to understand the discipline by which "European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient". This leads to a situation where the Orient is not a free subject of thought and action and where European culture "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said, 1978: 3).

The same applies to how the conceptualisation of the other came into being. Similar to the way that Said (1978: 3) argues that "'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" so too are the concepts of Self and other. Both of these dichotomies are essentially an idea, "with no corresponding reality" (Said, 1978: 3). According to Said (1978: 3), there are "cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West". The relationship between the other and the Self resembles

the way Said describes the relationship between Orient and Occident. To be "Orientalised" or, more relevant to the scope of this thesis, to be othered, implies a relationship "of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony"[18] (Said, 1978: 3). This is related to the way in which the Occident, or the Self, assumes an unchallenged centrality from which "an Oriental world [or an other] emerged" (Said, 1978: 4).

For the purpose of this study the canonical view of the other as represented by hegemonic discourses, is predicated mainly on Said's conceptualisation of Orientalism. Other in the context of this thesis will be referred to mainly regarding a male/female dichotomy – or self versus other relationship - but also concerning dichotomies (or othernesses) of race and class.

It is acknowledged that the canonical view of the other implies that it is produced and defined by the Self (usually regarded as the direct opposite of the other). However, a slightly different otherness is proposed here – one with positive and empowering connotations. Not an other as imposed or represented by a hegemonic order but an other which has a voice – a feminine subjectivity. For these purposes the theories of Luce Irigaray is central. In order to comprehend Irigaray's conceptualisation of the other it is however crucial to contextualise the origin of the idea of the women as other to man.

The woman as other is one of Simone de Beauvoir's[19] central ideas. According to Karen Green (2002: 2), it "was de Beauvoir who first claimed that the clue to woman's situation is that she is man's other. It was she who said that it is man who is

[18] In the literature overview the importance of the term hegemony and the Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci's role in developing it was acknowledged. Although the term will be used extensively in this thesis it is not within the scope of this paper to explicitly theorise it. A brief reference to the term's meaning is thus merited here. According to Bullock and Trombley (2000: 387-388) [i]n the writings of some Marxists it [the term hegemony] is used to denote the predominance of one social class over others, e.g. in the term *bourgeois hegemony*. The feature which this usage stresses is not only the political and economic control exercised by a dominant class but its success in projecting its own particular way of seeing the world, human and social relationships, so that this is accepted as 'common sense' and part of the natural order by those who are in fact subordinated by it. From this its follows that revolution is seen not only as the transfer of political and economic power but as the creation of an alternative hegemony through new forms of experience and consciousness".

[19] It must be acknowledged here that the reference to de Beauvoir in no way fully investigates the complexities of de Beauvoir's philosophy and conceptualisation of the other and that she is mentioned here to introduce and contextualize Irigaray and the concept of the other.

the subject, the absolute, women the other". One of the criticisms pitted against de Beauvoir's conceptualisation of woman as other to man is that, in her quest for the equality of women, a female subjectivity, she urges women to adopt masculine values. According to Green (2002: 7), because de Beauvoir accepts that woman is other, "she seems… to invest too much in the patriarchal discourse that defined women this way".

Radical feminists – to which Irigaray may be linked – challenge "philosophy's orientation around oneness, unity or identity – one truth, one method, one reality, one logic…" (Green 2002: 2). According to Green (2002: 2), Irigaray suggests that the "demand for equality is utopian, and expresses the fear that to attempt to suppress sexual difference would be to invite a more radical genocide than any known in history". Whitford (1991: 97) writes that Irigaray's "critique of Western metaphysics argues that women have been the substratum of representation and thus are not representable without complete transformation of the symbolic order as we know it". For Irigaray being other does not imply being other to the Same or the Self – thus other to man – but rather to be different. She attempts to speak from "a place that is not, or at least, from a place that doesn't exist from the point of view of man. This is the point of view of the other".

Irigaray is concerned with the possibility of a female imaginary (this was referred to in the previous section where she was quoted) – "images or representations of women in which women could recognise themselves, or with which women could identify" (Whitford, 1991: 97). Other, as it will be employed for the purpose of this study then does not imply an other that is defined by the Self. Rather it will be used here to connote a subject which acknowledges (and celebrates) its difference from the Self – from the hegemonic order – but which resists being defined by this hegemonic order as its binary opposition, resists being defined in the terms of the hegemonic order at all. An other that embraces its difference and employs this difference to create a new discourse – one in which the other may take part and create meaning for herself.

In *Narrative identity and sexual difference* Varpu Löyttyniemi (2006: 257) asks: "How should I understand narrative so that the words in-between, the words that cultivate body and difference, the poetic, musical words could be included in

narrative, and my self speaking them included in the notion of narrative identity?" In exactly the same way that Irigaray attempts to speak from a different point of view, or create a female imaginary, it will be argued in the following two chapters that if soap opera narrative may be gendered as a feminine and female narrative it may provide a site from which the other has a voice and consequently from where identities may be negotiated.

2.6 Conclusion

Soap opera has, characteristically, a narrative structure and it follows that, in order to analyse soap opera, narrative needs to be understood. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, was to achieve a workable definition or understanding of the term narrative. Narrative in this regard does not refer only to the literary concept, but rather to the telling of a story – whichever medium is employed to do so. Concepts such as time, truth, identity and the like, identified at the onset of this chapter seem insufficient to describe the intricacies of narrative. Narrative seems to demand its own terminology. Narrative truth, narrative time and inevitably narrative identity negate the original meanings of the concepts mentioned above.

The goal with the analysis of soap opera narrative is to determine the role of soap opera narratives in constructing identity - specifically in a South African context. Therefore this chapter also focused on terms such as identity. It was posited that narratives are employed to create identities - not only personal identities but also collective identities. The endowment of narratives with exceptionality - also referred to as the "why tell" function of narratives - were found to actively construct identities. Reference was made to what Brockmeier terms "life and identity narrative" and it is suggested in this chapter that soap opera indeed has a place in this "life and identity narrative". This suggestion will be critically addressed in the following chapter.

In order to construct ourselves as temporal beings and consequently constitute our identities in the present, narratives are constantly being constructed. This introduces another key concept in the analysis of narrative, namely time. Ricoeur's concept of narrative time was introduced and examined. Because narration always takes place in

the present, even if the subject matter may be the past, the relation between past, present and future time is a complex one as became clear in this chapter.

In the construction of narratives in the present the recollection of the past is involved, concepts such as memory and imagination are thus crucial when attempting an understanding of narrative. In this case the distinction Ricoeur makes between history and story (or fictional and non-fictional narratives) was questioned. Different contexts and target audiences influence the nature and construction of any given narrative. Consequently it was argued that no single narrative can be regarded as absolute or final truth. This is linked to the assumption that identity – and the construction of identity through narrative – is an ongoing process where something that might be 'true' at one specific time might be renegotiated shortly after.

The inclusion of imagination and memory and the acceptance of Buss's opinion that there is no separating the body from the process of narrating lead to the acknowledgement that the narrative body must be gendered. Arguments made by Haraway, Buss, Pinchin, Curti and Irigaray lead to the conceptualisation of narrative as a female construct, which in turn aided the argument made for its otherness in the final section.

The conclusions drawn in this chapter regarding the role of narrative in the construction of identity are pivotal to the arguments made in both Chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis. In Chapter 3 these conclusions are employed in order to investigate soap opera narrative and its potential to serve as a site of struggle and negotiation of identity, while conclusions drawn in both the second and third chapter is applied to South African soap opera narratives in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3
THE SOAP OPERA NARRATIVE

Whereas narrative was explored in the second chapter, in this chapter, the focus will be narrowed down to soap opera narrative. The first section will deal mainly with the history of soap opera[1] and its inherent characteristics. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, a clear understanding of the genre is required if one intends to investigate it critically. Secondly, a knowledge of soap history and characteristics is necessary in order to characterise the South African soap opera discussed in the fourth chapter.

From 3.2 onwards soap narratives will be investigated in order to determine its potential to critically comment on or effect social change. The argument for the gendering of narrative made in the previous chapter will be continued in this one. It will be argued that soap opera narrative may be gendered as feminine and female and, consequently, according to the "Orientalism" and other theories touched upon in the previous chapter, that it constitutes some kind of other. The hypothesis of the second part of this chapter is that the otherness of soap opera situates it on a site where it is able to become a vehicle for negotiation of existing identities and the possible construction of alternative ones. If this hypothesis proves to be a workable one, it will be explored further in the fourth chapter with specific reference to South African soap opera.

3.1 The soap opera

3.1.1 Soap history

Soap opera had its origin in the 1930s in America in the guise of daytime radio serials. These serials were sponsored by giant soap powder manufacturers like *Proctor and Gamble, Colgate, Palmolive* and *Peets* (Hobson, 2003: 7). According to Dorothy Hobson (2003: 7), after radio became a mass medium in the thirties, American manufacturers embraced it as an opportunity to expand their markets. This

[1] For the purposes of clarity it must be noted here that the term "soap opera" will be employed to refer to the phenomenon as well as to a singular soap opera whilst the terms "soap operas' or "soaps" will be utilised when referring to more than one soap opera.

obviously was not only the case in America. Radio as mass medium, as well as the use of soap opera to attract audiences and advertise products, spread to Britain, Australia, and eventually also to developing countries such as South Africa. These programmes were intended to attract the attention of female listeners or housewives who were at home during the day, creating an opportunity for these companies to advertise and sell their products. The scheduling of these radio serials reflected the times when women would sit down for a break from their housewifely duties.

Robert C. Allen (1985: 8) postulates that the term “soap opera” probably originated in the entertainment press of the late 1930s. The term came from its connection to soap manufacturers although there were also other sponsors and adverts including toothpaste, cereals, drugs, food and beverage. Soap operas were also occasionally referred to as "washboard weepers” (Allen, 1985: 8). According to Allen (1985: 9), the “opera” acquires meaning through its ironic and double inappropriateness. “Linked with the adjective ‘soap’, opera, the most elite of all narrative art forms, becomes a vehicle for selling the most humble of commodities” (Allen, 1985: 9).

According to Hobson (2003: 8-9), the first producers of a successful soap opera were Frank Hummert and his wife Anne Ashenhurst. They produced a soap called *Betty and Bob* in October 1932. In this production some of the basic characteristics of modern soap opera were already present; starting out as a love story and specifically dealing with the problems of marriage in a modern society. Other themes[2] also established at this time included: jealousy, fidelity, divorce, child-rearing/childlessness, family and romantic love (Hobson, 2003: 9).

As mentioned above, radio soaps did not remain restricted to America.[3] The first long-running series in the United Kingdom was called *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, and it ran from January 1948 until April 1969. Hobson (2003: 9) writes that this soap depicted the lives of middle-class characters.

[2] Themes of soap narrative will be dealt with extensively in the next subsection.
[3] At this point it is crucial to mention that most of the theory discussed here derived from studies based on American/Australian/British versions of soap opera. The background and theoretical framework constructed in this chapter is thus based on research done on the above-mentioned soap operas although the final chapter will focus solely on South African soap opera. South African soap operas use, but also move away from, this general theoretical groundwork. This will come to bear in the final chapter.

During the 1950s and 1960s there was a visible shift to working class characters, which reflected the changes in cultural awareness within all areas of popular entertainment as well as the arts. Thus a shift was made to the so-called "kitchen-sink" dramas, which emphasized domestic realism (Hobson, 2003: 10).

It was also in the 1960s that soap opera emerged as a new type of television programme. In 1978, the BBC transmitted the first episode of the American produced soap opera *Dallas,* which attracted twenty-four million viewers. The popularity of soap opera was thus established at an early stage. A soap opera like *Dallas,* however, still centred on upper middleclass characters. Australian soap operas, for example *Neighbours,* were the first to reveal the different attitudes and values of the culture it represented. According to Hobson (2003: 15), this greatly affected the production of soap operas because it introduced young people to mainstream soap operas, which led to the inclusion of more young actors, and therefore more young viewers. Today Anglo-American soap operas include characters from different ages and social standing.

3.1.2 Characteristics of the soap opera genre

As was shown in the previous subsection, the mention of a specific genre already invokes certain expectations about the kind of stories or narratives we are likely to encounter. It follows that in order to study the nature and influence of the soap opera an exploration of the specific genre is justified. The aim of this subsection will be to achieve some clarity on the characteristics intrinsic to the soap genre.[4] These characteristics will form a basic framework within which soap opera will be discussed in the rest of the chapter. For this purpose the views of a number of theorists will be discussed.

According to Christine Gledhill (2003: 343), relevant points when considering the form and structure of a television programme include: the particular broadcast genre, the narrative structure, the organization of shots, character types, modes of expression

[4] It is important to note that even though soap opera may have some intrinsic characteristics genre boundaries are not fixed or permanent. Rather as Gledhill (2003:357) argues "we find… sliding conventions from one genre to another according to changes in production and audiences". This issue will come to bear in following sections.

such as melodrama, comedy and realism, and lastly, the reception of the viewer, both on aesthetic and affective levels. The characteristics of soap opera will be discussed on the basis of these seven elements listed by Gledhill. All of these elements will be brought to bear in the following section in order to achieve a satisfactory idea of what soap opera entails.

Although not all soap operas share identical features, some features are inherent to this particular broadcast genre. Gledhill (2003: 352) identifies the following features that define soap opera as a genre: format and medium, subject matter and plots, narrative pattern, and character types. These conventions are discussed individually and their validity is supported by the opinions of other theorists.

3.1.2.1 Format and medium

According to Gledhill (2003: 352), soap opera usually consists of 30 minute slots, broadcast once or more a week through the mediums of either radio or television. Often these slots will be interrupted for the purpose of commercial breaks.

3.1.2.2 Themes and subject matter

Charlotte Brunsdon (1983: 78) writes that soap opera is constituted primarily through representations of "romances, families and attendant rituals [such as] births, engagements, marriages, divorces [and] deaths". Gledhill (2003: 352), in turn, characterizes the subject matter of soap opera as the "[u]ps and downs of family or community life and personal relationships". She also identifies congenital plots: "Fallings out between family and community members; jealousies, infidelities, dirty dealings, hidden secrets and their exposure, social problems, e.g. illegitimacy, abortion, sometimes work problems, e.g. redundancy" (Gledhill, 2003: 352). Robert C. Allen (1989: 49) articulates the prominent subject matter of soap opera as a "dramatic concern with heterosexual romance, kinship, and family…".

Tania Modleski (1982: 68) similarly identifies some of the frequent themes of soap operas as: "the evil woman, the great sacrifice, the winning back of an estranged lover/spouse, marrying her for money, respectability, etc, the unwed mother,

deceptions about the paternity of children, career vs. housewife, the alcoholic woman (and occasionally man)". In the fourth chapter it will be shown that South African soap opera also deals with these general themes and subject matter in its narratives.

3.1.2.3 Narrative pattern

Concerning the narrative pattern of soap opera, Gledhill (2003: 352) identifies the following: "Multiple interweaving storylines; we probably don't remember or never saw the beginning; no end in sight". This authenticates Mary Ellen Brown's (1987: 4) soap opera characteristics. She identified eight generic characteristics of soap opera, one of which refers to narrative pattern. According to her, soap opera is a serial form which resists narrative closure and which employs abrupt segmentation between parts. Allen (1989: 49) refers to this as "narrative seriality" and mentions (1983: 100) that the prolongation of events, rather than the compression of these events are congenital to soap operas with a high degree of both inter-episode and intra-episode redundancy. Brown (1987: 4) also refers to the "use of time which parallels actual time and implies that the action continues to take place whether we watch or not".

Again, according to Brown (1987: 4), the home, or some other place which functions as "home", usually serves as the setting for the show. Gledhill (2003: 352) validates Allen's referral to the "construction of a world that is for the most part an interior one" (1983: 100), when she lists the following as settings or locations for soap opera: "Home interiors and public places where lots of people can meet, e.g. pubs, launderettes, corner shops, offices, street corners, hospitals, sometimes the workplace". In the case of Anglo-American soap opera an example of this would be *Forresters*, the large fashion house in the *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The setting of a whole soap opera narrative in one street in Johannesburg – 7th Avenue – in the South African soap opera *7de Laan* is another case in point.

3.1.2.4 Characterization

According to Gledhill (2003: 352), the characters in soap operas are generally multiple and diverse, and span the social spectrum; with many female roles, including older women, widows and divorcees.

Despite the large variety of characters Gledhill identifies, soap operas are often criticized for stereotypical or archetypal representations that perpetuate the established beliefs about the nature of the masculine and the feminine. Milton (1996: 71), for instance, identifies the following archetypal or stereotypical characters inherent to soap opera: the romantic hero, the romantic heroine, the antagonist or anti-hero, the patriarch or matriarch, the female opposition (professional woman) or super bitch, the professional man, the loving mother, the gossipmonger, Cinderella and the reformed rake.

From the above it is clear that a closed setting and the prominence of the family is intrinsic to most soap operas. Tania Modleski (1982: 85-86) shares similar views on the characters and setting (referred to in 3.1.2.3) of soap opera:

> …[S]oap operas are set in small towns and involve two or three families intimately connected to one another. Families are often composed of several generations, and the proliferation of generations is accelerated by the propensity of soap opera characters to mature at an incredibly rapid rate… Sometimes on a soap opera one of the families will be fairly well to do, and another somewhat lower on the social scale though still, as a rule, identifiably middleclass.

Large parts of the dialogue are directed at "experiencing and discussing personal and domestic crises" (Modleski, 1982: 68). This is substantiated by Brown (1987: 4) who discusses soap opera's emphasis on dialogue, problem-solving, and intimate conversation.

Apart from the focus on family, the way in which characters in soap opera are represented and the way in which they interact are also similar. Modleski (1982: 86) points out that through intermingling and intermarrying class distinctions become blurred. One character may be from a lower class but this distinction quickly becomes void when the character marries somebody from another family or class. A possible example of this might be Brooke Logan in *The Bold and the Beautiful.* Although she came from a middleclass family her marriage into the Forrester family changed her social class.

Modleski also states (1982: 86) that although children feature in many of the plots, they don't make a lot of appearances on screen. Smaller children are important because they often determine marriages and relationships, but they are hardly ever

part of the storyline as three-dimensional characters. She also mentions that black Americans and other minorities in American soap operas are rarely represented but that controversial social problems are introduced from time to time.[5] In this regard Brown (1987: 4) mentions male characters that are "sensitive men" and female characters that are often professional and otherwise powerful in the world outside the home. Modleski (1982: 86) also refers to both males and females who frequently work outside the home as well as the fact that females are usually on a professional par with men.

3.1.2.5 Aesthetic devices

As stated by Gledhill, narrative structure and aesthetic devices are also important when studying a specific genre. Allen (1983: 100), for instance, claims that in soap operas "facial expressions are just as important as dialogue". This is recognisable in the use of close-up and extreme close-up shots characteristically employed in soap operas. Lidia Curti (1998: 72) identifies the following aesthetic characteristics of soap opera: "The horizontal, repetitive pace of the plot, the circularity of the structure, marked by the open format and the lack of closure, the absence of a preferred point of view and of authorial markers (such as the voiceover for instance), are some of its distinctive traits". Again, the characteristics that Curti lists are similar to those noted by the previously mentioned theorists.

3.1.2.6 Modes of expression

Gledhill states that one needs to pay attention to the specific modes of expression inherent to a genre. The term 'melodramatic' is often applied to soap opera to describe its emphasis on heightened drama. Gledhill (2003: 350) however, argues that soap opera differs from melodrama in that melodrama supposedly has a broader gender appeal. Whereas melodrama includes action and isn't aimed specifically at women this does not seem to be the case with soap opera. She (2003: 350) furthermore states that: "such melodramas [were not] perceived as antithetical to

[5] This aspect differs from soap opera to soap opera and it has also changed over time. Although it is only mentioned here, this subject will be dealt with extensively in following sections. This notion is explored especially where South African examples are analysed.

realism. Rather they were conceived as viewing reality in moral and emotional terms". Curti's opinion is different from Gledhill's. She (1998: 55) postulates that "[t]he melodramatic mode is filled with invention rather than information, fantasy rather than facts, tales rather than events. Its form is one of suspension, both because it is serial and because it moves from one interrogation to another, one enigma to another". Although Gledhill argues that soap operas differ to a certain degree from melodrama, Modleski indicates some similarities between the two genres. She uses John Cawelti's definition of melodrama to substantiate her view. He (Modleski, 1982: 90-91) defines melodrama as having:

> …at its centre the moral fantasy of showing forth the essential 'rightness' of the world order… Because of this, melodramas are usually rather complicated in plot and character; instead of identifying with a single protagonist through his line of action, the melodrama typically makes us intersect imaginatively with many lives. Subplots multiply, and the point of view continually shifts in order to involve us in a complex of destinies. Through this complex of characters and plots we see not so much the working of individual fates but the underlying moral process of the world.

Soap operas have this same suspension because of its serial from. It also employs a multiplicity of plots and characters in very much the same way that Cawelti claims melodrama does. Due to this viewers associate with a number of different characters, instead of focusing on one protagonist. This validates Curti's (1998: 72) argument for the "absence of a preferred point of view" referred to previously. It can also be argued that soap opera has at its centre a belief in the supremacy of the family and relationships linked to it. It is quite clear that soap operas do have characteristics that are similar to those of the melodrama in spite of the differences that Gledhill identifies.

3.1.2.7 Fact vs. fiction/Reality vs. verisimilitude

Another inherent characteristic of soap opera is that it closely resembles the everyday life of the viewer. It will be argued that soap narrative and the life narratives of soap viewers exist in close proximity and they are often interwoven. It is regularly suggested that soap opera is a vehicle to escape the burdens and mundaneness of everyday life. Yet, to contend that soap opera is mere escapism is to overlook much of the complexity underlying soap narrative. According to Allen (1983: 105), soap

opera "use devices which both distance the world of the soap from that of the viewer and make quite explicit connections with it".

The terms relating to narrative identified and discussed in the previous section are particularly important here. These include the notions of "truth", time and "reality", mentioned in Chapter 2. It is important to take into account the difficulties surrounding the term "realism". Gledhill (2003: 360) states that

> *realism* today is the more familiar term through which we judge whether a fiction constructs a world we recognise as like our own; but as we have seen, realism is a highly problematic category … in fiction *reality* is always constructed (original emphasis).

Soap opera takes signs from the social and cultural world familiar to us, not only to represent it, but to produce a similar but fictional world. Gledhill (2003: 360) introduces the term "verisimilitude" and she defines it as follows: "verisimilitude refers not to what may or may not actually be the case but rather to what the dominant culture believes to be the case, to what is generally accepted as credible, suitable, proper". *Reality* and verisimilitude cannot, however, be clearly separated in practice, "for the demand for realism won't go away, however problematic the notion" (Gledhill 2003: 360). This is also applicable to the verisimilitude of soap opera narrative.[6] This subsection will point out the similarities and differences between the soap opera world and the viewer's world.

One of the reasons why soap opera often seems so "real" is because of the proximity of soap opera time to "real" time referred to earlier by Brown. In the same way that soap opera resists closure it also resists a specific time. Like the lives of the viewers, soap opera does not have a strictly linear time flow but rather a minimum of three concurrent narratives which proceed through a succession of short segments (Brunsdon, 1983: 78). There exist no temporal relationships between segments although it is possible to say that time, in general, moves forward. According to Brunsdon (1983: 79), the very "simplicity of the use of 'interruption' as the major form of narrative delay, fabulously extending dramatic action, also works against the construction of coherent referential time". The different narratives co-exist in a

[6] However, the demand for a "'new' realism from oppositional and emerging groups opens up the contest over the definition of the real and forces changes in the codes of verisimilitude" (Gledhill 2003:260). The demand for changes in verisimilitude will be addressed at a later stage.

simultaneous present, along the life narratives of the viewer. This creates a kind of parallel universe with which the viewer can identify, and almost take part in.

The sets of soap opera also serve to create a feeling of verisimilitude. According to Brunsdon (1983: 79), the sets "function very literally as setting or background, seen always from the same points of view, as familiar as the room in which the viewer has the television". The viewer thus develops a kind of familiarity or intimacy with the space in which the soap opera takes place so that it becomes part of the viewer's life. Consider as a case in point the narrative of the fictional film *Nurse Betty* (Neil LaBute, 2000). In the film the main character – a fanatic soap opera viewer and nurse – loses her memory and meets one of the actors in her favourite soap. In this soap opera the particular actor portrays the role of a doctor. She is unable to distinguish between the soap opera and real life. Consequently she is unable to distinguish between the actors and the roles they play and she is convinced that she is applying for a nursing position at the hospital that exists only in the soap opera.

Hobson (2003: xiii) comments on the verisimilitude of soap opera characters. Apart from the fact that viewers become familiar with these characters because they encounter them on a daily basis, there exists a verisimilitude which defines these characters as being true to life. According to Hobson (2003: xiii), "they create the impression that they could live and breathe and operate outside their fictional form and could be transferred to other situations and still retain their credibility". This is again perpetuated in the narrative of *Nurse Betty* for example.

Although there is a vast difference between soap opera and "reality", soap operas feed, for example, on fears that have a basis in reality. According to Modleski (1982: 108), it is crucial to recognise that soap opera "allays real anxieties, [and] satisfies real needs and desires, even while it may distort them". Examples of this include the need for human interaction or romantic love that is central to both soap opera narratives and "reality".

It is clear that there exists a number of areas where it becomes possible for the "real" lives of viewers to interweave with the verisimilitude created on the sets of soap operas.

All the above constitute a framework according to which the soap genre may be discussed. To consolidate all this information, Hobson's definition of soap opera will be employed as the basic framework according to which soap opera will be discussed. Hobson (2003: 34) defines soap opera as follows:

> Soap opera is a radio or television drama in series form, which has a core set of characters and locations. It is transmitted three times a week, for fifty-two weeks of a year. The drama creates the illusion that life continues in the fictional world even when viewers are not watching. The narrative progresses in a linear form through peaks and troughs of action and emotion. It is a continuous form with recurring catastasis as its dominant narrative structure. It is based on fictional realism and explores and celebrates the domestic, personal and everyday in all its guises. It works because the audience has intimate familiarity with the characters and their lives. Through its characters the soap opera must connect with the experience of its audience, and its content must be stories of the ordinary.

Very specific characteristics have been identified regarding themes, narrative structure, characters, modes of expression, and the organization of shots in order to create the framework referred to earlier. The reactions and possible subject positions of the viewers will be dealt with in following sections.

3.2 Soap opera as the other

It will be argued that for various reasons soap opera can be regarded as other. Numerous aspects of soap opera narrative stand in opposition to the "traditional" or even the popular. Some of these aspects will be discussed in the following section. These include perceptions about soap opera, viewers and subject positions, the difference between soap narrative and traditional, canonical narratives, and the inherently feminine and female characteristics of the genre. It will be argued that precisely because of these aspects soap operas may be considered as other.

In Chapter two the unofficial origin of the term "other" was linked to Edward Said's (1978) conceptualisation of Orientalism. In terms of Orientalism the Orient is constructed by the Occident as encompassing mainly negative aspects that, according to the Occident, do not pertain to themselves. In other words a kind of binary opposition is created where progressive and positive characteristics are attributed to the Occident and the opposite to the Orient. The other – in the context of this thesis – must however not be regarded as simply one end of a continuum, one part of a

dichotomy. In a following section (4.2) reference is made to Franz Fanon who argues that this inferiority of the Orient, or the other, is constructed from the outside (by the Occident) and that the other need not, and does not, necessarily accept this inferiority. The idea of the potential of the other to affect change, or challenge the dominant is derived partly from Fanon, but mainly from poststructuralist philosopher Luce Irigaray's notion of the other as referred to in Chapter two as well as in the following sub-section. Gramsci's concept of hegemony also comes into play in the other's refusal to accept its inferiority. With this refusal the other is actively challenging the hegemonic order and in so doing challenging dominant ideologies.

Irigaray's conceptualisation of the other will be employed to determine in what way soap opera not only differs from other narratives, but also constitutes a genre in its own right. If soap opera is other in the way Irigaray conceptualises it, it offers a site where existing ideologies and identities can be negated as well as negotiated.

3.2.1 The notion of the other

In the previous chapter the origins of the term other was linked to Said's *Orientalism*. Margaret Whitford (2000: 181-183) provides the following answers to the questions: Who is the other? or, How can the other be defined? According to her (Whitford, 1991: 181), the notion of the other as a feature of gender, would traditionally represent the "possible locus of the definition of the fault, of imperfection, of the unheard, of the unfulfilled, etc." and this fault cannot be named "except by my other or its substitute". In a patriarchal society then, a woman is defined, not in her own terms, but as "other" to man.

Irigaray, however, does not accept this standard conceptualisation of the other. Although she adopts De Beauvoir's notion of the other she develops it further. De Beauvoir (Whitford, 2000: 24) sees otherness as "Other of the same". De Beauvoir emphasizes access to the world of men, in other words "equality", while Irigaray is suggesting the creation of sexual difference. For de Beauvoir (Whitford, 2000: 23) to be equal is to fit into the patriarchal system. "Equal", thus implies "equal to men", and, therefore, "equivalent to the imposition of the male norm" (Whitford, 2000: 23), which Irigaray warns would mean genocide, the genocide of women. Irigaray

(Whitford, 2000: 25) is posing an other not simply "as 'Other of the same' (and so a state to be transcended in the pursuit of the same), but a self-defined woman, who would not be satisfied by sameness" but whose otherness and difference would be given social as well as symbolic representation. Irigaray suggests a "subject which is definitely not one, but rather multilayered, interactive and complex", each sex would thus be "'other' for the other sex" (Whitford, 2000: 25).

Irigaray is concerned with a female imaginary which implies representations of women with which they can identify (Whitford, 1991: 97). In other words: not images of "women-for-men" (Whitford, 1991: 97) but images of women-for-women. She uses images of the body – two images in particular namely the two lips[7] and the mucous (membrane). Whitford suggests that these images have "become material for symbolic exchange among women" and that it has become a basis for "resymbolization". The argument in this chapter is that by being other soap opera has a contribution to make to this resymbolisation. There are various factors which might contribute to the othering of soap opera.

3.2.2 Fe/male[8] representations: soap opera narrative as feminine and female[9]

Apart from the fact that soap opera constitutes a part of the most popular mass cultural medium, it is also the only narrative on television created specifically for women. It follows that soap opera presents a valuable opportunity to examine the complexities of the female cultural code. In examining this code it might be established that it is possible for soap opera to contribute to the construction of the self-defined other (woman) to which Irigaray refers.

[7] Irigaray's image of the two lips was referred to in chapter 2.
[8] Lidia Curti (1998: xv).
[9] It is important here to distinguish between feminine and female. For the purposes of this study the feminine refers to the way in which psychoanalysts like Luce Irigaray and Julie Kristeva (Bullock & Trombley, 2000: 314) view it namely not as something that is purely socially and historically determined or constructed but as the idea of a feminine essence, and also "as repressed and oppressed by the phallic order of contemporary culture. This approach has appealed to those feminists who do not wish to reassess male values, but seek to reveal what has been hidden and deformed about an original feminine essence". This also correlates with the conceptualisation of the other in the context of this study. The term female, as used here, refers to the female sex and her identity as sexed other. These two terms are related but not interchangeable.

3.2.2.1 Soap opera as feminine

The purpose of this section is to investigate whether soap opera constitutes a gendered other, both in the traditional sense, but also in the way that Irigaray refers to the other.

It may be argued that because of the fluidity of the genre, and the fact that the term soap opera can be used to describe a number of related genres it is not possible to argue that the genre is inherently feminine. According to Curti (1998: xii) however,

> [i]f genres with distinct boundaries are disappearing (in the same way as gender and sexual dichotomies are the grounds for theoretical suspicion), there are nevertheless masculine and feminine constructions – whether textual or contextual, rhetorical, linguistic or social – in most narratives.

It is exactly this non-distinctiveness and the multilayered nature of soap opera that might constitute the kind of complex other Irigaray refers to.

It has been mentioned earlier that soap opera is essentially regarded as a feminine form and that it was originally created because of the need for advertisers to attract the attention of female consumers. Although this may be the case, feminists argue that soap operas are produced within "male-dominated, multi-national media conglomerates and within discursive practices which construct the male as the norm" (Gledhill, 2003: 365). Even if this is the case, the gendering of the soap genre has implications, and it may imply – at the very least – a space in which the feminine and the female have a voice.

Laura Mulvey (Modleski, 1982: 33-34) states that "the spectacle and the story work together in order to stimulate masculine pleasure and alleviate basic masculine psychological insecurities". But Modleski argues that "soap operas are one visual, narrative art uniquely adapted to the psychology of women in the home…" (1982: 34). In spite of Gledhill's argument it is thus possible that soap opera may function as a feminine narrative because of its uniquely feminine traits.

Some of the inherent characteristics of soap opera already identified mark soap narrative as feminine. Talking or conversation and emotion are traditionally regarded feminine characteristics. Gledhill (2003: 371) states that the characteristic camera set-

up for soap opera "is a 'close-up two shot', producing a drama of talking heads in intimate exchanges or altercation". According to her, talk offers a different mode of social action: "conversation, gossip, dissection of personal and moral issues, and at crisis points, rows" (Gledhill, 2003: 370). Fiske also presents this argument. According to him (1995: 343), soap opera's "extended middle" causes disruption and deferment of the soap opera narrative. Fiske states that this deferment is enacted in conversation and facial expressions. He also refers to the close-up as an important mode of representation in feminine culture (Fiske, 1995: 344). Modleski (Fiske, 1995: 344) argues that the use of close-ups can be linked to the feminine skill of "reading people", the skill to understand the gap "between what is said and what is meant". If this is the case, this predilection for conversation and emotional reactions present in all soap operas, defines it to be, at least in part, feminine.

Furthermore, fragmentation of the soap opera text and its resistance to narrative closure were identified in the first section as key characteristics of the soap genre. Allen (1983: 98) enquires how to deal with a form "in which audience satisfaction cannot possibly be derived from the telos at the end of the work (since there is none), a form in which the operation of the hermeneutic code is perpetually retarded". Modleski (1982: 101) writes that in soap opera "revelations, confrontations, and reunions are constantly being interrupted and postponed by telephone calls, unexpected visitors, counter revelations, catastrophes, and switches from one plot to another. These interruptions are both annoying and pleasurable". She identifies this as one of the possible reasons why the narrative of soap opera can be argued to be feminine. According to her (1982: 88), "soap opera invest exquisite pleasure in the central condition of a woman's life: waiting". Reference was made previously to the fact that one of the defining characteristics of soap opera is the fact that it never ends, and that the anticipation of an end becomes an end in itself. Hence, it may be argued that soap narrative is circular, rather than linear, thus opposing it to a linear masculine narrative.

Different critics hold opposing viewpoints on the role of fragmentation in gendering the soap opera genre. Rogers (1995: 328) argues that "women have no relief from the ubiquitous male instructor – even during commercial 'breaks', when they are subject to predominantly male voice-overs". She also argues that the fragmentation of the

soap opera text "reconcile women to traditional female roles and relationships" such as being a housewife. This, according to her, serves to reinforce patriarchal cultural behaviour. Thus, fragmentation in this sense perpetuates male dominance. According to Rogers (1995: 328), "while all these little expressions of male dominance and female submission may seem insignificant in and of themselves, they add up and create an effect that is overwhelming". Although Rogers's argument has merit, there seems to be overwhelming evidence that the fragmentation of soap narrative can negate male dominance and provide a worthwhile site for struggle. Ellen Seiter (1981: 43) for instance, counters Rogers' argument by posing that the fragmentation of the narrative negates the (masculine) master narrative:

> [t]he importance of small discontinuous narrative units which are never organized by a single patriarchal discourse or main narrative line, which do not build towards an ending or closure of meaning, which in their very complexity cannot give a final ideological word on anything, makes soap opera uniquely 'open' to feminist readings.

Fiske (1987: 179-197) similarly argues the same point because he believes that a variety of reading positions allows for the interrogation of patriarchy.

The fragmentation of the soap opera text also has another implication for the gendering of the genre. When subject positions come to bear in the next section, mention will be made of the fact that soap opera encourages associations with a multiplicity of characters. This point to the soap opera viewer as decentred. Both Modleski (1982: 105) and Fiske (1987: 179-197) refers to this notion of the decentred viewer. According to Modleski (1982: 105) "the feeling of being the centre of creation is typical of the ego-structure of the bourgeois male". Opposed to being the centre of creation is to be decentred. This is traditionally associated with the feminine.

Soap opera is severely criticized for its predilection for emotion and sometimes even melodrama. Emotion and the penchant for conversation, or rather emotive conversation, are regarded as traditionally feminine. Both Fiske and Modleski interpret this predilection as an emphasis on the inherent feminine skill of what Modleski refers to as "reading people" (Fiske, 1995: 344). According to Fiske (1995: 344), this is further emphasized by the fragmentation of the text because the slow plots encourage the desire to be implicated and it creates an opportunity for feelings and emotions to be savoured.

Arguing that soap opera has an inherently feminine narrative is, however, simplifying the matter. Gledhill (2003: 345) writes:

> An apparently anomalous feature of mass culture … is the provision of a cultural space designated explicitly as 'women's'…while a corresponding category for men hardly exists… Feminists argue this is because in Anglo-American society the norm of what counts as human is provided by the masculine and only women's culture needs to be marked as specifically gendered – much in the same way that 'man' is said to stand for men *and* women, or 'his' incorporates 'hers', etc. The gendering of culture therefore is not straightforwardly visible. The central, established values claim universal status and are taken to be gender-free.

Gledhill's argument leads to a few questions such as: How is gender constructed in representation and how does it impact on the cultural forms that do the constructing as well as the way things are perceived by society? Furthermore, how does this space designated as 'woman's own' differ from the masculine norm? (Gledhill, 2003: 345). Also, is the fact that soap opera exists in a space designated as "woman's own" favourable or detrimental to the argument that soap opera may pose the potential to negate hegemony?

Parallel to Gledhill's reasoning, Rogers (1995: 326) writes that "in countering the denigration of female forms, however, we must be wary of going the opposite direction, celebrating them just because they are female genres – especially when they may be potentially harmful…". Gledhill's argument is conceded, but, together with Modleski (1982: 87) I would like to propose an opposing view, namely "not to ignore what is 'feminine' [as well as female – see 3.2.2.2] about soap opera but to focus on it, to show how they provide a unique narrative pleasure which… provides an alternative to the dominant 'pleasures of the text'", as analysed by Roland Barthes for example.

3.2.2.2 Soap opera as female[10]

Not only is soap opera a feminine genre, as argued above, but it will also be argued that it has characteristics that are inherently female.

[10] Although the female and the feminine are related to each other as mentioned in a previous footnote, female in this context refers more explicitly to physical and biological aspects unique to women.

It could be argued that the fragmentation of the soap opera narrative is a female characteristic. Fiske (1995: 343) writes that in soap opera "[a]nticipation becomes an end in itself" and Brunsdon contends that the pleasure of soap opera lies "in seeing how the events occur rather than in the events themselves" (Fiske, 1995: 343). In other words, an event is never significant in itself, but is significant for the reactions, pleasures and effects it will have. Importantly, Fiske (1995: 343) states that "this endless deferment need not be seen simply as a textual transformation of women's powerlessness in patriarchy", as Rogers would argue, but it should be identified as something that I would like to suggest may be connected to female sexuality. According to Fiske (1995: 343), this deferment "can be seen as an articulation of a specific feminine [or female?] definition of desire and pleasure that is contrasted with the masculine pleasure of the final success". Thus, pleasure as ongoing or cyclical rather than "climatic or final" (Fiske, 1995: 343). Soap opera, it seems, does not only employ feminine narrative strategies, but also explicitly exhibits female characteristics. In the same way that a woman could have multiple climaxes, as opposed to the final male climax, so too does soap opera. Fiske (1995: 344) writes that soap opera's sexuality is concerned with seduction and emotion, "rather than, as masculine sexuality is, with achievement and climax". Modleski (1982: 98) also presented this when writing that the "open-ended, slow paced, multi-climaxed structure of soap opera is in tune with patterns of female sexuality".

Also like soap opera, women's sexuality is limitless. Irigaray, describing women's rediscovery of herself writes that "it is a sort of universe in expansion for which no limits could be fixed and which, for all that, would not be incoherence" (Modleski, 1982: 105).

The fact that soap narrative can be viewed as both feminine and as female constitutes it as the other to which Irigaray refers. Not just other or binary to the male norm, but other in and for itself. In other words, not an other that exists solely as defined by the Self as its opposite, but as something/someone with her own power of definition, with an essence (Irigaray's feminine essence referred to earlier). Consequently soap opera may prove to have some potential in constructing or investigating the self-defined woman, and her narrative, referred to at the beginning of this section. The gendering

of soap opera, however, is but one of the reasons why it may be regarded as other and it also contributes to the othering of the genre as will become clear in the next section.

3.2.3 Negative perceptions of soap opera: the high and the low

Another reason for the otherness of soap opera may lie in the negative perceptions surrounding the genre. A number of theorists have commented on this. Allen (1985: 8) writes that

> even for someone who has never seen an episode of a soap opera, it is impossible to approach that viewing experience… 'naively'… because soap operas… have a history covering more than a half a century [and] …come encrusted with the effects of previous viewings and readings.

According to Rogers (1995: 325), one of the major problems when dealing with soap opera is the "historical denigration" of this form. Soap opera is commonly perceived as negative. Rogers claims (1995: 325) that the "very term 'soap opera' has become so pejorative that it is applied condescendingly to a variety of genres and situations to indicate bathetic superficiality and kitsch". Modleski (1982: 86) expresses a similar view when she states that the perception exists that "if television is considered by some to be a vast wasteland, soap operas are thought to be the least nourishing spot in the desert". Charlotte Brunsdon (Gledhill, 2003: 344) describes how soap opera is popularly used as a measure for the "truly awful". It is clear that not only soap characters, but also soap opera itself is stereotyped and, in this stereotyping, othered to more canonical genres. Soap opera, in itself, is thus regarded as other to other "serious" and "credible" genres of television programming. The purpose of this subsection will be to investigate some of the possible reasons for the negative connotations associated with the soap genre.

The distinction between so-called "high" and "low culture"[11] plays a significant role in the perception of soap opera. This distinction is not a new one, but it is also one which has been criticised since the onset by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. Mass culture, and by implication soap opera, has long been regarded as low

[11] Low culture can be equalled to massification which is often connected to the gross and the feminine, which contributes to the gendering, and othering of the genre – this comes to bear in following paragraphs.

culture. For this reason soap opera is usually regarded as inferior to other cultural forms.

This is, however, simplifying the matter. Gledhill (2003: 349) suggests that the distinction between high culture and mass/low culture has a lot to do with the gendering of cultural forms. She writes that "…ranking what counts as culturally significant is 'gendered', and thus the privileging of certain cultural forms or characteristics must also be seen as part of the struggle within patriarchal culture to define 'reality'". Gledhill (2003: 349) argues that from the perspective of high culture, "all mass entertainment is inferior, and is associated with qualities that are inherently feminizing". Modleski (1982: 12) points out that the fact that a genre is feminine in itself implies negative connotations. She writes that, according to Freud,

> not only does the critical equation of pen and penis… suggest that women lack the necessary equipment to write, or at least to write well, but the feminine text itself is often used as a standard by which other products are measured and found to be not wanting.

Thus, one of the many reasons why perceptions of soap opera are negative will be because it is classified or constructed as "mass/low culture" and subsequently – as argued in the previous section, as feminine and female.

A similar view of soap opera is revealed by the fact that it is largely perceived as negative or inferior by most men. Even if these men constitute a large part of the audience. Gledhill (2003: 345) gives a possible reason for this. In discussing the distinction between high and low culture, the feminizing (and consequent othering) of mass culture, and thus also of soap opera, has already become apparent. Furthermore, she writes:

> [g]iven soap opera's association with the female audience, its relegation to the domain of 'the truly awful' suggests a gendered standard that aligns core cultural values with the masculine, which then needs protection from the feminizing deviations of mass culture.

Consequently, because soap opera is associated with the feminine - and with a predominantly female audience - it is laden with negative connotations because it deviates from the (masculine and male) norm. The feminine suggests an association with feeling and emotion, which, as mentioned above, is often regarded as negative by most viewers. Similarly soap opera's tendency for emotive expressions and its

identification with feeling may be one of the reasons why men dislike acknowledging their place in the soap audience (Gledhill, 2003: 345).

Not only men, however, but also women, see soap opera in a negative light because it is regarded as a feminine genre. Molly Haskell (Gledhill, 2003: 345) for instance, describes the Hollywood woman's film as "emotional porn for the frustrated housewife". Modleski (1982: 103) claims that although 'narrative pleasure' means different things to males and females, feminists imply that essentially only one pleasure can be derived namely a masculine one. "Hence, …[feminist artists believe that they] must first of all challenge this pleasure and then, out of nothing begin to construct a feminist aesthetic and a feminist form". This contradicts Irigaray's opinion that the other, and consequently the pleasure of the other, must not be simply opposed to a male pleasure, but rather constitute something in and for itself. Together with Modleski (1982: 103) and Irigaray, I would like to argue that to imply only one pleasure (the Sameness to which Irigaray refers) that must first be challenged is a mistaken position which will continue to keep women in the position of an adversary, always on the defence. Feminists don't have to search too far, "rather they can look for clues to women's pleasure which are already present in existing forms, even when the pleasure is currently placed at the service of patriarchy" (Modleksi, 1982: 104).

The negative perceptions of soap opera become even more complicated. While soap opera is seen as inferior because it is classified as mass/low culture, it is also perceived as inferior in comparison to other forms of mass culture. Modleski (1982: 13) writes that "a necessary if not a sufficient criterion for the worth of serials is their difference from the (utterly dismissible) soap operas". Another distinction is thus made which separates soap opera even further from other similar popular genres.

From Modleski's argument, for example, it is clear that although perceptions of soap opera are mainly negative, there are also positive connotations to the genre. The point remains that one of the reasons why soap opera may be constituted as other is because of the negative connotations attached to the genre.

3.2.4 Viewers and subject positions

In this section the audience of soap opera and its subject positions will be discussed. Although this is not a quantitative study about the viewers of soap opera it is important to investigate these two aspects in order to reach a conclusion about the gendering of soap opera, its otherness, as well as its social influence. According to Fiske (1995: 340), it is important to "explore the strategies television producers employ to produce a crucial categorization of its viewers into masculine and feminine subjects", because its techniques for gendering its audience "have grown more sophisticated, and nowhere more so than in its development of gender-specific narrative forms", such as soap opera.

Some critics may argue that soap opera viewers are mere passive pawns. This will be contested and to this end some clear distinctions need to be made between the terms relevant to this part of the study. For this purpose, one must distinguish between the viewers as such and the possible subject positions created by soap opera narrative. In other words there is a significant difference between the subject positions that a text constructs and the social subject who may or may not take up these created positions (Brunsdon, 1983: 76). Gledhill (2003: 373) makes another crucial distinction: not only does she distinguish between the subject positions and the social audience, but she also introduces the *ideal spectator*.[12]

According to Brunsdon (1983: 76), soap opera audiences are usually assumed to be female - this has been substantially argued in the previous sections. She also argues that the interplay between the social text and the reader can be examined by looking at the way in which aspects like scheduling and advertisements imply a gendered audience. She (1983: 77) states that the opposition of "devoted" and "everyday" to "adventurous" specifies the femininity of the audience. In "The search for tomorrow in today's soap opera" (1982), Modleski states that feminist film theorists, such as Laura Mulvey (1989), have argued that the organization of camera and narrative in mainstream films and programmes is predicated on the masculine spectator because it

[12] It is acknowledged here that "spectatorship" is usually associated with film or cinema. The origin of this concept in film theory is acknowledged, however, it is applied - and consequently it pertains - to soap opera viewers/spectators in this thesis.

incorporates the glamorized image of the woman as object. If this is indeed the case, it is important to query the kind of spectator constructed by soap opera in its attempt to address female audiences. Soap operas are created for someone, according to the way the producers believe that someone to be. The way in which the audience is addressed creates subject positions. The hegemonic power of address comes into play here since it has the power to address women, or the intended audience as subordinate.

Gledhill (2003: 374) argues that soap opera is created for a female viewer because, unlike traditional (masculine) narratives, such as mainstream Hollywood cinema, "it does not centre on an individual hero, nor, through his gaze, on the spectacle of the glamorized female". Instead, Modleski theorizes that in soap opera the filmic spectator is constructed as the idealized mother, "passively responsive to events and endlessly identifying with the needs of a range of conflicting characters" (Gledhill, 2003: 374). Although Modleski (1982: 98) admits the potential of soap opera to negotiate gender roles she contends that "soap opera as a narrative form also reflects and cultivates the 'proper' psychological disposition of the women in the home". Thus, even if it is possible to negate this position, the main subject position created by soap opera is that of the idealized housewife.

The above arguments can again be supported by the fragmented nature of the soap opera narrative. According to Modleski (1982: 100), a housewife functions by distraction as a result of her multitasking. This, Modleski argues, is why the "flow within soap operas as well as between soap operas and other programming units reinforces the very principle of interruptability crucial to the proper functioning of the women in the home". Because these disruptions fit into the schedule of a housewife's day the repetition, interruption and distraction becomes pleasurable. The reception of soap operas also takes place in a state of distraction which accounts, in part, for the 'realistic' feel associated with soap opera.

However, according to Modleski, soap opera invites identification with numerous personalities. Modleski (1995: 348) states that "soap operas continually insist on the insignificance of the individual life". The reason for this is that, unlike traditional narratives, soap operas do not have only one main character. Multiple plot lines cause

the viewer to engage with a large number of characters at the same time. It follows logically that viewers do not associate with an individual character but rather with a number of characters, possibly from a number of different plots. Although this perpetuates the creation of the subject position mentioned above, the fact remains that soap opera creates more fluid subject positions than most other narratives. This implies a potential for undermining a specific or single subject position.

Curti (1998: 56) points out that the existence of a woman's gaze has at times been forgotten and that it is often assumed that women derive their pleasures from watching other women and themselves through men's eyes. If soap opera viewers are regarded to be mainly female, this must have some implications for the female gaze. Curti (1998: 56), however, states that watching soap opera is still a "suspicious activity, not considered to provide sufficient proof of a subjective space for women". However, considering the minimal space for female viewers within a heterosexual, male dominated economy, soap opera does offer more than most other genres. Due to the variation of subject positions that soap opera offer, it seems to constitute an other to traditional narrative forms.

3.2.5 Difference and similarities between soap narrative and traditional narrative

Modleski claims, and it was argued extensively in preceding sections, that soap opera constructs a feminine narrative. She also argues that it shares attributes that belong to earlier popular novels for women. For instance, she notes that "soap opera continue the tradition of portraying strong women who, if they no longer single-handedly run large farms, nevertheless must struggle to keep intact the worlds which the weakness and unreliability of men threaten to undermine" (Modleski, 1982: 23). If soap narrative is associated with popular novels for women, it must differ from traditional (male) narratives.

Allen (1989: 50) distinguishes as follows between the soap opera narrative and traditional narratives:

> The term soap opera has provided a convenient and useful framework within which to examine programmes whose narrative structure would

> seem to be fundamentally at odds with that of the classic realist text, whose 'ideological problematics', modes of address and methods of pleasure production would seem to be quite different from the other forms of television…

According to Modelski (1982: 99), soap operas contrast sharply with "other popular forms aimed at masculine visual pleasure, which is often centred on the fragmentation and fetishization of the female body… Soap operas seem to be the one visual art which activates the gaze of the mother as opposed to the voyeuristic male gaze".[13]

The fragmentation of the soap opera form and its resistance to closure has been discussed in a previous section. Pertaining to the difference between soap narrative and traditional narrative it is, however, notable that traditional narratives are constructed according to a beginning, middle and end whereas soap opera consist of an "infinitely extended middle" (Fiske, 1995: 341). This is true for at least two reasons. Firstly, since soap opera is a continuous serial, the storyline or plot never reaches a conclusion. Although individual, smaller plots may reach some kind of climax, they are simply replaced or continued in new ones. Every hint of equilibrium is simply followed by more disorder. Relationships, for this reason, are in a constant state of flux. Another factor that contributes to the fragmented nature of soap opera is the commercial breaks that interrupt the narrative at regular intervals. Allen (1989: 48) refers to this fragmented nature when he writes that "soap opera, by this definition at least, would not be a mainstream narrative at all, since it is predicated upon the infinite delay of closure". According to Modleski (1982: 88), in soap opera "truth [as opposed to traditional narratives] for women is seen to lie not 'at the end of the expectation', not in the 'return to order', but in (familial) disorder". For these reasons, soap opera already differs from traditional narratives to a great extent.

Related to the above, and also functioning to differentiate soap opera significantly from more traditional narratives is the pace at which the narrative progresses. Due to

[13] According to Bullock & Trombley (2000: 352) the term gaze refers to the "importance of seeing in desire" and it had its origin in the writings of Freud and Lacan. Furthermore "feminist theorists such as Jacqueline Rose have argued that women are meant to look perfect, presenting a seamless image to the world so that the man, in confrontation with difference, can avoid any apprehension of lack". The gaze (also the voyeuristic gaze referred to here by Modleski) "has assumed a central role in the theory of art in relation to nude and in film and media theory in relation to the camera as a vehicle of masculine desire, creating a problematic relationship with the female subject and spectator". It is this male gaze that Modelski claims soap opera creates and alternative for.

not only the fragmentation of the text, but also the multiple plots and the predilection for conversation the pace at which soap opera narrative develops is not as fast and action orientated as more traditional narratives. Soap opera is "opposed to the classic (male) narrative, which, with maximum action and minimum, always pertinent dialogue, speeds its way to the restoration of order" (Modleski, 1982: 106).

The propensity for dialogue, along with the variety of other identified factors that mark soap operas as gendered also implicates a non-traditional viewer. The target audience or the ideal spectator of soap operas thus also differs from those of traditional (masculine) narratives. Modleski argues that:

> Daytime serial drama represents a narrative form diametrically opposed to more male-orientated novels and films: a feminine form of narrative structure, which inscribes its reader as the ideal mother, values dialogue over action, disperses the viewer's attention over huge extended families of characters, and forever retards ultimate resolution (Allen, 1989: 48).

Modleski (1982: 107) also points out another gendered difference between soap opera and traditional narrative that can be directly linked to soap opera's differentiation from traditional male narratives. She claims that: "in direct contrast to the typical male narrative film, in which the climax functions to resolve difficulties, the mini-climaxes of soap opera function to introduce difficulties and to complicate rather than simplify the characters' lives".

The above-mentioned factors distinguish soap opera and its narrative from mainstream genres. Even if it is not directly opposed to these genres or if some of its characteristics may be fluid enough to cross boundaries between genres, there are certainly grounds for contrasting soap opera as other to more traditional and masculine genres.

If, as Irigaray contends, the notion of the other is something that facilitates the creation of difference – not sameness or equality, and soap opera narrative does constitute this other as is argued above, then it seems that it may be a site for the creation or negotiation of this difference.

3.3 Soap opera as a site for struggle and negotiation

Modleski (1982: 25) claims that "contemporary mass-produced narratives for women contain elements of protest and resistance underneath highly 'orthodox' plots". The fact that soap opera is popularly regarded as non-influential, mass-produced and mere entertainment will be contested in this subsection. She (1982: 88-105) goes on to argue that soap opera "may be in the vanguard, not just of TV art, but of all popular narrative art… soap operas may not be an entirely negative influence on the viewer, they may also have the force of a negation, a negotiation of the typical (and masculine) modes of pleasure in our society". The potential to negate may be implicit, but as Fiske (1989) argues, the inherent possibility of popular texts and popular audiences to "erode" from the inside may be a powerful way to challenge the hegemonic order.

3.3.1 Politics or pleasure

The main goals of soap opera are to entertain and to serve as a marketing vehicle. One question that arises is how something that is primarily intended to provide pleasure can challenge hegemonic orders in the way Fiske (1989) argues that popular texts do? Gledhill (2003: 340) writes that

> the term fiction suggests a separation from real life. Stories are by definition only stories: they are not real life. This often leads to the dismissal of popular fictions as 'only' or 'harmless' entertainment, or worse, time-wasting, money-spinners made by the profit-driven entertainment industries.

Modleski (1982: 99) argues that:

> The consequent blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and life which sometimes occurs (as, for example, when fans write letters to the 'characters', giving them advice about their problems) suggests that the psychological fusion which Chodorow says is experienced by the wife or mother applies in these instances to the viewer's experience of the characters.

If Modleski and Gledhill's arguments hold true these fictions do somehow function as more than "only" or "harmless" entertainment. It cannot be denied that some of the functions of soap opera are to generate money and to create a pleasurable viewing experience, but the question that comes to bear in this section is whether this makes

soap operas irrelevant to the politics of lived experience. Thus, is soap opera without significance and does it constitute mere entertainment - politics or pleasure?

Narrative can be described as the "short circuit between the poetical and the political" (Kearney, 1996: 11). In other words narrative might be a way to link these two seemingly opposite concepts. The goal of this section, however, is not to argue for either pleasure or politics. As Gledhill (2003: 343) rightly states:

> We need to take care in using the term representation, that we do not use it in a limiting way to refer only to the representation of discourses, figures and events in the social world, and neglect the purpose of fiction in producing the pleasures of drama, comedy, melodrama, as well as the pleasures of recognising situations we know from lived experience.

Consequently, it will be argued that soap opera can be a political or ideological tool as well as (or while) providing pleasure.

According to Horace Newcomb in *TV: the most popular art,* television, and more specifically, soap operas, are ideally suited to encourage viewer involvement and accordingly to have some effect on their viewers. According to Newcomb (Modleski, 1982: 87) soap opera represents, in some ways, the furthest advance of television art. He writes that for all its stereotypical qualities, soap opera combines, to the highest degree, two of the most important elements of the television aesthetic: "intimacy" and "continuity". Newcomb states that because of soap opera's serial form it offers depictions of people in situations which evolve and change over time allowing for "greater audience involvement, a sense of becoming part of the lives and actions of the characters they see". If viewers get involved in the way Newcomb suggests it follows that the content of the soap opera may influence its viewers' perceptions (Modleski, 1982: 87).

Apart from the intimacy and continuity inherent to the soap opera aesthetic its structural characteristics also have consequences for its potential to change perceptions of viewers. Modleski (1982: 89) states that a large number of critics consider an end to be crucial to any narrative. According to her, however, critics like Frank Kermode and Walter Benjamin believe that fictive ends are probably "figures of death". For this reason, Modleski argues that the continuity of soap opera offers the

promise of immortality and eternal return.[14] She argues that for many women family is often their only support and that soap opera offers the assurance of the family's immortality. "They present the viewer with a picture of the family, which, though it is always in the process of breaking down, stays together no matter how intolerable its situation may get. Or, perhaps more accurately, the family remains close precisely because it is perpetually in a chaotic state" (Modleski, 1982: 90). This reassurance of the never-ending family would be one example of how soap opera may function on a moral level rather than as mere entertainment.

The intense viewer involvement Newcomb referred to, as well as Modleski's view on the moral implications of soap opera's endlessness and content, are related to Allen's view on the potential of soap opera to function as something more than pleasure. Allen (1989: 49) writes that despite soap opera's status as an advertising vehicle soap operas are "progressive texts by virtue of their raising of problems which are seen as relevant" to the lives of the viewers. In the previous section reference was made to Modleski's claim that soap opera occasionally addresses controversial social problems. Modleski (1982: 86) states that "[i]n spite of the fact that soap operas contain more references to social problems than do most other forms of mass entertainment, critics tend to fault them heavily for their lack of social realism".[15] Modleski (1982: 14-15) contends that the enormous and continuing popularity of the soap opera genre suggests that they address issues that are relevant to their viewers' lives. It is thus through this intimacy and pleasure which soap opera creates that it manages to attract and involve viewership and in the process play an ideological role in influencing viewers' perceptions about social issues.

Socially contentious issues such as HIV/AIDS, infidelity, racism, and gender roles and gender dominance make up an important part of the content of soap opera. In the following chapter these and other contentious issues that manifest in South African soap operas will be identified in order to further prove the argument that soap operas function as more than mere entertainment. If this is indeed the case, the contentious

[14] This recurring organical circle can again be interpreted as feminine and female.
[15] This is another example of how soap opera is constructed and stereotyped – and consequently othered – from the outside by hegemonic powers.

and serious content of soap opera – which is argued to be other and therefore a site for negotiation – gives it an even greater potential to renegotiate hegemonic orders.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to arguing that soap opera – while its main function may be entertainment and pleasure – has the potential to function on a socially relevant level. This issue will again come to bear in Chapter Four (section 4.4.2.1) with specific relevance to South African soap opera. One of the reasons that enable soap opera to function as more than mere entertainment and actively challenge the hegemonic male order is the potential it has for negotiating gender roles.

3.3.2 The negotiation or negation of gender roles: gender and genre

Although characterization in soap opera has been discussed briefly in a previous section, a more detailed look at this aspect is merited regarding the negotiation of gender roles. Mass media forms and representations constitute major sites for conflict and negotiation. Because of the large audiences reached by mass media forms they are powerful tools in creating (or negating) ideas about gender, class and race distinctions. According to Gledhill (2003: 348), representation is a key site for the struggle of power since the power of definition is a major source of hegemony. It follows that a look at the definitions and representations that soap opera creates is justified.

Soap opera's predilection for stereotypes has been a source of criticism. Gledhill (2003: 346) writes that early feminists attacked these representations for not representing woman as they really are or really could or should be.

> In other words, the critique pitted one form of representation against another in terms of their presumed realism: the *stereotype*, because obviously constructed, was assumed to be 'false', while the "psychologically rounded character" was assumed to guarantee truth to human nature.

According to Gledhill (2003: 346), the problem is not in the rejection of the media representations but the "supposed remedy". The problematic surrounding reality was discussed in the previous chapter and is also relevant here. Questions such as whose reality, what reality and reality according to whom arise. Gledhill (2003: 346) writes: "we encounter very practical problems in appealing to 'reality' as a means of

assessing the constructive work of representations. For the category 'women' does not refer to a homogeneous social grouping in which all women will recognise themselves".

Rogers (1995: 326) supports the feminist critique of soap opera stereotypes when she writes about the implications of the roles that men and women portray. According to Rogers (1995: 326), even though some female characters do have professional careers, romance and family always takes precedence, while the male professionals are depicted as "superior beings that transcend their specialties". One male doctor would for instance handle AIDS patients as well as deliver babies. In contrast to this, according to Rogers (1995: 327), women who devote too much time to their jobs are punished; this leads to what Rogers refers to as the "career less career woman". She (1995: 326) writes that "all this should not be surprising since in the soap world pregnancy within the marriage has always been the supreme state and children the ultimate 'achievement' for women". According to Rogers, representations and characterization like the above have some kind of hidden message. In Rogers' opinion (1995: 327) "[i]n the fictionalized representation of motherhood on daytime soap operas, the myth of the maternal omnipotence conceals the subordination and marginalization of women". In other words, according to Rogers (1995: 327) male dominance is ideologically perpetuated by posing that women are perfectly suited for childrearing and childcare.

Although Rogers makes valid points the characterization of men and women in soap opera can also be argued the other way around. Professional female characters may be associated with the traditional female role of motherhood, but soap opera still includes more professional female characters than any other genre. Accordingly, although the male characters are professionally idealized, they also have a vested interest in their children's lives, which is again more obvious than in other genres. Rogers (1995: 327) argues that this "male sensitivity" doesn't imply "shared parenting" but rather that it is a variation of the traditional male fantasy of "procreation and immortality". Fiske (1995: 342-343), however, counters this view when he argues that the ability of female characters to "understand, facilitate, and control relationships is often shown as a source of power" while men are shown to be deficient "in these abilities and knowledges, and cause many problems by this

masculine lack". Modleski (1982: 17) endorses this in claiming that in soap opera men are brought to "acknowledge the pre-eminence of love and the attractions of domesticity at which [they have]…, as a rule, scoffed". Contradictory to Rogers' argument then, this could be argued as a double victory for the feminine characters; even if soap men are prone to show more interest in the family (which is not the case in traditional narratives), they are still depicted as being insufficient. This set of abilities and knowledges "(normally devalued by patriarchy) is given high valuation and legitimation in soap opera" (Fiske, 1995: 343).

Apart from the fact that professional female characters are still inclined to focus on the family it can also be argued that the powerful females in soap opera often have some kind of deviation which also renders them unequal to men. The powerful woman in a soap opera is more often than not also the villainess suggesting that a successful or powerful female must have some inherent shortcoming. Modleski (1982: 95), however, argues that this can be empowering because the villainess is able to "transform traditional feminine weaknesses into the sources of her strength"[16]. In other words, these characters employ the aspects which normally render them helpless and use it to their advantage. An example of this would be pregnancy, often used as a weapon of manipulation. This, according to Modleski (1982: 95), causes a reversal of male/female roles because the "anxiety about conception is transferred to the male".

Brown (1987: 19-20) reiterates this idea. According to her soaps are positive and empowering in the way they deal with sexuality and sexual pleasure:

> Thus the image of the body as sexual currency is absent, but the spoken discourse of the power of the female body to create is given crucial importance. There is no need to reiterate here the number of pregnancies, the importance attached to paternity and sometimes to maternity or the large number of sexual liaisons between characters in soap operas. However, contrary to the discourse which places the pregnant woman as powerless over natural events, often women in soaps use pregnancy as power over the father of the unborn child. The father will usually marry the mother of his child, whether or not he loves her (or whether or not the pregnancy is real), thereby achieving the woman's felt need to be taken care of in the only way that is available to her in the

[16] It must be acknowledged that this is a peculiarly Anglo-American feminist modelling of strength, other traditions, for instance Indian /Brazilian soap opera may have different perspectives on this. For the purpose of narrowing down the scope of this study, mainly Anglo-American perspectives, also on soap opera will be employed.

> dominant system. Women characters, then, use their bodies to achieve their own ends.

This may create the idea that women can only be empowered if they manipulate or if they are represented as deviant. Fiske (1995: 345), however, contends that a woman's sexuality in soap opera does not lead to her objectification by the male. "Rather it is a positive source of pleasure in a relationship, or a means of her empowerment in a patriarchal world". It may thus not be ideal that powerful females are represented as in some way deviant, but the fact remains that these roles do pose the potential of challenging dominant perceptions about women.

Another female/male boundary that becomes blurred in soap opera narrative is that of females' predilection for conversation, more specifically emotive conversation. Although words or language, together with reason, is traditionally seen as masculine properties, this is contested in soap operas. Men still do a lot of talking, but the male characters in soap opera tend to be more willing to discuss their feelings, something that is regarded as more feminine. According to Fiske (1995: 344), power in soap opera is given a "'feminine' inflection" when men talk about their feelings because this produces different gender roles and relationships. Gledhill (2003: 381) summarizes this potential of soap opera to negotiate gender roles as follows:

> Cutting across the impact of male dominance in any given episode are the consequences of the still equal if not greater number of roles for female characters, of narrative inconclusiveness and reversal, of the role of the audience in extending the fiction beyond the bounds of the text, and the primacy, both textual and extra-textual, in this process of the feminine competence of talk.

From the above it may be deduced that female characters in soap opera utilize characteristics usually regarded as weaknesses to empower themselves.

> The villainess turns traditional feminine characteristics (which are often seen as weaknesses ensuring her subordination) into a source of strength. She uses pregnancy (real or alleged) as a weapon, she uses her insight into people to manipulate them, and she uses her sexuality for her own ends, not for masculine pleasure. She reverses male and female roles… and, above all, she embodies the female desire for power, which is both produced and frustrated by the social relations of patriarchy. The final control that the villainess strives for is, …control not over men, but over feminine passivity (Fiske, 1995: 346).

Fiske (1995: 346) admits that the portrayal of the villainess sets "positive" feminine characteristics in a

> framework of moral disapproval, and follows them at work through a repeated narrative structure that denies their ultimate success… [T]he contradictions in the text and its reading position reflect the contradictions inherent in the attempt to assert feminine values within and against a patriarchal society…

The point here is not the problems with the representation of women in soap opera but rather the fact that these representations offer more potential for negotiation of gender identities than traditional narratives. In this regard Modleski (1982: 98) states that at the least "while soap operas thrive they present a continual reminder that women's anger is alive, if not exactly well…"

In contrast to the above, characteristics usually regarded as positive to male characters are deconstructed in soap opera. Attributing traits traditionally associated with a hero to the villain negate gender roles even further. Fiske (1995: 345) states that 'macho' characteristics like "goal centeredness, assertiveness and morality of the strongest that identify the hero in masculine television, tend here to be the characteristics of the villain". According to him, feminized men are viewed more favourably while masculine men are associated with villains.

Curti (1998: 30) argues that the recent blurring and transgression of genres have caused a focus on the break-up of a fixed notion of genre. According to her, this can be connected with the changes in the notions of gender difference. In other words, in the same way that the boundaries of soap operas blur with that of other genres, so too do the boundaries between genders become blurred.

> This is not to suggest that talk as a culturally feminized activity is more ideologically acceptable than 'masculine' action, but, rather, that the submission of one to the other in the increasing intermingling of genres produces intersections of gendered modes and values which offer the potential for negotiations around gender definitions and sexual identities (Gledhill, 2003: 381).

This section focused mainly on the possibilities for the negotiation of heterosexual gender roles. When South African soap opera is analysed in the following chapter however, other gender roles are also identified and analysed.

In this deconstructing or challenging of gender definitions and sexual identities it is inevitable that the hegemonic order, in this case patriarchy as dominant ideology, is also questioned. In the following section, previously formulated opinions will be utilized to argue for the potential of soap opera to challenge the/a hegemonic order.

3.3.3 The potential of soap narrative to challenge the hegemonic order

The fragmentation of soap opera narrative is clearly significant. Not only does it have implications for the gendering of the genre as was argued in a previous section, it also plays a role in soap opera's ability to challenge the hegemonic order. Jane Feuer (Rogers, 1995: 328) reasons that because of the multiplicity of plot lines ideological stances remain unprivileged: "since no action is irreversible, every ideological position may be countered by its opposite". John Fiske (1995: 340) disagrees with this. He writes that soap opera, because it employs a narrative without an end, lacks all the "formal points at which ideological closure is most powerfully exerted". Disruption without resolution creates a text that is open to multiple readings. Even when individual plots reach a conclusion, it is never final. Characters return from the dead, or they simply live on through the gossip or memories of other characters. Because of the fact that soap opera never reaches a state of equilibrium, there exists the perpetual possibility of disturbance or threat. It follows that no definite ideological position can reign freely, since the possibility of its negation is always imminent.

Fiske also refers to the potential of soap opera to challenge the hegemonic order because of its lack of closure. Unlike Rogers, Fiske sees marriage as an example of soap opera's resistance to narrative and ideological closure. According to Fiske (1995: 342), soap operas interrogate marriage as they celebrate it. "Building the threat into the celebration opens marriage up to readings other than those preferred by patriarchy". Fiske (1995: 342) states that this double evaluation "is generic to soap opera, and it is part of the reason for its openness". Seiter (1981: 27) states that some of the female viewers she interviewed "openly and enthusiastically admitted their delight in following soap opera's stories of female transgressions which destroy the ideological nucleus of the text: the priority and sacredness of the family". Fiske (1995: 342) argues that "[t]he dominant ideology is inscribed in the status quo, and soap operas offer their subordinated women viewers the pleasure of seeing this status

quo in a constant state of disruption". Soap opera thus employs disruption to challenge the status quo, and by implication the dominant (patriarchal) ideology.

This constant disruption of the status quo may also serve to offer more negotiable subject positions for the viewers. Modleski's argument about soap opera constructing the ideal spectator (as identified by Gledhill) as the "ideal mother" seems to have mainly negative connotations such as perpetuating the role of the woman as housewife. It may, however, also have positive implications for the negotiation of subject positions, liberating the ideal mother/housewife from her traditional surroundings by suggesting the destruction of the ideological nucleus of the text Fiske refers to.

Ironically, the power of soap opera to challenge the hegemonic order lies also in that for which it is criticized. In previous sections reference was made to soap opera's predilection for emotion and dialogue. Modleski points out that the combination of the two, as well as semiotic devices like the close-up, emphasises the ability of women to read between the lines. Fiske (1995: 344) writes that language is used by "men to exert control over the meanings of the world but women question the effectiveness in this, and find pleasure in the knowledge that escapes it". The emphasis on the emotional thus also provides a means of resistance to the dominant (male) attributes of reason and speech.

Soap opera's propensity for conversation has more implications for the challenging of the hegemonic order. In the same way that the fragmentation of the text resists any specific ideological point of view, so too does the dialogue. The same set of events will be discussed repeatedly by different characters. According to Brunsdon (1983: 80), a range of different opinions and understandings of the same event is voiced. This, together with the continuous interruption of the text leads to "the consistent holding-off of dénouement and knowledge arguably invites the viewer to engage in exactly the same type of speculation and judgement". The fact that all the characters have the opportunity to voice their own opinions, regardless of their social position, poses a potential moral and ideological equality of all characters. Because different opinions are explored no single ideological or moral standard can be perpetuated and the viewer is able to choose which of the views to support.

Another point of criticism, often directed at soap opera, is the fact that it is a feminine text. Modleski (1982: 14) points out that some women's criticism of feminine narratives, which includes dismissal, hostility and even mockery, are indistinguishable from those of men. She writes that: "in assuming this attitude, we demonstrate not so much a freedom from romantic fantasy as our acceptance of the critical double standard and of the masculine contempt for sentimental (feminine) 'drivel'" (Modleski, 1982: 14). The argument of this chapter, however, is that exactly because of the feminine gendering of the soap opera narrative it is able to create a site for constructing an otherness and challenging the hegemonic order. Brunsdon (1983: 78) shows that there is no need for this contempt since, because soap opera is regarded as a feminine text created in a predominantly male society, it "colonizes the public masculine sphere, representing it from the point of view of the personal. It is through the concerns and values of the personal sphere that the public sphere is represented in soap opera". Thus, even though soap opera still functions in a male dominated sphere, it does so in a very personal, feminine fashion which definitely creates a platform from which women can negotiate meaning or colonize male spheres.

Rogers attempts to counter Modleski's argument. Although Rogers admits (1995: 329) that the potential for struggle or the negotiation of meaning exists she asks: "What if viewers fail to recognise the subtext? …Instead of constructing subversive readings of soaps, many viewers simply fail to recognise latent discourses…". This may or may not be the case but it is, however, not the point. The argument is simply that soap opera, more specifically soap opera as a feminine and female text, does create one of the few spaces for the negotiation of ideology and gender roles within popular culture.

3.4 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was, firstly to create a sufficient definition of soap opera as well as a general theoretical framework according to which South African soap opera may be analysed in the following chapter. The origin of soap opera and its name was briefly discussed. Furthermore generic characteristics of soap opera such as its format, themes, narrative patterns, characterization, aesthetic devices and modes of

expression were identified. The distinction between fact and fiction was also referred to and in this case the term “verisimilitude” was introduced to suggest the alternative, but parallel, world created in soap opera. It may be useful to point forward to the fact that South African soap opera use, but also in some cases deviate from, the general theoretical groundwork described in the first part of this chapter.

Secondly, I argued that soap opera constitutes a kind of other for various reasons. These include not only the gendering of the genre but also the negative perceptions about soap opera, the differences between soap opera and traditional narratives and the subject positions created by the genre.

If soap opera indeed constitutes the other in the way Irigaray conceptualises this term, this otherness creates the potential for a site of struggle where dominant ideas about power and ideology, in other words the hegemonic order, may be contested. The third, and last, section of this chapter was devoted to presenting this statement. Because soap opera does not only function as mere entertainment but also includes socially relevant issues it follows that it may have some influence in the perception or awareness of these issues. Furthermore, since soap opera is clearly gendered, it poses the potential for the negotiation of gender roles. Lastly, because of all this, it challenges the dominant hegemonic order of patriarchy. All of the above-mentioned arguments were made to substantiate arguments about South African soap opera that follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SOUTH AFRICAN OTHERNESSES: SOUTH AFRICAN NARRATIVE AND SOAP OPERA

South Africa has recently entered its second decade of democracy following the end of apartheid in 1994, and the country has undergone far reaching shifts in its political, economic and cultural paradigms. Through these paradigm shifts new histories and identities are being created. According to Annie E. Coombes (2003: 1), new stories of 'home' and 'nation' are created in "the public sphere during startling periods of political and social transformation…". Kristin Skare Orgeret (2004: 147) agrees when she writes that "understanding a nation state and its media becomes ever more important in newly democratized countries and not least in an era of increased globalization processes".

Questions thus arise as to the new identities made possible by these histories and this fledgling democracy, as well as the role the media has to play in this process. These shifts are also manifested in the production of meaning and the representation and construction of identities in popular visual culture and, more particular to this thesis, in soap opera. Coombes (2003: 1) argues

> …that the visual and material manifestations of new public histories are both produced by and effectively inform changing definitions of 'community' and 'nation' during periods of political transition where such concepts become crucial stakes in the resolution or management of social conflict and/or renewal.

André Brink (1999: 29) suggests that the socio-political shift in South Africa inevitably brought with it new aesthetic responses and that even if it didn't curtail the imagination it certainly prioritized some themes. If what Brink says is true, it follows that some themes tend to repeat themselves in the narratives found in the post-1994 period. Examples of these themes[1] include the concept of a South African nation[2]; the

[1] At this point it must be acknowledged that the idea of "a/the South African identity" in itself is a construct, residing in the themes mentioned here - all of it expressions of an emerging concept of "the South African identity". I argue however that within this concept of a South African nation there exist multiple new South African identities.

[2] The problematic surrounding the concept of nation is acknowledged here. According to Benedict Anderson (1983: 12) an explanation of nation, and related terms like nationality and nationalism

South African team; Proudly South African; the South African miracle; the Rainbow Nation, multiculturalism and multilingualism, to name but a few. It is therefore necessary to ask questions concerning the themes that became prominent in post-1994 narrative, as well as to question the meanings, purposes and possible repercussions of these narratives. The aim here is to establish whether the manifestation of these themes in South African soap opera – which will be argued as other and therefore as a site of negotiation – has the potential for contributing to the establishment of new South African histories and identities.

Apart from changing definitions of identity and related issues locally, media also has the responsibility to make these new definitions known internationally.[3] Skare Orgeret (2004: 159) contends that it

> is …important to emphasize that in addition to creating a South African identity and promoting new post-apartheid myths to South Africa, the local programming and their expected South African values are additionally promoted to the region and the rest of the continent.

The broad purpose of this chapter will therefore be to study how new public histories and post-apartheid identities manifest visually and materially in South African soap opera narratives. This will be done in order to determine the potential of these manifestations to challenge, change or perpetuate definitions and perceptions of "community", "nation" and identity within the South African context. It is argued that the construction of South African soap opera as an otherness, and the fact that it contains the above mentioned manifestations, creates, in these soap operas, a possibility for challenging hegemonic constructions.

In order to validate this, arguments made in the previous chapters concerning the nature of narrative, the characteristics of soap opera and of otherness will be applied to the South African context, South African narrative and more specifically South African soap narrative. The South African context and television media will briefly be discussed. The argument developed in the previous chapter about the otherness of

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remains a matter of "longstanding dispute". However, according to him, "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson, 1983: 12).

[3] Although the responsibility of the South African media to change definitions both nationally and internationally are of crucial importance, the success of the South African media in promoting these new myths and identities internationally is not an issue that can be explicitly and fully explored within the limited scope of this thesis. It will however again be referred to in 4.1.2.

soap opera will be further explored here as it will be argued that not only South Africa, but also South African narrative and soap opera constitute othernesses. If this argument holds true it opens the previously mentioned possibility for soap opera narratives to give a voice to the other and in so doing, potentially create a site for the negotiation of new identities and past hegemonic constructions. This will be brought to bear in the final section of this chapter.

4.1 The South African (his)tory[4] and context

The following section aims to provide the contextual background of this thesis. The problems surrounding South African identities are addressed, followed by a brief contextualization of South African mass media.

4.1.1 South African identities

The concept of South African identity or identities proves to be a problematic one, resisting one absolute definition. South Africa's conflict-ridden history clearly bears the traces of an ongoing search for identity. If one takes Ricoeur's view of identity as a basis, there can never be a settled identity; because identity is ever evolving; and conflict itself is part of the construction of all identities. The multicultural, multi-positional facets of South African identities are indicative of all identities; one is continuously more than one identity. According to Bullock and Trombley (2000: 413)

> recent sociological and psychological theory has stressed that a person's 'identity' is in fact something multiple and potentially fluid, constructed through experience and linguistically coded. In developing their identities, people draw on culturally available resources in their immediate social networks and in society as a whole. The process of identity-construction is therefore one upon which the contradictions and dispositions of the surrounding socio-cultural environment have a powerful impact.

Due to the diversity of cultures interacting in the South African context no one definition will be suitable or possible. South African identity or identities will thus inevitably be plural. The fact that eleven South African languages have only been

[4] The reason for the emphasis on "his" in South African history is that this history is a predominantly patriarchal, male orientated and male dominated history. This is an issue that will be explored with relevance to the othering of South African soap opera.

recognised as official languages during the last decade, for example, already points to the multiplicity of identities at work within South Africa today and the fact that identities are being renegotiated in a different set of political circumstances.

The complexities of the different identities being created and negotiated within South Africa is not something that can be contained within a few contextualising paragraphs. However, mentioning the arguments of a few theorists specifically working on the construction of identities may be instrumental to the rest of this chapter.

According to Zimitri Erasmus (2000: 71), "Apartheid South Africa was a racially defined democracy for white citizens. Its discourse re-created 'tribal' identities while simultaneously maintaining the overarching black/white division of the population". This is thus the background[5] against which new identities need to be created and negotiated within a post-apartheid context and this has lead to a variety of different discourses. Melissa Steyn (2004: 144) for example, refers to interdisciplinary literature labelled variously as "'Whiteness Studies', 'White Studies', 'Whiteness Critique', or 'Critical Studies of Whiteness'" as a field that dedicates itself to "subverting the power of whiteness". Related to this, and also merely functioning as one example out of many, could be the struggle within Afrikaans-speaking communities to re-position themselves and their language in such a way that it no longer perpetuates the apartheid connotations of the language as the language of the oppressor.

It is not just whiteness that needs to be renegotiated. The overarching black/white division of the population Erasmus refers to also holds implications for other identities. In this regard Erasmus writes (2000: 71): "Those classified 'Coloured' occupied an ambiguous position within the South African polity. 'Coloureds' were neither full citizens (in terms of access to rights before the law), nor complete subjects. Their socio-political position was characterized by both racial exclusion and selected inclusion".

[5] A background in which the construction of othernesses by the dominant hegemonic powers was rife.

Apart from this problem, the fact that apartheid has come to an end does not preclude a democratic process of creating identity. Erasmus (2000: 72) argues that the "post-apartheid myth of Rainbow Nationalism served to paper over continued racialized inequities and differential racialization" and that uncertainty about the place of "'colouredness' persists in the current South African context".

The three main, and oversimplified, categories namely white, black and coloured is completely inadequate for describing the complex identities at work within South Africa today. Erasmus, for example, poses that coloured identities are rich tapestries "made and re-made by those historically classified coloured, rather than simply imposed by the apartheid regime". He (Erasmus, 2000: 72) goes on to write that

> [t]hose historically classified coloured have responded to this new context in different ways. Some remain locked in an articulation of their identity 'as lack', arguing that they were 'not white enough during apartheid' and are 'not black enough in the post apartheid context' (Caliguire, 1996: 12). Others have resorted to claiming authentic identities based on ethnicity and historical links to the indigenous Khoi-San.

It is however not just racial identities that are being renegotiated within the South African context. During apartheid, South Africa was a patriarchal society in which the male and the masculine were dominant. Although it may be argued that the dominant hegemonic power in South Africa today is still a patriarchal one, gender identities are also currently being negotiated. Different and more equal opportunities are arising for women and marginalised sexual groups are campaigning for equal rights to the dominant heterosexual groups.

It is thus clear that a multiplicity of fluid identities are at work in the South African context and that no one absolute conceptualisation of a South African identity is possible. What may be argued as absolute though is that identities are being re-negotiated within the newly democratized South Africa. The creation of new, post-apartheid myths,[6] referred to earlier, opens up a space in which new identities may be negotiated.

[6] According to Kirkwood (1958: 22) "The distinctive quality of myth, the aspect of it that gives its peculiar value for literature, is its capacity to express in story form the primary emotional and imaginative workings of the human mind". For the purposes of this study myth will not be regarded as

If it is true that apart from the spiritual or non-material production, the material production of a nation contributes to the understanding, construction and negotiation of identities, as was argued by Skare Orgeret, Coombes and Brink previously, the analysis of the material production manifesting in the media, specifically soap opera, seems merited.

4.1.2 South African television media

Television was only introduced in South Africa in 1976 several decades after its introduction in countries like the United States of America. The reason for this late introduction was the negative attitude the National Party government had towards new and international media. More precisely: Albert Hertzog, the minister of Post and Telecommunications regarded television as a sinful instrument, contributing to the breakdown of social mores. According to Skare Orgeret (2004: 150), the introduction of television only took place after

> a forceful campaign by the National Party (NP) government to 'protect' South Africans from 'the devil in the Black Box' (Nixon, 1994: 43). The main reason for this late appearance was opposition to the new media from the Nationalist Party in power, which feared that television represented threats from both within and outside the national society.

Furthermore, when television was eventually introduced it was immediately employed by the government as a powerful ideological and hegemonic tool. From the outset the channels were clearly segregated. When SABC-TV was launched it screened "white" news. In 1982 TV2 and TV3 were launched and showed "black" news that differed considerably from the news screened on TV1 (Skare Orgeret, 2004: 150). "This divide was thus a hallmark of SABC News during apartheid; the news bulletins were separately produced in different ethnic languages… reinforcing the apartheid ideology of different development" (Skare Orgeret, 2004: 150). In other words, although it may have been expressed in different ways in this division between channels, one political ideology, namely that of apartheid, was employed to promote the same values; that of separation, apartheid and development according to caste and social standing.

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something fictional, but rather as something which, through language, gives form to a certain 'truth' within a certain context, in this case in the South African post-apartheid context.

Earlier an argument was briefly made for the potential of visual and material manifestations to influence concepts such as nation, identity and community. With the fall of apartheid and the transition to democracy it became increasingly important for South African television not only to address the "'dominant groups' point of view, but a broad range of different experiences, belongings and voices within the South African borders" (Skare Orgeret, 2004: 151). Because of the popularity of television and the potential it has to reach mass audiences "the SABC institution may be perceived as a nodal point around which many of the nation's debates and discursive practices are organized" (Skare Orgeret, 2004: 151). It follows logically that a popular genre, like soap opera, will have an important place in these debates and discursive practices.

The role of South African media in creating new ideas surrounding South African identity, community and history can be twofold. In the 1990s the South African media became players, although small, in the global mass media arena. South African media expanded into the southern African subregion, while South Africa itself was being further integrated into a global system (Skare Orgeret, 2004: 154). Not only does South African television media have a crucial role to play when it comes to constructing a national identity, it also has a responsibility to present the international world with a realistic view of this identity/identities. This implies a process of looking both inward and outward. SABC Africa, for example, is the SABC's Pay-TV channel broadcasting 24 hours a day on the DSTV digital satellite platform accessible on the African continent as well as internationally. Both *Isidingo* and *7de Laan* are examples of programmes that are both available on South African television as well as on SABC Africa where, in the case of *7de Laan*, it is broadcast in the original Afrikaans but subtitled in English.

In theory it seems that the policy of the South African Broadcasting Corporation includes the responsibility to represent the multiple voices of the South African community. According to Skare Orgeret (2004: 156), the SABC website "leaves us no doubt about the Corporation being the mother of the nation with a pronounced feeling of social responsibility". The website states that the SABC "must inform, educate, entertain; support and develop culture and education; and, as far as possible, secure

fair and equal treatment for the various cultural groupings in the nation" (www.sabc.co.za).

Whether this is achieved, however, is debatable. Until 2002, for example, the SABC slogan was "Simunye, we are one". Nevertheless, for Skare Orgeret (2004: 156) the "different channels increasingly appeared to be structured after distinctive social groups following a logic that may be working against the idea of a unified nation".[7] She develops two arguments that might explain this distinction between the three different channels. According to her, although one might argue that there is a "willingness to become non-racial"[8], it is a difficult task to break through racially structured markets (2004: 156). On the other hand one might argue that these distinctions are the residue of apartheid. Sean Jacobs (2000) writes that "racism is inextricably part of the media make-up in South Africa in how it perpetuates separate audiences, constructs markets for advertisers, portrays complex processes of political transition and organizes its newsrooms". The difficulty of breaking through racially structured markets and the implications of this segregation and the role it plays in the construction of separate audiences is a point that will also be addressed with specific reference to South African soap opera later in this chapter.

Apart from of the above a closer look at the specific content of South African television is also merited. Due to the fact that the cost of local television programming far outweighs the cost of international products, a large amount of time slots are filled with international programming. This in itself has implications. Skare Orgeret (2004: 157) contends that "a certain quantity of local content is considered as one of the main contributions to nation building, democracy and development and as a barrier against the flow of global/American content". Research also confirms that local audiences generally prefer locally produced programmes when confronted with a choice between two versions on the same level of quality (Skare Orgeret, 2004: 158). According to the SA Content Position Paper and Regulations, the ICASA (The

[7] Because of the discrepancies in the SABC's goals and the structure of the channels, soap operas from all of these channels will be analysed in the following sections.

[8] "[N]on-racial", and the related "non-racism", are loaded ideological concepts and problematic concepts at that. The validity of the term race in itself may be contested. Bullock and Trombley (2000: 719) for example, argue that the term "has been largely scientifically discredited. The consensus among social scientists today is that race is a social construction". Although this problem is acknowledged the value of Skare Orgeret's argument lies in explaining the - still contemporary - problem of the distinction between the different SABC channels.

Independent Communications Authority of South Africa) South African Television Content Regulations of 2002 reflect this:

> Through South African music and television programming, radio and television can make a vital contribution to democracy, nation building and development in South Africa. South African content quotas seek to protect and develop our country's national cultures and identities and to extend choice for the public. South African music and television programmes need to be produced by a wide range of South Africans, for South African audiences, in languages of their choice (ICASA, 2002).

The largest part of local programming on the SABC channels, as well as on the free to view slot (open time)[9] of the popular pay-channel M-Net, consists of news or actuality programmes and local soap operas. Although there seems to be a surge in the production of local dramas such as *Dit wat stom is*, *Known Gods*, *Amalia*, *Orion*, and *The Lab*, for example, these programmes are mainly available on the pay channels, such as the Afrikaans only channel, KYKnet, and M-Net, available on the DSTV platform.

An argument could also be made for the increasing role that South African films are playing in the construction of South African identities internationally (consider as a case in point the 2006 Oscar winning film *Tsotsi*) but ironically these films are made available more internationally than nationally. When studying the creation of new identities it thus seems logical that local productions that are readily available both nationally and internationally across all segments of the population, such as South African soap opera, are more relevant to the everyday shaping of identities.

The face of South Africa and South African media seems to be rapidly changing, but the prominence of South African soap opera remains unchallenged. When looking at the South African television media, as well as the focus on locally produced products, it is clear that South African soap opera has the potential to contribute to the young democracy, nation building and development in general. In order to validate this statement, it will be argued in following sections that South African soap opera has many qualities of the other which gives a voice to marginalised groups and

[9] At the time of writing this free-to-view slot (M-Net Open Time) was still available. From the 1st of April 2007 however, this free-to-view slot was discontinued.

consequently creates a site for the struggle and negotiation of power, and the construction of multiple new identities.

4.2 South Africa as other

The concept of the other and its origin was discussed previously. Reference was also made to Edward Said and his seminal text *Orientalism*. According to Vic Webb (2005), "[t]he notion of 'constructing the other' is neatly expressed in the cultural scholar Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism'. 'Orientalism' refers to the tendency to define people one does not know… in terms of the perceived differences between them and you". Although Said's conceptualization of the other may be the original one, Irigaray's conceptualization of the other constructs the other as powerful exactly because of its otherness, thus not viewing otherness as negative. In order to create grounds on which to establish the powerful otherness of South African soap opera, and in so doing prove that it may be a site for the negotiation and construction of identity, I argue that South Africa, in itself, may be regarded as other (mainly as other to the West, but also as other to other African states), but the powerful other Irigaray proposes, for various reasons which will be briefly explored in the paragraphs to follow.

Coombes (2003: 3-4) points to the anachronistic nature of South Africa, whilst Skare Orgeret (2004: 147) refers to this nature as the "Janus Face of South Africa". On the one hand it is a country that bears only a slim resemblance to other African states,

> having an infrastructure of roads and other support institutions… that have more in common with a highly developed industrialized capital state. On the other hand, South Africa shares many of the problems of developing nations with histories of extremes of unevenly distributed wealth.

South Africa's history of being colonized also contributes to this notion of otherness. In accordance with Said's *Orientalism*, in colonizing the colonizer already constructs the colonized as other. Webb (2005) states that "[t]his construction of the colonized people and their identities, also had an affect on the latter's perceptions of themselves, and colonized communities began perceiving themselves as being

'inferior'." Also according to Webb (2005), the Fanonian[10] argument would be different: although the colonized is deemed to be inferior he (Fanon refers to "he") does not accept that inferiority. Often that inferiority is constructed from the outside. Whether, as Webb states, colonization affected colonized communities' perception of themselves, or whether it was constructed from outside and not accepted, the fact remains that this constitutes South Africa not only as other to other African states, but also as other to developed countries. If South African otherness, however, is viewed in the Fanonian way, then it is possible that it might constitute the powerful otherness of Irigaray, referred to earlier.

It is, however, not only the contrast between South African infrastructure and that of the West or other African countries, or the distribution of wealth that makes it other, but also its contentious recent political history. The apartheid government based their system on the principles of Afrikaner nationalism and segregation, establishing their own superiority in the law books and enforcing it with propaganda. This not only caused South Africa to be condemned worldwide (and consequently being constructed as other to the West), but also led to its seclusion through international embargoes and boycotts. Skare Orgeret and Stephanie Marlin-Curiel validate this argument. According to Skare Orgeret (2004: 150)

> …the National Party feared the internationalization threat that television implied. This was at a period where South Africa's internal crises increased and the international attention to the apartheid regime gradually rose. The NP however, rejected all international condemnation. South Africa had left the Commonwealth in 1961, and within an increasingly diplomatically isolated context, the apartheid government seemed to choose to ignore the outside world...

The apartheid government themselves also constructed "Afrikaners as the other" by romanticizing the past, for instance the 19th century Boer Republics' wars with the British Empire or the battle of the Voortrekkers against Zulu warriors at Bloedrivier. In the case of Bloedrivier, history was constructed in such a way that the military victory was not ascribed to the Voortrekkers' technically superior armaments, but interpreted primarily as a sign of divine intervention. "With the battle behind them they believed even more strongly that white predominance over blacks is God's own

[10] Frantz Fanon was a black French intellectual. His most important contributions to post colonial studies were *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and, amongst other things, he argued that one can be colonized by language.

will" (http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history). Marlin-Curiel (2003: 62) writes that "[t]ogether the Broederbond[11] and the government attempted to ensure that Afrikaners did not encounter any reason to doubt that they were 'superior, Godly, […] descendant(s) of brave men and women who fought for their beliefs and values'". Travel, for example, was discouraged and construed by the state as a threat. It may be argued that these points belong to South Africa's past but there is no doubt that traces of this still influence not only South Africa, but also South African media today in the form of what Skare Orgeret (2004: 156) refers to as "the ghost of apartheid".

South Africa is currently a major tourist attraction but preconceived ideas and stereotypical notions of the country as representing part of "dark Africa" where wild animals and noble savages co-exist[12] inevitably play an important role in its appeal. Although South Africa may be represented as different, not like the other African countries, but rather as "an easy introduction to Africa", midway between the First World and the Third World, to some extent, the original notion of the other, as other to Anglo-American or European societies, still constitutes South Africa as other today.

Related to this is the fact that South Africa may be regarded as a Third World country. This in itself constitutes it as other to First World countries. Fourie (1994: 49) identifies the following problems typical of Third World countries that are also applicable to South Africa:

- Approximately 50% of the adult population in South Africa are illiterate
- 44% live in rural areas
- Approximately 7 million out of 40 million South Africans are homeless squatters
- 80% of the black population do not have access to electricity; and

[11] "In June 1918 disaffected Afrikaners were brought together in a new organisation called Jong Suid-Afrika. The following year its name was changed to the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB). The organisation had one main aim: to further Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa – to maintain Afrikaner culture, to develop an Afrikaner economy, and to gain control of the South African government. It evolved into a highly influential 'secret society'. "Every prime minister and state president in South Africa from 1948 to the end of apartheid in 1994 was a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond. Although revelations in the press, in the 1960s, about *Afrikaner Broederbond* membership began to erode its political power, influential Afrikaners continued to be members. Even at the end of the apartheid era… most members of the departing white parliament were members of the AB…" (http://africanhistory.about.com).

[12] In other words the othering, through preconceived ideas and stereotyping, of South Africa by Western civilisation.

- The largest majority of the black population do not have access to mass media.[13]

Concurrent with this concept of Africa as a dark and primitive continent is the fact that South Africa, or more specifically Africa, is the continent rifest with HIV/AIDS. This leads to a stereotypical view of the continent and the country. By 2002 approximately 600 000 South Africans younger than 15 have already lost their mothers to HIV/AIDS (Mail&Guardian, 2002). According to the 2006 UNAIDS report "Sub-Saharan Africa has just over 10% of the world's population, but is home to more than 60% of all people living with HIV—25.8 million. In 2005, an estimated 3.2 million people in the region became newly infected, while 2.4 million adults and children died of AIDS". Furthermore "it is thought that almost half of all deaths in South Africa, and a staggering 71% of deaths among those aged between 15 and 49, are caused by AIDS" (UNAIDS, 2006/7). This is a very real part of the South African context today, but it also constitutes South Africa as other to its European or American counterparts.

If the above serves as evidence that South Africa in itself represents some kind of other[14] it follows that the narratives created within this context will also be that of the other. South African soap opera, if it is a viable example of South African narrative, must then also share some of these characteristics of otherness.

4.3 Soap opera as South African narrative

South African narratives manifest in many forms, including the literature and the media. South African narrative is also not a homogenous narrative given that it encompasses such a large variety of voices. Consider as a case in point the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC of South Africa and the stories told during this Commission may be regarded as part of the beginning of creating New

[13] It is acknowledged that the information supplied here is dated and that the situation might be slightly different today but the purpose of including this is to establish the – still relevant – argument that South Africa is essentially a Third World country.

[14] Some of the arguments in this section might be perceived as merely perpetuating the othering of Africa and South Africa by colonial discourses and practices. I am however not simply affirming that othering and otherness. The point here is to establish South Africa as other – but an other that empowers itself by taking control of its difference and defining itself – in order to substantiate arguments about the other's ability to serve as site for the negotiation of hegemonic orders made earlier and following this section.

South African narratives and identities.[15] According to Marlin-Curiel (2003: 56) "[t]he TRC effectively defined a new hegemonic order by which post-apartheid social identities are negotiated, based on moral standing in relationship to the past".

The TRC can be described as a project that aims to tell the story of South Africa's Apartheid past (South Africa's stories) from the inside out. It aims to crystallize issues of identity and to expose silenced voices as well as the methods that silenced them. It could be argued that the search for meaning triggers narrative and therefore critically deconstructing these narratives might lead to the uncovering of some interesting meaning.

In view of the fact that soap opera constitutes a large part of the locally produced fictive products created and screened on South African television, it is arguable that these soap operas qualify as a type of South African narrative. Because of the variety of characters in a soap opera it has the potential to give a voice to a large part of the narrators that together make up South African narrative.

A key contributing factor that validates the analyses of South African soap opera as South African narrative is its accessibility. At the time of writing South Africa produces 10 local soap operas (*Egoli, 7de Laan, Isidingo, Generations, Backstage, Villa Rosa, Begeertes, Binnelanders, Scandal* and *Muvhango*), disregarding programming like *Yizo Yizo*, that may also qualify as socially conscious documentary style soap operas. The large number of local soap operas, the large amount of air time they receive and the fact that they are available on the free-to-air SABC channels make them accessible. Not only are these soap operas broadcast daily, there are also re-broadcasts daily as well as an omnibus[16] broadcast once a week. Any given episode that the viewer might have missed can thus easily be viewed in a number of alternative timeslots. Even though it may be only one of many South African

[15] I argue that within the New South Africa there are more than one narrative to be told, and more than one identity to be created. Unlike apartheid South Africa where there existed essentially one narrative and one identity, identities are unleashed and a variety of narratives are unearthed in the New South Africa.

[16] According to *The shorter Oxford English dictionary on historical principles* (1970: 1368), with relevance to books, the term omnibus refers to "a volume containing several stories etc. (usually by a single author) published at a low price to be within the reach of all". With relevance to soap opera rebroadcasts this term refers to a whole weeks' worth of episodes from a certain soap opera being rebroadcast back to back at a certain time.

narratives, local soap opera definitely qualifies as South African narrative and will be analysed as such.

4.4 South African soap opera

In order to attempt a more detailed discussion the soap operas discussed in this study will be limited to four (South African soap operas), namely: *7de Laan, Isidingo, Generations* and *Egoli.*[17]

In the following section these soap operas will be analysed according to the differences and similarities between local soap operas and their American counterparts, the female/male representations in local soap opera, verisimilitude in local soap opera and also the languages used. All of these factors contribute to the subsequent argument that South African soap opera can be opposed to, amongst other hegemonic structures, American soap opera and traditional male narratives, and consequently that it is other.

Stuart Hall (1986: 251) writes the following:

> [b]ecause there are many different and conflicting ways in which meaning about the world can be constructed, it matters profoundly what and who gets represented… and how things, people, events and relationships are represented… How things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after the event role.

Once South African soap opera is established as other, a study will be made of the potential these soap operas have to serve as a site for struggle and negotiation through its representations of South Africa.

[17] It must be noted here that *Egoli* is not broadcasted on one of the SABC channels. But on M-Net, which is a pay channel, but *Egoli* falls into its open time slot which (at the time of writing) gives anybody with access to the SABC channels access to this soap as well.

4.4.1 South African soap opera as other[18]

In the previous chapter various arguments were made according to which soap opera as genre in general may be regarded as other. Soap opera was contrasted to more "traditional" or even popular narratives. Other arguments for the otherness of soap opera included its structure, the perceptions about - or attitudes towards - soap opera, the subject positions created, as well as soap opera's inherent female and feminine nature. All of these arguments are also applicable to South African soap opera and thus already establishes it as other, and consequently as a site of negotiation.[19] In this section some of the arguments in the previous chapter will be applied specifically to South African soap operas, while more reasons for South African soap opera's otherness will also be identified.

4.4.1.1 "Local is lekker" – South African soap opera as other on SABC

There are inherently South African characteristics and situations which constitute South African soap opera as other. Consider for example the fact that South African soap operas comprise a large percentage of locally produced shows, which in themselves may be argued as other, and marginalised, to the large amount of international programmes to be found on local television. In the introduction to this chapter it was mentioned that although there seems to be a renaissance of local television productions and films, these productions remain selectively available, for instance only on the DSTV platform. Apart from news and actuality, soap operas are some of the few locally produced programmes screened by the free-to-air SABC and e-tv channels.

[18] It was mentioned earlier that other – in the way it is employed in this study – does not imply mere binary oppositioning. The concept of the other however, implies that it is other to something/someone. In the case of South Africa, and South African soap opera, it will be argued that it is other to various hegemonic orders broadly including the West, patriarchy and masculinity. It will also be argued that South African soap opera is other to some more traditional local programming. In other words, it may also be argued that South African soap operas constitute more than a single other, and rather various characteristics of otherness. This argument must be read in connection to the gendering if the genre and Irigaray's argument for a "sex which is *not one"* (own emphasis).

[19] If otherness is regarded as the way in which Irigaray conceptualises it, namely not as other to the Same but as something in and for itself then it follows that from this other position dominant meanings may be contested and consequently that a site of struggle and negotiation is created.

As was stated earlier, the costs of creating and screening local programmes exceed the costs of screening international programmes and consequently international programming makes up more than half of what is screened daily on free-to-air channels. Thus, due to the fact that it is locally produced and screened on local television, South African soap opera is other to the large amounts of international programming screened daily. South African soap opera constitutes the local minority on the SABC channels.

There are various other factors that contribute to classifying South African soap opera as other:

4.4.1.2 Differences and similarities between South African soap narrative and Anglo-American soap narratives

South African soap operas bear large similarities to American soap opera, primarily since they were created according to an Anglo-American example. Soap opera is generally transcultural, or universal, it encapsulates some universal appeal that fascinates people from most cultures. Therefore, it was possible to export *Egoli* to other African countries for example. However, there also exist some integral differences[20] between South African soap operas and their American counterparts.

One such difference would be the characterization. South African soap operas in general explicitly include large numbers of black actors and this is not an international phenomenon. It may be argued that a large number of American sitcoms have an all black cast, but this does not hold true for American soap opera. Consider for instance *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which employs hardly any African-American characters except in cameo roles. Other soap operas like *Days of our Lives* have one or two token black African-American couples for the sake of political correctness. American soap operas have never been a true depiction of, for instance, the black-white ratio. Cantor and Pingree (1983: 90) did some quantitative research on race in soap opera and determined that in 1982 approximately 97 percent of all daytime serial

[20] It may be argued that mere difference does not establish otherness. It is, however, the argument of this thesis that because of the difference of South African soap opera to other dominant, Western and masculine genres it does function from a position of otherness – and that this otherness empowers it to give a voice to difference against the hegemonic discourse of the Self or the Same.

characters were white with only 3 percent from the remaining racial groups, mainly black people. Granted, Cantor and Pingree's research seems dated, but the situation remains largely the same today. When seen in contrast to these statistics, South African soap operas have a cast more representative of the country's population (see Figure 1 below).[21] Consider for instance soap operas like *Backstage* and *Generations* where the white actors are the minority. In *7de Laan* and *Isidingo*, the black-white ratio is almost equal. Not only is the racial ratio more representative in South African soap opera, both white and black characters play equally important roles. In *7de Laan*, for example, actors like Ingrid Paulus, Melanie du Bois, Themsie Times and Vinette Ebrahim play leading roles.

Figure 1: The representation of the South African population in 4 soap operas

		White	Black	Coloured	Indian
Egoli	Female	8		2	
	Male	13		1	
Isidingo	Female	6	4	2	
	Male	5	4	1	1
7de Laan	Female	9	4	3	
	Male	6	2	3	
Generations	Female	1	6		
	Male		8		

Source: web pages of the four relevant soap operas

One of the reasons for the misrepresentation of ratio in American soap opera may be that soap opera, as Cantor and Pingree (1983: 90) call it: "tend to ignore the working class". The characters portrayed in American soap operas are usually representative of three percent of the total U.S. population. This leads to the recognition of another inherent difference between South African and American soap operas. South African soap operas depict characters from every social stratum. Set in a fictional mine village close to Johannesburg *Isidingo*, for instance, depicts characters from all walks of life. Whilst some of the characters do live in mansions, there are also working class characters that work and live in the surrounding mine area. Similarly, *Egoli* recently incorporated a new middleclass family (the Rheeders), as well as a whole new block of flats in a middleclass suburb, to the storyline after a viewer poll indicated that viewers preferred watching working class characters.

[21] In section 4.1.2 reference was made to the fact that there still exists racially structured markets and, although the casts of the four relevant soap operas are much more representative than their Anglo-American counterparts, this racial structuring is still reflected in Figure 1.

Related to this are the different settings employed in South African soap operas. True to the inherent characteristics of soap opera, South African soap operas are also set in closed environments or communities where the characters are all related or known to each other in some way. Local soap opera, however, differ from their American counterparts to the extent that the settings or environments in which they are set are more commonplace. *Generations* and *Egoli* might be centred respectively on large advertising agencies and Walco, a large transport firm, but they also include characters and environments from for instance Hillbrow (a lower middleclass suburb in Johannesburg). *Isidingo* uses a television station as main environment but also includes a mining community, whilst the biggest business in *7de Laan* is a sport shop jointly owned by one family – the Terblanche family. In this respect South African soap operas bear more resemblance to British soap operas, like *East Enders,* which also employ working class characters and settings.

Another distinction between local and American soap opera relates to the actors portraying the characters. Two prominent differences can be identified in this case. The first one pertains to the outward appearances of soap characters. Carla van der Spuy (2004: 26) writes the following about soap opera characters: “Hulle herrys uit die dood, word perfek gegrimeer wakker en eet permanent uit” (They rise from the dead, wake up perfectly groomed and forever dine out). Whilst all of this is true of American soap characters it differs slightly with local soap operas. American soap operas utilize perfectly manicured and groomed actors that might as well have been models. In contrast to this, local soap actors are far more realistic, again much like British soap operas. Actors in local productions, although also carefully groomed, are much more regular looking. Overweight and less attractive actors are often used in local soap operas.

The second distinction involves the status of the actors in soap operas. It can be argued that South Africa’s television and film output is significantly smaller than that of Hollywood and that accordingly, there are fewer opportunities for actors, and fewer actors altogether. The fact remains, however, that while American soap operas employ non-famous, average actors in their soap operas, South African soap operas sport some of the most distinguished actors in the country. Top actors acting in local

soap operas include the likes of Dawid Minnaar, Anna-Mart van der Merwe, Brümilda van Rensburg, Sharleen Surtie Richards and so forth. Often some of the actors also take part in the production of the soap operas, Pierre van Pletzen, who portrays the role of the comical Oubaas in *7de Laan*, for instance, also directs some of the episodes.

Apart from the settings, character ratio and class represented, the storylines of local soap operas also differ from their American counterparts. Love triangles and infidelity form part of the storylines of local soap opera, but to a much lesser extent. It can be argued that upper class characters and extensive plots centred on the Oedipus complex make for a more exciting storyline, but as Ndebele (Monyana, 1976: 95-96) points out, life in South Africa is "too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination". This could be one of the reasons why South African soap opera seems to be less fantastical than American soap opera. Ndebele (Monyana, 1976: 85-98) goes so far as to say that the theme of the absurd is the theme of daily life in South Africa. Contentious issues play a much more prominent role. Examples of this include gay or multiracial relationships and HIV/AIDS, but these issues are discussed in the following sections.

Differences and similarities between South African soap opera and the popular American soap opera are some of the factors that establish South African soap opera as other to these more glamorised, less realistic and less contentious narratives. There are, however, a number of other arguments for the othering of South African soap opera.

4.4.1.3 The gendering of South African soap opera

In the previous chapter soap opera was acknowledged as being other to more traditional, male narratives because of its feminine and female nature. The previous section was devoted to contrasting South African and Anglo-American soap operas in order to establish South African soap opera's otherness to Anglo-American soap operas. However, arguments made in Chapter Two about how soap opera's structure and themes distinguish it from more traditional narratives and consequently genders the genre also holds true in the case of South African soap opera.

In South Africa soap operas are still largely aimed at a female audience. The timeslots are mostly late afternoon or early evening, although all the soap operas relevant to the study are rebroadcast several times during the day, making it possible for both housewives and career women to view them. The advertisements aired during commercial breaks also reflect the fact that these soap operas are aimed mainly at a female audience. Such advertisements include shampoo adverts, chain store adverts, Verimark and Glomail adverts, as well as time specific adverts, for example for Mother's Day or Christmas. The fact that soap opera is aimed at a female audience might not in itself underlie the gendering of the genre since it is still aired in a predominantly male context. The fact that it remains one of the few genres specifically aimed at females, however, does make it (soap opera) significant and marks its otherness to more male-orientated genres.

Furthermore, in accordance with American soap operas, the narrative of South African soap operas resists closure and is constantly interrupted. Multiple storylines make up single episodes and even in the case of a single storyline reaching a conclusion, an ultimate climax continually evades. A case in point would be *Egoli*. In 1999 *Egoli* became the first local production to air more than 2000 episodes, and seven years later, in 2006, it is still aired five days a week. The longevity of this soap opera in itself proves its resistance to narrative closure and consequently its resistance to a male meta-narrative with a beginning, middle and end. The same holds true for *7de Laan*,[22] *Isidingo* and *Generations*, all of which have been continuing for more than a few years. The multiple storylines and the fragmentation of the text holds important implications for the potential of the genre to challenge dominant ideological positions, as will be argued in a following section.

Not only the textual format, but also the visual format and dialogue genders local soap operas as feminine. The predilection of soap operas for emotive dialogue identified in the previous chapter is also recognisable in South African soap operas. Not only female characters, but also male characters are continually involved in intricate and emotive discourses centred on the goings on in the relevant community.

[22] In 2007 *7de Laan* celebrated its 7th year on air.

The more intimate "drama of talking heads" Gledhill (2003: 371) referred to as a marker of the feminine nature of soap opera, can be explicitly identified in local soap operas. In *7de Laan* for example two of the actresses (Bertha le Roux and Melanie du Bois) were both pregnant for several months before it was necessary for producers to create storylines that would temporarily remove their characters from the screen. This was made possible by the medium close-up or close-up shots and the more intimate female nature characteristic of soap opera.

The themes of local soap operas also presuppose a female audience as well as a feminine genre. Similar to its American counterparts, the main themes in local soap operas are the family and romantic love. *7de Laan* for example constantly features fashion extravaganzas, largely associated with females, while also tackling contentious issues like females trying to assert themselves in a traditionally male corporate world. The same applies to *Isidingo*, where family and romantic love is at the core while females are also portraying powerful roles. In this case both the characters Cherel de Villiers and Lee Haynes would be good examples of successful professional women that also grapple with emotional and romantic issues.

It may be concluded from the above that like Anglo-American soap opera, South African soap opera is a (feminine and female) gendered genre. This in itself constitutes its otherness, at least to traditional male genres. It is, however, another element contrasting local soap operas with Anglo-American soap operas that constitute the final point in the argument for South African soap opera's otherness.

4.4.1.4 Verisimilitude and reality in South African soap opera

It seems that what is viewed on television has reached the status of defining the "real". In the twentieth-century, consumers' personal lives become increasingly interweaved with mass-consumer and visual culture. According to Burgin (1996: 229), viewers invariably regard television broadcasts or information in mass media as "truth" or "reality". It serves as a source of authority. "Authority is clearly to be derived from the broadly communal nature of an experience, as if the truth, 'we all saw it', makes what was seen 'the truth'" (Burgin, 1996: 229). Burgin uses the example of signs that accompany displays in stores reading "As seen on TV"

supposedly rendering the product more real because it's electronic image was seen by millions of viewers. Contemporary consumer-driven lives depend on the mass media to provide knowledge about the best and most recent products. This overlapping of mass culture and the personal happens to such an extent that fictional characters from television or films enter the personal domain. As a result of the ever-changing circumstances due to technological advance, which implies longer days, more stress and less focus on family life and religion, these holes and undesirable circumstances occur more and more frequently.

A prime example of these characters invading domestic lives is that of soap opera. Soap opera as a genre lends itself more readily to this infiltration into the private domain because of the continuous exposure viewers have to the characters. Viewers are seemingly more inclined to identify with these characters than those of any other serial form. This is because of the fact that soap operas run for much longer, making it possible for particularly strong bonds to develop between the audience and the characters. On the 1st of April, for example, a character from *Egoli*, Jane Edwards, made the headlines of the national weekly paper, *Rapport* (Roos, 2007: 1). An article questioning whether this character, portrayed by Corine du Toit, would survive a jump from an airplane was featured prominently. The character was referred to simply as Jane – making no reference to the fact that she is in fact a fictional character. Soap opera serves as a source for filling private spaces with consumer images. It becomes a kind of xenogamy;[23] soap opera draws from the lives of consumers for inspiration and vice versa.

Soap operas are broadcast every day, and in South Africa particularly, they emulate the idea of being real, thus relying on verisimilitude. The extent to which South African soap opera incorporates "reality" again constitutes it as other to Anglo-American soap opera. Anglo-American soap opera roughly stick to the same time frame their viewers are in, for instance celebrating Christmas in December. South African soap opera, however, incorporates this to a much bigger extent. The accessibility of South African soap operas, furthermore, is not restricted to the actual

[23] The term xenogamy refers to cross-pollination. In this case between soap opera and the audience and vice versa.

programme. Apart from being able to view these soap operas, viewers are also encouraged to buy into the soap operas as products. *7de Laan* for instance provides the option of downloading its theme song as a ring tone for cellphones. Interaction with soap operas as products include guest appearances by soap opera stars at public shows or shopping malls. Viewers are also able to interact with the characters on the individual websites where pictures, voting polls, chat rooms and archival information are available. Soap opera characters are also frequently referred to in magazine and newspaper articles as was mentioned in the previous subsection. In the unlikely event that a viewer did not manage to watch one of the three or more screenings of a specific episode, information on previous as well as up and coming shows can be obtained via the websites or via short cellphone messages (sms). American soap operas like *The Bold and the Beautiful* also have websites and fan sites where fans converse, but the interaction between the show, its characters and producers and its audience is less pronounced than in the case of local soap operas.

One of the most basic ways in which South African soap operas create verisimilitude is by placing the narratives in surroundings familiar to the viewer. The environment created in soap operas thus approach the status of the 'real'. *7de Laan* , *Isidingo*, *Generations* and *Egoli* are all set in Johannesburg. Viewers visiting the *7de Laan* website can even take a virtual tour through the places featured in the show. Bongani Majola (2003) writes the following on the popularity of Johannesburg as a setting for soap operas: "Johannesburg is the favourite location for the country's television soapies. With equal vigour, independent commercial broadcasters as well as the national broadcaster have used Johannesburg as a focal point of dramatic action in their storylines". Producers do not merely create the settings of soap operas as resembling Johannesburg, real location shoots were also employed:

> Egoli's associate producer Burgert Muller says 'our viewers have shown, through television market research, a clear need to shoot around Jozi, as opposed to shooting only in the studio. Last year, M-Net allocated an additional budget to shoot around the city'. On an ongoing basis since November last year, Egoli has created a virtual community in a street in Brixton, and the soapie follows all the drama taking place in that street. Location shots for Egoli have included Johannesburg International Airport, Rosebank Mall, Hillbrow and the city's highways. Another shoot that will depict the new vibrant Newtown Cultural Precinct is in the pipeline, as well as the Nelson Mandela Bridge when it's complete, according Muller (Majola, 2003).

In an earlier section reference was made to the larger amount of average looking actors used in local soap operas. Although local soap operas may still be argued to offer the viewer some form of escapism, the more realistic looking actors perpetuate the verisimilitude of local productions. As mentioned, *Egoli,* for example, recently introduced the middleclass Rheeder family. "Hulle weerspieël die uitdagings en kwessies waarvoor 'n Suid-Afrikaanse gesin in die 21ste eeu te staan kom" (They mirror the challenges and issues faced by a South African family in the 21st century), according to Kerri-Ann Roper (2006: 142).

Local soap operas co-exist with what happens in a South African context on a daily basis, and it employs 'real time' as far as possible. South African viewers thus get the chance to celebrate Christmas or New Year with their favourite soap opera characters whilst they are celebrating these same events at home. *7de Laan* and *Egoli* often have huge events, or concerts celebrating these days. In 2002, for example, the *7de Laan* New Year's party was broadcast on the 31st of December at midnight perpetuating the illusion that the characters celebrate New Year in real time. Accordingly, in *Egoli,* the characters had an elaborate ball on the 14th of February 2007 to celebrate Valentine's Day.

In *7de Laan* the characters also supposedly support popular South African musicians of the day. Quite a few popular local artists have made guest appearances on the show as themselves, singing in the 'club' for example. South African musicians or bands that have performed in the *7de Laan* club include Chris Chameleon, Patricia Lewis, Kurt Darren, Dozi, Arno Carstens, Koos Kombuis, Karen Zoid, ddisselblom and Beeskraal. Recently, at the opening of a new restaurant called *Mostly Matisse*, Anna Davel was featured as the opening act. Similarly, the popular Afrikaans authors Marita van der Vyver and André P. Brink were featured visiting the *7de Laan* bookstore to promote their newest publications while they were in fact doing the same in reality. In *Egoli,* popular vocal artist Kurt Darren was featured taking "Doreen" (a character) on a Valentine's date in 2006. The singer Heinz Winckler made a guest appearance in *Egoli* and the music presenter Garreth Cliff appeared as himself in *Generations*. It may be argued that these celebrity appearances serve to glamorize the shows and generate audience numbers. While this may be true the fact remains that

incorporating real-life celebrities does contribute to the verisimilitude of local soap operas.

The concept of 'reality television' is already a problematic one since even the most realistic shows are inevitably mediated. In South Africa, characters from several 'reality shows' have been incorporated into the soap narratives, contributing to the verisimilitude of the worlds created in soap operas. Soap opera characters having the same idols or heroes constitute the soap world as more real. The finalists of the South African *Pop Idols* competition made an appearance in *Egoli* for instance. In *7de Laan,* Riaan Venter, local celebrity, host of *Die Nutsman* and participant in a reality show entitled *Strictly come dancing,* appeared as a judge for a dancing competition held in the local club. Apart from this, the winners of the South African *Extreme make-over* competition were offered roles in *Egoli* as part of their prize.

Soap opera was initially created as an advertising vehicle, and it still serves the same purpose today. During commercial breaks advertisements are specifically aimed at what is regarded to be the target audience of soap operas. These breaks include advertisements for washing powders and beauty products, for example. Advertising also plays a role in the verisimilitude of local soap opera content. In the case of *7de Laan* a popular grocery chain, Shoprite/Checkers, is one of the sponsors of the show and is consequently incorporated into the storyline. A grocery store was created on set closely resembling the décor of a real Shoprite/Checkers, including signage, packaging and uniforms. While constituting a real and familiar space and contributing to the verisimilitude of the show, Shoprite/Checkers was also advertising. Two arch enemies, Hilda and Netta Nortje, annually take part in the Shoprite/Checkers boerewors competition which, in reality, runs simultaneously. The characters are also featured in magazine and television advertisements advertising the real competition, or simply advertising Shoprite/Checkers boerewors. This is indicative of how no distinction is made between the soap characters and the actors who play them. Outside of the soap opera narrative these actors still portray the roles of their characters, perpetuating the illusion of, for example Hilda and Netta, being real.

This section dealt with the reality produced, or the verisimilitude, in local soap opera. This verisimilitude of South African soap opera constitutes it as other to American

soap opera since it is not incorporated to the same extent in the latter. More importantly, it emphasizes its accessibility and relevance to its audience which contributes to its potential to act as social commentator, educator or platform for discourse.

4.4.2 South African soap opera as a site for struggle and negotiation

Arguments made for the status of South African soap opera as other raise questions about the potential for these productions to serve as a site for the negotiation of identities in the post-1994 South Africa. If the hypothesis about South African soap opera constituting Irigaray's concept of the other is plausible, then it should have some potential to make a contribution to the construction of new identities. The following section assumes that South African soap opera may be regarded as constituting otherness and subsequently aims to identity possible areas in which the voice of the other may contribute to renegotiating hegemonic structures.

4.4.2.1 Pleasure and politics

In the second chapter, reference was made to the fact that the popular view of soap opera is that of brainless entertainment. It is not contested here that the main purpose of soap opera is to serve as entertainment and as a commercial product. However, arguments made by both Geldhill (2003: 340) and Modleski (1982: 99) were employed to create the hypothesis that soap opera can also serve as a potential political or ideological tool.

Skare Orgeret (2004: 149) mentions this alternative function of the media:

> Media is believed to be a most central actor in the construction of the nation state in the everyday life of its citizens… If we want to know more about current processes of nation building it is thus important to study the patterns and boundaries that are central to the media.

In the previous chapter reference was made to Newcomb's opinion that soap opera combines two of the most important elements of the television aesthetic namely intimacy and continuity. Irene Costera Meijer substantiates this opinion. In an

interview about how to sustain the interest of viewers Costera Meijer (Thie, 2006: 27) suggested using elements from soap operas to encourage viewer interest.

> Jongeren vinden nieuws saai en houden van soaps, zegt de schrijver van het boek, Irene Costera Meijer. Nieuws is vooral saai als het zich herhaalt: elke week dezelfde beelden van een oorlog. Maar de dagelijkse praktijk van die oorlog, interesseert ze wel… Dus als je het nieuws aantreklijker wil maken, kun je elementen uit soaps gebruiken. Bijvoorbeeld een *cliffhanger*.
> (Young people find the news boring but yet they like soap operas according to Irene Costera Meijer, the writer of the book. News is particularly boring when it is repetitive. It is boring for example when repeating the same imagery about a war every week whilst war as such does interest them... thus, if you want to make the news more interesting you can use elements from soap opera, for example the cliffhanger).

It is thus not only the content of soap opera but also its structure that may prove to be useful. Suspense is one of the inherent characteristics of soap opera and this ensures viewers' interest. If viewers remain interested and the argument for the verisimilitude of local soap opera holds true, the discourses, figures and social world represented in South African soap opera may potentially function as more than mere entertainment.

South African soap opera creators are becoming increasingly aware of the genre's potential to fulfil more than an entertaining role. If viewers are kept entertained and interested, and social issues are simultaneously raised, it betters the chances of these important issues to impact viewers' opinions. Both *Generations* and *Isidingo*, for example, overtly tackle issues on HIV/AIDS and dispense crucial information about this through the narratives, educating in the process. *Isidingo* also actively engages in the discourse on Black Economic Empowerment. *Egoli*, on the other hand, tackles gender issues head on. A myriad social issues are brought to bear in soap opera, as will become clear in the rest of this chapter.

4.4.2.2 The negotiation of identity and gender roles in South African soap opera

At the onset of this thesis the role of soap opera in the construction of identity was identified as one of the key issues in this thesis. The fact that soap opera may be gendered as female already suggests the potential to challenge dominant ideas about both gender and identity. In the following section specific narratives from the relevant

soap operas will be analysed in order to demonstrate the extent to which South African soap operas negate and negotiate identity and gender roles.

4.4.2.2.1 Fe/male characters

In the South African context, patriarchy very much remains the dominant ideology and most of the communities in South Africa function under male domination. South Africa also has a large culture of violence against women. This is however changing: on a political as well as a social level the roles of females are being celebrated, re-evaluated and negotiated. This holds true for the narratives of soap operas as well. The gendering of the soap opera genre furthermore directly opposes it to the hegemonic male order which creates the possibility of creating new gender identities.

Marlin-Curiel (2003: 65) refers to the "Afrikaner masculinity" as a given when she writes that "the first step to debunking Afrikanerdom is to castrate the Afrikaner masculinity (It may also bring to light the urges generated by years of repression under Afrikaner patriarchy)". Although this might be a rather strong statement the deconstruction of dominant male roles in the South African context is crucial. Marlin-Curiel (2003: 62) writes for instance that "Rugby served as a training ground for Afrikaner machismo, discipline and anti-English sentiment". This may be only one example of South African machismo, but by debunking rugby as a marker of masculinity soap operas create new roles for males. In *7de Laan,* for example, when Oubaas hears that De Waal does not play rugby, he calls him a "moffie", questioning his masculinity. Because the viewer has been privy to De Waal's love life and is thus convinced of the contrary, rugby as a marker of masculinity is re-negotiated.

South African male characters, like their American counterparts, are depicted as more in touch with their emotions. Characters like Tim in *Isidingo,* Steven in *Egoli* and Zander in *7de Laan* are all examples of sensitive, emotional and soft spoken males. This gives preference to the more feminine characteristics of emotive conversation and consequently creates a more feminine narrative.

Sexual preference is another gender issue being deconstructed in South African soap opera. *Egoli*, *Isidingo* and *7de Laan* incorporate homosexual male characters in their storylines, sometimes challenging existing stereotypes.

Same sex relationships are also being portrayed in South African soap opera, challenging the dominant ideas about males and male sexuality. In *Egoli*, Braam and Krynauw are (at the time of writing) in a longstanding monogamous relationship. The relationship is tested when Braam becomes briefly infatuated with a female character, but he regrets his decision later and returns to Krynauw. The difficulty same sex couples face is dealt with when Krynauw's mother moves in with them and they have to pretend to be friends for a while before confronting Krynauw's mother with their love for one another. Upon the death of a mutual friend they are granted custody of her baby boy, which they raise together. This also comments critically on the dominant perception that gay couples cannot raise children.

Isidingo tackled the same issue more explicitly. It incorporated a storyline in which a homosexual couple got married shortly after a South African law was passed in 2006 that granted homosexual couples the right to marry legally. Preceding the marriage were a lot of heated conversations about the implications of a homosexual marriage. Different characters were depicted as having differing opinions on gay marriages representing opposing points of view and opening this contentious issue up for debate. Steve and Luke got married and had a traditional wedding ceremony despite the fact that Steve's mother was opposed to the marriage. *Insig* (Dick, 2007: 104), a Afrikaans magazine, lists this wedding as one of the top ten most memorable moments on South African television in 2006 also commenting on the fact that this "stekelrige kwessie" (difficult issue) was tackled without pretending that it is "maanskyn en rose" (moonlight and roses).

In both of the above cases the homosexual characters are portrayed as well-rounded characters in touch with their masculinity, in this way challenging dominant ideas not only about homosexual males but also about masculinity.

Isidingo also has an openly bisexual character called Len. Len actively pursues both males and females openly referring to himself as "metrosexual".[24] Len's character thus actively challenges dominant ideas about sexual preference, negating the perception that a person is attracted to only one (usually the opposite) sex. Openly admitting to be metrosexual also challenges the dominant ideas about masculinity that depicts men as completely out of touch with their feminine characteristics.

Gender roles are challenged, not only regarding dominant ideas about sexual preferences but also regarding power relationships. Candy, a character in *Egoli,* and realtor by profession, dresses up as a male while showing possible buyers around available homes claiming that it's a man's world and that she sells more houses in her guise as male than as herself. Although the situation is portrayed in a humorous way this comments on the fact that the business world is still largely patriarchal and males are taken more seriously in a professional context than females.

South African soap operas do not only challenge male roles. In the second chapter of this thesis the point was made that strong female characters, which may be potentially empowering role models, are usually given some form of deviation, being portrayed as the evil female for example. In local soap operas, this might also hold true for matriarchal characters such as Monika in *Egoli,* or villainesses such as Jane in *Egoli* or Sandra in *7de Laan.* Characters like Cherel de Villiers in *Isidingo,* though conniving to the point of being a murderess, on some level still empower females since she manages to hold her own against the onslaughts of Barker, one of the most powerful men in this soap opera. There are, however, also female characters portrayed as both powerful and morally strong. In *Isidingo* for instance, Lee, arguably one of the strongest and most powerful female characters, constantly fights her father, Barker, when he attempts to make immoral or unethical personal or business decisions. Another case in point would be Dezi in *7de Laan.* She actively resists her mother-in-law casting her in the role of a wealthy, stay-at-home wife by diligently pursuing a career and getting her husband to support her in creating her own upward

[24] "Metrosexual was coined in 1994 (as was its noun, metrosexuality) by British journalist Mark Simpson, who used it to refer to an urban male of any sexual orientation who has a strong aesthetic sense and spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle"(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metrosexual).

mobility. Similarly, in *Generations* a large number of high-powered female characters dominate the storyline.

Although the representation of female characters in local soap operas may open some avenues for the liberation of the female, these representations are not without problems. Viola Milton (2005: 4) points to the fact that almost all the coloured females in *Egoli* and *7de Laan* are portrayed as the wise, motherly type (consider Nenna in *Egoli* or Charmaine in *7de Laan*), or as unwed mothers (consider both Vanessa and Felicity in *7de Laan*) left by the fathers of their children to be single parents. According to Milton (2005: 5) (on the subject of coloured female characters) there are simply not enough programmes representing rounded coloured characters.[25] She believes that there should be a conscious effort to write stories in which the spectrum of coloured Afrikaans experiences is represented.

It is thus clear that although there are some problematic issues, South African soap operas actively challenge and deconstruct male and female, as well as masculine and feminine, roles. Furthermore, South African soap opera explicitly challenges existing perceptions about cultural interaction. A number of romantic relationships depicted in South African soap operas open up a variety of reading positions and negotiations of different identities.

4.4.2.2.2 Multiracial relationships and the crossing of cultural boundaries

During a discussion forum on the topic of the "Afrikaner", held at the 2007 ABSA KKNK,[26] Dr Debra Meyer, academic scholar, criticised the popular South African soap opera, *7de Laan*, for not including romantic relationships across racial borders in its narratives (Prins, 2007: 16).[27] In light of this remark the weekly newspaper

[25] At the time of writing, Milton was correct in her observation, and although some of the problems remain, and therefore the argument also remains current, an argument could be made that since then there has been significant development of some coloured characters. This is especially relevant to the spectrum of coloured characters – both male and female – portrayed in *7de Laan* in 2007.
[26] The Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (National Arts Festival), hosted by ABSA (a South African bank) is held annually in Oudtshoorn, South Africa. The festival includes performing and visual arts, literature and academic discussion forums.
[27] Regarding the prominence of local soap opera in South Africa, and consequently its potential to reach and educate a large part of the population, it is interesting to note here that, together with the newspaper report mentioned in 4.4.1.4, this is the second time in the space of a week that a South African soap opera made the headlines of a national newspaper.

Rapport ran a viewers poll and the large majority of viewers seemed to agree with Dr. Meyer, thus validating this point of criticism. *7de Laan* is however the only South African soap opera relevant to this thesis that does not include multiracial relationships.

Egoli, Isidingo and *Generations* all include multiracial relationships. *Isidingo* became the first South African soap opera to depict a multiracial relationship and marriage. Phillipa de Villiers (Bianca Amato) married Derek Nyati (Hlomla Dandala) twice, one wedding was in traditional indigenous fashion and the other in the Western/Christian tradition, and their wedding was described as the television wedding of the year (Kühn, 2001: 13-14). Initially, viewers reacted negatively towards the relationship but when the characters broke up fan mail poured in demanding that they get back together again. This was just the first of a few multiracial relationships to be portrayed in *Isidingo.*

In *Isidingo* the black Matabane family had to deal with the fact that their daughter Lettie was dating the white Jo. The reaction of Lettie's family, and in particular that of her father, played a prominent role in the narrative. Zeb Matabane, Lettie's father, tried everything to break up the relationship, including making Lettie's boyfriend slaughter a chicken and then help to prepare it for dinner. The situation was portrayed in a realistic way, dealing with, for example, the attitudes different generations have to multiracial relationships. Whilst Lettie's parents were opposed to the relationship because of tradition, her brother and his wife were supportive. Dialogue between characters centred on contentious issues such as racism and the tribulations of multiracial relationships. Once again, apart from the value representations like these have in creating awareness it also addresses the subject matter from a variety of different viewpoints, not reducing it to a simple matter.

Generations approached the situation from another point of view. When a black female character, Queen, starts dating a white boyfriend he becomes so engrossed in her African culture – acquiring the language, practicing her family traditions and eating traditional foods – that the very westernised Queen could no longer stand it. In this case the issue of westernisation in South Africa was addressed. Queen was not

willing to indulge in these traditional practices, and seemed much more interested in a glamorous westernized life, to such an extent that the relationship came to an end.

The conflict between traditional values and westernized societies – or rural and urban blacks – is also addressed in the case of Cleo/Nobesutho and her estranged daughter living with her grandparents in another town. Because she was making a living as an escort in Johannesburg, she was not willing to have her daughter stay with her. Cleo fell in love with Kabelo, but was not allowed to get married to him because Kabelo, according to tradition, was forced to marry his deceased brother' wife. Thus even though this soap opera is criticized for portraying a one-sided view of westernized, upper-class black characters, the conflict between rural and urban constantly plays a role in the narrative of *Generations.*

A similar situation arises with the characters Ntombi and Sibusiso in the same soap opera. Ntombi's father it unsettled when he hears that she intends to marry Sibusiso since he already made arrangements with another elder in his community that their children be wed. In both the above cases, the difference between rural and urban and consequently also the shift within one specific culture, is addressed.

Isidingo character Rajesh Kumar has been involved in more than one relationship with white female characters. In these cases the Indian family's values and traditions are tested when Rajesh introduces his female companions to his parents. His involvement with Lee Heyns unsettles her father to such an extent that he has Rajesh framed for pornography in order to break up the relationship.

By portraying multiracial relationships and questioning cultural boundaries soap operas are playing an active role in challenging dominant ideas about interaction between cultures as well as educating the viewers on different cultural issues and traditions. In this process it gives a voice to the experience of the other and contributes to the construction of identities that negate the hegemonic order.

4.4.2.2.3 Language

According to Victor Webb (2005), language can be described in a purely descriptive, objective way, or "it/they can be described with reference also to the power dimension: language as a site of struggle for power and control". According to Webb, in present day South Africa there is not only a power struggle between different communities regarding values, norms, beliefs and attitudes (in other words – cultural struggles), but contemporary South Africa is also a site of struggle for power and control between the different language communities in the country. Reference was made to the struggle of Afrikaans-speaking communities earlier in the section on South African identities for example.

Webb states that language can be used to construct people's view of reality. He uses the example of the use of the words "white" and "non-white" and "European" and "Non-European" to describe the South African population during the time of apartheid. In doing so the "reality was created… that the South African population consisted of only two categories of persons: white and non-white" (Webb, 2005). This problematic and simplified distinction was also addressed by Zimitri Erasmus in a preceding section.

Related to this, Webb (2005) argues that it is the "accrual by words of affective or social meanings, which likewise reflect values, norms and attitudes". Examples of such words are "liberals", "Boers", "Afrikaner", "Coloureds", "Bantu", "blacks", "radicals", "self-determination", and slogans such as "Kill the Boer, kill the farmer and "One settler one bullet". "Similarly, words such as *Mandela, Soweto 76, Sharpeville, 46664* and *Robben Island* have strong symbolic meaning" (Webb, 2005).

The implication of this is that this "reality" is artificial and constructed because such a positive, deterministic correlation between language and culture cannot be justified. Consider for example the fact that the 6 million speakers of Afrikaans are not "culturally homogeneous", while English, too, "across the world, symbolizes very different cultural identities… It is clear, therefore, that culture and language are not related in a one-to-one, causal or deterministic way" (Webb, 2005).

Even if language and culture cannot be related in a deterministic way, it still serves to construct identities. Webb (2005) provides several examples to substantiate his point about the power of language to construct identity. One possible example would be the name changes in South Africa. Changing, for instance, the name of Pretoria to Tshwane (also compare Polokwane; Bela-Bela (Warmbad); Mpumalanga; Roberts Heights x Voortrekker Hoogte x Thaba Tshwane;…). Such a name change signals ownership and therefore changes the identity of the place in question.

Similarly, according to Webb (2005) the appropriation of Afrikaans by its white speakers created the myth that Afrikaans is a "white man's language". Afrikaans originated as a "bastard language", a "language beneath contempt" (Giliomee, 2003: 216) but it evolved to become the primary language of white South Africans, becoming an instrument in the exercise of power and control. Ironically, attempts are now being made to transform Afrikaans into a language that crosses borders and symbolizes unity (Webb, 2005). From the above it is clear how language can be a tool in creating an identity, or an (evolving) image of Self.

Related to the above is the use of language to construct an identity for the self as "not-the-Other" and in doing so also constructing an identity for the other. An example would be where colonizers regarded themselves and their ways of doing as superior to those of the colonized. "Having defined them as 'inferior' etc. Orientals [others] could be understood, defined, controlled and manipulated by the dominant party" (Webb 2005).

The language policy of South Africa's current political leadership is a good example of the role language plays in the construction of identity.

> Their use of English only in legislative debates, their tacit support for the use of English as the only language for state administration … and their lack of attempts to promote multilingualism effectively means that individuals have very little choice and become compelled to select English in all high-function public contexts, including the language of learning and teaching in schools and universities (Webb 2005).

The question that needs to be asked, and which is also relevant to the study of identity construction in soap opera, is whether multilingualism can indeed function "as an

index of national unity in SA, given that language has a role in the construction of national identity" (Webb, 2005).

According to Webb (2005), (and this is also the argument that will be followed with specific reference to soap opera)

> multilingualism *can* function as an index of 'being South African': through the fact that citizens know more than two (of the specific 11) languages and can thus communicate more effectively across linguistic boundaries, as well as developing a culture of multilingualism, of pluralism, and of upholding the values associated with multilingualism (e.g. respect and appreciation for difference)(Webb, 2005).

The struggle for power and control between different language communities in South Africa is relevant also to the deconstruction of South African soap opera since the language employed in these soaps obviously contribute to the construction of a South African identity through narrative.

Because language is central to any narrative and because of the multiplicity of languages and cultures in South Africa and the fact that these languages are also spoken in South African soap opera, it is important to refer to these languages and the contribution they make to the construction of identities.

The four different soap operas relevant to this thesis are created with specific audiences in mind and this is reflected in the languages employed in the narratives. *7de Laan* for example is aimed mainly at an Afrikaans audience, but it includes English subtitles since these are not the only viewers they attract. *Generations* on the other hand is aimed at black upper-class audiences and largely employs indigenous languages (Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho) apart from English with English subtitles when the characters are not speaking English. The same applies to *Isidingo* where the characters switch from using English to Afrikaans or other indigenous languages (Zulu and Sotho) and English subtitles are supplied.

Because of the multiplicity of languages used in soap operas and the fact that all four of the relevant soap operas include subtitles, it is possible to also include characters with impairments. In *Egoli,* for example, one of the characters, Nora, was diagnosed with breast cancer and the oncologist treating her was hearing impaired. In this case

sign language was thus included in the narrative. The sign language was both translated by another doctor and visually displayed in the subtitles. Other – hearing – characters in the soap also showed an interest in acquiring the skill to use sign language so that a few basic sentences were learned by some of them.

The use of multiple languages makes the soap operas accessible to a larger audience and gives audiences the opportunity to interact with different cultures and languages, in this way deconstructing existing language identities and broadening the scope of potential viewers. If what Webb contends is true, soap operas thus contribute to a national unity (and a subsequent embracing of the national complexity) or a kind of South African identity that forms part of the multiplicity of identities within the South African context.[28]

4.4.3 The potential for social reform or education

"We want to showcase the beauty of Johannesburg to the rest of the country, as opposed to crime scenes that are shown on television news"
(Majola, 2003).

The potential of South African soap opera for social reform and education is two-fold. The first aspect is the explicit activities that soap operas and its stars are involved in. *Isidingo* actors (Brendan Auret, Ilse Klink and the likes), for instance, take part in variety shows that raise money for specific charities supporting the awareness of contentious issues. *Generations* actors advertise a viewers' competition that has as its prize half a million rand for the building, upkeep or expansion of the winner's home. The competition is called *Wini Khaya.* The individual websites of these soap operas also have information on these and issues – such as HIV/AIDS for example. Thus, although soap operas are mainly broadcast on television, they also colonize other forms of mass media. Through radio advertisements, magazine articles, the internet as well as public appearances, stars and characters contribute to creating awareness of contentious issues.

[28] Although it is not touched upon in this section due to the limited scope of the thesis, the contribution of language in constructing identity could also be analysed with reference to the types of language used by characters, and the subsequent identities established in this process. Code mixing and code shifting would be some of the language specific phenomena that would contribute to such a study.

On the other hand the implicit reform and education that takes place in the narrative of soap operas also plays an important role. Because of the large audiences from all walks of life that follow soap operas, the programmes have the potential to dispense valuable information and educate in the process.

In the previous section it was mentioned that South African soap operas are more socially aware and accountable than their Anglo-American counterparts. This not only pertains to soap opera as a site for struggle and negotiation of identities, but also the inclusion of socially contentious issues in the narratives as will become clear in the following paragraphs.

The roles granted to both male and female characters challenge existing identities, as argued in the previous section. The same applies to the multiracial relationships and the crossing of cultural and language barriers. By depicting, for example, both Anglo-American and traditional weddings, viewers are educated in the practices and beliefs of different cultures within South Africa.

Other socially contentious issues included in the narratives of soap operas include for example: the passing of new laws on same sex marriages, Black Economic Empowerment, the empowerment of women and HIV/AIDS.

In *Isidingo,* as was mentioned previously, a homosexual marriage made up part of the storyline shortly after this was legalized in South Africa. Storylines like these not only challenge dominant ideas about gender identities, but also serve to educate the viewers on the passing of this new law and in so doing create an awareness of options other than those provided by the hegemonic order.

Also in *Isidingo,* Vuzi and Siyanda are planning to turn the (soon to be closed down) mine and the surrounding area into recording studios and a golf estate which would supply both training and job opportunities for the large number of people who will be left jobless by the closing down of the mine. While Siyanda views this as a business opportunity, Vuzi actively campaigns for education programmes and the creation of jobs. The lengthy discussions these two characters have are educational and

informative about Black Economic Empowerment, which is a contentious issue in South Africa today.

Both *Isidingo* and *Generations* include characters that are HIV-positive. Characters have differing reactions to the virus and the problems surrounding HIV/AIDS are extensively discussed by different characters. So, for example, Nandipha and her husband, Parsons, in *Isidingo,* thoroughly researched the viability of them conceiving a child even though Nandipha is HIV-positive. After taking into account all the different possibilities and getting a variety of doctors' opinions the couple decided against conceiving a child. In this process valuable information is dispensed in an entertainment context thus making it more palatable and reaching larger audiences.

Similarly, in *Generations,* Magda sues her previous boyfriend for knowingly infecting her with the virus. She continually reads articles from books and the internet on the virus and how it affects one's life and in so doing also educates the viewers of the soap opera not only on the virus itself but on the rights of individuals. She becomes actively involved in AIDS counselling perpetuating the idea that one is not helpless in the face of the virus but that one could use these circumstances to be empowered and to make a difference.

The potential of soap opera to create social awareness is an argument that has been made throughout this study and this section only aimed to provide a number of examples of this. It may be argued that some of the issues mentioned here are simplified and simply serve the function of making local soap opera narratives more dramatic and interesting. The fact remains, however, that a large number of viewers are also being educated about different social issues in the process. Soap opera then constitutes the potential to aid social reform and education.

4.5 Conclusion

The first section of this chapter contextualized South Africa and its current political and cultural situation. The contextualization elucidated characteristics of South Africa that may mark its otherness. South Africa was marked as other not only to Anglo-American First World countries, but also as other to Third World countries.

Due to South Africa's multicultural and multiracial nature there are a large number of voices and a large number of South African narratives. South African soap opera constitutes one of these narratives. In Chapter 3, the otherness of soap opera was argued. It follows logically that if South Africa constitutes some kind of otherness so too would its narratives. South African soap opera was thus established as other on the grounds that were identified in Chapter 3, the hypothesis that South Africa is marked as other and number of other reasons. These include the fact that it is locally produced, its inherent differences from Anglo-American soap operas, its gendering as feminine and the verisimilitude it creates.

The marking of soap opera as the type of other Irigaray suggests, means that it has the potential to challenge or negotiate existing ideas and identities. It was concluded that South African soap opera creates a site for struggle and negotiation and that it does not merely function as entertainment or a vehicle for escape. Concrete examples were identified from *7de Laan, Isidingo, Egoli* and *Generations* in order to determine the potential of local soap opera narratives to challenge and negotiate identity and gender roles. It was shown that the narratives of South African soap opera include a large number of storylines and characters that question the hegemonic order and negotiate identities.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of chapters

The introduction to this study set the goals to be achieved as well as the perimeters of the study. The study was situated within the broader discourse of Cultural and Media Studies and defined according to the contribution it aims to make to the analyses of South African soap operas through the literature overview. Upon reviewing the available research on South African soap opera it was clear that very little research on it, and specifically its role in the construction of identity, has been done. Soap operas are as popular, if not more popular, in South Africa as elsewhere, which makes it an important cultural phenomenon to study. In view of this fact, and the fact that identity construction is a constant and ever changing discourse, I intended to research the possibility for indigenous soap opera narratives to create a space in which identities may be created, negotiated and dominant ideologies challenged within the South African post-apartheid context. In order to accomplish this, I set out to determine whether soap opera constitutes an otherness that gives it a unique voice and consequently this potential to speak from outside the hegemonic order and, in so doing, negotiate identities.

In the second chapter the concept of narrative was investigated. This was done in order to establish a working definition of narrative and also to reach an understanding of its role in the creation of identity so that this may be applied in the following chapters. For these purposes, the theories of Paul Ricoeur were used, largely, as basis, although some of his views were contested. Narrative's contribution to the creation of not only personal but also collective identity constituted the first part of the chapter. The relation between narrative and time, as well as narrative and history, story and imagination followed. The conclusion that inherently feminine characteristics such as imagination and story contribute greatly to the construction of narratives, be it fictional or non-fictional narratives, led to the question of the embodiment of narrative. The last section of the chapter centred on the argument that narrative can be embodied and that there exists a crucial relationship between the narrative body and the feminine. Arguing that the narrative body is a gendered one, and a feminine one at

that, created the possibility of investigating a narrative that might constitute the other. A brief history of the origin of this term in the work of Edward Said was provided. This was done to create an understanding of what the term entails but also to contrast Luce Irigaray's conceptualisation of the term against the dominant ideas about the other. In the philosophy of Irigaray, being other is not regarded as negative. According to her (and it was recognised that this is also the definition of the other that this study will adopt), being other does not imply being other of the Same. Rather it constitutes a site of difference where new identities may be created in a conversation with other identities, not as its direct opposite but also not denying the inherent tension between Self/Same and other. This laid the grounds for arguing soap opera narrative as other in the third chapter.

The introductory part of the third chapter was devoted to defining soap opera narrative. A brief history was supplied and universal characteristics of soap opera narrative were identified. This was done in order to be able to analyse soap opera narrative in the second section of the chapter but also to aid the analysis of South African soap opera in the fourth chapter. It was argued that soap opera may be regarded as other on the following grounds: firstly, because it is a feminine but also a female genre; secondly, because of all the negative perceptions surrounding soap opera; thirdly, because of the various subject positions created by soap opera narrative; and lastly due to the fact that soap opera narrative stands in direct opposition to the more traditional (male) narratives. Soap opera was thus argued to constitute not just a single otherness, but rather as containing attributes of various othernesses. These defining characteristics of soap opera, as well as the view that soap opera constitutes the other, was instrumental in concluding that it poses a site for the negotiation and creation of identity.

The fourth chapter focused specifically on South African soap opera. South Africa, as well as the South African media, was briefly contextualised and the problematic surrounding South African identity was touched upon. South African soap opera as South African narrative was validated. It was also argued that South Africa in itself constitutes the other for various reasons. Soap opera was already argued to be other in Chapter 3 and it followed that South Africa(n) (in itself other) soap opera will also be other and consequently have even more potential to challenge the hegemonic order. In

this section issues such as differences and similarities between South African and American soap opera, fe/male representations and reality versus verisimilitude were addressed. Working on the hypothesis that South African soap opera may be regarded as other, voicing the narratives that negate dominant hegemonic narratives, the final section argued South African soap opera as a probable site for struggle and negotiation. Throughout the fourth chapter the arguments were supported with concrete examples from the soap operas relevant to this study (*7de Laan, Isidingo, Egoli* and to a lesser extent *Generations*). In conclusion it was hypothesised that because of all the above South African soap opera also has an educational function. Examples such as AIDS awareness created in soap operas were used to support this hypothesis.

5.2 Conclusions and implications

The definition and construction of identity and the use of identity as a political tool are contentious issues, even more so in South Africa today. Because of the country's multiracial and multifaceted nature, no single, absolute South African identity is possible. These issues are also reflected in the cultural products and the creation of meaning in this country. It is important that there should be spaces in which these identities may be negotiated and renegotiated constantly. It has been argued throughout this study that South African soap opera constitutes one such space.

One of the research questions formulated at the onset of this study focused on the construction and characteristics of narratives. It is one of the conclusions of this thesis that the act of narrating actively constructs identity. In narrating, concepts such as time, memory and imagination come into play and together these concepts contribute to the construction of identity. Soap opera has an essentially narrative structure, and because of its unique South African nature local soap operas could be argued to be one of the multiple South African narratives at play within the South African context today.

Due to narrative's, and specifically soap opera narrative's nature, the argument was made that narrative may be embodied. The body implies gender and it was furthermore argued that soap narrative may be gendered as feminine and female due

to its inherent characteristics. The view that the prevailing hegemonic order, also in South Africa, is a patriarchal one, can hardly be contested and it follows that if soap opera is gendered as feminine and female it opposes the hegemonic (male) order and as a result it is other to this order.

Soap opera was however not argued to constitute an exclusively gendered other but also functioning as other to other hegemonic orders, such as western and racial orders. Because of its contrasting content it is constructed as other to these dominant orders and discourses. In this otherness to these discourses lies the potential for soap opera to challenge them.

The struggle of finding new and relevant South African identities is a struggle against (still prevailing male) hegemonic orders and identities. If soap opera in general, but specifically South African soap opera, may be regarded as a socially relevant narrative, while at the same time constituting an other – as is maintained in this thesis – it follows that soap opera speaks from a site different than that of the hegemonic order. If, as Irigaray argues, the other can be something in and for itself, actively taking part in its definition and not merely accepting its construction by the Self/Same, South African soap opera as other opens up new possibilities for the construction of identities.

By arguing for South African soap opera as constituting an other, it was concluded that because of its difference to mainstream, traditionally male narratives it offers an opposition to the hegemonic order and therefore a space in which dominant ideologies and established gender and cultural roles may be contested.

5.3 Contributions of this study

As was shown in the literature overview, soap opera is a subject which has been thoroughly researched - in Anglo-American countries that is. In the South African context very little research has been done on this aspect of popular culture. What little South African research on soap opera is available focuses mainly on empirical audience studies rather than critically engaging with the cultural content of the soap operas. It is exactly this aspect towards which this study aims to contribute.

Apart from contributing to the available research about South African popular media, and more precisely South African soap opera, this study also aimed to contribute to the very contentious discourse about South African identity. In a time where talk about a national identity is widespread, this study aims to contribute to this discourse. I maintain, however, and attempted to argue this throughout the study, that no single South African identity is possible but that multiple new ones are, and should be, created and (re)negotiated. Factors such as the multilingualism of the South African people could be used as a common factor in the construction of the identities of South Africans but these identities remain plural and multilayered. It was the aim of this study to point out that the popular mass media – such as soap opera – plays an active role in the discourse about identity formation in the South African context.

5.4 Limitations of the study

A purposive sampling of South African soap operas was made in order to support the arguments presented in this dissertation. Although not all South African soap operas are covered in the investigation, it is likely that other indigenous soap operas may also contribute to forming a site for the negotiation of South African identity. One of the limitations of this thesis is therefore that not all the relevant soap operas are included here. The nature of this thesis, however, still remains broad and the conclusions drawn here general. The broad scope of the thesis limited the detailed analyses that would be possible if its focus was narrower.

The central argument for the potential of soap opera to challenge hegemonic orders centred on establishing its otherness. The concept of the other, both as constructed by the Same, as well as its potential to exist as something in and for itself is a complicated one. Although the othernesses of soap opera were established in the scope of this thesis, they were largely lumped together and somewhat generalised. As mentioned previously, soap opera does not constitute merely a gendered other, but also a non-western and racialised other, for example. Another limitation of this study is therefore that although several others or othernesses were uncovered and it was indicated how these othernesses might critically engage with dominant discourses, what was not analysed in detail is how these othernesses correspond to one another and oppose the Same/Self.

The conclusions drawn about representation and negotiation of identity largely centred on the positive potential South African soap operas have. This is not to imply however, that some of the identities constructed in these soap operas are entirely unproblematic. For the scope of this study, however the focus was on determining the potential for negotiating and negating existing identities.

Determining the potential of South African soap opera to influence the construction of identity creates questions about which identities are created in these soap operas. Although examples from the relevant soap operas were employed to establish that current gender and racial stereotypes and identities where being renegotiated, the specific identities being constructed were not analysed in detail.

When analysing soap opera narrative, the primary model was an American or Anglo-American one. This is not to say that there are no other differing, equally important and influential models to work from. This pertains not only to views on soap opera but also to Anglo-American feminist perspectives.

The methodology of this thesis was qualitative, and not quantitative. Conclusions were drawn on the possible subject/viewer positions that soap operas create although no empirical research was done on audience reactions.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

Because only a few of the local soap operas where analysed in this study and not enough research on South African soap opera is available it will be merited to also analyse the remaining South African soap operas with regard to identity construction.

Related to this, however, is the fact that in analysing four soap operas the findings were largely general, and that although these four soap operas do share similarities relating to content and narrative they are still different. A possible suggestion for further research might be to focus on one specific soap opera in order to analyse soap opera in more detail with regard to the construction of identity.

As was mentioned in the previous section, this study focused largely on the potential of South African soap operas to negotiate or construct new identities in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa. The conclusions drawn were largely positive. The fact remains however, that not all the constructions and representations are unproblematic and they differ from soap opera to soap opera. Further research might include the inherent problems in identity construction as it pertains to the South African situation and South African soap opera. An issue that was not addressed in depth, for example, is the issue of memory or amnesia in the current epoch. South African soap operas largely portray a positive if not idealistic view of the interaction of cultures and communities, indulging in a kind of amnesia regarding past conflicts. A question that may be addressed is the value of these amnesiac representations. Consider as a case in point *7de Laan* where one homogeneous community is represented without explicitly acknowledging or problematising the inherent differences between cultures, communities and genders. I am not suggesting these to be either positive or negative, merely that it merits some further research.

In the South African context, due to its stormy political history, the problematic of identity is a very real one. A lot has been achieved by, for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This raises the issue of narrative as testimony and also of narrative as healing. This was not covered by the scope of my undertaking but I think it would be a valid topic for further research, considering the role of testimony and also of healing on the formation of identity. Soap opera's predilection for dialogue makes it an ideal space for both testimony and healing.

With reference to the construction of identities and their analyses, it was mentioned in the previous section that these identities were analysed in general and with the main purpose of establishing that soap operas do have the potential to (re)negotiate identity. It might, however, be useful to analyse a specific soap opera in more detail regarding the specific identities constructed and negotiated in the narrative.

In the contextualisation of the South African media it was mentioned that South African media has a dual function. Not only does it have a responsibility to be representative of the multiple identities at play within South Africa today, it also has the responsibility to accurately portray South African identity/identities

internationally. This portrayal of South African identities by the South African media internationally did not fit into the scope of this thesis but it is a contentious issue that merits research.

As mentioned in the previous section, a primarily Anglo-American model of soap was used for analysis. Studying South African soap opera in relation to other marginalised countries' soap operas will also make a valid contribution. Consider as a case in point non-Anglo-American soap opera such as Indian or Brazilian soap opera.

The same holds true for the feminist perspectives aired in the course of this research: another study might concentrate on the role of the other and consequently gender roles from a non-westernised feminist perspective.

The qualitative nature of this study is valuable but inevitably has limitations. It would also be purposeful to do a quantitative study to back up the hypotheses formulated in the course of this study. An empirical study could for instance be done to determine whether soap opera narratives and identity representations have any meaningful effect of South African identity construction.

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Because television, and specifically popular visual culture, may influence readers' views of reality and their ideological alignments, the significance and necessity of critically analysing these texts must not be ignored. The hypothesis of this thesis is that South African soap opera narrative actively contributes to the construction of new identities and the negotiation of existing ones within the post-apartheid, post-colonial South African context in which these constructions are a contentious issue. In so doing, dominant hegemonic orders are challenged and questioned. Being gendered as a feminine and female genre uniquely equips South African soap opera to critically speak from a marginalised point of view while at the same time reaching a large audience. In the analysis of these texts important information is gathered about the way in which South African societies function and also about the way that they are continually undergoing change due to the underlying power struggles that are inherently part of its existence.

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