

**THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN HAIR IN SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMAS: A  
CASE STUDY OF *GOMORA*, *UZALO* AND *THE RIVER***

by

**MABOTJA MERRIAM**

DISSERTATION

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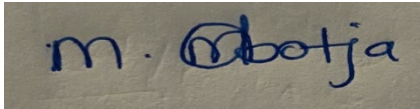
**SUPERVISOR: Dr E J Malatji**

**CO SUPERVISOR: Dr J Le Roux**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the *Exploring the Representation of African Hair in South African Soap Dramas: Gomora, Uzalo, and The River* (dissertation) hereby submitted to the University Of Limpopo, for the degree of Masters (Media Studies & Film and Television) has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at or any other university; that is my work and that all materials used or quoted have been properly cited.

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored surface. The signature reads "m. Mabotja".

Mabotja Meriam

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Temosho Maselaelo Mabotja; as well as my parents, Mr Phillip Noko Mabotja and Mrs Mamaala Lucy Mabotja; my family and friends for their love, support, inspiration, encouragement, and motivation during the course of this project.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| BCCSA- | Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa   |
| BRCSA- | Broadcasting Research Council of South Africa        |
| DSTV-  | Digital Satellite Television                         |
| FPA-   | Film Publications Act                                |
| FPB-   | Film Publications Board                              |
| IBA-   | Independent Broadcasting Authority                   |
| ICASA- | Independent Communications Authority of South Africa |
| MMVCA- | Mzansi Magic Viewer's Choice Awards                  |
| SAARF- | South African Audience Research Foundation           |
| SABC-  | South African Broadcasting Corporation               |
| SAFTA- | South African Film and Television Awards             |
| SATRA- | South African Telecommunication Regulatory Authority |
| SMSA-  | The Simon "Mabhunu" Sabela Awards                    |
| TREC-  | Turfloop Research Ethics Committee                   |

## ABSTRACT

The cultural baggage and ridicule of African hair have formed part of the history of South Africa. “Good hair” has become public opinion and has consistently been defined by the beauty industry through an assortment of beauty products displayed in the media. The desire to attain “good hair” has been a life-long pursuit and this need has been designed through various avenues, which are largely displayed in the media. The mass media wield considerable influence, possessing a unique capacity to impact individuals in diverse ways. This study delves into the portrayal of African hair within the media, specifically focusing on magazines. Despite its prevalence in this medium, the research concentrates on the representation of African hair in three local South African dramas: *Gomora*, *Uzalo*, and *The River*. Guided by a theoretical intersection of Tajfel’s (1979) Social Identity and Hall’s (1997) Social Representation, the study aims to explore the types of hairstyles depicted in the selected dramas and the messages they convey. An exploratory research design, namely, a qualitative content-thematic analysis was employed to acquire an understanding of the representation of African hair in the selected South African dramas. The findings show that there has been a radical change in how Black women and African hair are portrayed and represented in South African dramas. Black women are portrayed as powerful and play the role of protagonist and antagonist in all the three dramas. Natural hairstyles are most dominant, specifically the afro, which is associated with power and leadership. This shift in the representation of African hair and Black women is significant for South African media.

**Keywords:** African hair, dramas, artificial hairstyles, natural hairstyles

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## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Hair is an important part of expressing personal identity. Although hair is an unresponsive genetic phenomenon, when it is controlled or processed by cultural customs, it has meaning and social value (Madlela, 2018b). In addition, hair plays a significant role in most civilisations and has a variety of meanings depending on the sociocultural and political context. According to Alubafi, Ramphalile and Rankoana (2018), African hair has political power, and it is often used as an allegory to talk about race, culture, language, identity and other issues. Mitchell and Morris (2018) point out that a person's identity can be strongly inferred from the way their Black hair is groomed. Therefore, a hairstyle is tortuously connected to ideas about hair, appearance, and the structure of the whole-body image on a cultural, social, and psychological level. A person's hairstyle communicates certain aspects about them, which in various countries might signify different things. For instance, it may signify marital status or even race in some areas of African society. Therefore, hair can be a symbol of both personal and group identity.

In an article titled "Shame and Glory: A sociology of hair", Anthony Synnott (1987) discussed the debate over hair symbolism as both ancient and complex, applying not only to gender but also to politics. In the same article, Synnott (1987) states that perhaps, hair is physical and therefore extremely personal, although personal, is also public rather than private. Moreover, according to There (2022) the hair of Black women, or Black people in general is very complex.

For Black women and girls, identity is inextricably linked to their relationship to and presentation of their hair (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). In many cultures, hair is important, and its meaning and symbolism vary depending on social and cultural context (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). In Africa, there is a deep symbolism of hair, and its meaning extends in multiple dimensions of Black culture and life (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Therefore, hair may have spiritual and religious connotations (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Glace and Waldstein (2022) explore hair as part of a spiritual body, defined as an embodied

state of heightened sensory awareness. The following is a brief history of the numerous traditional African hairstyles prior to colonialism.

In Le Roux's study from 2020, it was noted that hairstyles in early African civilisations held significant cultural meanings, receiving meticulous care, and closely resembling those of ancient Egypt (Sieber and Herreman, 2000). African hair sculpture was viewed as an art form, with various styles serving different purposes within traditional African societies. Certain hairstyles in different regions symbolised ceremonial events, age, or maturity. Some hairstyles were crafted using materials such as clay, tree bark, braids, twists, and cloth (Sagay, 1983).

For example in North Africa, hairstyles exhibited a rich diversity across the region's various ethnic groups and cultures. Cornrows and braids are often found in North Africa, particularly among the Amazigh (Berber) people, and involve carefully braiding hair close to the scalp, with designs representing tribal membership or social position while Henna-Dyed hair, popularly known among the Arab and Berber women, includes applying henna, a natural dye, generally fashioned in loose waves or curls. It is firmly steeped in history and connected with festivals (Shaw, 1995)

In ancient Egypt, hairstyles were intricate and often carried symbolic meaning. Both men and women adorned themselves with wigs, intricately styled and embellished with beads, ribbons, or other decorations, reflecting social status, profession, or religious significance (Shaw, 1995). Among the indigenous Berber people, women typically wore their hair long and braided, sometimes adorned with beads or shells, while men often kept their hair short or shaved, although styles could differ based on tribal customs (Brett & Fentress, 1996). The Tuareg people, a nomadic Berber group residing primarily in the Sahara Desert, also had distinctive hairstyles. Tuareg men often wore their hair long and flowing, sometimes obscuring their faces, or wrapped in a turban, while women's hairstyles varied but often involved long hair, occasionally braided or adorned with ornaments (McDougall, 2006). With the influence of Islam across North Africa, certain hairstyles became associated with religious practices, such as head shaving during Hajj as a sign of devotion, yet everyday hairstyles continued to reflect diverse local customs and traditions (El Guindi, 1999).

In West Africa, the Yoruba culture of Nigeria places great emphasis on hairstyles as a means of cultural expression and communication. For Yoruba women, hairstyles convey social status, marital status, and even spiritual beliefs. Traditional Yoruba hairstyles, such as "ileke," involve intricate braiding techniques passed down through generations, symbolizing familial lineage and cultural pride (Adepegba, 2007). The female initiates typically shave their hair to facilitate the application of special medicinal ingredients to their scalps, or they adorn elaborate hairstyles adorned with vibrant beads (Lawal 2000). Whereas the Igbo people believe that upon reaching puberty and developing breasts, young girls should groom their hair in a specific manner to attract potential suitors (Sagay 1983). Similarly, in other cultural contexts, a mature woman would accompany a young female initiate, styling her hair intricately to enhance her appeal to suitors, thereby signifying her transition through initiation (Siegmann 2000). Regarding males, it's customary for a young boy to sport a tuft of hair on his head, but upon reaching puberty, all his hair would be shaved off as a symbolic act representing his initiation and circumcision rites (Sieber & Herreman 2000).

In central Africa, specifically in what was formerly known as Zaire but is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a diverse range of hairstyles was prevalent. Men typically sported cone-shaped hairstyles, while women had two distinctive styles. One involved shaving and darkening the front part of the head with soot, while the back was braided and adorned with paint. Another style saw women's hair groomed into longitudinal ridges and coloured with red clay (Sagay 1983).

The Masai people from East Africa also showcased a variety of hairstyles as hair plays a crucial role in cultural ceremonies and rites of passage. Women often had bald heads coated with animal fat and red ochre, while male warriors flaunted long hair styled into various arrangements. Maasai warriors, known for their distinctive long, braided hairstyles adorned with red ochre and beads, signify strength, courage, and cultural identity (Hodgson & McCurdy, 2001). The issue of hair in East Africa is still emerging, therefore there is a scarcity of literature on the topic in the region.

Hairstyles in Southern Africa varied across different tribes and communities. A notable example is the traditional hairstyle worn by married Swazi women, characterized by a top knot fashioned from split cow horns, resembling a cap. This hairstyle was typically



secured using red-ochre clay (Le Roux, 2020). For the Xhosas on the other hand, hair holds immense ceremonial and spiritual importance. Traditionally, the initiation process into manhood, known as "ukwaluka," involves the shaving of young men's heads as a symbol of their transition into adulthood (Nobumba, 2003). Similarly, among the Zulu people of South Africa, hairstyles are emblematic of social status and identity. Historically, married Zulu women adorned their hair with intricate beadwork and cowrie shells, reflecting their marital status and cultural heritage (Bryceson & Fonseca, 2006).

The hairstyles of individuals were characterized by intricate designs achieved through the use of red clay and fat, accompanied by the practice of shaving women's foreheads for a refined aesthetic (Madlela, 2018). Within Zulu and Ndebele cultures, hair held profound symbolic significance, particularly in rituals surrounding death. Following the passing of a loved one, it was customary for close relatives to undergo a hair-shaving ceremony as a means of purification, dissociating themselves from the association with mortality (Richter, 2005). Among the Tswana and Sotho ethnic groups, pregnant women adhered to cultural prohibitions against braiding their hair due to beliefs about potential adverse effects on fetal development. Tswana tradition posited that braiding during pregnancy might lead to the entanglement of the umbilical cord around the fetus's neck, while Sotho culture linked it to the risk of prolonged labor (Ntoane, 1988). Additionally, within Ndebele customs, expressing gratitude to hairstylists for their services was regarded as inauspicious (Madlela, 2018).

Even though we live in a post-apartheid, post-colonial, democratic South Africa, "good hair" has become public opinion and has consistently been defined by the beauty industry through an assortment of beauty products displayed in the media. Evidence of this is found in a racist hair advertisement in South Africa where Black hair was compared to White hair. In September 2020, nationwide protests were held after it was revealed that White hair was characterised as fine and normal while Black hair was described as dry and damaged (Wicks & Nair, 2020). This incident indicates that hair remains a sensitive topic in the democratic dispensation of South Africa (Bellinger, 2007).

Consequently, there is a desire among most Black women to attain "good hair", which is propagated through various avenues displayed in the media in South Africa. Hence, the power of the mass media cannot be ignored as they are powerful entities with the unique capacity to affect people in a variety of ways (Azibo, 2010). Fourie (2010) states that the

symbols and images which we consume through the media shape the way we view others and the way we think of ourselves. The “beauty” cultures that the media portray incorporate transnational characteristics. Moragas (2019) argues that the media frequently depicts current beauty ideals that encompass transnational attributes, exemplifying a blending of cultural influences from several global areas. This phenomenon emphasizes the interdependence of beauty cultures worldwide, where an intricate interaction of local customs, global fashions, and media portrayals influences standards.

The media plays a crucial and indisputable role in the globalization of beauty standards and the representation of identity and appearance (Essien & Wood, 2021). The prevalence of this depiction in the media contributes to the global standardization of beauty. The proliferation of specific beauty ideals by the media across various cultures and societies fosters a collective understanding of what is deemed attractive or desirable, thereby causing a convergence of beauty standards on a global scale. This beauty standard, which is only achievable by altering products such as hair chemicals, make-up, plastic surgery etc., is often presented as an ideal and ultimate standard of beauty (Randle, 2015). The media creates global ideals of feminine beauty, which presents a limited scope of what it means to be a beautiful woman. Therefore, the study aimed to explore the representation of African hair in South African dramas and the kind of hairstyles that are mostly represented in South African dramas such as “Gomora”, “Uzalo” and “The River”. The impetus for studying this nature stems from the historical and cultural context of South Africa, wherein African hair has been subject to ridicule. Hair in the South African context has served as a symbol of identity, which communicates beauty, class, race and acceptability (Hooks, 1992; Thompson, 2009b; Le Roux & Oyedemi, 2021).

## **1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

In the portrayal of Black individuals by media outlets, there is an observable reinforcement of white supremacist ideals. The inadequate and frequently stereotypical representation of Black individuals and their blackness is a consequence of the perpetuation of white supremacist structures, notably evident in the media (Bogle, 2019). This includes the representation of “good hair” in the media. “Good hair” is usually portrayed as straight,

long, and Caucasian/White hair while other types of hair are stereotyped in representation and presented as less desirable. Although the concept of hair representation has been researched with a focus on identity and notions of beauty (Thomas, Hacker & Hoxha, 2011), in magazines and hair advertisements (Madlela 2018a), literature and culture (Hammersley 2013), there is a paucity of literature concerning hair representations, and what they communicate in dramas. Consequently, this study undertook an examination of the representation of African hair within South African dramas, elucidating the specific focal points these depictions conveyed about the nature of hair.

### **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

#### **Aim**

The study aimed to explore the types of hairstyles represented in South African dramas, specifically “Gomora”, “Uzalo,” and “The River” and their intended communicative meanings to the target audience.

#### **Objectives**

- a) To determine which type of hairstyle is represented most in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and to understand the cultural, social, and political significance of the hairstyles, as well as their potential impact on viewers' identities.
- b) To compare the hairstyles worn by the antagonists and the protagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and establish what they intend to communicate to the target audiences.
- c) To explore the diverse types of hairstyles worn throughout various episodes by the protagonists and antagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and identify what it intends to communicate to the target audience.
- d) To investigate how the three theories namely, Social Representation Theory, Social Identity Theory and Audience Reception Theory provide an understanding of the representation of different types of hairstyles in “Gomora”, “Uzalo” and “The River”.

## **1.4 SCHOLARLY CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

The scholarly context of this study was based on the literature relevant to this research as well as the theoretical frames used in this study. The researcher examined the literature on the historical background of African hair; African hair and identity politics; media representation of Black hair; the history of dramas, the characteristics of dramas, the background of selected dramas and lastly, the study discussed the theoretical framework of this study. The sub-sections below provide an overview of the literature which was discussed in this study.

### **1.4.1 Historical background of African hair**

Johnson and Bankhead (2014) indicate that to comprehend the centrality of hair to African people, one should do so through the perspective of an African worldview and cosmology, because at that point the full extent of its significance will be thoroughly understood. However, Muhtar, Sultan, Amir and Syam (2019) elucidate that throughout all the ages, from the ancient Nile Valley civilizations to the development of West and the foundation of Western African domains, hair has kept a spiritual, social, cultural, and stylish importance in the existences of African people. Indeed, hair has played significant roles in traditional African societies, including being an integral part of the language and communication system.

Moreover, Glace and Waldstein (2022) explore Rastafari hair as spiritual (rather than magical, religious or social) entity, focus on dreadlocks (and other hairstyles) as a conscious, personal symbol rather than on any underlying psychoanalytic meanings. Focusing on the spiritual meanings of hair shows that dreadlocks and baldness can represent the same thing (i.e a dedication to Rastafari) but are respectively, outward (visible) and inward (hidden) manifestations of it. According to Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014), hair played an important role in the culture of ancient African people as it symbolises family background, social status, spirituality, tribe, and marital status. This means that through hairstyles one could be identified as either rich or poor.

This study discusses the historical background of African hair by referring to the importance of hair in precolonial, colonial and apartheid South Africa. Several types of hairstyles, which include natural and artificial hairstyles, are discussed. According to

Johnson and Bankhead (2014), the only way to understand how important hair is to Africans is from the standpoint of an African worldview and cosmology since only then would the entire extent of its significance be fully grasped.

However, Muhtar et al., (2017) explain how hair has remained a spiritual, social, cultural, and fashionable aspect of African people's lives throughout time, from ancient Nile Valley cultures through the rise of the West and the establishment of Western African countries. Hair has played important roles in traditional African social structures, including serving as a component of the language and communication system. Moreover, Glace & Waldstein (2022) theorise hair as having a grammar (as in language) that can change as different individuals put it to use. Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014) claim that hair was a crucial part of the culture of ancient Africans since it represented marital status, tribe, spirituality, and family origin. This implies that one could be classified as rich or poor based on their hairstyle, for instance.

#### **1.4.2 African hair and identity politics**

This study reviews the literature on the political nature of African hair. It also discusses how African hair is used as an indicator of black racial identity. The perceptual framework surrounding African hair has engendered a transformative process, notably through the application of chemical straighteners, with consequential implications construed as manifestations of self-deprecation (Byrd and Tharps (2014)). This discussion highlights the complex relationship between hair and one's sense of self, ultimately leading to an examination of the devaluation of Black hair. The African continent harbors various ethnic groups, some of which have biological similarities, particularly among those with darker skin and curly hair (Madlela, 2018b). The uniqueness of African women's hairstyles remains one of the methods used to identify them based on their various races and geographic locations. Ndekei (2017) observes that identifying a person's race based on their hairdo has become a widespread practice due to the global movement of people and goods. Presently, global identity competes with racial and national identity. Moreover, Brosius and Polit (2020) postulate that due to the development of technology, the accelerated development of international personnel and international exchanges has led to the diversification and mixing of identities.

According to Johnson and Bankhead (2014), for African women and girls, their relationship with their hair and their performance are integral parts of who they are. Many cultures place a high value on hair, and according to the social and cultural setting, certain aspects of hair have symbolic meanings. In all facets of African culture and society, hair has a symbolic importance for Africans. This meaning is broad and profound. In other words, hair might represent something spiritual or holy. It can have a significant social and cultural impact, and its meaning can occasionally be used as a way to express themselves.

The contemporary era is marked by global localization, which necessitates the reinterpretation of global trends to cater to local preferences (Muhtar, Sultan, Amir & Syam, 2017). Due to the advancement and commercial viability of braids and wigs, individuals from different ethnic backgrounds can now have long, straight hair, including Africans. This demonstrates that social identity is dynamic and constantly under discussion and modification.

### **1.4.3 Media representation of black hair**

5. According to Madlela (2018), the media have effectively recommended improving certain lifestyles and self-awareness particularly through the promotion of natural hair care practices and embracing diverse hairstyles and textures. To achieve the ideal state, most women usually spend a lot of money on their hair. Considering its multi-ethnic population, the South African hair care market aims to meet the needs of African and Caucasian hair. The demand for African hair care products and services surpasses that of white hair care, reflecting the unique needs and preferences of individuals with African hair textures (Norwood, 2018). In the domain of African hair care, there is a wide range of styles and treatments that are customized to suit individual preferences and hair textures. These encompass various hair care techniques, such as natural treatments, chemical relaxers, and hairstyles like locks and ponytails. Each of these options necessitates specialized products and maintenance procedures. This raises the question of what impact it will have on the social, cultural, and economic consequences of African women living in South Africa.

6. In the past 20 years, the role of African women in income and expenditure has changed. The purchase of hairdressing products by African women has aroused

people's interest and promoted the development of the world economy (Nyamnjoh, Durham & Fokwang, 2002).

This section focused on the following sections: hair and the beauty industry in South Africa; social media and Black hair, including a discussion on Instagram and YouTube; and lastly, television and its representation of Black hair. According to Madlela (2018b), the media have effectively recommended improving certain lifestyles and self-awareness. Most women typically overspend on their hair to obtain the ideal standard of beauty. The hair care market in South Africa endeavours to address the diverse requirements associated with African and Caucasian hair, thereby accommodating the intricacies arising from its multi-ethnic demographic composition. Additionally, African hair care is more in demand than White hair care (Chiwaza, 2020). African women come in a variety of shapes and styles showcasing a broad range of hairstyles such as dreadlocks, ponytails, natural hair, and chemically treated hair. According to Laham (2020), although different hairstyles may require distinct treatments and care routines, it is crucial to acknowledge that the apparent necessity for certain products and treatments is often influenced by society standards and advertising, rather than being inherently necessary. Advertisers and media exert a substantial influence on the formation of beauty standards and women's decision-making process when it comes to their hair (Laham, 2020).

The use of hairdressing products by African women has attracted attention and made significant contributions to economic growth in diverse ways (Nyamnjoh, Durham & Fokwang, 2002). This involves promoting the use of a wide variety of hair care products that are specifically designed for various hair types and styles, which in turn encourages the development of new ideas and business ventures within the beauty sector. Moreover, the increasing popularity of African hair care procedures has led to the emergence of employment opportunities and market prospects, especially within local communities and the global market. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that economic advantages are not uniformly allocated, and discrepancies may arise regarding the availability of resources, representation in the market, and the sharing of profits within the hair care sector. Hence, the procurement of hairdressing items by African women has unquestionably impacted the worldwide economy. However, it is vital to contemplate the wider social and economic consequences and endeavour for comprehensive and fair development.

#### **1.4.4 Background of dramas**

This section focused on the historical background of selected dramas, the characteristics of each drama's composition as well as a detailed background of the local television dramas, which were selected for this study, namely, *Uzalo*, *Gomora* and *The River*.

### **1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

The definitions provided here are not direct definitions of the concepts. They provide definitional explanations of how these concepts are engaged and applied in this study.

#### **1.5.1 Drama**

An ongoing fictional dramatic television program, known as a "drama," is broadcast in many serial episodes every week and focuses on the interactions between individuals in a particular community (Ang, 2013). According to Dutta (2020), drama, soap operas (soapies), and telenovelas are television genres with commonalities in their narrative storytelling, character-driven plots, and serialized structure. They utilize dramatic elements to captivate audiences and frequently delve into fictional interpersonal relationships. Moreover, these genres often incorporate cliffhangers to maintain viewer engagement throughout multiple episodes.

#### **1.5.2 Episode**

Merriam-Webster defines episode as a "typical brief action" in a play or book as a noteworthy occurrence that stands on its own within a larger sequence. This phenomenon may manifest as a compilation of scenes seamlessly integrated for a designated duration, as frequently observed in the context of soap operas.

#### **1.5.3 Television**

Television is an instrument that transforms electromagnetic impulses into audiovisual content, and it plays a significant role in providing entertainment, spreading information, and facilitating cultural interchange. It transmits both real-time and pre-recorded visual and auditory content, molding public conversation, mirroring cultural standards, and impacting individual viewpoints. Television programming has a substantial impact on



shaping contemporary society, facilitating relationships, and initiating discussions on various subjects (Harboe, 2010). In addition, Bignell and Woods (2022) regard television (TV) as a multifaceted medium that encompasses both the programming institution and the audience, shaping a distinctive viewing culture through the mediation of representations of reality and fiction.

#### **1.5.4 African hair**

Hankins and Hankins (2019) define African hair as Afro-textured hair types, textures, and styles. African hair represents more than just a physical attribute; it embodies a rich tapestry of cultural heritage, identity, and self-expression. Historically, African hair has been intricately woven into rituals, traditions, and societal norms, reflecting the diverse cultural landscapes across the continent. It serves as a medium through which individuals assert their cultural identity and connect with their ancestral roots. African hair is deeply intertwined with spirituality, community values, and personal aesthetics, shaping individual and collective experiences. This perspective aligns with Omotoso's (2018) assertion that African hair encompasses a spectrum of diverse textures and coil patterns, serving as a reflective tapestry of the continent's rich cultural diversity.

#### **1.5.5 Natural hair**

According to Phoenix Austin (2018), natural hairstyles are those that involve minimum alteration or manipulation of the hair's natural texture, such as braids, twists, locs, or afros. These styles highlight the hair's natural structure and frequently need little or no chemical treatments or heat styling. Braids, for example, are created by weaving or interlacing strands of hair without the use of chemicals. They have a lengthy history in diverse cultures, with distinct styles holding cultural significance and being passed down through generations. Braids are usually regarded as natural hairstyles since they need minimal treatment of the hair and work well with its natural texture. They hold significant cultural and historical importance, particularly within African American and African communities, as highlighted in studies such as Hall et al. (2018) and Byrd and Tharps' (2002) book "Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America," as well as an article by McGee (2019) in the *Journal of Black Studies* exploring how cornrows and other natural hairstyles are part of a movement towards self-acceptance and challenging Eurocentric beauty standards.

### **1.5.6 Artificial hair**

Synthetic polymers are used to create artificial hair. Byrd and Tharps (2014a) define artificial hair as flimsy plastic fibres designed to resemble human hair makeup. Artificial hairstyles include weaves, extensions, and wigs, as well as chemical treatments such as relaxers and perms. Weaves, in particular, entail stitching or gluing synthetic or natural hair extensions to a person's natural hair to add length, volume, or texture. These hairstyles frequently necessitate more intensive care, which may include the use of chemicals or heat styling products to obtain the desired effect. Weaves are often referred to as artificial hair because they rely on external materials to alter the appearance of one's natural hair. Green (2018) explains that weaves involve the use of synthetic or human hair extensions, which fundamentally alter the texture, length, or volume of the individual's hair. This careful manipulation distinguishes weaves from natural hair and emphasizes their artificiality. Smith, Johnson, & Williams (2019) support this viewpoint by classifying weaves as non-biological hair extensions, emphasizing their foreign origin and the deliberate effort required for their application. Brown and Johnson (2019) emphasize the synthetic or externally derived components that are present in weave installation, distinguishing it from real hair.

### **1.5.7 Colonialism**

Colonialism is a form of oppression in which one group is subjected to another (Kohn & Reddy, 2006). Furthermore, Apata (2022) defines colonialism as the seizure of land and the subjection of a population. Colonisation is the act or process of settling among and controlling an area's indigenous inhabitants (Kohn & Reddy, 2006). According to Mbunyaza-Memani (2019), colonization not only involved land confiscation and cultural invasion by a dominant nation, but it also fostered an inferiority ideology among the colonized.

The following section enunciates the demarcation of the chapter.

## **1.6 OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE OF STUDY**

The study comprises five chapters, outlined as follows:

### **1.6.1 Chapter one: introduction**

The objective, scope, substantiated introduction, and background of the investigation were all presented in this chapter. Additionally, it offered the background information on dramas, definitions of key terms, and a study boundary.

### **1.6.2 Chapter two: literature review and theoretical framework**

This chapter offers a brief overview of the literature, both from a national and international perspective. An overview of the historical background of African hair is provided. Furthermore, it examines the type of hair by considering both its natural and artificial hairstyles. The chapter focuses on African hair and identity, as well as the media representation of African hair. It also explores the history and characteristics of dramas and delves into the roles of the protagonist and antagonist. The theoretical framework is also included in this chapter.

### **1.6.3 Chapter three: research design and methodology**

This section presents the methodology and research design employed in the study, offering a concise overview of qualitative research approaches. The chapter examines the methodology of data collecting and presents comprehensive details on the process of data analysis. The text provides an outline of population and sampling procedures, as well as the quality standards used to assess the data's quality. In addition, the chapter highlights ethical considerations in compliance with the laws and regulations of the university.

### **1.6.4 Chapter four: data analysis and interpretations**

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the theoretical analysis and its role in shaping and interpreting the results. It elucidates how theoretical frameworks guide the analysis process, informing the interpretation of findings and ensuring coherence and consistency in the research outcomes.

### **1.6.5 Chapter five: findings, recommendations, and conclusion of the study**

This chapter examined the portrayal of African hair in South African dramas, recognizing a noteworthy concern arising from soap operas and proposing remedial measures to address the identified challenges.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the types of hairstyles represented in South African dramas. This chapter provides an overview of the literature on the historical background of African hair; African hair and identity politics; media representation of Black hair, the history, and dynamics of dramas with specific reference to the South African dramas, namely, *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*; and lastly, it discusses the theoretical framework for this study.

#### 2.2 A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AFRICAN HAIR

In order to understand the history of African hair, it is important that the three eras, the pre-colonial era, the colonial era, and the post-colonial era are discussed. Hair, particularly the hair of previously colonised people, cannot be understood outside of the context of colonialism. The historical significance of black hair has been characterized by a complex interplay of meanings and associations. It has been seen as a symbol of both the perceived inferiority of Black people and their exoticism. Additionally, African hair has been viewed as intricate and has served as a powerful expression of self-affirmation and the reclamation of Black identity and African heritage (Alubafi, Ramphalile, and Rankoana, 2018). This is because the colonisers propagated a stereotypical association of Black with ugliness and White with beauty, and hair became a defining tool for this othering (Knight and Long, 2019, Montle, 2020). These racialised notions of hair have deeply penetrated social structures of society (Fernandes-Knight and Long, 2019), and the media is used as a means through which these stereotypes are spread. Therefore, in the paragraphs that follow, natural hair will be discussed using a timeline from the pre-colonial era.

##### 2.2.1 The importance of African hair during pre-colonial era

Ancient African communities valued hair greatly in their cultures. According to Sherrow (2006), hair is a symbol of marital status, spirituality, tribe, family history, and social

standing. According to Njoroge, Nyamache and Tarus (2012) hair is believed to be a portal for spirits to pass through to the soul. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, braids are believed to send messages to the gods (Njoroge et al., 2012). Glace and Weldstein (2022) explore hair as part of a spiritual body, using MacPhee's definition of spiritual body, which is the embodied state of heightened sensory awareness. Additionally, in Egypt bad spirits were driven out of the body through the cutting of hair (Njoroge et al., 2012).

According to Haas (2008), hair is utilised in various cultures, particularly in African cultures, to demonstrate distinctiveness or adherence to the standards, customs, and beliefs of a specific community. Around 3000 BC, wigs crafted from materials like palm leaf fibres, human hair, wool, or cotton became prevalent. In ancient Egypt, individuals typically adorned their hair in its natural state. According to Haas (2008:526), Egyptian art stands out as the most abundant historical record of wigs. Physical hair artefacts from ancient Egypt include wigs made of human hair. Wealthy ladies wore their own long hair, occasionally augmented by extra strands, or a wig worn over their long hair, while men kept their hair short or shaved, necessitating the employment of wigs to achieve chic masculine hairstyles (Mayo & Callender, 2021). Egyptian women's wigs were often long and braided, adorned with gold ornaments or ivory hair pins (Njoroge et al., 2012).



*Image 1: The Egyptian goddess Hathor, with long and straight hair (Basson, 2012)*

The significance assigned to hair in ancient African societies played a crucial role in formulating the overarching concept of "Africa" as a continent characterised by diversity and cultural wealth. The varied applications of hair, representing symbols of marital status, spirituality, tribal affiliation, family history, and social standing, as detailed by Sherrow (2006), mirrored the complex cultural mosaic woven throughout diverse African communities. In the context of V. Mudimbe's concept of the "community of experience," the implications are significant. Mudimbe's framework emphasises the shared experiences and collective consciousness that shape the identity of a particular community. The diverse uses of hair within African societies, as highlighted in the statement, imply the existence of a community of experience where individuals, through shared cultural practices related to hair, contribute to the formation of a collective identity. This shared experience is not confined to a singular ethnic or geographical group but extends across diverse communities within the African continent.

The use of wigs in ancient Egypt, as documented by Haas (2008), further underscores the interplay of cultural practices across different African communities. The adoption of wigs by both men and women in ancient Egyptian society was not merely a stylistic choice but also a practical adaptation, reflecting shared cultural norms and values within that community of experience. Moreover, the reference to diverse African hairstyles serving as identifiers of gender and ethnic identity, as well as markers in rites of passage, aligns with Mudimbe's concept of a community of experience. Considering the preceding information, it is imperative to bear in mind that the present enthusiasm for human hair and wigs is not a recent phenomenon. Africans had various hairstyles that acted as identifiers of gender and ethnic identity in addition to being decorative (Netshia, 2017).

Hairstyles were also employed as rites of passage symbols and to distinguish between different age groups of individuals. In addition, hairstyles were influenced by societal conventions, economic concerns, and religious beliefs. Oladumiye and Israel (2015) claim that Egyptians during the Old Kingdom of ancient Egypt, which lasted from around 2686 BCE to 2181 BCE frequently shaved or trimmed their hair short, except for a long lock of hair called the "side-lock of youth" that was left on the side of the head. This s-shaped lock's hieroglyphic representation is a youngster or young person. Both males and females had this style up until adolescence.

Young males typically shaved their heads, young girls wore their hair in ponytails that hung down the middle of their backs, and members of the royal family sported ornate hairstyles as a symbol of their status. Prince (2009) agrees with Haas (2008) as he postulates that various tribes across Africa such as the Nguni speaking people (Southern Africa), the Hausa Tribe (West Africa) and the Maasai Tribe (East Africa) used hair to mark social stratification during the 15th Century. Thompson (2009b) emphasises that hair serves as a symbol of human identity. Given its physical nature, which renders it highly personal, and the fact that it is public rather than private, hair is likely the most potent indicator of both individual and group identity.

For many Black Africans, hair is a vital part of expressing their cultural identity. In addition, historical and current hairstyles are an art form that represents nationalities, social status, and even occasions. Girls in Ghana's Akan tribe had their hair adorned with gold ornaments as they advertised their availability for marriage during special annual festivities particularly during the 20th century (Sieber & Herreman, 2000). Hair was purposefully untidy and normal haircuts were omitted during the grieving season in the same tribe. Senegalese young women shaved a portion of their hair to signal that they were not ready to marry, but young men braided their hair at times of war (Byrd & Tharps, 2014a). Hair, which is on top of the head and closer to the sky, is believed by many African tribes to be a channel of contact with God (Olivelle, 2008).

Body hair constitutes a vital component. According to Nettleton (2014), ancient African cultures believed it might be used for sacramental communication. This notion led to the process of styling people's hair being entrusted to close relatives. Madlela (2018a) reported that if hair fell into the enemy's hands, even one hair may cause hurt or damage to its owner. Hair is used on behalf of the deceased as a witness to a person's capacity for extension, and it is seen to be an essential component of a ritual mask to increase the force and efficacy of their efforts (Sieber & Herreman, 2000). Moreover, Byrd and Tharps (2014b) note that hair is an especially important part of identity in Africa.

In many African tribes, hair is a way of indicating a person's status, identity, religion, and ancestry. According to Robinson (2011), within the historical context of the United States, specifically during the 18th and 19th centuries, occurrences were documented wherein women exhibiting a hair texture more closely resembling that of Caucasians, often individuals of biracial or mixed heritage, were subjected to domestic servitude.



Simultaneously, Black women possessing curlier hair were frequently compelled to engage in field labour. This historical account underscores the growing significance of hair as a determinant of an individual's social standing in American society during this period.

In the historical context of the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in the Southern states, slaves of African descent faced stringent expectations regarding their appearance imposed by white masters. Wanzer (2022) delineates that during the historical period under consideration, the imposition of strict grooming codes compelled individuals of African descent who were subjected to slavery to undertake additional measures. These measures, irrespective of the inherent texture of their hair, were undertaken to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty, with the overarching objective of presenting an appearance as closely aligned with the prevailing idealized notions of "whiteness" as conceivable. This historical phenomenon underscores the intersectionality of racial subjugation, grooming practices, and the perpetuation of Eurocentric aesthetic norms during that particular epoch. This period reflected a stark manifestation of socio-economic power dynamics, racial stereotypes, and the imposition of cultural norms by those in authority.

### **2.2.2 The significance of African hair during colonial era**

Mercer-Jones (2021) proposes that caring for one's hair is a prominent social activity, especially among women. However, over time, Black African hairstyles and hair habits have evolved and changed, and these behaviours can be linked to pre-colonial and colonial eras (Alubafi, Ramphalile, and Rankoana, 2018). Hairstyles were used to convey information and interact with people in West African society from the 15th Century (Byrd & Tharps, 2014b). Various hairstyles also symbolised marriage status, age, wealth, and social status (Olivelle, 2008). Hair not only carries information, but it also can unleash a certain amount of cultural force, which is another sort of evident information that goes beyond the physical appearance of hair as a basic object (Madlela, 2018b).

Hair, next to skin, is the most apparent hallmark of blackness, and refusing unruly hair is also about silencing inassimilable black politics (Madlela, 2018a). During the apartheid era in South Africa, racial classification played a crucial role since it involves categorizing individuals into racial groups using a complex yet brutal set of criteria. As a result, White,

Black, Indian, and Coloured people were the four groups into which the population was split, with the Coloured and Indian groups being further separated. Powe (2009) indicates that these tests were also used to determine the race of people who had either appealed their categorisation or whose classification had been called into question by others. The tests were mostly based on appearance - skin colour, facial features, and the appearance of hair on the head (and other parts of the body).

The "pencil test," for example, required that if a person could shake their head while holding a pencil in their hair, they were ineligible to be classified as White. These tests had the drawback that individuals of the same extended family could be categorised as belonging to multiple racial groups due to the classification system's inaccuracy and ambiguity (Oyedemi, 2016). Race and ethnicity have consistently exerted a substantial influence on South Africa's history, politics, society, and economics, and the idea of emulation is widespread throughout the nation.

The implementation of such protocols by the dominant group not only subjected individuals to dehumanizing encounters but also raised doubts about the fundamental nature of their humanity. This took place in the apartheid era, which is analogous to a colonial period in which the colonizing population group was already an identifiable part of the national populace. The segregation during this period was mostly justified by the perceived differences in "civilization" or "developmental" levels. The dehumanization that occurred under apartheid was evident in the compulsory categorization of individuals into government-defined "race" categories, which then determined all aspects of their socio-economic existence.

The humiliation inherent in this process was further exacerbated in the example provided, contributing to the creation of an ostensibly definable "racial identity" (Gani, 2021). Through the repetition of these tropes and the endurance of such living conditions over decades, individuals became acclimated to their imposed "identities." These identities were subsequently imbued with supposed "cultural" attributes, further entrenching divisions and fostering the segregation of the public (Cvetkovich, 2018). This protracted and systemic process not only marked a dark chapter in South Africa's history but also underscored the insidious impact of institutionalized discrimination on the collective consciousness of its people.

### **2.2.3 The importance of African hair during the post-colonial era**

In the present, there has been a noticeable transformation in social reality, particularly in the interaction between women and their hair. Recent research and current trends indicate that women are progressively asserting their uniqueness by diverging from collective standards and adopting more customized decisions. A study conducted by McKinsey in 2020 indicates that there is an increasing trend of customization in the fashion and beauty sectors. This trend reflects a growing need for products that are tailored to individual preferences and requirements. Instagram and similar social media sites offer women the opportunity to display their unique fashion choices, while books like "Untamed" by Glennon Doyle (2020) promote liberation from traditional norms. Furthermore, according to reports by Deloitte (2021) and the World Economic Forum (2023), women are gaining economic power and the ability to choose flexible work arrangements. This trend highlights a larger cultural change towards valuing individuality and self-expression. Brown (2021) posits that a discernible transformation is evident in women's involvement with hair culture, wherein personal preferences and expressions of individual identity assume a more prominent role. This shift underscores a contemporary trend wherein women exercise greater agency in shaping their choices and self-representation within the realm of hair culture.

The change in dynamics can be attributed, in part, to a transition from customs observed collectively within a group to the adoption of fashions chosen by women on a more individualized basis. Unlike historical contexts where grooming practices were often dictated by societal norms and enforced by those in positions of power, modern women have greater agency in shaping their own hair choices. Hairstyles today are influenced not only by societal perceptions but also by personal interests, diverse cultural influences, and a broader acceptance of individual expression. This subtle evolution emphasizes the multifaceted nature of hair culture, situating it within a continuum of socioeconomic power shifts, racial stereotypes, and the dynamic interplay between collective standards and individual agency. According to Ross (2023), the transition from past impositions on slaves' appearances to today's emphasis on personal choice represents a complex and dynamic terrain in which hair culture reflects broader societal developments and the search for individual identity.

## **2.3 TYPES OF AFRICAN HAIRSTYLES**

African perspectives on the cultural significance of men's and women's hair ornaments offer a more authentic and nuanced understanding of these traditions, diverging from historical observations by missionaries, settlers, and travellers. By centering the narrative on indigenous voices, people can delve into the depth of the variety and visual richness of hair ornamentation within African communities.

Historically, external observers have documented these practices, but it is essential to acknowledge the potential biases inherent in this "looking at the OTHER" approach, as highlighted by Kaplan. This perspective often stemmed from a Eurocentric lens, which, at times, compromised the accurate portrayal of African cultural subtleties and complexities. To counterbalance this, a more culturally rooted exploration begins by examining African sources such as Shuaib (2020), Oyeniyi (2015) and Marco (2012) that articulate the significance of men's and women's hair ornaments. Indigenous perspectives shed light on the profound meanings, rituals, and societal roles associated with these adornments.

Shuaib (2020), Oyeniyi (2015) and Marco (2012) not only enrich our understanding of the aesthetic elements of hair ornaments but also provide insights into the spiritual, social, and symbolic dimensions attached to these practices. Natural and artificial hairstyles, as explored by Madlela (2018a), take on deeper significance when analysed within the context of indigenous narratives, offering a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive portrayal. In this reoriented perspective, the exploration of men's and women's hair ornaments becomes a dynamic journey into the heart of African cultures, fostering a greater appreciation for the intricacies and vibrancy that characterize these traditions.

The following section focuses on two types of hairstyles, namely, natural hairstyles and artificial hairstyles.

### **2.3.1 Natural hairstyles**

Natural hair, as defined by scholars such as Byrd and Tharps (2001) and Hall (2002), refers to unaltered Afro-textured hair types that celebrate the inherent texture and characteristics of hair commonly found among individuals of African background. This term embodies a cultural and socio-political movement that challenges Eurocentric

beauty standards and promotes self-acceptance within Black communities (Banks, 2000). Rooted in African cultural traditions, natural hair represents a reclamation of cultural heritage and a connection to ancestral roots (Matory, 1999; Thompson, 2009). Braids are considered natural hair because they do not involve chemical alteration of the hair's texture. While the braiding process may involve the use of extensions or synthetic hair for added length or volume, the natural hair itself remains untouched (Simpson, 2017).

Additionally, the history of adding hair extensions to African hair can be traced back to ancient Egypt and Nubian civilisations (Hamidou, 2023). Ancient Egyptians wore their hair in a natural style however, wigs made from human hair, wool, palm-leaf fibres of cotton were introduced around 3000BC (Hamidou, 2023). In light of the above, the recent wig and human hair trend of today is not new to Africa (Hamidou, 2023). Therefore, braids created with the assistance of hairpieces still fall under the category of natural hair, as they do not involve chemical processing to permanently change the hair's structure or texture.

Following are examples of natural hairstyles:

- *Dreadlocks*

Oyedemi (2016) highlights that among the Himba tribe, hair serves as a nuanced indicator of age, life stage, and marital status, encapsulating a complex system of cultural symbolism. The tribe lives in North-Western Namibia. The tribe members traditionally styled their dreadlocks by combining ochre, goat's blood, and butter, showcasing a distinctive and culturally rooted approach to hair grooming within the community. They also included hair extensions when knitting dreadlocks. Xu, Kwa, and Silverberg (2017) state that among the Himba tribe in Namibia, specific dreadlock styles signify different life stages and social statuses. For instance, teenage girls wear dreadlocks hanging from their faces to symbolize entering puberty. Young ladies preparing for marriage tie back their dreadlocks to reveal their faces, while unmarried men express their status through their dreadlock hairstyles. Once married, women cover their heads, unveiling them solely during funerals.

Mercer (2000) describes the Hamars, a community living in the Omo Valley, Ethiopia, within a culturally varied environment. Within the Hamar community, ladies ornament their hair with thin ochre dreadlocks known as Goshas. This distinctive hairstyle, created by

combining water and resin, serves as a unique cultural expression. To further enhance their appearance, Hamar women complement their dreadlocks with colorful beaded jewellery.

In the meantime, Rastafarianism emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s and quickly expanded throughout the world in terms of support and adherents. Its roots, firmly embedded in the early-to-mid 20th century, are notably associated with the distinctive hairstyle known as dreadlocks (Barnett, 2014). Many artists and reggae music lovers (a type of music usually associated with Rastafarians) wear dreadlocks, such as Bob Marley and Lucky Dube wore dreadlocks to identify with the global Rastafarian culture (Alleyne, 2017). This hairstyle was created or developed to promote equality and justice for all and freedom for Africans and Black people around the world. The adoption and development of the dreadlocks hairstyle within the Rastafarian movement were rooted in a socio-political context aimed at advancing principles of equality, justice, and freedom for Africans and Black people globally. This distinctive hairstyle served as a visible expression of resistance against societal norms, advocating for the recognition and empowerment of marginalized communities within a broader framework of social justice and liberation (Cudjoe, 2020).

According to Kuumba and Ajanaku (1998), some Rastas, such as the Twelve Tribes of Israel group within Rastafarianism, which was created in Kingston, Jamaica in 1968, derive their name from the biblical concept of the twelve tribes. It encourages unity and fraternity across races and backgrounds. The organization's name represents inclusivity and shared spiritual principles that transcend cultural boundaries. Dreadlocks are not always the preferred hairstyle, and they are not needed to be worn with turbans. According to Kuumba and Ajanaku (1998), Rastafarians wore dreadlocks securely wrapped in a headscarf, and women wore veils for a variety of reasons, including hygiene, protection from prying eyes, and detachment from the world.

- *Braids and Beads*

Navigating the transient landscape of hairstyling trends can be a formidable task, yet amidst the flux, braided hairstyles have demonstrated remarkable enduring popularity, currently standing as a prevailing choice (Dabiri, 2019). Braids have been a popular hairstyle since ancient times, predating the 20th century, as evidenced by their

prominence in many ancient societies. Braids have served as a prominent hairstyle for millennia, originating from Africa as early as 3500 BCE. For example, the Himba people in Namibia have been adorning themselves with braided hairstyles for millennia. Moreover, the Venus of Willendorf, a statuette believed to date back around 25,000 years, portrays hair that has been intricately braided (Brunnschweiler, 1953). Brunnschweiler (1953) posits that the persistent prevalence of this hairstyle suggests the establishment of a legendary legacy, indicative of its enduring nature. Ranging from traditional basic braids to intricate styles like Dutch braids, braided hairstyles have consistently served as symbolic expressions, signifying nuances of social rank, race, religion, and other societal constructs (Marco, 2012).

According to Meadows-Fernandez (2024) states that beyond its use as a protective hairstyle, braiding has a vital role in Black mother customs. This practice exhibits a diverse range of style techniques that have been documented in African history, including possibilities such as cornrows and individual braids. The different techniques of braiding, which differ in size, location, and patterns, have been transmitted between generations, showcasing the lasting cultural history and skill of braiding within Black communities. In that time braids have become many things, evidence of tribal affiliation and a map to communicate the journey to freedom, and more recently, an embrace of Blackness and a ready to wear protective hairstyle (Meadows-Fernandez, 2024). According to Byrd and Tharps (2014a), historically, braids and other intricate hairstyles were worn to signify marital status, age, religion, wealth, and societal rank. From kings' ornate beaded braids to special headdresses worn by new mothers, these styles had deep cultural and historical roots (Byrd and Tharps, 2014a).

According to Randle (2015), box braids gained widespread popularity in the United States during the 1990s. The style became a significant fashion trend, particularly within African American communities, and gained recognition for its versatility and protective styling qualities. The weaving patterns have not been altered, but the expressions and fashions have. Bailey and Da Costa (2013) state that braids are adorned, worn, and appreciated in various manners in contemporary society, encompassing both tidy and unstyled braids. Upon observation, the author notes that the braids worn by Black women today exhibit a casual and untidy style, characterized by a lack of tightness and perfection. This suggests

that Black women have an appreciation for a variety of hairstyles. Franklin, Wohltmann, and Wong (2021) affirm the same claim about the current weave hairstyle.

- *The Afro*

The natural hair movement emerged primarily in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, parallel to the Civil Rights Movement. The call for embracing natural hair and avoiding damaging products became a significant aspect of the broader push for racial equality and self-affirmation within the Black community in the United States (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2014). According to Jeffries and Jeffries (2014), the advocacy for Black power during the Civil Rights Movement was incompatible with the prevailing dominance of Eurocentric norms within American society. Embracing organic hairstyles, particularly the afro, was seen as an activist statement and a powerful assertion of reclaiming one's cultural roots (Runcie, 1976). Celebrities like Angela Davis, Jimi Hendrix, and Diana Ross, known for proudly wearing afros, played a significant role in popularizing this symbol of resistance (Žďárská, 2017). During the Civil Rights Movement, unconventional hairstyles faced ridicule and were labelled as "unprofessional," reflecting broader challenges to non-conforming aspects of the movement within the American context (Oriowo, 2016). The term "European standards" underscores the influence of Eurocentric beauty norms in shaping societal expectations, revealing the rejection of these standards by the Black community as part of their broader struggle for equality and cultural affirmation during the Civil Rights era.

According to Frymus (2020), the afro hairstyle assumes a symbolic role in signifying Black identity, encompassing a distinctive aesthetic that holds profound implications for its adherents and the overarching socio-cultural movement. The Afro's symbolic import transcends its visual appeal, instead operating as a marker of cultural pride, resistance, and empowerment within the Black community. The characteristic spiral halos, curls, and kinks inherent to natural Black hair, constituting the afro, serve as not only aesthetic embellishments but also as visual affirmations of the wearer's embrace of their natural hair texture. This intentional departure from historical Eurocentric beauty standards represents a conscious subversion, underlining the afro as an emblem of individual and collective self-empowerment.



Moreover, the Afro's symbolic association with a dignified crown signifies a reclamation of cultural heritage and an exultation of individual and collective identity. In a socio-political context, the historical link between the afro and movements advocating for civil rights, racial equality, and Black liberation amplifies its role as a visual manifestation of solidarity and resilience. The act of adorning the afro becomes a deliberate declaration of commitment to the ongoing societal struggle for social justice (Frymus, 2020). In essence, the significance of the afro to its wearers and the broader socio-cultural movement resides in its nuanced symbolism as an emblem of cultural pride, a tool of resistance against entrenched beauty norms, and a visible language of empowerment and advocacy for transformative social change.

Walker (2000) notes that a few young Black jazz dancers and vocalists defied the standard practices of the Black community by not straightening their hair in the late 1950s. When Black media became aware of their unspecified hairstyle, it was often described as "trimmed" hair (Riquelme et al., 2018). Dancers and musicians demonstrated solidarity with the Civil Rights Movement not exclusively by virtue of a perceived resonance with their natural, curly hair, but predominantly due to the movement's alignment with their broader racial and cultural identity (Browne, 2018). The intentional adoption of a specific hairstyle, notably the embrace of natural curls, operated as a visible and deliberate manifestation of their sociopolitical stance. By affiliating themselves with the Civil Rights Movement, these artists aimed to convey a shared commitment to racial pride, egalitarianism, and the dismantling of discriminatory frameworks (Das, 2017). In this context, the chosen hairstyle functioned as a symbolic extension of their identity, substantiating a purposeful alignment with the principles and objectives of the Civil Rights Movement rather than constituting the primary catalyst for their empathies.

In the 1990s, resolute female Civil Rights activists at various Black universities, including Harvard University, opted to discontinue the practice of straightening their hair. Instead, they chose to adopt shorter hairstyles, a decision that garnered disapproval and criticism from their peers (Seltzer, 2009). The Afro hairstyle has evolved into a huge spherical shape that is worn by both men and women and is produced by pulling the longer, unstraightened hair outwards using a broad-toothed comb known as the Afro comb.

The "Black is Beautiful" movement emerged during the 1960s within the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Rooted in the fight for racial equality, this

cultural and social movement sought to challenge prevailing Eurocentric beauty standards. It encouraged Black individuals to celebrate their natural features, reject societal pressures to conform to Westernized ideals, and take pride in their cultural heritage (Taylor, 2016). The movement's symbol, the Afro hairstyle, became emblematic of the rejection of Eurocentric beauty norms, emphasizing a return to natural hair textures. "Black is Beautiful" was not only a cultural affirmation but also an integral part of the broader push for social justice and equality.

The impact of the "Black is Beautiful" movement was transformative, influencing individuals' self-perception and prompting changes in media and advertising. Taylor (2016) further indicates that it fostered positive self-image and confidence among Black individuals, challenging harmful stereotypes and empowering them to resist societal pressures. In the realm of media and advertising, the movement prompted a shift in representation, advocating for more diverse portrayals of Black people. Johnson-Hun (2020) state that advertisers began featuring Black models and actors in a more positive light, contributing to a broader recognition and appreciation of diverse forms of beauty. The movement also had economic implications, encouraging support for Black-owned businesses, particularly in the beauty industry, and contributing to the growth of products and services tailored to Black consumers. Overall, the "Black is Beautiful" movement played a pivotal role in reshaping societal perceptions of beauty and identity (Peacock, 2019).

- *Bantu knots*

Bantu knots, also known as Zulu knots, are a traditional African hairstyle with roots in the Bantu-speaking peoples of Africa. The Bantu knots are created by sectioning the hair and twisting it into small, coiled knots. While the term "Bantu knots" is named after the Bantu linguistic group, it's essential to recognize that this hairstyle has been embraced by various African ethnic groups across the continent and is not exclusive to the Zulu tribes as claimed by (Bizimungu, 2021).

The Bantu knots have cultural significance and historical roots within the diverse traditions of African hairstyling. This hairstyle has been passed down through generations, representing a form of self-expression and cultural identity. It is important to appreciate the rich tapestry of African cultures and recognize the widespread use and significance

of Bantu knots among various ethnic groups throughout southern and west Africa (Mensah, 2020). The hairstyle is created by twisting portions of hair until a knot forms, and it is typically worn as a protective hairstyle by women with Afro-textured hair. According to Mensah (2020), Bantu knots are frequently adopted as a protective hairstyle, particularly by individuals with Afro-textured hair. Protective hairstyles serve the purpose of reducing damage and breakage, thereby supporting the overall health and growth of natural hair. The knots play a crucial role in safeguarding the hair ends and mitigating exposure to environmental factors that might contribute to hair damage.

Despite being a basic and typical styling method, Bantu knots have a politicised Western context. Bencosme (2017) states that Bantu knots are a statement of pro-Blackness and self-love because of the significant African heritage associated with the style. However, like with many Black historical forms, mainstream expectations leave potential for criticism, misunderstanding, and appropriation (Bencosme, 2017).

### **2.3.2 Artificial hairstyles**

Artificial hair, commonly referred to as synthetic hair, is a type of hair material engineered to resemble natural human hair while being manufactured from synthetic fibres such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polyvinyl chloride (PVC), or polypropylene (Smith, Johnson, & Williams, (2019). These fibres are often processed and styled to mimic the texture, colour, and shine of real hair, offering a cost-effective alternative to natural hair products.

Ancient wigs are seldom preserved since hair is perishable and certain places of the Roman Empire have a humid climate. However, historical evidence indicates that wigs were commonly used, regardless of the presence of natural hair. Prominent individuals like Emperors Otho and Domitian, as well as many others in Roman society, are known to have worn wigs. Toner (2014) states that women in the Flavian and Tarjani eras found wigs to be highly beneficial for creating the tall hairstyles that were popular during that time. Wigs allowed women to achieve voluminous styles regardless of their natural hair length or texture. The ancient author Juvenal eloquently described these hairstyles as resembling multi-story towers, and they were highly respected for their formidable appearance.

Wigs were made from human hair, and Black hair from India and blonde hair from Germany were particularly prized—especially if they came from the heads of conquered civilisations (Diop & Cook, 2012). The golden hair of many Germanic peoples was symbolic of the war's prizes. A natural appearance was preferred when wigs were worn to cover baldness, thus one with hair that matched the wearer's original colour was worn (Bartman, 2001). On the other hand, naturalism did not play a key role when a wig was worn as a fashion statement. It was evident that false wigs were favoured since they were usually braided with two different hair colours, as in India's black hair and blonde hair from Germany (Festa, 2005). Gold dust also lightened existing blond hair and gave the appearance of having blond hair. It was said that Emperor Lucius Verus covered his head in gold dust to make his naturally blond hair appear more uniform (Stenn, 2016).

Thomas (2013) asserts that a woman's hair serves as both her crowning achievement and a physical representation of her femininity. A woman's hair is thought to be an important indicator of both her health and attractiveness. Long, straight hair is preferred by the Western beauty standard. The establishment of such a norm generates a hierarchy of hair, with hair from African Americans at the bottom and long, straight hair at the top. Black women usually have dry, tightly curled, or coiled-styled hair. To meet the standards of Western ideals of beauty, most African American women "relax" or use chemical straighteners to achieve their desired results. Black haircare and styles from publications like *Sophisticate*, among others, which show Black women with straightened hair lend credence to this.

According to DeLongoria (2018), Black women in the United States of America were aware of the stereotypes and social comparisons associated with their hairstyles. They also understood that having loosened or straightened hair indicates favourable treatment, social acceptance, and occasionally easier employment conditions. Compared to women who wore their hair in more ethnic ways, ladies with straight or relaxed hair were viewed as friendlier and less dangerous (Mbilishaka and Hudlin, 2023). In North America, straight hair is still the standard, and employers typically require it, for African American women (Powell, 2018). Even micros (micro-braids), which give the appearance of long, straight hair due to their small size, are chosen by some women. According to Dabiri (2019), the rationale behind this decision varies throughout different generations.

A different type of artificial hairstyle called a hair weave involves weaving a section of human or synthetic hair into the wearer's natural hair. Weaves can alter a person's appearance for a long or brief period of time by adding additional hair to the wearer's natural hair or by completely covering the existing hair with human or artificial hairpieces (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014). One can enhance their hair without using chemicals by altering the texture, adding more human or artificial hair, or adding more volume, length, and colour (Mayo & Callender, 2021).

## **2.4 AFRICAN HAIR AND IDENTITY POLITICS**

Hair for Black women can serve a political purpose in addition to being a celebration of who they are. It can be a powerful weapon, especially if one works in an atmosphere where other employees' or the supervisor's behaviour has created a hostile or intimidating work environment that interferes with one's ability to do their job. African women are categorized as Black and treated accordingly based on their hair colour, texture, and style (Arnold, 2018).

Although African hair is naturally variable in texture, enslavement, rape, and intermarriage have increased the range of Black hair, which has complicated identity politics (Tharps, 2016). Historically, Black women at the extremes of the spectrum, with looser, straighter hair and whiter skin, have been described as more "energetic," "accommodating," and "perfect." Black women at the other end of the spectrum, when tighter curls meet darker complexion, receive the most unfavourable, intimidating, and unpopular adjectives. Many ladies straddle these two poles of fashion and comfort (Price, 2009).

Black hair range has been and is still employed as a predictor of Blackness, according to Banks (2000); as an illustration of consciousness, it exhibits varying degrees of combativeness or consistency. The term "hair police" is commonly used to describe the societal standards and expectations that determine whether Black women are accepted or rejected by specific social circles based on their hair preferences. This phenomenon highlights how race, gender, and appearance are intertwined, with Black women who have naturally curly hair or tightly coiled hair often being marginalized by Eurocentric beauty standards. Academic publications like Beverly Tatum's "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" (1997), Bell Hooks' "Hair Politics" (1997), and Trudier Harris' "Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning

Rituals" (1984) provide valuable perspectives on the intricate nature of racial identity, societal ideals of beauty, and the control exerted over the hairstyles of Black women. Moreover, current news articles, personal accounts, and online conversations offer concrete instances of how Black women handle instances of hair discrimination and the issue of being policed for their hair in different situations. A greater presence of naturally occurring African hair is believed to indicate a heightened level of Black consciousness when assessed by a person of colour. This includes having a high feeling about oneself and being proud to be Black.

Nevertheless, there is a perception that adopting straighter, lighter, and more European-styled hair colouring or hair trends among Black women is associated with a form of self-hatred (Price, 2009). These women are frequently accused of seeking to blend in or be more like White people; hence, they are viewed as sell-outs or supporters. Alternately, the opposing theory holds when a White person is the aggressor. A greater percentage of Black women with natural hair are illiterate, naïve, overly aggressive, and hostile. Fewer ethnic styles are adopted by Black women who perceive themselves to have more European ancestry, to be more civilised, and to be more socially accepted (Price, 2009).

There are several ethnic groups on the African continent, some of which are biologically similar, especially with darker skin tones and curly hair (Madlela, 2018b). However, Ndekei (2017) shows that judging race by hairstyle is becoming increasingly difficult with the international movement of people and products. In this era, racial and national identities compete with global identities. Brosius and Polit (2020) also postulate that the rapid development of international personnel and international exchanges with advances in technology has been linked to the diversification and mixing of identities. Johnson and Bankhead (2014) maintain that for women and girls in Africa, identity is inseparable from hair and performance. Many cultures place a high value on hair and depending on social and cultural contexts, different hairstyles have different symbolic meanings. The symbolism of the hair encompasses every element of African culture and existence and is very emblematic of Africans.

However, Muhtar et al. (2017) demonstrate that the head, as a sign of female identity, is both physical and private on the one hand and public on the other. Depending on their personality, each person can style their hair differently. Different hairstyles can be displayed women to highlight each one's individuality. In this case, the abundance of hair

care and cosmetic products available on the market represents a form of industry democratisation that enables women the chance to express themselves (Shay & Van der Horst, 2019). Regardless of the social conventions that are prevalent in their culture, women have the freedom to select the form, colour, and haircut that they desire.

Consequently, Byrd and Tharps (2014b) indicate that “Blacks tend to assume that certain hairstyles tell us something about a person's socio-economic status.” Hairstyles have historically shown a social class and political position (Byrd & Tharps, 2014b; Rooks 1996; Chapman, 2007). During the era of slavery, individuals of African descent faced severe oppression, and aspects of their cultural identity, including hairstyles, became significant markers of resistance and resilience. Many African cultures had diverse and rich traditions related to hair grooming, each with its own symbolic meanings. Enslaved individuals often used hairstyles to maintain a sense of identity, cultural continuity, and resistance against the dehumanizing effects of slavery (Kuumba, and Ajanaku, 1998).

Straightening or altering the natural texture of Black hair was sometimes associated with Eurocentric beauty standards that were imposed during slavery and later periods. Some individuals conformed to these standards, while others embraced their natural hair texture as an expression of pride and resistance. It's important to note that experiences varied widely among enslaved individuals, and the significance of hairstyles depended on factors such as the specific cultural background, regional differences, and personal choices (Mbilishaka, Clemons, Hudlin, Warner, and Jones, 2020).

In the 1900s, Black women in South Africa encountered several social, political, and cultural changes that had a significant influence on their lives and ideals of beauty. These women traversed the complicated dynamics of colonialism, segregation, and resistance from the early 20th century through apartheid and into the late 20th century, with each era bringing with it its problems and upheavals (Berger, 2016). During this time, efforts to question and redefine Eurocentric beauty standards coexisted with the persistence of these values, resulting in a richly varied century of experiences for Black women in South Africa. The influence of European beauty standards persisted throughout the century, impacting perceptions of attractiveness and acceptance. Various practices, including straightening or relaxing natural hair textures, were often employed by Black women to conform to these standards (Craig, 2002). This practice was, in part, driven by societal norms that favoured straight hair as more desirable.

While some Black women adhered to Eurocentric beauty standards, others resisted and embraced their natural hair textures, contributing to the broader cultural shifts that gained momentum from the mid-20th century onwards. The natural hair movement, which gained prominence from the 1960s onwards, encouraged Black individuals, particularly women, to embrace their natural hair textures and reject the notion that only Eurocentric features were beautiful (Drumond, 2020). Hair is a prominent characteristic of one's ethnicity and racial identity, and as a result, it serves as a "key ethnic identifier" (Mercer, 2000). Hair is one of "the various components of the multiple identities that are ingrained in Black women" (Chapman, 2007).

In accordance with the findings posited by Msweli and Gwayi (2019), hair is inherently personal and serves as an extension of an individual's personality. The rejection of one's hair is deemed as a repudiation of the fundamental essence of the individual. In addition, Harrison and Sinclair (2003) assert that hair may be changed to conform to societal norms and fashion trends, making it a tool for forming identities. Johnson and Bankhead (2014) also point out that Black women's hair is especially important to who they are. Even hair texture and style, according to Lukate (2019), have an impact on how a woman's identity is formed. The majority of Black women, according to Oyedemi (2016), use hair extensions to mask the imperfections in their natural hair. The notion of "imperfections" in the natural hair of Black women is a reflection of long-standing social ideals of beauty that favour features and hair textures that are characteristic of European origin (Hall, 2016; Byrd & Tharps, 2001). These criteria reinforce the notion that specific hair textures, especially those associated with Black and Afro-textured hair, are intrinsically inferior or less attractive (Akomolafe, 2019). The concept of "imperfections" implies a departure from the Eurocentric standard and strengthens a system of beauty hierarchy that marginalizes characteristics that do not adhere to it (Thompson & Keith, 2001). These misconceptions lead to the stigmatization of natural Black hair and diminish the self-esteem and confidence of Black women (Davis & Burns, 2016). Nevertheless, it is crucial to question and dismantle this idea by advocating for a variety of depictions of attractiveness and accepting natural hair textures as legitimate and aesthetically pleasing (Robinson & Ward, 2018). By acknowledging and appreciating the distinctiveness of different hair textures and styles, society may actively strive to dismantle detrimental preconceptions and cultivate a more inclusive and embracing atmosphere (Ogbara, 2014). As a counter-narrative, Johnson, and Bankhead (2014) emphasised the significance of forging a



positive natural identity for one's hair, as this can help people learn to embrace their hair as it is.

Black women's natural hair is still devalued in the English-speaking Caribbean, where it is seen as ugly, unprofessional, and in general inferior to Caucasian hair in both schools and workplaces (Bradshaw, 2015; Cavanagh, 2019; Martindale, 2015; and Sealy, 2015). Black women in the Caribbean, meanwhile, are gravitating more toward natural hairstyles. The internet is heavily influenced by this natural hair movement, which discusses changes in hairstyles, beauty practices, and lifestyles (Bardzell, 2010).

According to Rooks (1996), hair serves a multifaceted role for Black women, extending beyond a mere adornment to communicate nuanced messages regarding their self-identity and the desired perceptions they aim to convey to external observers. According to Rooks (1996), hairstyles in 1976 expressed racial identity politics and the bond between African American women. One's style can influence whether specific groups and social classes are accepted or rejected, as well as if job advancement is possible.

#### **2.4.1 Black women's diverse hairstyles in a south African visual arts context**

Due to South Africa's volatile history of colonialism and apartheid which prohibited cultural and racial assimilation into the then "mainstream" idea of society constructs such as identity, gender, race and culture are heavily contested issues (Marco, 2012). Therefore, this research also takes into consideration historical perspectives to highlight the complexities of representation for Black women and their hair throughout the history of visual arts (Marco, 2012).

According to Madlela (2018) the Black body is a politically charged subject and it has been historically produced and constructed as an object of desire and political embodiment of the 'Other'. Media influences the behaviour people display towards each other through what they have seen, heard, or watched on various mediums such as television shows, movies and music videos (Lewis, 2019). While there is a scarcity of literature on the representation of Black women's hair in South African films, it is important to note that throughout history, Black women have been represented in media with three distinctive stereotypes, Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire (Lewis, 2019). The Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire stereotypes are long-lasting stereotypes that have traditionally

influenced the portrayal of Black women in media. The Jezebel stereotype characterizes Black women as excessively sexualized and morally permissive, whereas the Mammy stereotype presents them as devoted and subservient caregivers. On the other hand, the Sapphire stereotype paints them as assertive and castrating. The stereotypes, which are based on racist and misogynistic beliefs, continue to spread damaging falsehoods about Black femininity and add to the process of treating Black women as objects and excluding them from society (Lewis, 2019). Although these are not South African constructed stereotypes, they penetrated the South African media industry.

Images of Black women in the media vary from the wild, untamed, and primitive to the exotic and beautiful (Madlela, 2018). It is critical to consider the historical context of the photographs' creation and publication, as well as the environment in which they are read (Madlela, 2018). During colonization and apartheid, pictures were created for a certain target audience (white people) who held the cultural capital to read them (Madlela, 2018).

## **2.5 MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF BLACK HAIR**

The mass media are powerful forces with the ability to have a wide range of effects on individuals (Gilchrist, 2011; Azibo, 2010; Shaker, 2009; Spellers & Moffitt, 2010; Thompson, 2009a; Thompson & Heinberg, 1999; Chomsky, 1991). Information is distributed to wide audiences using mass media such as television, radio, print, film, the internet, and other platforms. People interact with media of some kind daily, and as a result, the various outlets affect people's social, cultural, or economic lives (Biagi, 2010). People's perceptions of themselves and the world around them are significantly influenced by the messages that the media convey to the general audience.

According to Baker-Bell (2020), when showcasing Black people in the media, media outlets support White supremacist ideals and maintaining White supremacist structures, particularly in the media, has the effect of limiting how Black people and their blackness are represented (Baker-Bell, 2020). Additionally, the media have an impact on society's perceptions of beauty in a variety of ways (Thompson, 2009a). White women's appearances are important in shaping Western nations' perceptions of beauty, and these photographs have been developed and kept up to date through media outlets (Thompson, 2009a; Patton, 2006). According to Thompson (2009a) and Patton (2006), media outlets such as magazines, television, advertising, and social media carefully select and

distribute pictures of white women that conform to the standards of beauty that are now in vogue. These photographs are meticulously chosen, edited, and presented to accurately represent current trends and tastes, so playing a role in strengthening and transforming beauty standards over time. These photos have a huge impact on shaping social standards of beauty and affecting how individuals view themselves and others, as they are constantly circulated through various media outlets. Black women are hardly represented in the media, their natural hairstyles are perceived as unprofessional or unrepresentable (Henry, 2021). Beauty clichés that are similar to White aesthetics are distributed and reproduced through the media (Ellington, 2014). As a result, Black women have issues with mental health, cultural limits, and self-esteem (Ellington, 2014).

Women now have more freedom to choose the kind, colour, and hairstyle they want for themselves without having to consider social conventions because of the growth of the manufacturing and media industries (Muhtar et al., 2017). The industry has consistently established hair's existence and elevated it to a public right through a variety of cosmetic products. Its requirements are produced through media advertisements that are disseminated. In this situation, a woman's ability to reveal her identity through her hair is a facade of freedom. The concept of women's ability to express identity through hair as a facade of freedom has been explored in various contexts. For instance, Lewis (2006) discusses how societal norms and expectations often dictate women's choices regarding hairstyles, shaping their perceived freedom of expression. Similarly, Davis (2019) examines the intersection of race, gender, and hair politics, highlighting how Black women's hairstyles are often scrutinized and policed, constraining their ability to authentically express their identities. These works shed light on the complexities of hair as a form of self-expression and the underlying social and cultural factors that may limit women's true autonomy in this regard. Women's use of beauty products has prompted them to yield to the industry's submission process, although in the modern world, they do have a selection of hairstyles (Wolf, 2013). As media consumers, they are gradually building their self-identity through the mass media's lifestyle trends.

### **2.5.1 South Africa's hair and beauty industry**

As posited by Mercer (2000) and expounded upon by Madlela (2018a), the media plays a pivotal role in endorsing specific lifestyles and body images. Notably, a substantial number of women globally allocate considerable financial resources to adhere to the

Western standard of aesthetic hair, thereby highlighting the pervasive influence of media-driven ideals (Clark, 2020). South Africa's hair care industry is designed to meet the needs of both African and Caucasian textured hair due to its multi-ethnic population (Nyamnjoh, Durham & Fokwang, 2002).

The assertion that the needs of African hair surpass those of Caucasian hair, as articulated by Dove and Powers (2018), underscores a substantive distinction that extends beyond mere stylistic preferences. The diverse array of hairstyles embraced by Black women, ranging from natural textures to straightened hair, locks, and braids, necessitates a nuanced understanding of hair care requirements. The reference to "needs" rather than "fashions" implies that these distinct hair characteristics are not solely driven by transient trends or fashionable choices but are rooted in essential and specific care demands intrinsic to the diverse nature of African hair. Also, the economic engagement of African women in the global market through expenditure on hair care products accentuates the practical and ongoing nature of these needs, transcending the ephemeral realm of fashion.

In contrast to disparities in body shape or facial features, Rojas-Sosa (2020) contends that ethnic distinctions in hair can be more easily modified by cultural practices like straightening. Black women frequently change their hair (styles), which has increased the production and marketing of hair products designed exclusively for Black hair. The focus is on Africa since, according to Madlela (2018b), both South Africa specifically and the entire continent are swiftly growing into significant hubs for the hair and beauty industries. As indicated by Euromonitor reports, Procter & Gamble, Unilever South Africa, Avon, Colgate-Palmolive, Justine, and L'Oréal South Africa stand at the forefront of the beauty and personal care sector among international corporations (Chinomona, 2018). These companies also serve the needs of these consumers and are consumers of the country (Wolf, 2013).

Although international enterprises are currently dominant, domestic start-ups are establishing a reputation for themselves. In the tumultuous 1980s, certain companies, such as Black Like Me, were founded with the aim of dismantling the colonial mindset in Africa (Nyoni, 2019). The 2004-founded company Duelle takes pride in advertising its range of products, which includes low lye relaxers, conditioners for the hair and scalp, and gels and sprays for at-home and salon style.

## **2.5.2 Social media and black hair**

With the advancement of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, new forums for the discussion of Black hair have emerged. Social media platforms have played a significant role in promoting natural hair acceptance among women as well as normalising kinky, curly, and afro hairstyles. Gill (2015) argues that women are given the chance to speak up in online forums about the issues they encounter in society with relation to their hair because the web is well known for its participatory culture.

### **2.5.2.1 Instagram**

The use of Instagram increases the impression of psychological empowerment both directly and indirectly (Riquelme, Rios and Al-Thufery, 2018). This has inspired Black women to accept their natural hair and gain confidence in themselves, and this platform encourages Black women to make use of alternative ways to care for their hair instead of using hair straightening chemicals, which could harm their hair and scalp. Additionally, social media enables users to fulfil their desire for human connection, a sense of belonging, and a desire to be heard (Riquelme et al., 2018). As a result, Instagram enables users to discuss their personal hair experiences, consequently establishing bonds among community members.

Hair care methods, styling, and product recommendations are shared with followers through tutorials, videos, and Instagram stories. For instance, the Instagram page “Healthy Hair Journey” (2020) brings together ladies from all over the world, who have the same objective of returning to natural hair. It serves as a handbook, providing advice on how to maintain their natural hair as well as the steps required in the distinct phases of development. It also serves as an online community, where women may interact with one another, identify with one another, and experience a sense of belonging.

Instagram has aided Black women in normalising their hair and spreading awareness of the value of treating one’s locks with love and care. According to Everett (2018), Zozibini Tunzi’s natural hair portrait was widely circulated on Instagram when she was named Miss Universe 2019, and many fan groups were formed. Additionally, this has supported and normalised the idea that Black women may look good while wearing their natural hair. On her Instagram feed, for instance, Alicia Keys routinely sports protective hairstyles and

loves her natural curls (Gayles & Yu, 2019). The acceptance of one's hair by innumerable Black women has been made easier by the fact that such powerful people display their natural beauty.

### **2.5.2.2 YouTube**

Social media are a tool for change and a welcoming atmosphere for those seeking assistance because of the quick and easy access to information and the development of virtual communities (Ellington, 2014). Among social media sites, YouTube has made a name for itself as a crucial community-building tool. YouTube encourages involvement and makes it possible for regular people to create videos. As additional people post material to the network, its cultural significance is continually reinterpreted across a variety of concerns (Burgess & Green, 2009). Online influencers determine how information is spread and opinions are expressed on platforms like YouTube (Susarla, Oh & Tan, 2012).

YouTube has significantly contributed to the dissemination of information on natural hair and influenced the ongoing discussion on the topic. Viewers engage in a consistent and shared practice of watching videos featuring natural hair, wherein they are collectively informed and motivated to act. This recurrent behaviour aligns with concepts in media studies and cultural engagement, where repeated actions contribute to shared experiences and cultural identity formation (Walter, 2020; Ellington, 2014). Due to its para-social character, which is described as the appearance of "face-to-face interaction" between content providers and viewers, YouTube possesses a distinctive capability to achieve this (Walter, 2020). This turns into a much more powerful tool for fostering community interaction than having readers merely interact with blog posts or still images on other sites. According to Walter (2020), Black women can interact with the people they choose to watch and the content they are searching for, whether it be support, education, or encouragement, by using both visual aids and in-depth information.

### **2.5.2.3 Television representation of black hair**

While the natural hair movement originated as a real social phenomenon, its portrayal in movies reflects broader cultural attitudes and perceptions surrounding Black identity and beauty standards. Therefore, the evolution of media portrayals in movies may indicate a

shift in societal norms and acceptance of natural hair among Black women, influencing how these themes are depicted and explored in cinematic narratives (Thomas, 2013). In contrast to Spike Lee's movies *Jungle Fever* and *School Daze*, there have not been many movies that have only featured Black hair (Banks, 2000). Lately, prominent figures exhibiting their Black hair on television programs are increasingly challenging and dispelling long-standing negative perceptions associated with Black hair. Black actresses have altered their natural hair either following their debut in films or due to directives from costume and makeup managers to appeal to mainstream audiences starting with Josephine Baker's meticulously styled, slicked-down coiffure in the 1934 film "Zouzou" and extending through Hattie McDaniel's roles in "Gone with the Wind," wherein her hair was recurrently obscured by a headscarf (Canella, 2020).

However, as more Black directors and scriptwriters have access to creative freedom, there has been a rise in projects that highlight the variety of Black life, including hairstyles. The Marvel film "Black Panther" stands as the most comprehensive representation of the diversity of Black hairstyles to date (Bucciferro, 2021). Moreover, current television programs such as "Black-ish," "Insecure," "She's Gotta Have It," "Dear White People," and "Queen Sugar" routinely showcase and discuss the array of hairstyles worn by Black women (Dabiri, 2019).

The excitement of having unrestricted access to one's hair and the challenges of gaining acceptance for it have both been leveraged as plot hooks in "Living Single" and HBO's "Insecure" (Yacowar, 2003). According to Siebler (2021), the discourse on Black hair has become increasingly prominent due to the availability of many popular shows from the 1990s and 2000s, such as "Moesha," "Girlfriends," "The Parkers," "The Game," and "Sister," on Netflix. The statistics affirm this trend: In 2017, the Season 2 premiere of "Insecure" achieved its highest-ever same-day rating, reaching 1.1 million viewers. Additionally, within two days of its August debut, "Moesha," featuring a character with braids, ascended to become Netflix's fourth most-watched series.

However, this was not always the case. Braids were once perceived as an alternative to the prevailing trend of pin-straight, relaxed hair during that period. They were often associated with portraying stereotypical "hood" characters, as exemplified by Queen Latifah in the 1996 film "Set It Off," or with characters involved in criminal activities. The

more refined or well-styled a character appeared, the greater the likelihood that mainstream viewers would identify with them.

While the variety of Black hair on television continued to grow, Chaney and Robertson (2016) note that the White standard persisted in the background, particularly on ABC's "Scandal", where Kerry Washington played Olivia Pope in the Emmy Award-winning series, which debuted in 2012 and was directed by Shonda Rhimes. She used her influence to assist the White House in resolving several issues. However, as evidenced by her relationship with the show's White president, her identity remained tokenized. Pope had set herself the impossible task of always having straight hair, sleeping without a hat or hair wrap, and waking up without frizz (Tremper, 2006).

## **2.6 HISTORY OF DRAMAS**

The term "drama" traces its origins to its Greek roots, specifically from the Greek word "dran," meaning "to do" or "to act." In the context of ancient Greece, drama encompassed various theatrical performances, including tragedies and comedies, and was a significant cultural and artistic form (McDonald, and Walton, 2007). Greek drama, which flourished in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, comprised two main genres: tragedy and comedy. Tragedies, exemplified by works of playwrights like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, explored serious and often sombre themes, while comedies, as seen in the works of Aristophanes, focused on humour and satire (Walton, 2015). These Greek dramatic traditions laid the foundation for subsequent developments in theatrical storytelling.

William Shakespeare became recognized as a leading actor in the field of play after a thorough reading of the Elizabethan period in England. His plays, such as "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Romeo and Juliet," not only contributed significantly to the evolution of English drama but also became enduring classics (Graham, and Kolentzis, 2019). Shakespeare's exploration of human nature, complex characters, and poetic language shaped the dramatic landscape for centuries to come. As societies evolved, the entertainment genres in the pre-broadcasting era, including literature, stage plays, and other live performances, served as direct precursors to radio drama and later television drama. Hand & Traynor (2011) indicates that in the 19th and early 20th centuries,



serialized novels, theatrical productions, and variety shows captivated audiences, setting the stage for the transition of dramatic storytelling into the new medium of radio.

Radio drama gained popularity in the early 20th century, providing a platform for scripted, audio-based storytelling (Hand, and Traynor, 2011). This format continued to evolve with the advent of television, leading to the creation of television dramas that became a dominant and influential genre in the entertainment industry (Chalaby, 2016). The rich history of drama, from its roots in ancient Greece through the works of Shakespeare to its adaptation into radio and television, reflects the enduring appeal and adaptability of this form of storytelling across diverse cultures and time periods.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, dramas first appeared on radio and television, primarily serving to entertain domestic workers (Drain, 1996; Buckman, 1984). Similarly, Harrington, Scardaville, Lippman, and Bielby (2015) make it clear that dramas were serialized stories anchored in radio and television daytime transmissions in the United States of America in the early 1930s. In contrast to critics of primetime television, film, music, and theatre, "much less is known about the origin, role, and position of daytime television critics," even though dramas were one of television's first forms of programming (Bielby, 2011:251). As a result, dramas have received only cursory attention from the television business because,

"long-held notions that the audience was not sophisticated enough to appreciate critical analysis, that the genre was not authentically complex enough to be subjected to a critical evaluation, and that there was no need for critics or their criticism because the audience was already firmly attached to the medium and would watch regardless of esthetical evaluation, and that the audience itself was so devoted and knowledgeable due to avid viewing that it managed to serve a purpose for the medium that was not served by critics or their criticism (Harrington, Scardaville, Lippman & Bielby, 2015)".

However, Anitha (2014) and Hilmes (1990) suggest that the history of dramas can be traced back to the 1800s when they materialised in the form of novel writing and newspaper in a serialised format. According to many sources (Allen, 1985; Slade & Beckenhem, 2005; Tufte, 2005; Lavender, 2016), dramas first appeared in American "daytime soap operas" in the 1930s. Dramas also became prominent and influential on

television and radio from their first premiere. Therefore, the researcher emphasizes that the history of dramas can be traced back to the period when television and radio were introduced in Latin America during the 20th century (Nelson, 2013). The introduction of television and radio had a significant global influence, completely transforming the fields of entertainment and communication on a worldwide scale. Across continents such as North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, these innovative technologies revolutionized the manner in which narratives were conveyed and experienced, hence facilitating the rise of dramas as a dominant mode of entertainment worldwide (Nelson, 2013).

Additionally, the term "soap opera" originated from the fact that soap manufacturers served as sponsors and producers of the first dramatic radio serials (Quart & Auster, 2018). The term "television drama" originated in America and later spread to other countries like Britain, India, Australia, Korea, and eventually South Africa (Nelson, 2013). The evolution of the genre aimed to entertain stay-at-home spouses and domestic workers during breaks, with a primary goal to advertise soaps (Hobson, 2008). These serialized dramas were sponsored by major soap powder manufacturers such as Palmolive and Colgate, strategically designed to attract stay-at-home spouses and generate listeners and viewers (Cox, 2005).

The first serial considered a drama was "Painted Dreams," which debuted on WGN radio in Chicago on October 20, 1930. Its broadcast was weekly and targeted predominantly female audiences, especially housewives and domestic workers (Svanberg Mattsson, 2022). Clara, Lu 'n Em" was traced to be the first soap to be aired on national radio known as the National Corporation Blue Network at 10:30 pm on Tuesday 1931 January 27 in Chicago (Nyaruri et al., 2014). In Britain, the first drama "Peyton Place" was screened from 1964 to 1969 on British Television. On the other hand, the Korean drama "Frog Husband" first premiered in Korea in 1962 (Oh, 2012). Likewise, in India "Hum Lug" was screened for the first time in the 1980s (Pandža, Franjić, Trinajstić, Škvorc, and Stančić, 2001). However, the drama continues and is still reaching and increasing the number of viewers across the country. Dramas gained more popularity between 1965 and 1970.

### **2.6.1 Dramas in South Africa**

Dramas serve as the flagship offerings of television channels worldwide, and South Africa is no exception. This open form of storytelling aspires to endure from one episode to

another, or at least for as long as it can captivate the audience's attention. Askwith (2007) posits that episodes are typically marketed as 30 minutes long, although they are actually 22-24 minutes in duration, and the rationale is apparent: considerable time investment is necessary to generate considerable advertising revenue. Similar to their international counterparts, South African dramas are custom-tailored to adhere to a winning formula. They feature a provocative plot replete with conflict and intrigue, along with characters that elicit both audience affection and disdain (Sukhan, 2019).

As outlined by Mpanza (2018), *Generations*, initially broadcasted in 1994 on SABC, has consistently held the top position among South African dramas for numerous years. The narrative unfolds within the advertising industry, exploring themes of competition, betrayal, and extortion. Notably, *Generations* stands as South Africa's inaugural television series that not only garners revenue through commercial episodes but also derives income from strategically integrated product placements within the script (Wittebols, 2004).

Giappone (2012) indicates that *Rhythm City* (ETV) debuted in July 2007 as a replacement for *Backstage*, which lost its appeal to viewers. To those without expertise, *Rhythm City* may appear like *Backstage*, yet it still won the favour of the audience. The series is set in the world of the music industry and the story revolves around record labels, promoters, producers, DJs, stars, stars, stars of the past, their families, and lovers. Television dramas in South Africa are considered more popular and the most loved genre than other television genres like documentaries, news, sport, movies, reality shows and sitcoms. More than five-million viewers watch dramas daily on television stations like SABC 1,2,3, ETV, and DSTV channels (Film Publication Board, 2019; Film Publication Board, 2009).

Moreover, Mwali (2016) posits that dramas gained popularity by generating suspense through their ongoing storylines, effectively captivating viewers and keeping them engaged with their television screens. This indicates that a majority of viewers are drawn to dramas due to their realistic portrayal of societal issues, coupled with their ability to educate and entertain through compelling storylines (Rosenthal and Folb, 2021). Therefore, most drama viewers associate the character's lifestyle and personality with the reality that they have also experienced. Similarly, according to Wagumba (2021), the genre is well-known for its ability to provide entertainment, depict reality, address social issues, and reflect everyday life situations.

## 2.6.2 Characteristics of dramas

Every genre possesses its own distinct characteristics. This holds true for television dramas, which, regardless of factors like nation, culture, economics, or politics, showcase unique features that set them apart within the broader landscape of media genres. Dramas interact with their audience's experiences through their characters, and typically their content consists of stories from everyday life, although there are common characteristics across the world. Seiter et al. (1989) denote that a drama is characterised by its proximity to a viewer's daily life treatment of real and current issues. Additionally, they are accompanied by narratives of events in the lives of the lead characters of that drama (Hobson, 2003).

Dramas can be broadly categorised as television dramas with a series structure (Suggs, 2020). A core cast of characters and settings are present. The play gives the impression that even when viewers are not watching, life goes on in a made-up universe. The play reflects narrative theories of seriality and continuity in TV dramas and soap operas. Its portrayal suggests an ongoing life in the fictional universe, persisting even when viewers are not actively watching. This aligns with the serialized nature of soap operas, where interconnected storylines unfold across multiple episodes (Hilmes, Huber, Jaramillo, Martin, Milch, Nayman, Seitz, Sharrett, Taubin and Willimon, 2014). The narrative strategy aims to sustain viewer engagement by creating a dynamic and continuously evolving fictional world (Mittell, 2006).

As a result, the story develops linearly through action and emotional high points and thoughts. Its main narrative structure is a continual form of repeated catharsis (Mathobela, 2021). Dramas draw from fictional realism, exploring and celebrating the intricacies of everyday family life. Their success is rooted in the audience's recognition and identification with the depicted people and circumstances, creating a sense of familiarity. This connection is strengthened by the portrayal of relatable, everyday situations, contributing to the appeal and effectiveness of the genre (Mathobela, 2021). The following are the three main characteristics of dramas:

### 2.6.3 Duration of telenovelas

Duration, in the context of visual storytelling, relates to the amount of time required to fight a single episode of a commercial, drama, film or any other related content. Television dramas, often referred to as TV series, telenovelas, or soap operas, are a distinct genre within the realm of visual storytelling. Unlike traditional stage dramas, television dramas are serialized narratives designed for episodic consumption on television or digital platforms. These series typically consist of multiple episodes, each contributing to an overarching storyline that unfolds over time.

The importance of duration in television dramas is multifaceted, influencing the structural integrity, audience engagement, and narrative complexity of these serialized narratives Melina (2008). Firstly, the duration of episodes significantly impacts the structural coherence of television dramas. According to Lu and Argyle (1993), the pacing and depth of storytelling within each episode are directly affected by the allocated time frame. This implies that longer durations allow for more comprehensive exploration of plotlines and character development, contributing to a more cohesive narrative structure. Additionally, Hahn (2005) notes that television dramas lack the linear structure of traditional dramas, with no clear beginning, middle, or end within individual episodes. As a result, the duration becomes a critical factor in maintaining the continuity and coherence of the story across episodes, ensuring that each instalment contributes meaningfully to the overarching narrative arc (Lu and Argyle, 1993).

Secondly, duration plays a pivotal role in shaping audience engagement with television dramas. Longer episodes provide ample time for character development, plot twists, and emotional resonance, thereby enhancing viewer immersion and investment in the storyline. Melina (2008) highlights the significance of duration in influencing audience perception, suggesting that longer episodes allow for greater narrative complexity and depth. This aligns with the findings of Lu and Argyle (1993), who emphasize that extended durations enable the exploration of intricate storylines and nuanced character motivations. By immersing viewers in a rich and multifaceted narrative world, longer episodes can captivate audiences and sustain their interest over multiple instalments and seasons.

Moreover, duration impacts the narrative complexity of television dramas, with longer episodes facilitating deeper exploration of themes and character arcs. According to Artman (2017), television dramas feature long storylines delivered through periodic episodes, often with commercial breaks interspersed. This format allows for the development of complex narrative threads and the incorporation of multiple subplots within each episode. As noted by Hahn (2005), the absence of a clear episodic resolution in television dramas encourages the continuous unfolding of storylines over time, contributing to the overall complexity and depth of the narrative. Therefore, the duration of episodes serves as a crucial determinant of the storytelling potential and creative scope available to television drama creators.

#### **2.6.4 Dramatic serial narratives**

Globally, television dramas not only attract large audiences but build loyalty among the viewers (Allen, 1985). This is mainly because they depict everyday life situations that audiences experience daily. The situations include love, everyday lifestyles, violence, problems and solving problems. Artman (2017) highlights that addictive nature of dramas, demonstrated by scriptwriters strategically incorporating captivating hooks at the end of commercials and daily episodes, effectively maintaining viewer engagement. Consequently, at the conclusion of a daily drama episode, the audience is left in suspense, generating intense excitement and anticipation for what lies ahead.

Dramas are keeping up with society, as demonstrated by Anitha (2014), which offers viewers fresh narratives that mirror contemporary culture. Therefore, effective story construction provides valuable content, engages with dynamic action, and possesses an influential and irresistible quality. The loyalty of audiences is mainly based on the emphasis on family, personal lifestyle, interpersonal relationships, sexual attraction, and emotional and moral conflict. Similarly, Nyaruri et al. (2014) point out that the background of dramas is the usual interior space of the family, and occasionally travels to a new place. This kind of portrayal mainly tells the lives of a group of people who live or work in a particular place. Sometimes, dramas focus on a large family, delving to some extent into specific cultural, political, and traditional aspects. Basically, these are the everyday experiences that people mostly care about and tend to follow to navigate, solve problems, and engage with in their daily lives.

## **2.6.5 Multiple characters and plots**

Family, life, interpersonal relationships, sexual drama, culture, violence, and moral dilemmas are highlighted in TELEVISION dramas (Nyaruri et al., 2014). Most current events discussions predominantly unfold in a familiar setting, occasionally diverting to different locations and interiors to provide additional context for the characters. It centres on a huge extended family or chronicles the lives of a group of characters who reside or work in a certain location. According to Mwali (2016), the main characters frequently maintain an elevated level of credibility, making it challenging for viewers to distinguish them from fictional actors. This is because these characters represent authentic journeys, struggles, emotions, and difficulties that viewers deal with daily. Dramas utilize three narrative techniques to depict current events: firstly, by incorporating themes of high social interest; secondly, through verbal allusions to ongoing events; and thirdly, by integrating plot structures and motifs that resonate with the audience's preferences (Melina, 2008). However, by connecting the storyline to the characters' everyday lives and the fictional social context in which they exist, drama plots portray a fictional reality that is incorporated into a concrete social reality (Melina, 2008).

## **2.7 THE ROLE OF PROTAGONIST AND ANTAGONIST**

### **2.7.1 Protagonist**

Proferes (2005) defines the protagonist as the central figure in a certain piece of literature, theatre, cinema, or other narrative work. There is a prevailing notion that the protagonist in a narrative is invariably portrayed as the "hero," although this is not necessarily accurate. The main character has the potential to also assume the role of the villain. Viewers must connect with the protagonists and the characters surrounding the narrative details in TV drama. These characters are frequently positioned in direct conflict with another person, group, or institution and are referred to as opponents (Choi, 2016). During the conflict with an adversary, the protagonist frequently goes through some significant emotional or intellectual shifts.

The protagonist is described by Aristotle (384-322 BCE) in his *Poetics* as being a valuable character with strengths and weaknesses, but most importantly, as someone with whom

the spectator can empathise or identify. In many cases, the protagonist is called the “hero” of the story. Taylor (2016) points out that although there are no fixed rules to define what an effective protagonist is, these roles are often complex and detailed. The viewer is directly or indirectly aware of the protagonist’s emotions and can usually relate to the personal challenges they face throughout the narrative. Although many stories focus on events, other stories use events as tools to shape and change the protagonist’s psychological and emotional state (Igartua & Fiuza, 2018). Such changes, rather than the event itself, are often the focus of the narrative.

### **2.7.2 Antagonist**

In the narrative, the antagonist is a rival or adversary who opposes the protagonist or the protagonist's objective ("confrontation") and generates a significant conflict. The antagonist might manifest as an individual or a collective entity. In traditional narratives, the villains typically assume the role of the antagonists. In literature, the antagonist refers to the primary adversary or contrasting force that opposes the main character, known as the protagonist, in a drama or narrative. The term "antagonist" is derived from the Greek word "antagonists," which translates to "adversary or opponent" (Ehler, 2006). An adversary might take the form of a person, animal, natural force, or psychological inclination that obstructs the protagonist's endeavours to accomplish their goal. The antagonist can be described as the character that one does not wish to support, often portrayed as the malevolent figure or the villain. Typically, they are the individuals who exhibit the less pleasant aspects of human behaviour.

## **2.8 BACKGROUND TO THE SELECTED DRAMAS**

### **2.8.1 Background of “Uzalo”**

"Uzalo" is a dramatic television series produced by Duma Ndlovu, a renowned playwright, producer, and co-written by Chris Radebe, the head writer. It is produced by Mpfariseni King Dave Mukwevho, executive produced by Gugulethu Zuma-Ncube and Mmaditse Thibedi. Lastly, it is directed by Sbongiseni Zondi, Sello Letsatsi, Sabelo Ndlovu, Fikile Mogodi and Kgatontle Mdleleni under Stained Glass Productions (Nzimande, 2021).



"Uzalo" is a provocative, bold, and fictional narrative drama that tells the story of two family dynasties, the Mdletshes and the Xulus. Its slogan is "blood is forever". "Uzalo" achieves authenticity through its portrayal of relatable human experiences and societal issues within its fictional narrative. The imaginative characters and events still resonate with real-life situations, fostering a genuine connection with the audience (Lipkin, 2002). Ultimately, the show captures universal truths about the human condition, enhancing its relatability and authenticity.

It tells the story of the rivalry between two families, which revolves around two young men named Mxolisi and Ayanda. They are both believed to carry hopes and a legacy of their families as they face complexities in their lives such as family, money, and love. The Mdletshes, guided by patriarch Pastor Melusi Mdletshe (Bheki Mkhwane) and currently (Glen Gabela), lead the God-fearing family at the KwaMashu Kingdom Church. In contrast, the Xulu family, headed by Muzi Xulu (Mpumelelo Bhulose), now known as Nkunzi (Masoja Msiza), engages in a life of crime, creating a moral conflict within the storyline.

The two families are projected as immersed in a contradictory world of church and crime, respectively. The first episode of *Uzalo* premiered on Monday of 9th February 2015 at 20:00 on SABC 1. It originally aired from Monday to Thursday, starting on February 9, 2015, until early September 2016. Due to a growing viewership, it was later expanded to include Fridays from September 2016 onwards. The decision to augment the broadcast days from three to five signifies a modification in the "Uzalo" programming schedule. Nevertheless, the alteration in the number of broadcast days has no impact on the type of the show, which remains a soap opera. "Uzalo" broadcasted an omnibus every Sunday from 12:30 to 14:00, starting from February 14 to September 2016, when it was extended to 15:00 and has continued to the present.

Moreover, the Broadcast Research Council of South Africa in December 2016 confirmed that "Uzalo" is the most-watched soap on SABC 1, and it continues to grow its viewership. Also, in January 2017, the Broadcasting Research Council of South Africa (BRCSA) said that "Uzalo" was still the top drama in South Africa, sitting at number one on the most-watched TV show lists for both top five and top ten per channel. The story commenced during the period when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Within the story, there was an unintentional mix-up of two infants born on February 11 at Queen Anne Hospital.

While Ayanda Xulu (Khumbulani Kay Sibiya) was switched and given to the Mdletshe family, where he grew up in a typically Christian home, Mxolisi Mdletshe (Naymaps Maphalala) was nurtured by the family of criminals. After twenty-four years, both the Mdletshe and the Xulus remain oblivious that their boys were switched at birth. Furthermore, they have not experienced any significant changes in their lives due to the absence of their sons.

Amid personal aspirations, the play explores the value of loyalty and family ties. It unfolds a narrative where caring patriarchs exert an unfavourable influence on their ambitious progeny, shaping the plot and character development within the storyline. Then, when one of the family members' chooses to forego family business in favour of their career aspirations, tension develops between the family members. On the other hand, the Xulus are portrayed in *KwaMashu* as a strong, wealthy, and prosperous family. Represented as the most violent and criminal family in the community, they stand in contrast to the Mdletshe, a respected family actively striving to combat crime and violence in their community. Once Mxolisi completes his studies and obtains his law degree, he becomes acquainted with the criminal enterprise run by his family. Mxolisi encounters Mastermind, portrayed by Ntokozo Dlamini, who is likewise deeply involved in a criminal lifestyle. Mxolisi's education is revealed as less important and useless, prompting him to join and invest his life in crime.

The narrative of *Uzalo* also reflects on two concepts, namely plot and popularity, which are briefly discussed. In essence, the drama depicts how the family uses unlawful means to amass a fortune. According to Onuh (2017), *Uzalo* delves deeply into its characters' lifestyles and attitudes, showing the intricacies of ambitious yet dysfunctional families who resort to violence and criminality for financial gain. The series explores the moral quandaries that its protagonists encounter, as well as the implications of their decisions. Viewer acceptance of *Uzalo* can be ascribed to its capacity to reflect real-life challenges by showing relevant human situations and dilemmas (Onuh, 2017).

"*Uzalo*" draws viewers from a wide spectrum of demographics, including different ages, races, and occupations. Its storyline, which frequently dives into societal issues while also combining themes of family drama and romance, appeals to a wide audience. "*Uzalo*" has a diverse viewership, with young adults, middle-aged people, and senior audiences all showing a strong interest. Its modern topics and sympathetic people may particularly

appeal to younger audiences (BRCSA, 2017). Reflecting South Africa's cosmopolitan environment, the show's viewership is likely to be multiracial, with its portrayal of characters from many racial backgrounds contributing to its broad appeal. According to the council's report, "Uzalo" attracted an incredible 8,116,993 viewers in January 2017.

### **2.8.2 Background of “*The River*”**

*The River* is a fast-paced series/drama known for its thrilling moments. It elicits a quick sensation of intense exhilaration, enjoyment, or apprehension in the spectators. It was created specifically for broadcasting on the 1Magic Channel (Channel 103) on DSTV. According to Ferreira (2017), it is characterized as an exhilarating telenovela where two worlds merge in a dramatic manner. Besides, it is a story of two worlds intertwined by secret, murder, and betrayal. Mbonambi (2018) states that Phathutshedzo Makwarela and Gwydion Beynon, who also serve as Executive Producers, are the authors of "*The River*" produced by Tshedza Pictures Production. The show is co-produced by Connie and Shona Ferguson, and the production team includes Candice Tennant Bonga and Percy Vilakazi. Johny Barbuzano is at the helm as the director (Mbonambi, 2018).

*The River* is set in Pretoria (Tshwane) and follows the lives of two dynasty families: the Dlamini's and Mokoena's. According to Ferreira (2017), *The River* is situated in Refilwe, Cullinan, and Pretoria, and it depicts the collision of two distinct but interdependent worlds in thrilling turn events. The families are from diverse backgrounds that are brought together and divided by the discovery of diamonds in Cullinan, a stone's throw away from Pretoria. It is a telenovela set in South Africa about the contrast between prosperity and poverty. The haves and have nots bound together by secrets and betrayal as they battle for land. Mabaso (2019) concurs that the show is established as a journey of two worlds that reflect the essence of township struggles.

The protagonist of the narrative, Sindi Dlathu, played by Lindiwe Dlamini Dikana, rises from the underclass to become a diamond mining tycoon. She depicts a refined and astute mining tycoon who has defeated anyone who dares oppose her financial interests with her high-heeled shoes. Laron Moagi, on the other hand, portrays Itumeleng Mokoena, a young individual from the "poor" part of town who is determined to thwart

Lindiwe's relentless greed, even if it means her actions negatively affect her beloved neighbourhood. However, this drama portrays the courage and trickery that ultimately clash when the families are unable to reconcile their disagreements. This is demonstrated by the show's ongoing depiction of a journey that combines the gritty reality of ongoing township issues with the glamour and harshness of the commercial world. It may be summed that the factors attracting the upper class to the show likely involve themes, lifestyles, or narratives that resonate with their preferences or aspirations, rather than the perfection of the plot itself (Nelson, 2013).

The first episode of *The River* was on Monday 29 January 2018 at 1:00 am on Mzansi Magic Channel 161. It was broadcasted from Monday to Friday from its first day of the premiere to date. Additionally, episodes repeat every weekday from 12:00 to 12:30. In addition to this, every Saturday from 17:00 to 19:30, it broadcasts its omnibus. Certainly, the notable cast of *The River* includes Lindiwe Dlamini Dikana (Sindi Dlathu), Zweli Dikana (Hlomla Dandala), Zolani Dlamini (Lawrence Maleka), Thato Mokoena (Don Mlangeni), Itumeleng Mokoena (Larona Moagi), and Malefu Mokoena (Motshidi Motshegwa). The show won awards during the 13th Annual SAFTAS in 2019. According to Ferreira (2017), the show bagged awards at the 13th Annual SAFTAS in 2019. According to Ferreira (2017), it won 11 awards out of 17 nominations. *The River* achieved recognition in various categories, including Best Scriptwriting, Telenovela, Directing, and excelled in the categories of Best Actor, Actor, and Supporting Actors. *The River* received nominations for the "2019 47th Emmy Awards" in Argentina, Colombia, Portugal, and New York (Engelbrecht, 2019). *The River's* viewership include both telenovela enthusiasts and those who value top-notch drama series.

### **2.8.3 Background of “Gomora”**

Seriti Films is the producer of the drama *Gomora*. It was created by M-Net exclusively for M-Net Mzansi Magic. In the narrative of the television show, two families with contrasting lives find themselves brought together by a catastrophe. The program draws its name from the fact that it is filmed in the Alexandra township. Gomorrah is a biblical city associated with moral depravity and divine punishment. Therefore, the name "Gomora" for a show filmed in Alexandra Township could suggest an exploration of societal issues, morality, or challenges within that context (Heer, 2019). *Gomora* is broadcast every day at 19:30 on DSTV channel 161. The storyline unfolds as it introduces a well-respected

man in the neighbourhood, facing financial struggles. This character stands in sharp contrast to another family led by a man who has amassed wealth through illicit means from a bank he owns. The convergence of their worlds occurs after a failed hijacking attempt, plunging both families into a whirlwind of chaos and upheaval (Ferreira, 2017). The programme explores social and economic issues as well as the disparity between South Africans from poor and upper socio-economic classes, whose contrast is vividly depicted using one of the most innovative filmmaking approaches (Narain, 2022). The show's audience primarily consists of South African viewers, particularly those interested in local drama series that reflect the realities of life in urban townships.

#### **2.8.4 Viewership of the selected soap operas**

Audience members who watch "*Gomora*," "*Uzalo*," and "*The River*" are primarily South African viewers who appreciate local culture and languages reflected in these dramas. They tend to be fans of soap operas and dramatic storytelling, enjoying intricate plots and character development (Mathobela, 2021). The age range of the audience is broad, encompassing teenagers to older adults, with a significant portion being in the 25-49 age bracket (Mxokozeli, 2021). These viewers are often socially engaged, valuing how the shows address real-life issues such as crime, poverty, and family dynamics (Mathobela, 2021). The fan base is loyal, regularly following the series and actively engaging on social media platforms and fan forums. Overall, the audience is diverse, coming from various economic and social backgrounds, which reflects the inclusivity and relatability of the shows (Mxokozeli, 2021).

### **2.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Three theories, *Social Representation*, *Audience Reception* and *Social Identity Theory*, forms the study's theoretical framework.

#### **2.9.1 Social Representation Theory**

Social Representation Theory, as articulated by Stuart Hall (1989) focuses on how media constructs and perpetuates social stereotypes. It examines how dominant classes and media portray minority communities, gender, and sexuality, often reinforcing existing power structures. In the context of the study, the theory offers a lens to analyse how

African hair is represented within these South African dramas, considering the societal messages conveyed through these representations (Butler, 1993; Hall, 1997).

The researcher employs Social Representation Theory to investigate how African hair is represented in South African dramas namely, *Uzalo*, *Gomora* and *The River*. By utilising this theoretical framework, the study aims to determine predominant types of hair portrayed and identify recurring elements contributing to societal norms regarding African hair (Blount, 1996). This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the layers of meaning and cultural influences embedded in media depictions of African hair within the context of the selected dramas.

Bird et al. (2007) suggest that symbolic codes, such as clothes and hair, along with technical codes, can be used to analyse social representations in dramas. Thus, the chosen sample of South African dramas can be analysed using these codes to understand how African hair is represented, examining the roles assigned to characters based on their gender (Blount, 1996). The portrayal of women in media offers insight into its influence on self-perception and its implications for societal values (Wang, 2020). Within the selected dramas, the representation of African hair may reflect broader societal attitudes towards women and their appearance. Therefore, analysing these representations through the lens of Social Representation Theory can provide valuable insights into gender dynamics and societal norms within the context of South African media.

The framework of Social Representation Theory offers a comprehensive approach to analysing the representation of African hair within the selected South African dramas. It allows for an exploration of how media constructs and perpetuates social stereotypes, particularly concerning gender and appearance, and provides valuable insights into broader societal attitudes and norms.

### **2.9.2 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel (1970), focuses on how individuals categorise themselves into social groups and how these group memberships influence their behaviour and perceptions. In the context of the selected South African dramas, Social Identity Theory helps understand how characters in the television series perceive

themselves and others based on their social identities, including factors like ethnicity, race, class, and gender. The theory suggests that individuals strive for a positive social identity, which may lead them to identify with certain groups and discriminate against others. In the case of the series, characters may be depicted adhering to or challenging societal norms regarding African hair, reflecting their social identities and the power dynamics within their respective communities (Hogg, 2020; Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

Social Identity Model of Media Effects builds upon Social Identity Theory to explore how media consumption influences individuals' social identities and perceptions of groups. It posits that media exposure can shape viewers' identification with certain groups and affect their attitudes and behaviours toward those groups. This suggests that the portrayal of African hair in the media can influence viewers' perceptions of beauty standards, cultural identity, and social norms. Viewers may engage with the media representations of African hair to affirm their own identities or seek validation from their social groups (Reid, Giles, & Abrams, 2004; Trepte, Schmitt, & Dienlin, 2018).

The selected television series, "Gomora," "Uzalo," and "The River," likely depict characters from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultural contexts within South Africa. These characters may navigate issues related to social identity, including perceptions of African hair, within the narratives of the shows. The representation of African hair in the series can serve as a reflection of societal attitudes, norms, and power dynamics surrounding beauty standards and cultural identity in South Africa. By analysing how characters interact with and perceive African hair within the narrative framework of the television series, researchers can explore the ways in which social identities are constructed, negotiated, and reinforced through media consumption.

### **2.9.3 Audience Reception Theory**

According to Stuart Hall (1973), audience theory is the study of how audiences read and interact with media texts, examining issues such as reception, interpretation, and media consumption patterns. Audience reception research was a child of the broadcasting age, emerging strongly as a sub discipline in media and communication research in the 1980s (Schroder, 2019) Reception-oriented literary theory, history, and criticism, all analyse the

processes by which literary texts are received, both in the moment of their first publication and long afterwards. It describes how texts are interpreted, appropriated, adapted, transformed, passed on, canonised, and/or forgotten by various audiences (Willis, 2021). The theory refers throughout to a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader (Holub, 2013). This theory posits that audiences are not passive recipients but actively construct meaning from media messages, drawing on their individual, cultural, and social contexts. It emphasises the dynamic and diverse ways in which audiences interpret, negotiate, and derive meaning from media texts, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between media producers and consumers (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1991).

Audience Reception Theory emphasises the multifaceted nature of audience interpretation, rooted in subjective experiences and cultural frameworks (Morley, 1980). The theory acknowledges power imbalances between media producers and audiences, where media content creation is often influenced by dominant ideologies (Morley, 1980). The discussion on the perpetuation of White supremacist ideals in media representations aligns with this theoretical tenet, highlighting how power dynamics contribute to the crafting and dissemination of biased narratives (Baker-Bell, 2020).

Audience Reception Theory underscores the significance of individual identity, including race and gender, in shaping audience responses (Ang, 1991). The theory posits that media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of reality for audiences (Morley, 1980). The discussion regarding the media's contribution to societal norms and individual beliefs concerning beauty standards and racial dynamics aligns with this perspective. Moreover, the negative consequences outlined in the analysis hint at a potential feedback loop, wherein audience reactions may influence future media content (Ang, 1991).

The examination of mass media's influence on racial representation and beauty standards finds resonance within Audience Reception Theory. By recognising the active role of audiences in interpreting media messages within their unique cultural and personal contexts, the theory provides a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between media content and audience reception (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1991). The critical lens offered by this theoretical framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis of how media representations impact societal perceptions and individual identities.



## **2.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided context for the literature review overview. It delved into the historical background of African hair, explored the intersection of African hair and identity politics, examined media representations of Black hair, traced the history of dramas, offered a background on selected dramas, and introduced the chosen theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the study's methodology. A research methodology is often described as the critical phase that guides the researcher on how to conduct the study. A methodology, according to Mishra and Alok (2022), provides a full explanation of the overall investigation, including research methodologies, research design, data collection (sampling), and analysis. Rajasekar, Philominatha and Chinnathambi (2013) claim that a methodology is implied by the techniques by which researchers do their research while explaining, expounding, and anticipating events.

Similarly, Wimmer and Dominick (2014) define methodology as a research process that aims to answer the question of "why" the study is being conducted. In this way, methodology equips a piece of research with its guiding principles, goals, and presumptions, all of which are then utilised to justify the study (Almalki, 2016).

#### 3.2 RESEARCH METHOD

According to Hammersley (2013), qualitative research is a type of social inquiry that favours a flexible and data-driven study design. This approach involves analysing a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail. In this study, the naturally occurring cases are the characters and their arcs within the soap operas, as they develop over time within the narrative structure of the show without experimental manipulation. This method emphasizes the importance of subjectivity in the research process and uses somewhat unstructured data, such as scripts, episodes, and viewer feedback, to gain a deep understanding of character development and its impact on the audience. It also uses verbal analysis rather than statistical analysis. According to Allan (2020), qualitative research is a method for generating results without using statistical procedures or quantifications.

Additionally, qualitative research collects non-standardised data to analyse the social construction of themes, events, and behaviours or their subjective significance (Allan, 2020). This also increases the amount of time spent analysing language, documents, and images rather than numbers, graphs, and statistics. Therefore, the approach centres on the interpretation of a subject matter that is based on nature.

Qualitative research is useful for a variety of reasons, including providing a detailed understanding of characters' feelings, motivations, and interpretations of their actions within soap operas. Similarly, Rahman (2020) emphasizes that this approach is used to find deeper insights into complex issues, such as those linked to language assessment design, administration, and interpretation. Denzin and Lincoln (2010), on the other hand, state that qualitative research aims to comprehend human experience holistically in specific situations. In this study, the focus is on understanding the intricate character arcs and development within the soap operas, analysing how these elements contribute to the narrative and impact the audience. This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the characters' experiences and transformations as portrayed in the show.

Utilizing qualitative research methodologies, particularly content-thematic analysis, showcases a dedication to a comprehensive examination of how African hair is represented in South African productions. This approach entails a methodical process of identifying, analysing, and documenting patterns or themes that emerge from the data. Content-thematic analysis enhances our comprehension of the intricate aspects of cultural identity and representation in the media by utilizing observational data and a contextual approach. Researchers can use this technique to examine how African hair is shown and its significance within the narrative and visual setting of the dramas. This analysis can provide insights into broader socioeconomic concerns and cultural identities as portrayed on television.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research used a qualitative paradigm and an exploratory design. The process of any scientific research planning from the first step to the last step of the investigation is known as a study design (Creswell, 2012). A research design, in the words of Seale (2012), is a plan or blueprint for how the study will be carried out. Babbie and Mouton (2007) add that the scenario in which the researcher describes the method by which a phenomenon will

be evaluated is known as the study design. Creswell (2012) defined research design as a strategy or plan that, after establishing the underlying philosophical premise, specifies the participants to be employed, the data collection methods to be used, and the data analysis to be used.

In order to comprehend the research problem, validate its existence, and determine its characteristics, the researcher employed an exploratory research approach. According to Bezuidenhout, Davis, and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), this methodology allows for adaptability in pinpointing previously unexplored facets of the study. This design is deemed appropriate for both collecting and analysing data. Du Plooy (2006:48) lists the following as some more broad benefits of the exploratory design:

- a) To familiarise oneself with unfamiliar circumstances, states, and behaviours.
- b) To prioritise social demands.
- c) To recognise the effects of the research problem.

### **3.4 POPULATION**

The term “population” refers to the entire universe of occurrences that a hypothesis attempts to explain (Gerring, 2012). The incorporation of specified elements and sampling units is pivotal, as it allows for a more precise and targeted research approach. Moreover, the population serves as a guiding factor, assisting the researcher in making informed decisions during the sampling selection process. In essence, these considerations contribute to the refinement and relevance of the study. Similarly, Bhattacharyya (2009) perceives population as the collection of all segments and constituents that are generally specified according to the research sampling selection. According to Wiid and Diggins (2010), the population refers to the entire group of individuals or entities for whom information is needed, based on social artifacts. Similarly, Bezuidenhout et al. (2014) demonstrate that the characteristics of a population are determined by the type of study and social artifacts, the population size, and the distinct attributes of the population. Hence, the population of this study was television dramas in South Africa in the year 2022.

### **3.5 SAMPLING**

Purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, involves selecting specific cases or instances based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this study, the selection criteria includes factors such as popularity and viewership, variety and diversity of portrayals, and availability of data. This sampling was informed by the fact that selected dramas were familiar and easily accessible to the researcher. They are also purposively chosen because they have a large viewership in South Africa (Sicetsha, 2018). These dramas received awards such as the South African Film and Television Awards and Simon “Mabhunu” Sabela Film and Television Award from the South African Broadcasting Research Council (BRCSA) 2019 for three consecutive years (2016-2018). BRCSA (2021) points out that after breaking the record of 12.35 million viewers, "*Gomora* maintained its position as the number one TV series with 15.4 million viewers". In addition, the selected operas were chosen for showcasing African hair(styles). The focus was on all female actors in each television drama. The reason for this was to see how African hair is portrayed in local South African TV dramas. The study examined 10 episodes from *Gomora* season two, 10 episodes from *Uzalo* season seven as well as 10 episodes from *The River* season three to investigate how the three South African dramas portray African hair. The researcher chose the selected seasons because they were aired at the time of conducting the study.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION**

Dubovskiy (2018) defines data collection as the information-gathering process required to conduct research from relevant sources to find answers to research questions. In the study, the 30 episodes of "*Gomora*," "*Uzalo*," and "*The River*" serve as the sample, representing a subset of the entire series for each respective show. Data collection involves extracting information from these episodes to address the research questions. The researcher gathers data directly from the sample by observing and recording details such as the types of hairstyles worn by the protagonists and antagonists in each episode. This information is then used as the basis for analysis, allowing the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and trends related to African hair representation within the context of South African television dramas. Therefore, the episodes themselves are the primary source of data from which insights are derived for the study.

## **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Scenes and characters for selection were identified through a systematic process aimed at capturing relevant data while excluding extraneous content. In this study, a focused approach is employed to target scenes and characters directly contributing to the research objectives, primarily centered around African hair representation in South African dramas. The relevance of scenes to hair representation, the significance of characters, consistency, and variation in hairstyles, and exclusion of non-contributory content were established. By adhering to these criteria, the researcher ensured that the selected scenes and characters provided a representative sample for analysis, facilitating a thorough exploration of the portrayal of African hair within the context of the chosen television dramas. The analysis is detailed below:

### **3.7.1 Content analysis**

In the study, data collection involves viewing and transcribing relevant segments from the selected episodes of "*Gomora*," "*Uzalo*," and "*The River*." Specifically, scenes featuring characters with diverse hairstyles or discussions related to hair are identified and documented. This data collection process aimed to capture instances of African hair representation within the context of South African television dramas. By focusing on scenes and characters that directly contributed to the study's research objectives, the collected data provided a comprehensive basis for qualitative analysis, enabling the examination of patterns, themes, and insights regarding the portrayal of hair within the selected dramas. The study of texts in multiple formats, as well as textual materials and other types of communication like images, audio, and video, is known as content analysis (Stemler, 2000). Content analysis is a tool used by social scientists to examine communication trends in a systematic and repeatable manner. One of the key advantages of using text analysis to research social phenomena is that it is non-invasive, as opposed to simulating social interactions or collecting survey data (Stemler, 2000).

The study's content analysis was based on the research aim and objectives:

#### **Aim**

The study explored the type of hairstyles represented in South African dramas, specifically “Gomora”, “Uzalo,” and “The River” and their intended communicative meanings to the target audience.

### **Objectives**

- e) To determine which type of hairstyle is represented most in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and to understand the cultural, social, and political significance of the hairstyles, as well as their potential impact on viewers' identities.
- f) To compare the hairstyles worn by the antagonists and the protagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and establish what they intend to communicate to the target audiences.
- g) To explore the diverse types of hairstyles worn throughout various episodes by the protagonists and antagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and identify what it intends to communicate to the target audience.
- h) To investigate how the three theories, namely, Social Representation Theory, Social Identity Theory and Audience Theory, provide an understanding of the representation of different types of hairstyles in “Gomora”, “Uzalo” and “The River”.

#### **3.7.2 Thematic analysis**

In the study, data analysis involved the examination of recorded episodes from "Gomora," "Uzalo," and "The River" to identify patterns and themes related to African hair representation. Specifically, scenes featuring characters with diverse hairstyles or discussions about hair were transcribed and analysed to discern recurring motifs, cultural contexts, and societal implications associated with different hair representations within the narratives. Through qualitative content analysis, the researcher systematically reviewed and interpreted the textual and visual data to generate themes reflecting the nuances and complexities of African hair portrayal in South African television dramas. This analysis process facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the cultural, social, and media dimensions of hair representation within the selected dramas. The information was then arranged according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommended steps (2006):

### **Step 1: Become familiar with the data.**

The researcher familiarized herself with the data by watching and re-watching episodes of the selected dramas. This phase involved immersing and deeply familiarizing oneself with the data through reading and re-reading it, as described by Braun, Clarke, and Weate (2016). By engaging in repeated viewings of the episodes, the researcher gained a thorough understanding of the traces and intricacies of African hair representation within the narratives. This immersion in the data allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the themes and patterns present in the portrayals of hair across the selected South African television dramas.

### **Step 2: Generate initial codes.**

At this phase, the researcher began to organise the data deliberately and purposefully. Coding allows for the division of large data sets into smaller, easier-to-handle informative chunks. Instead of conducting an inductive analysis, the researcher chose to conduct a theoretical thematic analysis since she is interested in providing answers to the study objectives and aim. The researcher coded every relevant record about the research topics or containing noteworthy information. Coding entails the methodical process of assigning labels and categorizing data segments based on their thematic substance or relevance to the study goals. The researcher utilized this procedure to categorize the data into manageable pieces for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. By allocating codes to certain clips or sequences from the recorded episodes, the researcher might discern patterns, trends, and insights pertaining to the portrayal of African hair in the context of South African television dramas.

### **Step 3: Searching for themes.**

This phase involves reviewing the codes and data to identify any major, overarching themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this phase refocuses the study on themes rather than codes, and it entails sorting the various codes into potential topics, as well as combining all relevant coded data extracts inside recognised themes. The researcher looked for themes using the research technique and objectives as a guide such as cultural representations, societal trends, character developments, or the portrayal of beauty standards in the context of the chosen hairstyles. There were no additional themes developed based on the themes that were generated.



#### **Step 4: Review themes**

This phase covers the process of defining themes as a pattern of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept (Braun et al. 2016). In connection with the code data, the phases are refined, with some being divided, combined, or eliminated. The researcher reorganised the coded data set and sorted it into categories, evaluating each code for its relevance to the study. Similarly to this, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested checking and reviewing the themes at two different levels: (a) determining whether the themes accurately captured the essence of the coded data with the research questions, and (b) determining whether the themes held across the entire data set. In this procedure, the researcher also determined whether the developed themes have enough evidence to support them. If not, those themes would have been blended with similar themes and their contents described.

#### **Step 5: Define themes.**

In this phase, a thorough examination of each theme is undertaken, encompassing an analysis of its breadth, key points, and narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2012), this stage requires meticulous analysis to distill the analysis into its finer elements. The researcher systematically reviewed all generated topics, assigning names while aligning with the study's objectives. Major themes and subthemes were concurrently identified, drawing insights from the coded data. Themes were renamed when necessary to enhance relevance to the study's aims and objectives, addressing any misalignments.

#### **Step 6: Producing the report.**

This is a stage where all the procedures of thematic analysis are put together to analyse and produce the findings. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), the final stage involves synthesising the analytical narrative, data extracts, and contextualising the findings within the existing body of research. In this phase, the researcher provides a detailed analysis while having concise, coherent, and logical data across the themes by quoting or extracting data. Additionally, the existing literature in this phase is used to either support or contradict the findings of the study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the results are compared to a larger body of literature to determine whether they are consistent with, contradict, or add to the existing body of knowledge. Thus, the researcher presented

themes, and, in the discussion, the findings and analysis were compared with the literature.

### **3.8 QUALITY CRITERIA**

Quality criteria in research are foundational standards widely advocated and accepted across disciplines. In the context of qualitative research, essential criteria encompass credibility, confirmability, transferability, anonymity, and confidentiality, even if the study is not within the realm of psychology or medicine (Braun and Clarke 2019).

#### **3.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility is the consistency of the researcher's interpretation of the data gathered (Sileyew, 2019). By carefully re-watching the episodes, the researcher made sure that the validity of this study is maintained. The researcher, in assessing appropriate interpretation, depended on the analysis of readily available episodes accessible on the internet.

#### **3.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability involves researchers summarizing their findings and exploring their potential applicability in different contexts and circumstances. However, researchers cannot definitively demonstrate the transferability of their outcomes, as noted by Sileyew (2019). To help readers assess whether the research findings may apply to their own settings, the researcher offered a detailed description of the research procedure. This comprehensive explanation of the methods used in data collection, analysis, and interpretation allows readers to gauge the context in which the findings were generated and consider their relevance to other settings or populations.

#### **3.8.3 Confirmability**

The study made it possible for other researchers to duplicate the findings and demonstrate that they were obtained through independent research techniques rather than due to conscious or unconscious biases (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). By ensuring that

the interpretation of the data is based on the study and data acquired rather than the researcher's preferences and opinions, the researcher-maintained verifiability.

#### **3.8.4 Dependability**

Dependability is the extent to which research tools (such as tests) consistently produce the same results under various conditions (Ramlo, 2021). The University of Limpopo's Code of Ethics was strictly followed during this research. In this way, the consistency approach was utilised to assess the validity of the study, i.e., the consistency of the data gathered through recording.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

According to Frey et al. (2000), ethical consideration is a moral rule that most researchers adhere to when conducting a study: allowing subjects to make a free decision, protecting their right to privacy, and helping rather than hurting them. To prevent any potential ethical conundrums, Wimmer and Dominick (2014) advise mass media researchers to follow certain guidelines, including authorisation to conduct the study, ethical concerns with writing up and disseminating research, risk/harm, and the potential value of the study. To prevent using unethical research methods, the research adhered to the following sub-topics in terms of ethical concern.

#### **3.9.1 Permission to conduct the study.**

The researcher received approval from the University of Limpopo Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) before attempting to operationalise the study. TREC ensures that the study complies with the University's research ethical standards. By undertaking this approach, the researcher can minimise the risk to themselves and mitigate any potential negligence.

#### **3.9.2 Ethical issues in writing up and disseminating research.**

As recommended by Creswell (2013), in ensuring ethical issues in data reporting, the researcher reported data honestly without changing or altering the findings to support the research questions. In addition, the research report will be made available to qualified

scholars, community members, and professionals on the University of Limpopo website, since Creswell (2013) recommends that the report should not remain unpublished. Thus, the research report is the researcher's original work.

### **3.9.3 Risk/Harm**

The researcher meticulously identified all potential risks and potential harm associated with the research for those reading the final report. The study did not have risks associated with chemical experiments or tool utilisation, as the study was a non-participant observation. The researcher ensured that the words used in the study did not perpetuate discrimination, or hatred and no participants were interviewed for this study.

## **3.10 CONCLUSION**

The discussion of the study's methodology in this chapter, which covered the research design, methods for collecting data, sampling, and data analysis, laid the framework for the data analysis process. The ethical concerns and limitations of the study were also made clear in this chapter. The following chapter entails the presentation and interpretation of the research findings from the selected drama episodes.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the research methodology of this study was discussed. In this chapter, the research findings and the interpretation of the findings are presented. This study focused on three South African dramas, namely, *Gomora*, *Uzalo*, and *The River*, and obtained data from them. For many years, theorists such as Rosado (2003), Calefato, (2021) and Hall, (2012) have recognised that the choice of hairstyles yields different meanings that embody signs and symbols whose meaning can be explained within the context of a specific culture. In the Black community, hair is of utmost importance, and the social significance of hair has cultural and spiritual roots that are deep (Matjila, 2020; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014).

Although there has been a large amount of literature on the significance of hair in the Black community, there is a paucity of literature concerning hair representations, and what they communicate in dramas. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the representation of African hairstyles in dramas with a specific focus on three South African operas, *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*. This chapter ensures that the data gathered are presented, analysed, and interpreted in a way that addresses the study's objectives and research questions. It serves as the bridge between raw data and meaningful insights, guiding readers through the process of understanding and deriving conclusions from the gathered information. By presenting the data in a structured and systematic manner, the chapter enables readers to comprehend the depth and breadth of the research findings, while the analysis and interpretation phases shed light on the significance and implications of these findings in relation to the overarching research goals. Through clear and rigorous presentation, analysis, and interpretation, this chapter ensures that the study's objectives are effectively met and its contributions to the field are properly conveyed.

The study explored the type of hairstyles, which are represented in South African dramas, specifically *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*. Therefore, the analysis of these three dramas focused on answering the following research objectives set out for this study:

- a) To determine which type of hairstyle is represented most in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and what it communicates.
- b) To compare the hairstyles worn by the antagonists and the protagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and establish what they communicate to the target audiences.
- c) To explore the diverse types of hairstyles worn throughout various episodes by the protagonists and antagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and identify what they communicate to the target audiences.
- d) To investigate the three theories, namely, Social Representation Theory, Social Identity and Audience Reception Theory provide an understanding of the representation of different types of hairstyles in “*Gomora*”, “*Uzalo*” and “*The River*”.

Each drama was analysed during the data collection procedure to see how African hair is represented. The study examined 10 episodes from *Gomora* season two, 10 episodes from *Uzalo* season seven as well as 10 episodes from *The River* season three to investigate how the three South African dramas portray African hair. The researcher chose the selected seasons because they were aired at the time of conducting the study.

## **4.2 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS**

The data were collected from three South African dramas namely, *The River*, *Gomora* and *Uzalo* by recording ten episodes of each of the three South African dramas respectively. A total of 30 episodes of these three local South African television dramas were collected. Purposive sampling was used for this study. The dramas were chosen firstly because they were readily available to the researcher; secondly, because there is generally limited literature on the representation of African hair in dramas, thirdly, these

dramas are targeted at a Black audience/viewership and lastly, because these dramas showcase African hairstyles.

The study followed a systematic process: firstly, a content analysis, aligned with the research objectives, was undertaken. Subsequently, data were captured and subjected to thematic analysis, following the six-step model outlined by Javadi and Zarea (2016), encompassing familiarity with the data, generation of initial codes, theme exploration, review, definition, and final report production. The chapter is structured into sections presenting brief summaries of each drama, character descriptions, character development, content analysis findings, and the presentation of study themes.

#### **4.2.1 Sub-plot**

In television dramas such as "*The River*," "*Gomora*," and "*Uzalo*," producers routinely use story twists to interest and trick audience members. These twists frequently include unexpected developments, revelations, or cliff hangers that heighten suspense and interest while keeping viewers immersed in the plot. Producers use story twists carefully to keep audiences interested, generate discussion, and enhance viewing.

In "*The River*," for instance, plot twists are integral to the show's narrative strategy, driving the storyline forward and captivating audiences. The series is well-known for its suspenseful twists and turns, including surprise character deaths, surprising betrayals, and dramatic narrative revelations. These twists are intended to keep viewers on the edge of their seats and generate conversations both online and offline. According to O'Regan (2008), plot twists are an effective storytelling method that allows producers to disrupt audience expectations and generate interesting storylines that contradict traditional storytelling standards. For example, a severe natural disaster strikes the community, leaving the characters, especially Lindiwe and Zweli Dikana, to deal with loss and suffering while reconstructing their lives. This unforeseen event tests the characters' strength and forces them to work together in solidarity to confront the obstacles they face.

Similarly, in "*Gomora*," plot twists are employed to maintain audience engagement and sustain dramatic tension throughout the series. The show features intricate plotlines and complex character dynamics, with twists and turns that challenge viewers' perceptions and keep them guessing. As argued by Hills (2015), plot twists are a key component of

serialized storytelling, offering opportunities for narrative innovation and audience manipulation. By strategically deploying plot twists, producers can manipulate audience emotions, elicit shock and surprise, and drive viewer engagement. In “*Gomora*”, an unexpected twist occurs when the character Ntokozo Dlamini (Gladys's son) is found to be living a double life and engaging in illicit activities such as money laundering and corruption. This revelation shocks society and threatens to shatter his carefully crafted persona, resulting in dramatic clashes and surprising alliances.

Plot twists are fundamental to the narrative technique of “*Uzalo*,” propelling the storyline along and keeping the audience interested. The series is renowned for its dramatic twists and turns, which include unexpected narrative developments, character reveals, and shocking cliffhangers. These twists are intended to keep viewers interested and returning for more, as observed by Jenkins (2006), who highlights the importance of suspense and surprise in catching audience attention and maintaining viewer engagement.

For instance, when Gabisile, who was assumed dead, resurfaces, this motif comes with a twist: she has no memory of her previous existence and appears to be a completely different person. This unexplained return piques the interest of the other characters, who are trying to figure out what happened to her and why she reappeared so suddenly.

Lindiwe is resilient, she forged her way through living in apartheid South Africa, in the informal settlement of Refilwe and built herself in a space that is dominated by white men. She is not only resilient, but she is also strong, fierce, rebellious, non-conforming and oftentimes she does not play by the rules in the pursuit towards what she wants. Although it is not within the scope of this research, it is important that Lindiwe is a cut-throat businesswoman who is ruthless and seems to care less about her employees (Nehanda, 2020). She easily discards those who stand in her way of generating and maintaining wealth, even her own children (Nehanda, 2020).

### **4.3 THE RIVER DRAMA DESCRIPTION**

*The River* is a South African television show produced by Phathutshedzo Makwarela and Gwydion Beynon. The mining industry in South Africa serves as the setting for the Pretoria-based television series (SATS, 2018). A diamond found in the river that separates the wealthy neighbourhood of Silver Lakes from the impoverished township of



Refilwe swiftly becomes a curse. Mabaso (2019) indicates that *The River* narrates the story of the owner of the Khanyisa Diamonds mine and the lengths she will go to keep her wealthy lifestyle and protect her family. Lindiwe is a mother to Andile and Mbali Dikana and a stepmother to Nomonde Dikana. She is married to the provincial police commissioner Zweli Dikana. The Dikana family resides in Pretoria East, South Africa, in a mansion.

*The River's* premiere episode aired on Mzansi Magic Channel 161 on January 29, 2018, at 1:00 p.m. Since the day of its debut, it has been televised from Monday to Friday. Additionally, every weekday from 12:00 to 12:30 episodes are repeated. Moreover, every Saturday from 17:00 to 19:30, it broadcasts its omnibus. According to M-NET Press (2017), many of the residents of the impoverished township of Refilwe in *The River*, where Khanyisa Diamonds is located, work at the mine. Malefu Mokoena and her children Thuso, Dimpho, and Itumeleng reside in Refilwe as the Mokoena family. Malefu is the sole character who is aware of Tumi's adoption; Tumi was found in a river as a baby by her late adoptive father, Thato Mokoena.

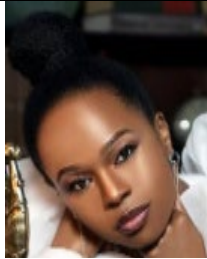



#### 4.3.1 Character description





Character descriptions are particularly important because they help the reader to visualise and grasp how each one of the characters in a story interacts with and perceives the others. It gives characters and their interactions additional depth and significance. However, the characters discussed in the character description are not all the characters in the soapie, but they form part of the main characters of the drama.

Table 4.1 below indicates the character role and description as well as images of hairstyles worn by the characters throughout the selected episodes for illustrative purposes.

**Table 4.1: *The River* character role description**

| No | Character's name and role | Image of hairstyle type worn |
|----|---------------------------|------------------------------|
|----|---------------------------|------------------------------|

|                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| <p><b>1</b></p> | <p>Lindiwe, the protagonist, is the owner of Khanyisa Diamonds Mine. She is a cunning, ruthless mining magnate who dresses to kill. She is a vicious and calculating woman who will do anything in her power to keep her opulent lifestyle and family together. Lindiwe is styled in natural hairstyles.</p>                    |  <p>Image 4.1.1: Natural hairstyle: Lindiwe's natural hair is styled in a bun.</p>   |
| <p><b>2</b></p> | <p>Nomonde, the antagonist, is the Chief Operating Officer of Khanyisa Diamonds. She is Zweli Dikana's first daughter, who is a spoiled child who always gets what she wants from her father. She became Lindiwe's enemy over time. Natural and artificial hairstyles are chosen as her hairstyles throughout the episodes.</p> |  <p>Image 4.1.2: Artificial hairstyle: Weaves</p>  <p>Image 4.1.3: Natural hairstyle: Cornrows</p> |
| <p><b>3</b></p> | <p>Paulina is a noisy shebeen queen who usually wears trashy make-up. She is head over heels in love with a thug. She resides in Refilwe and is styled in natural hairstyles throughout the selected episodes.</p>  |  <p>Image 4.1.4: Natural hairstyle: Paulina's natural hair is styled in a bun.</p>   |

|          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| <p>4</p> | <p>Kedibone is an aunt to the Mokwena kids. She is an ex-convict and is trying to fix her life. She is in love with a dying man and would stop at nothing to try and save him. Kedibone portrayed with natural hairstyles throughout the selected episodes.</p>                                       |  <p>Image 4.1.5: Natural hairstyle: Benny and Betty's hairstyle</p> |
| <p>5</p> | <p>Dimpo is Itumeleng's younger sister, and she adores her very much. She is a free-spirited student with huge ambitions for her future. She acts like a queen at home to hide the hard reality of squatter camp existence. She is styled in natural hairstyles throughout the selected episodes.</p> |  <p>Image 4.1.6: Natural hairstyle: Cornrows</p>                    |
| <p>6</p> | <p>Beauty is a young lady who is vivacious and talkative. She owns a beauty salon and is an entrepreneur residing in Refilwe. Throughout the selected episodes, Beauty is displayed with natural hairstyles.</p>  |  <p>Image 4.1.7: Natural hairstyle: Afro</p>                      |
| <p>7</p> | <p>Itumeleng is a long-lost daughter of Lindiwe Dikana who was adopted by Thato Mokwena. She works as Khanyisa Diamonds' Corporate Social Responsibility Officer. Itumeleng</p>   |  <p>Image 4.1.8: Artificial hairstyle: Weave</p>                  |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <b>portrayed with artificial hairstyles in the selected episodes.</b> |  |
|--|---|--|

Lindiwe, the protagonist, is characterized by a natural bun, embodying the role of a ruthless mining magnate and mother. Nomonde, the antagonist, exhibits versatility with weaves and natural cornrows while serving as the Chief Operating Officer and adversary to Lindiwe. Paulina, a shebeen queen in Refilwe, showcases a natural bun, adding depth to her character portrayal. Kedibone, the aunt to the Mokwena children, features a distinctive natural hairstyle, reflecting her role as an ex-convict. Dimpo, a free-spirited student, styled in natural cornrows, complementing her character as Itumeleng's younger sister. Beauty, an entrepreneur with a portrayed in natural Afro, adds vivacity to the Refilwe community. Itumeleng, embodying the role of a long-lost daughter and Corporate Social Responsibility Officer, is styled in an artificial weave.

This nuanced categorisation enhances the understanding of each character by considering both their hairstyles and roles, providing a more intricate analysis of the interplay between appearance and character attributes within the narrative.

#### **4.3.2 Character development (protagonist and antagonist)**

##### **Lindiwe Dlamini-Dikana**

Lindiwe Dlamini-Dikana's character in "The River" can be explored through the lens of social representation theory, which posits that media representations reflect societal attitudes, values, and stereotypes. Lindiwe's portrayal as a wealthy and powerful businesswoman driven by ambition is consistent with societal norms surrounding success and power. This depiction aligns with research by Hall (1973), who emphasizes that media representations often reinforce dominant ideologies. However, Lindiwe's character also challenges stereotypes by revealing vulnerabilities and moments of remorse. This complexity enhances her portrayal and provides a realistic reflection of the contradictions between ambition and vulnerability in modern society (Hall, 1997).

Moreover, Lindiwe's character development is closely intertwined with social identity theory, which examines how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others and

how these identities are shaped by social contexts. Lindiwe's identity as a mother, businesswoman, and member of her community influences her actions and decisions throughout the series. Her strained relationship with her daughter Tumi highlights the conflicts between her personal and professional identities, as she navigates the demands of her career while grappling with her responsibilities to her family. This dynamic character portrayal aligns with research by Tajfel and Turner (1986), who argue that social identity is fluid and subject to change based on individual experiences and interactions.

Additionally, audience reception theory offers insights into how viewers interpret and engage with Lindiwe's character. The theory suggests that viewers' interpretations are influenced by their personal experiences, values, and cultural backgrounds. Some viewers may empathize with Lindiwe's struggles and root for her redemption, while others may condemn her actions and view her as a villain. This variability in audience responses underscores the complexity of Lindiwe's character and the diverse perspectives through which she is perceived.

### **Nomonde Dikana**

At the beginning Nomonde is portrayed as a spoiled and materialistic young woman who is primarily concerned with her own desires and ambitions. She often acts impulsively and manipulates others to get what she wants, displaying a lack of empathy for those around her. For example, she initially agrees to marry her step-cousin, Zolani, solely for his wealth and social status, without considering his feelings or the impact on their relationship. However, as the series continues, she experiences various challenges and hardships that force her to confront her selfish tendencies and reevaluate her priorities. For instance, she faces betrayal and loss within her family, leading her to question her previous actions and motivations. Through these trials, Nomonde begins to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of the consequences of her actions on others.

Audience Theory provides a perspective through which to understand how viewers interpret Nomonde's character development throughout the series. Because of her selfish and materialistic demeanor, Nomonde may appear to be a stereotypical adversary at first. However, as the story unfolds, Nomonde's quest to redemption becomes more emotionally engaging, compelling viewers to identify with her tribulations and hope for her

change. The representation of Nomonde's progress inspires spectators to consider their own values and views, increasing their involvement with the plot.

Nomonde's character embodies societal views and stereotypes, as explained by Social Representation Theory. At first glance, Nomonde embodies the stereotype of a superficial and materialistic young woman, following cultural conventions around wealth and position. However, as Nomonde develops personally, she confronts these clichés, providing a more complex image of repentance and self-discovery. The portrayal of Nomonde's character challenges viewers to reassess their previous beliefs about people who appear greedy or shallow at first glance.

#### **4.4 UZALO DRAMA DESCRIPTION**

*Uzalo* was created by Stained Glass Productions, which Kobedi “Pepsi” Pokane and Gugu Zuma-Ncube co-owned (Gibson, 2018). It debuted in 2015 and soon gained popularity due to the cast’s strong performances and the show’s fascinating storyline, writing, and director. Initially, it related the story of two young men who were switched at birth, one of whom was brought up in a household that upheld strong Christian principles and the other in a crime syndicate. Currently, SABC 1 airs it Monday through Friday. In South Africa, it is the programme with the most viewership (Rikhotso, 2022).




It was broadcast from Monday to Thursday from 9 February until early September 2016. It was later extended to Friday in September 2016 and has continued due to the daily increase in viewing. *Uzalo* aired five days a week rather than three and was televised as a drama. From 14 February to September 2016, *Uzalo* transmitted an omnibus every Sunday from 12:30 to 14:00, and it has since been extended to 15:00. *Uzalo*’s initial episode attracted five million viewers in 2015, according to Digital Census but in 2016, it had eight million viewers, the majority of whom were young people. *Uzalo* is filmed in KwaZulu Natal Township, popularly known as Kwa-Mashu.

Table 4.2 below indicates the character role and description as well as images of hairstyles worn by the characters throughout the selected episodes for illustrative purposes.

#### 4.4.1 Character description

**Table 4.2: *Uzalo* character role description**

| No | Character's name and role  | Image of hairstyle type worn   |
|----|--|--|
| 1  | <p>Gabisile, the protagonist, is a lively, straight-talking disciplinarian and a leader at Kwa-Mashu Kingdom Church. She is a landlord and Qhabanga Khumalo's wife. She portrayed as a person who wears her hair artificially and naturally.</p> | <div data-bbox="1050 528 1337 763" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="970 779 1417 869"><b>Image 4.2.1: Artificial hairstyle:<br/>Weave</b></p> <div data-bbox="1066 902 1321 1111" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="946 1131 1444 1167"><b>Image 4.2.2: Natural hairstyle: Afro</b></p> |
| 2  | <p>Babekazi the antagonist, is the aunt of Nomcebo. She is outspoken. She is Qhabanga's sister-in-law and also a member of the Kwa-Mashu Kingdom Church. Babekazi is portrayed with artificial hairstyle.</p>                                    | <div data-bbox="1074 1272 1313 1485" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="965 1505 1422 1594"><b>Image 4.2.3: Artificial hairstyles:<br/>Weave</b></p>   |
| 3  | <p>Lilly is a young woman from a humble background, who is displayed with artificial hairstyles and joins the police force to change her fortunes. She is Ma'Dongwe's daughter and a cousin to Nonka.</p>  | <div data-bbox="1070 1615 1316 1787" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="970 1809 1417 1899"><b>Image 4.2.4: Artificial hairstyle:<br/>Weave</b></p>  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 4 | MaMadlala is a gossipmonger and Ma'Dongwe's friend. She adores young males and has no idea how to keep her business to herself. She persistently intrudes into matters that are not her concern. She is a committee member of the Kwa-Mashu Kingdom Church and is portrayed in artificial hairstyles in the selected episodes. |  <p><b>Image 4.2.5: Artificial hairstyle:<br/>Weave</b></p>         |
| 5 | Nonka is Lilly's cousin and Njeza's younger sister who struggles to choose either to go to school or fall in love. She eventually impulsively agreed to marry Sibonelo in a polygamous marriage. She is a manager of a restaurant called Kwa' Njomane and she is styled in natural hair.                                       |  <p><b>Image 4.2.6: Natural hairstyle:<br/>Braids and beads</b></p> |
| 6 | Hlelo is depicted as a damaged soul that has been changed from the harsh realities of the streets into a domestic violence victim and she portrays natural hairstyles. She was saved by Gabisile and works as a waitress at Kwa' Njomane.  |  <p><b>Image 4.2.7: Natural hairstyle: Afro</b></p>               |
| 7 | Nosipho is the daughter of Muzi and Mangcobo. She is a victim of gender-based violence. She is a loan shark and is displayed with artificial hairstyles.   |  <p><b>Image 4.2.8: Artificial hairstyle:<br/>Weave</b></p>       |

The characters in the drama series exhibit diverse personalities and backgrounds, each uniquely portrayed through their distinct hairstyles. Gabisile, the protagonist, emerges as a vibrant and assertive figure, seamlessly styled in artificial weaves and natural afros,



reflecting her multifaceted identity. In contrast, Babekazi, the antagonist, is portrayed to embrace artificial weaves, aligning with her outspoken demeanour. Lilly, hailing from a humble background, and is depicted in artificial weaves as she endeavours to change her circumstances through a career in the police force. MaMadlala, the gossipmonger, consistently presented with artificial weaves, underscoring her vibrant character.

Nonka, the cousin torn between education and love, styled in natural braids and beads, reflecting a connection to her roots. Hlelo, depicted as a domestic violence victim saved by Gabisile, portrayed in natural afro hairstyles, symbolising her journey from the harsh realities of the streets. Lastly, Nosipho, a complex character entangled in gender-based violence, exhibited for artificial weaves, contributing to the diverse tapestry of hairstyles that serve as visual cues to the characters' stories.

#### **4.4.2 Character development (protagonist and antagonist)**

##### **Gabisile**

Gabisile's character in "*Uzalo*" embodies several social representations that resonate with the audience. According to Stuart Hall's theory of representation, media texts construct meaning by representing the world in specific ways that reflect dominant ideologies and cultural norms (Hall, 1997). Gabisile is introduced as a formidable and mysterious woman with a secretive past, embodying the archetype of the outsider who disrupts established community dynamics. This portrayal taps into the audience's fascination with mystery and intrigue, aligning with the concept of media representations shaping perceptions and understanding of reality (van Dijk, 2008). As the series progresses, Gabisile's vulnerabilities emerge, challenging stereotypical portrayals of strong, intimidating women and humanizing her character. This complexity allows the audience to relate to her on a deeper level, as they recognize the universal struggles of insecurity and fear (Hall, 1997).

Her character development is intricately linked to her social identity and interactions with other characters within the narrative. Social identity theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), suggests that individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups and the roles they play within those groups. Gabisile's relationships with various characters, including romantic interests, family members, and rivals, serve as mirrors reflecting different aspects of her identity. Through these interactions, the audience gains

insight into Gabisile's motivations, inner conflicts, and the complexities of her personality. As she confronts her past mistakes and seeks redemption, her journey resonates with the audience's own struggles with personal growth and self-acceptance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In terms of Audience theory, her character arc engages and captivates the audience through the use of identification and parasocial interaction. Viewers develop emotional connections with characters by identifying with their experiences and traits. Initially, viewers may be intrigued by her mysterious demeanor and imposing presence, which piques their curiosity and keeps them invested in her storyline. As her vulnerabilities are revealed and her redemption arc unfolds, audiences become emotionally invested in her journey, rooting for her to overcome obstacles and achieve personal growth. The series utilizes moments of introspection and self-reflection to encourage viewers to empathize with Gabisile's struggles and reflect on their own experiences (Hartmann and Goldhoorn, 2011).

### **Babekazi**

Babekazi's character development in the early seasons of *Uzalo* can be analysed using social representation theory. According to this hypothesis, media representations have a significant impact on societal views and attitudes toward various social groups. Her initial portrayal as a vulnerable and submissive character reflects common stereotypes and expectations placed upon women, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such representations not only reflect existing power dynamics within society but also have the potential to perpetuate and reinforce them (Van Dijk, 1993).

As the series progresses, Babekazi's transformation can be understood in terms of social identity theory, which emphasizes the importance of how individuals perceive themselves within their social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Her journey towards assertiveness and independence reflects a shift in her self-concept and social identity. Through her experiences and interactions with others, she begins to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations, ultimately redefining her own identity within her community.

Audience theories further illuminate her character arc by considering the reception and interpretation of her story by viewers. Uses and gratifications theory suggests that

audiences actively engage with media content to fulfil their own needs and desires (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1973). Viewers may empathize with Babekazi's struggles and find inspiration in her resilience, seeing aspects of their own lives reflected in her journey. As a result, Babekazi becomes not only a character within the narrative but also a symbol of empowerment and agency for the audience, resonating with their own aspirations for self-discovery and personal growth.

In analysing her character development through these theoretical frameworks, it becomes evident that her story transcends mere entertainment and serves as a reflection of broader social dynamics and struggles. By challenging stereotypes, reshaping social identities, and resonating with audience experiences, Babekazi's journey embodies the transformative potential of media narratives in shaping perceptions and empowering individuals within society.

#### **4.5 GOMORA DRAMA DESCRIPTION**





*Gomora-ivili liya jika*, when translated means “What goes around comes around”, which Phathutshedzo Makwarela, Kutlwano Ditsele, and Amanda Lane collaborated to write is distributed by Seriti Films. For Mzansi Magic, M-Net’s local interest channel was commissioned to produce an original work. *Gomora* premiered on March 30, 2020, and is currently airing weekdays Monday to Friday at 19:30 on Mzansi Magic-Uzogcwala, Channel 161. Each episode lasts between 22 and 24 minutes. The crime, drama, and thriller television series *Gomora* is filmed in Alexandra Township, popularly known as *Gomora*.

*Gomora* narrates the story of a woman named Mam’Sonto, who steals and sells cars. Mam’Sonto is portrayed by Connie Chiume. She employs a group of young people to assist her in carrying out the hijacking task; they are led by a girl named Ma’Zet, who is played by Siphesihle Ndaba. Ma’Zet receives instructions from Mam’Sonto and instructs the group as to which car is required.

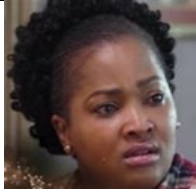


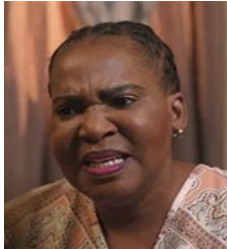
#### 4.5.1 Character description

Table 4.3 below indicates the character role and description as well as images of hairstyles worn by the characters throughout the selected episodes for illustrative purposes.

**Table 4.3: Gomora character role description**

|  | Character's name and role  | Image of hairstyle type worn   |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>Onthathile, the protagonist, is Mam'Sonto's daughter. She is in her early 40s. She is a mother of two teenagers (Buhle and Langa). She joined the world of crime after she relocated to <i>Gomora</i>. Onthathile showed with both natural and artificial hairstyles.</p> |  <p>Image 4.3.1: Artificial hairstyle: Weave</p>  <p>Image 4.3.2: Natural hairstyle: Cornrows</p>   |
|  | <p>Gladys, the antagonist, is a fierce and street-smart social worker who believes in community upliftment. She does everything by the book. Gladys is styled with both natural and artificial hairstyles.</p>   |  <p>Image 4.3.3: Artificial hairstyle: Weaves</p>  <p>Image 4.3.4: Natural hairstyle: Braids</p> |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>Mam’Sonto is in her late 60s, and a mother of two adult daughters (Onthatile and Pretty). She is a Motswana woman from <i>Gomora</i> and a leader of hijackers. Her portrayal in the context of crime was purposefully portrayed as a gangster/criminal that never gets her hands dirty. This is visible in her personality depiction and how she interacts with the other characters. She displayed with natural hairstyles.</p> |  <p>Image 4.3.5: Natural hairstyle: Afro</p>     |
|  | <p>Ma’Zet is Mam’Sonto’s right-hand woman. She takes care of the business, gives orders to her male accomplices, and makes sure that everything is delivered on time. She is presented with natural hairstyles.</p>  |  <p>Image 4.3.6: Natural hairstyle: Braids</p>  |
|  | <p>Buhle is Onthatile’s spoilt daughter. She has ended up in the township as a result of her father’s failure to pay school fees and life insurance. She is a student at <i>Gomora</i> High. She presented with natural hairstyles.</p>  |  <p>Image 4.3.7: Natural hairstyle: Braids</p> |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | <p>Pretty is Onthatile’s younger sister. She harbours anger toward her sister since she has spent her entire life in the shadow of Onthatile. She is Tshiamo’s mother and Sbonga’s wife. She manages her mother’s tavern. She is styled in both artificial and natural hairstyles.</p> |  <p>Image 4.3.8: A mixed hairstyle: A mixture of natural hair (cornrows) and artificial (afro bun)</p>  <p>Image 4.3.9: Artificial hairstyle: Weave</p> |
|  | <p>Zodwa is a recovering alcoholic and is Teddy’s mother. She works for Melusi and Gladys as a cleaner. She can be abrasive at times, particularly when provoked. She depicted with both natural and artificial hairstyles.</p>  |    |

The characters in *Gomora* are intricately defined through their distinct hairstyles, each serving as a visual marker of their personalities and roles within the narrative. Onthatile, the protagonist, symbolizes adaptability with a versatile choice of artificial weaves and natural cornrows. Gladys, the antagonist, strikes a balance between fierceness and community upliftment, reflected in her alternating styles of artificial weaves and natural

braids. Mam'Sonto, the matriarch and leader of hijackers, exudes authority with a steadfast commitment to her Tswana roots, portrayed through her natural afro. Ma'Zet, Mam'Sonto's right-hand woman, epitomises leadership and organisational prowess with her natural braids.

The younger generation, represented by Buhle and Pretty, expresses individual journeys through natural braids and a combination of artificial and natural styles. Zodwa, a recovering alcoholic, conveys complexity through a mix of artificial weaves and natural Benny and Betty hairstyles, reflecting her resilience and vulnerability. In *Gomora*, the characters' diverse hairstyles are not just aesthetic choices but integral elements contributing to the nuanced portrayal of their identities and roles in the unfolding narrative.

#### **4.5.2 Character development (protagonist and antagonist)**

##### **Onthahile**

She is initially depicted as sheltered and naive due to her privileged background, her transformation following a tragic event mirrors concepts found in social representation theory. According to this theory, media representations shape our understanding of social realities by constructing narratives and portraying characters that reflect societal norms and values (Van Dijk, 2012). Onthahile's portrayal as a wealthy and sheltered individual reflects common stereotypes associated with privilege, highlighting the contrast between her life and the struggles faced by those in the township of *Gomora*.

Following the death of her husband and the subsequent challenges she encounters; Her character development aligns with Social Identity Theory. This theory posits that individuals develop their sense of self through identification with social groups, and their identity is influenced by the social context in which they operate (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Her journey of self-discovery and growth prompts her to confront her privileged identity and question the values and beliefs associated with it. Her experiences outside her comfort zone challenge her preconceived notions and reshape her understanding of herself and her place in society.

Audience theories come into play as viewers engage with her character arc and its implications. The theory suggests that audiences actively interpret and negotiate meanings from media texts based on their own backgrounds, experiences, and social contexts (Hall, 1980). As viewers follow her journey, they may empathize with her struggles, drawing parallels with their own experiences or those of people they know. Moreover, cultural studies approaches emphasize the role of media in reinforcing or challenging dominant ideologies and power structures (Storey, 2003). Her transformation challenges stereotypes and offers a nuanced portrayal of privilege and resilience, potentially prompting audiences to reconsider their own assumptions and attitudes towards social class and privilege.

## **Gladys**

Gladys' character development shows the dynamics of social representation and identity in television storylines. She was first portrayed as a stereotyped representation of a fragile woman relying on her husband for emotional and financial assistance, this represents certain societal conventions and expectations around gender roles and relationships. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, media representations reinforce dominant ideologies and power structures within society, in this case, her portrayal as a submissive wife reflects traditional gender roles where women are expected to prioritize their family's needs above their own (Hall, 1980).

As the series progresses, she undergoes a transformation that challenges these conventional representations and societal expectations. This evolution aligns with social identity theory, which posits that individuals derive their sense of self from the groups to which they belong and the roles they occupy within those groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Her discovery of her husband's infidelity serves as a rupture in her social identity as a devoted wife and mother. This crisis prompts her to reassess her priorities and assert her autonomy, reflecting her desire to redefine herself outside of traditional gender roles.

Audience theories such as reception analysis shed light on the relevance of Gladys' character journey. This theory holds that audience members actively interpret media materials using their own lived experiences and social situations (Morley, 1980). Viewers may empathize with Gladys' challenges and find inspiration in her quest for empowerment. Gladys' tenacity and determination make her an approachable character



for audience members facing similar struggles in their own lives. Overall, Gladys' character development highlights the intricate relationship between media portrayals, social identity, and audience participation. Gladys, by defying established gender conventions and pushing for personal agency, acts as a catalyst for broader talks about gender equality and empowerment, both inside the series' fictional setting and in the audience's real experiences.

## **4.6 CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS**

### **4.6.1 Type of hairstyles represented most in *Gomora*, *The River* and *Uzalo***

The analysis of natural and artificial hairstyles across episodes of *Gomora*, *The River*, and *Uzalo* reveals intriguing patterns and preferences within each TV series. In *Gomora* (episodes 209 to 217), natural hairstyles, including Benny and Betty styles, cornrows, braids, and afros, dominated with thirty-eight instances. Artificial hairstyles, particularly weaves, were also prominent, totalling seventeen. Notably, the inclusion of a hybrid style combining cornrows (natural) with an artificial bun adds a layer of diversity to the portrayal of hairstyles.

Contrastingly, in *The River* (episodes 105 to 114), a significant emphasis was placed on natural hairstyles, reaching a count of fifty. This encompassed a variety of styles, such as cornrows, afros styled in separate ways, and the Benny and Betty style. Artificial hairstyles, mainly weaves, were notably fewer, totalling nine. *Uzalo* (episodes 247 to 256) displayed a distinct trend, showcasing a lower count of natural hairstyles (twelve) compared to the other series. In contrast, artificial hairstyles, primarily weaves, were predominant, totalling thirty-one instances. This suggests a particular emphasis on artificial styling in *Uzalo*.

In summary, *The River* stands out for its extensive portrayal of natural hairstyles, *Gomora* follows with a balanced representation of both natural and artificial styles, and *Uzalo* places a pronounced focus on artificial hairstyles. These variations not only reflect the diverse aesthetics within each series but may also be indicative of cultural and stylistic choices that contribute to the overall narrative and characterisation in each show.

Table 4.4 below indicates the types of hairstyles represented most in *The River*, *Uzalo* and *Gomora*.

**Table 4.4: Hairstyle types represented most in *The River*, *Uzalo* and *Gomora***

| Hairstyle Type                       | <i>The River</i>               | <i>Uzalo</i>                          | <i>Gomora</i>                        |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Number of Natural hairstyles worn    | Fifty (50) natural hairstyles  | Twelve (12) natural hairstyles        | Thirty-eight (38) natural hairstyles |
| Number of Artificial hairstyles worn | Nine (9) artificial hairstyles | Thirty-one (31) artificial hairstyles | Seventeen (17) artificial hairstyles |

Table 4.4 reveals that there is a high representation of natural hairstyles in all the three dramas, namely, 100 natural hairstyles as compared to 57 artificial hairstyles are represented. The natural hairstyle which is evident in all three dramas seems to be the afro, as this hairstyle is present in each drama. The artificial hairstyle, which seems to be evident in all three dramas is the weave. Thus, the most dominant or most represented type of hairstyle in the above-mentioned dramas is the natural hairstyle, namely, the afro.

The historical racialization of African beauty during the period of colonization has left a lasting impact on contemporary perceptions and ideals. As highlighted in the literature Montle (2020), the colonisers propagated a stereotypical association of black (Africa) with ugliness and white (West) with beauty. This Eurocentric standard not only influenced beauty ideals but also contributed to the stigmatization of afro hair, which was deemed defiant of white beauty norms and a direct challenge to the prevailing power structures (Matjila, 2020). The negative associations attached to afro hair persisted over the years, reflecting a broader societal reluctance to embrace diverse forms of beauty.

However, the representation of the afro hairstyle in contemporary South African television dramas offers a nuanced perspective. In these narratives, the afro is not portrayed as a symbol of resistance or ugliness but is rather associated with powerful women in leadership positions. This divergence from historical stereotypes underscores the evolving nature of cultural narratives and challenges established norms. It is crucial to

critically analyse this shift in representation. While the positive portrayal of afro hairstyles in these dramas signifies a departure from historical prejudices, it also raises questions about the persisting influence of colonial beauty standards. The acceptance of the afro as a symbol of power may be viewed as a positive step, yet it necessitates a deeper examination of how historical repressions continue to manifest in contemporary beauty ideals.

The emergence of lead women in television dramas embracing their natural hair reflects a transformative shift in beauty standards, challenging the historically imposed European ideals. Despite acknowledging the ongoing journey towards the eradication of the European beauty standard, the portrayal of women in these dramas with their natural hair is deemed essential for societal progression. Araxi Lindsey, the head hairstylist for the American sitcom "Black-ish," underscores the importance of normalizing Black women wearing their natural hair rather than relying on wigs and weaves, expressing anticipation for the celebration of the inherent beauty of Black women's natural hair (Martinbrough, 2022). This sentiment aligns with the broader societal movement towards embracing and celebrating diverse forms of natural beauty.

Within the theoretical framework of social identity, social representation, and audience theories, the acceptance of these foreign norms in the South African population and media representations takes on a more complex perspective. Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of self from their group memberships, and the acceptance of non-European beauty standards can be viewed as a collective redefinition of identity within the South African context. Moreover, social representation theory emphasizes the role of media in shaping societal perceptions, illustrating how the positive portrayal of natural hair in these dramas contributes to reshaping collective representations of beauty.

In the context of audience theories, the reception and interpretation of these representations become crucial. The audience's engagement with narratives featuring women with natural hair in lead roles can be seen as a dynamic interaction between media messages and individual perceptions. The acceptance or resistance to these representations may be influenced by factors such as cultural background, subjective experiences, and the evolving social landscape.

The incorporation of these diverse narratives in mainstream media, such as "The River" and "Gomora," reflects a nuanced understanding of social dynamics. The acceptance of natural hair in these dramas not only challenges historical norms but also contributes to the complex interplay between societal identity, media representation, and audience reception. These representations, when analysed through the lens of social identity, social representation, and audience theories, highlight the multifaceted nature of beauty standards and their evolving role in shaping societal narratives.

On the other hand, the weave, which is the most prominent artificial hairstyle, indicates that not only are natural hairstyles showcased but artificial hairstyles are also prevalent. Mercer-Jones (2021) contends that one of the causes of this shift in hairstyles was the negative connotations associated with African hair. African women began pursuing straighter, silkier hair in an effort to assimilate into Western culture and achieve social mobility; however, African women, in particular, use weaves as a kind of hair protection.

#### **4.6.2 A comparison of the type of hairstyle worn by the protagonists and antagonists in each drama.**

##### **4.6.2.1 "The River"**

The protagonist of *The River*, Lindiwe, who is portrayed as ruthless, cunning, and powerful, is the owner of Khanyisa Diamond Mine and portrays solely natural hairstyles throughout the selected episodes. She is shown with cornrows and her natural hair styled in a bun. The antagonist, Nomonde, who is the Chief Operating Officer of Khanyisa Diamond Mine, is portrayed as spoiled, since she always receives what she wants. She is less powerful than the protagonist, Lindiwe. Nomonde is portrayed with both artificial (weaves) and natural (cornrows) hairstyles.

When comparing the hairstyles of the protagonist and antagonist in *The River*, we see that the protagonist who is shown in natural hair portrayed as more powerful in comparison to the antagonist who is presented with both artificial and natural hairstyles. Lindiwe, the protagonist, is the owner of the Khanyisa Diamond Mine, a mother, and a wife. She is portrayed as smart and has built the mine from the ground up. She comes from Refilwe, an impoverished community but managed to build a legacy for herself while Nomonde, the antagonist shown with both natural and artificial hairstyles is portrayed as

a spoilt brat that acquired her position in the mine not by merit but because her stepmother owns the mine. She has never suffered a day in her life, she squanders money and makes poor life decisions.

In a departure from the typical portrayal often found in telenovelas and films, the woman embracing her natural hair challenges the stereotypical characterizations of being passive, poor, involved in toxic relationships, and engaged in low-paying occupations (Abu-Lughod, 2008). Contrary to these common depictions, Lindiwe breaks away from these stereotypes. Lindiwe is represented as a powerful mogul in her own right who only wears natural hairstyles. According to scholarly discussions, there is a viewpoint suggesting that when Black individuals are depicted in the media, certain representations may inadvertently reinforce White supremacist ideals (Wilson and Gutiérrez, Chao, 2013; Nguyen, 2002). This perspective is rooted in critical race theory and media studies, with scholars highlighting the potential perpetuation of racial stereotypes and the reinforcement of systemic inequalities through specific media portrayals (Wilson et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2002). Maintaining White supremacist structures, particularly in the media, results in a limited representation of Black people and their blackness (Madlela, 2018b).

The media has historically perpetuated a narrow standard of beauty, often emphasizing straight, long, Caucasian/White hair as the ideal, while marginalizing and stigmatizing other hair textures (Wilson et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2002). This limited representation has played a role in shaping societal perceptions of what is considered "good hair." In this context, the emergence of characters in contemporary media embracing African natural hair can be seen as a notable departure from established norms.

This shift is significant within the broader landscape of media representation, as it challenges traditional beauty standards and encourages a more inclusive portrayal of diverse hair textures. While individual instances may not represent a complete transformation, the increasing visibility of African natural hair in media narratives contributes to a gradual but meaningful change in the way beauty is depicted and perceived. This ongoing evolution suggests a positive trend towards greater acceptance and celebration of diverse forms of beauty, including African natural hair, in mainstream media.

#### 4.6.2.2 “Uzalo”

The protagonist of *Uzalo*, Gabisile, who serves as the leader of the Kwa-Mashu Kingdom Church and is also a landlord, is portrayed as a straight talker, a disciplinarian, and someone with an intense sense of power. Gabisile, who can be characterized as economically powerful due to her role as a landlord, is depicted wearing both natural (afro) and artificial (weaves) hairstyles in various episodes. Importantly, Gabisile is not confined to a specific type of hairstyle, showcasing her agency and the ability to choose between natural and artificial styles. This multifaceted representation challenges traditional stereotypes, highlighting Gabisile's autonomy and the freedom to express her personal choices in both appearance and economic endeavours.

This type of power or agency is described by Le Roux's *Multi-flex Neo-hybrid identity Theory* (2021). She states that the African woman is provided with agency and the ability to choose which identity she would like to portray through the hairstyles she chooses to wear. *The Multi-flex Neo-hybrid identity theory* is described in the following manner:

Firstly, this theory provides the African woman with agency and the ability to choose which identity she would like to portray for a specific period through the hairstyle she chooses to wear. Hairstyles communicate identity. Hence, the African woman in the postmodern age is allowed to choose from a multiplicity of hairstyles which are presented to her through the market. Secondly, the multi-flex neo-hybrid identity which is free from the subjugation of conforming to a single identity instead it accepts all the identities that it creates through a variety of hairstyle choices. Thirdly, this identity is flexible as the individual can easily navigate and adapt to various identities and fit in with those identities it created (Le Roux, 2021).

The antagonist of *Uzalo*, Babekazi, is a member of the Kwa-Mashu Kingdom Church and is portrayed as someone outspoken. She is shown solely wearing artificial (weaves) hairstyles. *Uzalo* as a drama, therefore, does not cling to one type of hairstyle when representing African hair. The representation in *Uzalo* showcases characters, particularly African women, with the agency to adopt both natural and artificial hairstyles, and both styles are presented positively within the context of the show. Consequently, the characters are not subjected to judgment or shame based on the hairstyles chosen for

them. This fictional portrayal reflects a positive and inclusive perspective within the show's narrative. It is essential to recognize the distinction between the characters in the fictional context and the broader societal attitudes and expectations of the viewers.

#### **4.6.2.3 “Gomora”**

The protagonist of *Gomora*, Onthathile, is portrayed as a criminal who runs an illegal business of stealing and selling cars. She is a romantic at heart, even though she lost two of her children and her multiple partners, which transformed her into a ferocious beast who terrorises her family without mercy. She is presented in both natural (cornrows) and artificial (weaves) hairstyles. The antagonist of *Gomora*, Gladys, is a social worker who is portrayed as someone who is street smart and fierce. She is portrayed with both natural (braids) and artificial (weave) hairstyles.

The protagonist, Onthatile, engages in criminal activities, challenging the conventional portrayal of a morally upright main character. This deliberate choice by the scriptwriter disrupts the usual dichotomy of a virtuous protagonist and a morally dubious antagonist. Onthatile's positive framing as a strong woman thriving in a male-dominated industry adds complexity to her character, humanizing someone engaged in illegal activities. This subversion challenges the audience to reconsider traditional judgments and stereotypes associated with characters involved in criminal lifestyles.

In contrast, the antagonist, Gladys, is presented positively as a social worker deeply committed to her community. This inversion of roles, where the character engaged in illicit activities is portrayed with nuance and empathy, while the morally upright figure faces challenges, contributes to a narrative that defies predictable characterizations. The scriptwriter's choice to sensationalize criminal lifestyles in fiction could be seen as a deliberate attempt to provoke thought and challenge preconceived notions. By portraying the protagonist in a morally ambiguous light and the antagonist with positive qualities, the narrative encourages the audience to question traditional binary distinctions between right and wrong.

In contemporary storytelling, there has been a noticeable shift towards portraying characters with greater complexity, blurring the traditional lines between hero and villain. This trend reflects a more nuanced understanding of human behavior and challenges

audiences to engage with characters on a deeper level (Smith, 2019). By subverting expectations and presenting protagonists engaged in illegal activities in a positive light, creators make a deliberate choice to spark discussion about the representation of morality and ethics in fiction (Brown, 2020). This approach serves as a commentary on the intricate nature of human morality, inviting audiences to consider the multidimensional aspects of characters beyond conventional stereotypes.

The portrayal of female characters who thrive in their respective fields while defying societal expectations tied to their hairstyles is another example of this evolving narrative landscape. This positive representation challenges prevailing social norms, asserting that success is not contingent upon conforming to stereotypical beauty standards (Jones, 2018). By showcasing characters with diverse hairstyles who achieve success, regardless of societal expectations, creators contribute to a narrative that celebrates individuality and diversity (Chen, 2021). The similarities in their hairstyles serve to emphasize shared traits, aligning with the evolving expectations of the target audience, who increasingly seek narratives that celebrate authenticity and inclusivity.

Moreover, the agency given to African female characters in choosing their hairstyles further reinforces the Multi-flex Neo-hybrid identity theory (Le Roux, 2021). By allowing characters to express themselves through various hairstyles, creators acknowledge and validate the diverse identities within African communities. This portrayal not only reflects the changing expectations and values of the contemporary audience but also contributes to a more inclusive and representative storytelling landscape (Blackwood, 2020). Through the depiction of characters with agency over their appearance, the narrative fosters empowerment and self-expression, resonating with viewers who aspire to see themselves authentically represented on screen.

Table 4.5 below showcases the type of hairstyles the antagonists and the protagonist’s wear.

**Table 4.5: Type of hairstyle worn by antagonist and protagonist**

| Type of hairstyle | The River | Uzalo | Gomora |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|--------|
|-------------------|-----------|-------|--------|



|                    |  |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Antagonist</b>  | <b>Natural and artificial hairstyles</b> | <b>Artificial hairstyles</b>             | <b>Natural and artificial hairstyles</b> |
| <b>Protagonist</b> | <b>Natural hairstyles</b>                | <b>Natural and artificial hairstyles</b> | <b>Natural and artificial hairstyles</b> |

#### **4.6.3 The diverse types of hairstyles worn throughout the episodes by the protagonists and antagonists.**

*The River's* protagonist is presented in natural hairstyles, namely, cornrows and a hair bun throughout the episodes, whereas the protagonist of *Gomora* is shown in both natural hairstyles in the form of cornrows and artificial hairstyles in the form of weaves. The protagonist of *Uzalo* is displayed with both a natural hairstyle in the form of an afro and artificial hairstyles in the form of weaves throughout the episodes.

Compared to the other protagonists, Lindiwe, the protagonist from *The River*, can be described as the most powerful character since she owns a diamond mine. What is interesting to note is that she is shown with natural hair throughout all the episodes. According to Njoroge (2012) many women keep the same style most of their lives, while others change style and colour with mood and events in their lives. While the first statement is true for Lindiwe, the latter is true for Onthatile, Gladys, Nomonde, Babekazi and Gabisile change their hairstyles with mood and events. Onthatile is seen in cornrows when her life is falling apart, or when she is hijacking cars. At her happiest or when she is out meeting her affluent friends, she is seen wearing a weave.

The scriptwriter's decision to portray Lindiwe, who is consistently styled in her natural hair can be seen as a deliberate effort to convey a particular message or aesthetic. This creative choice reflects a commitment to presenting a character who defies conventional beauty norms. It may be a strategic move to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive representation of beauty in the storyline.

The deliberate selection of natural hairstyles over artificial ones contributes to shaping Lindiwe's visual identity and reinforces the character's image as someone authentically

embracing her natural self. This aligns with broader cultural and societal conversations about natural beauty and challenges prevalent norms within the media. Lindiwe's consistent portrayal with natural hair becomes a deliberate aspect of her character arc, reflecting the collaborative effort between the scriptwriter and costume designer to challenge traditional beauty standards and promote a more diverse and authentic representation within the drama. This implies that her natural hair is perceived as superior to artificial hairstyles. The styling of her natural hair in all the episodes shows how natural hair is currently associated with success and power. Although this was not true in the past, natural hair is now seen as more powerful and authentic than artificial hair.

Both the antagonists from *The River* and *Gomora* are styled in both natural and artificial hairstyles. *The River's* antagonist is displayed in natural hairstyles, namely, cornrows and artificial hairstyles, i.e. weaves, while the antagonist of *Gomora* is shown with natural hairstyles in the form of braids and artificial hairstyles in the form of weaves. The antagonist of *Uzalo* wore solely weaves, which is an artificial hairstyle.

Table 4.6 below indicates the distinct types of hairstyles worn throughout the episodes by the antagonists and protagonists.

**Table 4.6: Variety of hairstyles worn by protagonist and antagonist**

| Drama            | Type of Hairstyle |          |        |      |        |
|------------------|-------------------|----------|--------|------|--------|
|                  | Cornrows          | Hair bun | Braids | Afro | Weaves |
| <i>The River</i> |                   |          |        |      |        |
| Protagonist      | 1                 | 9        |        |      |        |
| Antagonist       | 10                |          |        |      | 1      |
| <i>Gomora</i>    |                   |          |        |      |        |
| Protagonist      | 6                 |          |        |      | 4      |
| Antagonist       |                   |          | 3      |      | 7      |
| <i>Uzalo</i>     |                   |          |        |      |        |

|                    |  |  |  |          |           |
|--------------------|--|--|--|----------|-----------|
| <b>Protagonist</b> |  |  |  | <b>2</b> | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Antagonist</b>  |  |  |  |          | <b>10</b> |

The three dramas have “depicted Black hair with pride, being intentional about featuring it as commonality of Blackness” (Martinbrough, 2022). This is in contrast to Abbas’ (2018) argument when he/she describes an Indian series. Abbas (2018) asserts that despite occasional attempts to reflect reality, Indian series have so far not developed past the two-dimensional roles of a devoted wife and a scheming vamp. Another different study conducted in India by Sachdeva (2018) demonstrates that women are still subjected to discrimination, inferior treatment, and the promotion of numerous gender stereotypes. His research shows that women with fair skin are idealised as beautiful, while women with darker skin are unappealing and attract fewer men. Additionally, negative roles are frequently depicted alongside those of modernism and liberalism (Abbas, 2018). For instance, although educated women are increasingly prevalent, men make a mockery of their education and jobs. According to his survey, the majority of educated women are single, and their fathers are not proud of them (Abbas, 2018).

The current study explores the representation of women in South African dramas, specifically examining their hairstyles. The analysis notes a significant departure from traditional roles, such as housewives, in the three South African dramas under investigation. The focus is on the intentional and positive inclusion of various Black hairstyles, portraying them as a source of pride and commonality among the depicted characters. This shift in emphasis on hairstyles suggests a different approach to visual representation and cultural identity in comparison to the Indian series discussed in the passage.

**4.7 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

**4.7.1 Theme 1: repositioning of the representation of African hair through the media**

The first theme which emerged from the data is “repositioning the representation of African hair through the media”. This theme was based on how the selected dramas

showcased natural hair. In the three dramas under study, *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*, African natural hair is showcased as empowering, and women who wear their natural hair are not denied economic, social, educational, and vocational benefits. Lindiwe, *The River's* protagonist, shown with natural hair only and is an owner of the Khanyisa Diamond Mine. The protagonists of both *Uzalo* and *Gomora* displayed in both natural hair and they are leaders in their respective fields. Gladys, *Gomora's* antagonist is a social worker, she is financially stable, respected in society and has a loving husband.

The selected dramas are changing how African natural hair is perceived. Repositioning African natural hair as desirable, despite the parallels in beauty standards that placed natural hair at the end of the desirability spectrum, likening kinky hair to unruliness, disruptiveness and in need for fixing is a significant endeavour (Onyango, 2022). Natural hair in these dramas is also not represented as unruly, disruptive and in need of fixing, the women wear their hair with pride. By virtue of adopting natural hairstyles that are non-normative like the Afro, *Benny and Betty*, and braids, the female characters position themselves outside the normative ideology (Onyango, 2022).

According to Brown (2018), having natural hair has become perceived as a political statement since the Black Panther Party's founding in 1966 in Oakland, California (Williams, 2008), marking the birth of the concept of Black pride. In South Africa, the choice to wear natural hair can be viewed as political, resonating with historical and contemporary sociocultural dynamics. South Africa has a complex history shaped by apartheid, where Eurocentric beauty standards were often imposed, and natural Black features were marginalized. In this post-apartheid era, choosing natural hair can be seen as a form of resistance and a reclaiming of identity, challenging the historical pressure to conform to Western ideals. The political nature of natural hair in South Africa reflects broader discussions around cultural pride, self-determination, and resistance against societal assimilation (Matjila, 2020). The excerpt from Akola Thompson's 2022 article, "Is your hair still political?" sheds light on the nuanced and sometimes subtle nature of hair-based discrimination faced by Black individuals. Thompson suggests that instances of discrimination based on hairstyles and textures may be pervasive in everyday life, and while some are challenging to identify, others are overt and unmistakable.

In addition the mention of a "white mainstream gaze" in the interpretation of Black individuals' hair aligns with a broader discourse on how Eurocentric beauty standards can

influence perceptions of hair textures that deviate from those standards. The reference to Jahangir (2015) likely expands on the idea that the styling choices of Black individuals are often subject to misinterpretation and discrimination by a societal gaze that may not fully appreciate or understand the cultural and personal significance of diverse hairstyles. This citation highlights the ongoing relevance of discussions surrounding the politics of Black hair, emphasizing the need to challenge and rectify discriminatory interpretations rooted in cultural biases and stereotypes.

According to Abu-Lughod (2008), the lengthy history of the association of natural hair with animalistic tendencies, from the dehumanisation of field slaves to the idea that curly hair reflects personality traits unsuitable for a successful professional, shows how racism and control permeate language.

In South Africa, the historical association of natural hair with negative stereotypes is rooted in the era of apartheid, during which Eurocentric beauty standards were enforced, suppressing traditional African hairstyles. Post-apartheid, societal attitudes have gradually evolved, with a growing movement advocating for the reclamation of cultural identity and pride in natural, textured hair. Despite progress, challenges persist, including workplace discrimination based on certain hairstyles. Efforts to address these issues are ongoing, paralleling global discussions about inclusivity and legal protections against discrimination in various contexts. The narrative in South Africa reflects a complex history of racial oppression, cultural suppression, and ongoing efforts to challenge societal norms surrounding natural hair.

Scholars suggest that there was a push towards pathologizing African features such as dark skin and kinky hair to demoralise slaves, especially women, by slave owners (Matjila, 2020). The internalisation of the slave owner's racist rhetoric by slave women, which was almost inevitable, resulted in the women passing down the pathology to their children and subsequent generations (Matjila, 2020). This was also reinforced by the media since media outlets supported White supremacist ideals. Maintaining White supremacist structures, particularly in the media, results in a lack of adequate representation of Black people and blackness (Hawkman & Diem, 2022). However, Dawson, Karl and Peluchette (2019) indicate that prominent characters are showing off their natural hair on television now more than ever, breaking the negative connotations that have surrounded African hair for years.

South Africa with its history of apartheid and racial oppression, share parallels in terms of the internalisation of racist ideals. The discussion on media reinforcing White supremacist ideals and the positive shift in showcasing natural hair in television series may align with South Africa's ongoing efforts to challenge Eurocentric beauty standards and promote inclusive representation (Le Roux, 2020.)

In the historical context of South Africa, various institutions wielded considerable influence in enforcing Eurocentric norms and suppressing African cultural practices. Schools and mission stations, often administered by European religious institutions, enforced dress codes and grooming policies that pressured individuals, including students, to conform to Western standards, including expectations about hairstyles (Ford, 2021). The government administration, particularly during apartheid, implemented policies to assimilate Black individuals into European cultural norms, regulating hairstyles and diminishing personal expression (Alubafi et al., 2018). Churches, both local and those overseen by European "mother" churches, reinforced Eurocentric ideals of beauty and discouraged traditional African hairstyles, contributing to the symbolic erosion of cultural identity. Economic marginalization, intertwined with systemic discrimination, limited Black individuals' agency in economic opportunities, reinforcing the broader loss of control over their lives. The symbolism of hair, a significant aspect of African culture and self-expression, became a battleground where institutions sought to erase cultural identity, highlighting the power dynamics that stripped individuals of their agency in defining their own identity.

The study's findings suggest that the selected dramas showcase African natural hairstyles in both professional and social settings. However, in comparison to apartheid, where Africans were stripped of their traditional hair by force in an attempt to dehumanise them and by their necessity for practical survival, there has been a significant shift in how African hair is represented (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). This is evident in episode 252 of *Uzalo* where Gabisile wore a natural hairstyle at church while in episode 211 of *Gomora*, Zodwa wore a natural hairstyle at work. Therefore, this suggests that some dramas value natural hairstyles as being acceptable in any context whether it is a social or professional context.

Ellington (2014) suggests that the minimal representation of natural hairstyles in the media may have given the impression that these hairstyles do not belong in a comparable

real-life situation. However, the media often portrayed the obsession with the straightening of Afro hair to somehow reflect the perceived normalcy of stereotypical hair as some sort of default setting (Wilson, 2020). The researcher contends that there has been a notable shift in perceptions of African hairstyles, transitioning from the Eurocentric ideals of beauty to a contemporary Afrocentric perspective. The transition from historical Eurocentric grooming norms to a contemporary acceptance and celebration of natural hairstyles is palpable in real-life contexts, as articulated by Schwarz (2022). Individuals are increasingly embracing these hairstyles, marking a departure from the entrenched Eurocentric ideals that had long influenced perceptions of beauty and personal expression. This societal shift reflects a broader acknowledgment and validation of diverse cultural aesthetics, emphasising the evolving embrace of Afrocentric beauty standards in the contemporary landscape.

In parallel, fictional entertainment products, such as television dramas, reflect this societal change by showcasing characters with natural hairstyles in diverse settings, both professional and social (Griswold, 2012). Notable examples include instances in episodes of shows like *Uzalo* and *Gomora* where characters wear natural hairstyles at church or in the workplace. This deliberate representation aligns with the evolving acceptance of diverse cultural expressions. Audience responses to such portrayals, though not explicitly mentioned, may serve as a gauge of societal receptivity to these shifts, reflecting broader attitudinal transformations towards Afrocentric beauty standards in contemporary media.

The selected dramas are dispelling the stigma attached to African natural hairstyles by encouraging the idea that they have a place in the social and professional spheres. The representation of natural hairstyles in selected dramas suggests that African women should cease subscribing to Eurocentric hair trends and instead move towards an Afrocentric way of styling their hair. The researcher acknowledges the assertion made by Dawson and Karl (2018) regarding the underrepresentation of Black women in the media, coupled with the perception of their natural hairstyles as unprofessional or unpresentable. However, a contrasting perspective is presented based on the analysis of dramas such as *The River* and *Gomora*. In these fictional narratives, natural hairstyles are prominently featured, indicating that these particular shows place importance on and value the representation of natural hairstyles. This stands as a departure from the broader trend noted by Dawson and Karl, suggesting that certain entertainment products intentionally

prioritize the visibility and significance of natural hairstyles, potentially contributing to a more inclusive representation in the media landscape.

Hoijer (2011) posits that Social Representation Theory serves as a framework to unite societies, organizations, and individuals, drawing attention to phenomena that stimulate discussion, disagreement, and ideological conflicts while shaping collective societal perceptions. In the context of how Black African women perceive their hair, the theory highlights the pivotal role of media in shaping attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, dramas like *Gomora* and *The River* are identified as active agents in this process, seeking to enhance the visibility and legitimacy of women as political entities challenging Eurocentric beauty standards. By focusing on the representation of natural hairstyles, these narratives contribute to the broader societal discourse on beauty norms, representing a deliberate effort to reshape collective thinking on these matters.

#### **4.7.2 Theme 2: hairstyles communicate identity.**

The second theme which emerged from the data was that hairstyles communicate identity. This thematic concept implies that hair and its styling have functioned as a communicative tool, conveying aspects of individuals' identities. The way people choose to style their hair has been utilized as a visual language, expressing various elements such as cultural affiliations, personal preferences, and societal belonging. Hair is an important part of expressing personal identity (Thompson, 2009b). Although hair is an unresponsive genetic phenomenon, when it is controlled or processed by cultural customs, it has meaning and social value (Madlela, 2018b). Thompson (2009a) points out that hair is likely the most powerful sign of individual and group identity, for two reasons, namely, it is physical and hence, intensely personal, and it is also public rather than private. In addition, rather than being imposed or 'given,' hair symbolism is frequently voluntary.

According to Msweli and Gwayi (2019), a person's hair reflects who they are as a person. Harrison and Sinclair (2003) think that hair is a tool for constructing identities since it can be altered to fit cultural standards and fashion trends. In addition, hair plays a significant part in how Black women identify themselves, as indicated by Johnson and Bankhead (2014) and Lukate (2019), who discovered that even hair texture and style influence how



women identify themselves. According to Oyedemi (2016), the majority of Black women use hair extensions to cover up their natural hair's flaws. As a counter-narrative, Johnson and Bankhead (2014) stress the significance of forging a positive natural identity for one's hair, which can help people learn to embrace their hair as it is. Stokes (2021) affirms that people usually reveal their genuine identity for the first time through their hair. It allows individuals the freedom to express themselves honestly, audaciously, and fearlessly without any physical restraints.

The study suggests a potential association between African natural hairstyles and certain traits such as hatred and aggressiveness, as evidenced by character depictions in specific TV series episodes. For instance, Lindiwe in *The River*, portrayed as ruthless and fiercely protective of her family, consistently opts for natural hairstyles. Likewise, Onthatile in *Gomora*, displaying pestering behaviour, is presented with natural hair, whereas Gabisile in *Uzalo*, known for her peaceful demeanour amid hostility, is depicted with an artificial hairstyle. In contrast, Sonto, a key character in *Gomora*, shown in a natural hairstyle and is portrayed as ruthless in safeguarding her car hijacking business. These portrayals underline the study's revelation that individuals' identities can be complex and diverse, emphasizing the communicative role of hair in conveying aspects of character identity. The study underscores the multifaceted nature of personal choices in hairstyling, illustrating how protagonists and antagonists in the analysed dramas utilize diverse hairstyles to mirror their distinct identities rooted in personality traits.

When analysed through the lens of audience reception theory, it suggests that viewers actively interpret and derive meaning from the portrayal of hairstyles in the selected TV series. Audience members are likely to engage in diverse interpretations based on their cultural backgrounds and subjective experiences, contributing to varied discussions within different audience segments. The deliberate representation of natural hairstyles as symbols of identity may resonate differently with individuals from the Black community, fostering a sense of connection or, conversely, prompting critical discussions around cultural stereotypes and diversity in media representation.

From a social representation theory perspective, the findings highlight the role of media in shaping and perpetuating cultural stereotypes. The associations made between African natural hairstyles and specific character traits can contribute to the reinforcement or challenge of existing stereotypes. The producer's deliberate choices in styling the

character's hair not only construct cultural identities within the narrative but also influence how viewers perceive and categorize individuals based on their hairstyles. The interplay between media content and societal norms in the portrayal of hairstyles underscores the broader impact of visual representation on cultural identity and the potential to shape or challenge prevailing stereotypes within the audience's social framework.

*Social identity Theory* is defined by Grossman and Helpman (2018) as a person's understanding of belonging to various social groups, which incorporates feelings and values. Therefore, the significance of *Social Identity Theory*, particularly in the chosen dramas, lies in its ability to allow the researcher to discern the kind of identity embraced by the protagonists and antagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo*, and *The River* – an identity shaped not by birth but crafted through imagination, plot structure, and acting.

#### **4.7.3 Theme 3: equal representation of natural and artificial hairstyles**

Theme three is the equal representation of natural and artificial hairstyles. The study's findings reveal an equal representation of both natural and artificial hairstyles. The two dramas namely, *Gomora* and *The River*, mostly represented natural hairstyles while *Uzalo* mostly represented artificial hairstyles. What is evident from the three dramas is that women in *The River* and *Gomora* are represented as powerful and challenging normative societal views. The protagonists, Lindiwe and Onthatile, lead empires that are generally led by men. They are fierce, strong, and cunning, defying gender stereotypes. Lindiwe, who wears her hair in natural hairstyles throughout the selected episodes challenges the Eurocentric standards of beauty, challenging the notions that Black women's hair deprived them of upward social mobility. Much like Lindiwe, the protagonists of both *Uzalo* and *Gomora* also hold positions of power although they are presented in both natural and artificial hairstyles.

While for many years, women have been cast in films with artificial hairstyles, the equal representation of both natural and artificial hairstyles in these dramas speaks to a move away from this norm (Thabethe, 2008). Of the three dramas, *Uzalo* showcased artificial hairstyles as dominant, while within *the River* and *Gomora* natural hairstyles were dominant. There has been advancement in the Black Consciousness movement's rejection of whiteness and all of its Eurocentric ideals of beauty, which has opened up an awareness of the true nature of the colonial and apartheid racial systems, whose

overarching goal was the establishment of white supremacy (Alubafi, Ramphalile & Rankoana, 2018).

The selected dramas employ a deliberate approach in presenting an equitable depiction of natural and artificial hairstyles, intending to communicate to viewers that both styles exude elegance and professionalism. Moreover, the study posits that these dramas actively challenge the idea that an individual's intrinsic value should be tied to their hairstyle, whether it's short, curly, wavy, or wig adorned. This perspective aligns with Schwarz's (2022) assertion that the acknowledgment of embracing diverse hairstyles often arises from observing women confidently showcasing both natural and artificial styles. Instances from *Gomora*, *Uzalo*, and *The River* serve as illustrations of this viewpoint, such as Gladys showcased in both natural and artificial hairstyles in *Gomora* episode 210, Gabisile presented both styles in *Uzalo* episode 112, Nomonde displayed a natural hairstyle in *The River* episode 107 and an artificial one in a different episode.

An image will eventually become recognisable to the public, according to Walsh and Gentile's (2001) theory if it is repeatedly introduced to that public and is taken in by them. Walsh and Gentile's theory is supported by Haugtvedt, Petty and Cacioppo (1992), who claim that customers who are "very exposed to advertisements" are not motivated to consider the text that is continually shown to them but are nonetheless influenced by the recurrent visual.

The equal representation of natural and artificial hairstyles in the selected dramas holds significance when analysed through the lenses of audience reception, social representation, and social identity theories.

## **4.8. REFLECTIONS OF ANALYSIS THROUGH THE LENSES OF THEORIES**

### **4.8.1 Audience Reception Theory**

Drawing from Stuart Hall's (1989) Encoding-Decoding model, the deliberate effort in presenting an equitable depiction of natural and artificial hairstyles suggests that creators encode a message of inclusivity and diversity. The audience's decoding of this representation could vary, but the intention is to challenge traditional norms associated with beauty standards and hairstyles. The equal representation aims to appeal to a

diverse audience and challenge preconceived notions about the societal value attached to different hairstyles. Viewers might interpret this representation as a positive step toward embracing various forms of self-expression.

#### **4.8.2 Social Representation**

The dramas challenge societal norms and Eurocentric ideals of beauty by depicting powerful female protagonists, like Lindiwe and Onthatile, who lead with authority while embracing natural hairstyles. This challenges the historically prevalent idea that certain hairstyles are more acceptable or professional than others. The rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards aligns with the Black Consciousness movement, challenging the racial and gender representations perpetuated by colonial and apartheid systems (Ndichu, and Upadhyaya, 2019). The dramas actively contribute to reshaping these representations through diverse and empowering portrayals.

#### **4.8.3 Social Identity**

By showcasing both natural and artificial hairstyles as expressions of elegance and professionalism, the dramas contribute to empowering individuals in their choices. This aligns with social identity theory, which emphasizes how individuals derive a sense of identity and self-worth from their group memberships. The dramas actively challenge the stereotype that a person's intrinsic value is tied to their hairstyle. This challenges social identity norms that might associate specific hairstyles with certain societal roles or judgments.

The author suggests that the deliberate representation of natural and artificial hairstyles in the selected dramas has implications for audience perceptions, challenges societal norms, and contributes to the evolution of social representations and identities. The inclusive portrayal fosters a sense of acceptance and challenges traditional standards, aligning with evolving societal attitudes towards diversity and individual expression.

#### **4.9 BLACK EMANCIPATION IN THE USA: RELEVANCE TO THE FINDINGS OF THE SA SOAP OPERA**

The relevance of Black emancipation in the USA to the findings of the study lies in the historical and cultural interconnectedness between the two regions, particularly regarding perceptions of Black identity and beauty standards (Johnson, 2010). The Black is Beautiful movement emerged during the 1960s Civil Rights era in the United States, advocating for the celebration and acceptance of natural Black features, including hair texture and skin tone (Thompson, 2009). This movement challenged Eurocentric beauty standards that had long marginalized Black individuals and promoted self-acceptance and pride in one's racial identity (Byrd & Tharps, 2002).

The Civil Rights Movement itself, spanning roughly from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, fought against racial segregation and discrimination, aiming for equality and justice for African Americans (Branch, 1988). This period of social and political upheaval had global reverberations, influencing movements for racial equality and cultural pride around the world, including in South Africa (Davies, 2018).

In South Africa, where apartheid was entrenched during this time, the struggles of African Americans resonated deeply with those fighting against racial oppression. The notion of Black pride and self-determination propagated by the Civil Rights Movement found echoes in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (Ntsebeza, 2020). The appreciation for natural Black hair in South Africa can be seen as a reflection of this broader cultural shift towards embracing Blackness and rejecting Eurocentric standards of beauty (Jones, 2015). As South Africans became more exposed to global movements like Black is Beautiful and the Civil Rights Movement, they began to challenge colonial beauty ideals imposed upon them (Ngugi, 2017). Today, the natural hair movement in South Africa has gained significant momentum, with many individuals opting to embrace their natural hair textures rather than conforming to Westernized standards (Mkhize, 2021). Social media platforms like Facebook have become hubs for sharing self-help strategies and tips for caring for natural hair, fostering a sense of community and empowerment among Black individuals (Mudimeli, 2019).

For instance, South African celebrities and influencers have played a crucial role in normalizing and celebrating natural hair. Public figures like Nomzamo Mbatha and Pearl Thusi have openly embraced their natural hair on various platforms, inspiring others to do the same (Sithole, 2020). The historical context of Black emancipation in the USA, particularly through movements like Black is Beautiful and the Civil Rights Movement, has had a significant impact on South African perceptions of natural Black hair (Nkosi, 2016). This cultural shift towards embracing and celebrating Blackness has led to the growth of the natural hair movement in South Africa, influencing societal attitudes and beauty standards (Molefe, 2018).

#### **4.10 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS**

The outcomes of this study reveal that South African dramas exhibit a diverse array of hairstyles, incorporating both Eurocentric and Afrocentric styles, despite the nation's complex historical backdrop. These dramas not only feature relaxed hair, wigs, and weaves but also prominently showcase natural hairstyles, including afros and authentically styled options. Although there is a surface-level alignment with White beauty norms, the dramas actively contribute to advancing African standards of beauty. This phenomenon resonates with the global trend of increasing appreciation for Black aesthetics. Notably, recent years have seen a heightened focus on Afrocentric hairstyles within these dramas, indicating a discernible shift in beauty ideals. Moreover, the intentional display of both Afrocentric and Eurocentric hairstyles suggests that cosmopolitan Black African women are diversifying their beauty preferences, breaking free from imposed norms, and embracing a broader spectrum of beauty ideals.

#### **4.11 CONCLUSION**

The presentation and interpretation of the research findings were the chapter's primary focus. The study's data were analysed utilising content-thematic methods. This chapter covered the major themes of the research and gave a brief overview of its conclusions. This made it possible for the researcher to comprehend how African hair is represented in some South African dramas. The study's summary, conclusion, and recommendations are covered in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to explore the type of hairstyles represented in South African dramas, specifically *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*. This chapter summarises the research chapters and outlines the conclusion from the previous chapter, which dealt with data presentation and interpretation. The findings were also summarised in terms of the previously defined theme and generalised findings. Furthermore, the scientific research approach was used to produce trustworthy findings that attempted to supplement current information. This chapter provides an overall response to the research objectives of this study.

#### 5.2 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

##### 5.2.1 To determine which type of hairstyle is represented most in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and what it communicates.

The first objective of the study was to determine which type of hairstyle is represented most in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*. The findings revealed that natural hairstyles, namely, the afro are more represented in *Gomora* and *The River* than in *Uzalo*. This reveals that there is a high representation of natural hairstyles in all three dramas, namely, 100 natural hairstyles as compared to 57 artificial hairstyles are represented.

The study's findings provide evidence that natural hairstyles such as Benny and Betty, cornrows, and afros are valued and celebrated in South African popular dramas. These results align with the observations made by Dawson, Karl, and Peluchette (2019), supporting the notion that television series are now showcasing natural hair more than ever, breaking away from the negative connotations that have surrounded African hair for years. The recognition and celebration of these natural hairstyles in South African dramas signify a notable shift in societal attitudes towards embracing and appreciating diverse African hair textures and styles. Hence, this suggests that there is an increase in the prevalence of showcasing natural hair(styles) some on local South African dramas,



especially the afro hairstyle. This is significant because the media, namely, the local dramas portray the importance of showcasing natural African hairstyles and including this type of hairstyle in the plethora of hairstyles available to Black South African women.

### **5.2.2. To compare the hairstyles worn by the antagonist and the protagonist in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and what this communicates.**

#### ***The River***

**The protagonist-** Lindiwe presented in natural hair and is described as a strong woman, mother, wife, and the proprietor of the Khanyisa Diamond Mine.

**The antagonist-** Nomonde, portrayed with a diverse array of hairstyles including both natural and artificial, is portrayed as a character shaped by privilege in *The River*. Her entry into a job at the mine is not attributed to merit, but rather to her stepmother's ownership of the mine. The character is presented as someone who, shielded by her privileged background, has not faced the trials and tribulations that often accompany life's challenges.

It seems that *The River* advocates natural hairstyles, specifically the afro. Natural hair is associated with power, leadership, and strength while the antagonist who wears both natural and artificial hairstyles is portrayed as weaker than the protagonist. This suggests that the woman who wears both hairstyle types is not as strong and powerful as the woman who wears her natural hair.

#### ***Uzalo***

**The protagonist-** Gabisile shown both natural (afro) and artificial (weaves) hairstyles throughout the selected episodes. Gabisile is portrayed as economically powerful because she is a landlord and equally has the power or agency to choose the type of hairstyle she wants to wear. She is not portrayed as someone who is subjected to one type of hairstyle, but she is able to change her hairstyle, be they natural or artificial hairstyles.

The **antagonist** of *Uzalo*, namely, Babekazi is a member of the Kwa-Mashu Kingdom Church and is portrayed as someone outspoken. She solely showcased with artificial (weaves) hairstyles. *Uzalo* as a drama, therefore, does not cling to one type of hairstyle

when representing African hair. It portrays African women with the agency to wear both natural and artificial hairstyles. Both these hairstyles are portrayed in a positive light.

### **Gomora**

The **protagonist**, Onthathile, presented with both natural (cornrows) and artificial (weaves) hairstyles and is portrayed as a criminal and runs an illegal business of stealing and selling cars. She is a romantic at heart, despite the fact that she lost two of her children and her multiple partners, which transformed her into a ferocious beast who terrorises her family without mercy.

The **antagonist**, Gladys, displayed with both natural (braids) and artificial (weave) hairstyles and is a social worker who is portrayed as someone who is street-smart and fierce.

Both these women are thriving in their respective fields of work regardless of their hairstyles. The women are both represented in a positive light despite their hair types, and they have a lot of similarities much like their similar hairstyles. Hence, similarly to *Uzalo*, this drama does not portray African women who only wear one specific hairstyle type, but they wear natural and artificial hairstyles.

#### **5.2.3 To explore the diverse types of hairstyles worn throughout various episodes by the protagonist and antagonist in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River* and what this communicates.**

The third objective of the study was to explore the distinct types of hairstyles worn throughout the various episodes by the protagonists and antagonists in *Gomora*, *Uzalo* and *The River*. The study established that the drama, *The River*, advocates natural hairstyles since the protagonist only wears natural hairstyles throughout the episodes. Natural hair is associated with power and strength while the antagonist who is portrayed with both hairstyles is considered less powerful.

In *Gomora*, both natural and artificial hairstyles are portrayed by the protagonist and antagonist and are presented in a positive light despite the hairstyles worn. Both the antagonist and protagonist are portrayed as fierce and thriving in their respective fields. Hence, *Gomora* promotes an African woman with agency when it comes to hairstyles.

In *Uzalo*, the protagonist are styled in both hairstyles while the antagonist only wears artificial hairstyles. Both these women are portrayed in a positive light. One type of hairstyle is not portrayed as better than the other. Hence, *Uzalo* also seems to promote an African woman with agency when it comes to the hairstyles she chooses to wear.

### 5.3 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The study's findings, which emphasize the communicative role of hair in expressing identity, align with Social Identity Theory. This theoretical framework posits the existence of distinct social classes within society, each characterized by its unique set of privileges and social standing. The recognition that hair serves as a symbolic communicator of identity resonates with the Social Identity Theory's central premise that individuals define themselves in part by their membership in various social groups and categories. The way individuals choose to style their hair can be seen as a reflection of the social identity they align with, reinforcing the theory's understanding of how people derive a sense of self from their social affiliations and the associated privileges and standings (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Grossman & Helpman, 2018). Socio-economic status can be divided based on factors such as ethnicity, race, class, occupation, gender, and religion. The application of this idea was spurred by women's current conviction that change in the modern world is required, as well as by the reality that women can be members of a wide range of groups (Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton, 2009). Reid, Giles and Abrams (2004) make the main assumption of their *Social Identity Theory* of media uses and impacts that media consumers interact with the media and build their identities.

On the other hand, the findings of the study align with Social Representation Theory, affirming that there is equal representation of African hair in the media. This resonance is attributed to the media's influential role in shaping public opinion and behaviour, particularly regarding how Black African women perceive their hair. The study supports the theoretical notion that media representations contribute significantly to constructing shared meanings within society, emphasizing the impact of inclusive portrayals of African hairstyles in shaping collective perceptions. For instance, African women are now drawn to various hairstyles. This is due to the variety of hairstyles they have encountered, some

of which adhere to the European idea of attractive hair. This indicates that what is communicated by society affects how African women choose to perceive their hair.

The study's findings are consistent with the core concept of audience reception theory, which states that audience members actively interpret and generate meaning from media content based on their own experiences, values, and cultural settings. The recognition that hair functions as a communicator of identity, as supported by Social Identity Theory, is consistent with how audiences may relate to these images of their own identities and experiences. Moreover, viewers may associate these social categories with their own lives, thereby influencing how they perceive and interpret media portrayals of identity, particularly those connected to hairstyles.

#### **5.4 LIMITATIONS**

Due to practical constraints within the allotted two-year timeframe, this study could not comprehensively include every television show featuring African hair. The sample size had to be judiciously reduced, focusing primarily on well-known streaming services and specific genres like television dramas. However, this deliberate narrowing of the sample excludes other popular television genres such as films, talk shows, sports, and news, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

The data collected for this research was conducted in 2022, which means that there were only two seasons of "Gomora" to sample data from whereas The River had three seasons and Uzalo had seven. Moreover, the use of secondary data fails to ensure that the study is true to the representations and meanings behind why certain characters wear natural hairstyles while others do not. Additionally, the researcher was unable to obtain the views of those involved in the creation of the dramas on why certain hairstyles were chosen in specific plots and scenes.

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations for further research are given below based on the study's findings, given that it was exploratory in nature.

### **5.4.3 An ongoing investigation into how African hair is portrayed in South African dramas.**

Longitudinal research could assist to assess whether the representation of African hair affects how African people view their hair or not. This could help to assess whether African women are affected by how hair is represented in the media positively or negatively.

### **5.4.1 Analyses using triangulation that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques.**

Triangulation, which is both qualitative and quantitative in nature, can be employed in a study comparable to this one with a bigger sample size from a wider range of television programmes. The study's quantitative component would enable the generalisation of the results.

## **5.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study makes a noteworthy contribution to our understanding of how African hair is represented within the spheres of communication, identity, media, and culture. It holds particular significance by addressing a gap in existing research, focusing on the portrayal of African hair in dramas. The examination of these representations not only deepens the researcher's understanding of the complexities surrounding African hair but also provides broader insights into the societal implications attached to various hairstyles.

Beyond its academic implications, this study seeks to offer meaningful insights to the general public, aiding in their comprehension of the messages conveyed through the representation of hair in South African dramas. It aspires to serve as a valuable resource for students studying Communication Studies, offering guidance for a more nuanced exploration of how media messages, especially those related to hairstyles, play a role in shaping societal perceptions.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

The results of an exploratory study on how African hair is represented in South African dramas were summarised in this chapter. Even though the study had its limits, it

nonetheless produced useful data that may aid in additional research. The researcher believes that this study has added to the understanding of how African hair is represented in South African dramas. In order to answer the research aim and objectives, and to build an understanding of how African hair is represented in South African dramas, the researcher began by highlighting the history of hair in Africa, painting a picture of why hair is such an important aspect for Africans. The researcher chose to use only soap operas that focused mainly on the hair of African women not because hair holds less significance in the lives of African men, but because colonialism had different impacts on the hair of African women and men. Black/African women's hair is heavily politicised, and it is these politics that informed this study.

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## LETTER OF EDITOR

UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO



**Faculty: Humanities**

**School: Languages and Communication Studies**

**Department: Languages**

**Private Bag X1106**

**Sovenga**

**0727**

**Tel: +27 15 268 3564**

**Cell: 073 597 4602**

**E-Mail: [moffat.sebola@ul.ac.za](mailto:moffat.sebola@ul.ac.za)**

18 August 2023

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to certify that I have edited a research dissertation titled: **EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN HAIR IN SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMA: GOMORA, UZALO AND THE RIVER** by **MABOTJA MERRIAM**. I am an Associate Member of the Professional Editors' Guild in South Africa.

I trust you will find the editing quality in order.

Best regards

**Sebola, M**

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## University of Limpopo

Department of Research Administration and Development

Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa

Tel: (015) 268 4713, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: moore.hutamo@ul.ac.za

### TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

### ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

**MEETING:** 25 July 2023

**PROJECT NUMBER:** TREC/361/2023: IR

**PROJECT:**

**Title:** The representation of African hair in South African Drama: A study of Gomora, Uzalo and The River.

**Researcher:** M Mabotja

**Supervisor:** Dr E.J Malatji

**Co-Supervisor/s:** Dr J Le Roux

**School:** Languages and Communication Studies

**Degree:** Master of Arts in Media Studies

**PROF D MAPOSA**

**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

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- i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.
- ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.
- iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.



**University of Limpopo**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**Executive Dean**

Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 4895, Fax: (015) 268 3425, Email: Satsope.maoto@ul.ac.za

**DATE: 17 May 2023**

**NAME OF STUDENT:** MABOTJA, M  
**STUDENT NUMBER:** [201615202]  
**DEPARTMENT:** MA – Media Studies  
**SCHOOL:** LANGCOM

Dear Student

**FACULTY RATIFICATION OF PROPOSAL (PROPOSAL NO. FHDC2023/4/2.2.2)**

I have pleasure in informing you that your MA proposal and Ethical Clearance application was ratified at the Faculty Higher Degrees Meeting on 26 April 2023.

**TITLE: THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN HAIR IN SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMAS. A CASE STUDY OF GOMORA, UZALO AND THE RIVER**

Note the following:

| <b>Ethical Clearance</b>   | <b>Tick One</b> |
|--|-----------------|
| In principle the study requires no ethical clearance, but will need a TREC permission letter before proceeding with the study          |                 |
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| Requires ethical clearance (Animal) (AREC)<br>Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate               |                 |

Yours faithfully

**Prof RS Maoto,**  
**Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities**

Director: Prof MJ Mogoboya  
Supervisor: Dr EJ Malatji  
Co-supervisor: Dr J le Roux