

# We were looking for our men in the faces of stars: Soap opera and Afrikaner masculinities in *Egoli: place of gold*

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of masculinities in selected episodes from the soap opera *Egoli: place of gold*, aired in 1994. This specific moment in South African media history is characterised by a heightened sense of anticipation surrounding *Egoli* as the first local long-running soap opera developed for the relatively new – and only – independent broadcaster in the country, M-Net. Because of this genre’s reliance on perceived realism, *Egoli* offers a historically significant televisual mediation of the widespread social and political changes that mark this particular period. This article, however, diverges from the wealth of research on soap opera as a so-called women’s genre and approaches *Egoli* with a keen interest in the programme’s negotiation of masculinities. The article’s analysis centres on two particular white, Afrikaans male characters: Dr Walt Vorster (portrayed by well-respected opera icon Gé Korsten) and Doug Durand (portrayed by the controversial ‘bad-boy’ rock star Steve Hofmeyr), and examines how *Egoli* deals with the immanent destabilising of Afrikaner patriarchy at that historical juncture. The article furthermore examines these characters through the notion of celebrity-intertextuality. The author identifies *Egoli* as the pioneer of casting celebrities as soap opera characters and turning soap opera actors into stars – a trend which has become characteristic of the South African soap opera genre.

**Keywords:** Soap opera; masculinities; television; celebrity; Afrikaner; patriarchy.

# Introduction

The inception of *Egoli: place of gold*,<sup>1</sup> the first long running locally produced South African soap opera, coincided with a period of accelerated political and cultural transformation, highlighted by the first national democratic election held on 27 April 1994. This article proceeds from the premise that the story of *Egoli* is a story about social change rooted in the many unresolved questions about an uncertain future facing all South Africans at that historical juncture (Wasserman & Jacobs 2003:15).<sup>2</sup> During these years of transition, ubiquitous promises of change and transformation raised the question of what a 'New South Africa' would look like.<sup>3</sup> Franz Marx, the creator of the programme, approached *Egoli* with a firm belief that it had an important role to play in the realisation of this 'new-ness'. In an article for *Die Vrye Weekblad* in 1992, Marx states (1992; translated by Jonker):

I do hope that this series will be able to contribute to transformation in the country. I am merely trying to mirror our society as it is today. Actually I just have a story to tell and my zeitgeist to reflect.<sup>4</sup>

It might seem somewhat ambitious for a soap opera to position itself in such close proximity to the complexities of a widespread political reassessment. Yet, this ambition is quite difficult to fault, when taking into account that *Egoli* managed to maintain a larger viewership than its direct competitor in the same timeslot – the national broadcaster's (South African Broadcasting Corporation) evening news bulletin – even during the turbulent political climate of 1994 (Silber 1994:38). As a genre, the soap opera is a form of mass media with unprecedented popularity, which makes it a valuable phenomenon for cultural research (Marx 2007:1; Geraghty 1996:88). This article, however, diverges from the wealth of research available that typically frames the genre as a 'women's genre' by shifting its focus towards masculinities.

For Robert Bocock (1986:63), political transformation, regardless of its context, is essentially a struggle for hegemony. In the case of South Africa, hegemony was safeguarded up until the early 1990s solely by white – predominantly Afrikaans – men (Morrel 2007:619).<sup>5</sup> This article's interest in *Egoli*'s early representations of white Afrikaner masculinity is rooted in an awareness of the temporal unsettling of this stronghold on hegemony, on the eve of the country's birth as a democratic nation.

1. *Egoli: place of gold* - from here on referred to as *Egoli* - first aired on South African television on 6 April 1992 and ran for 18 years and 4,650 episodes, until production was stopped on 31 March 2010. The scope of this article is limited to the investigation of the representation of masculinities in the characterisation and narrative of the episodes aired in 1994 (episodes 456-718). During its years on air, *Egoli* became the first South African television programme of any genre to reach 2,000 episodes and at its zenith aired in more than 30 countries (*Egoli, place of gold* [sa]). The long running history – spanning almost twenty years, pre- and post-1994, and its wide popularity make *Egoli* an important site within the South African media landscape.

2. In brief, these early years of *Egoli* chronicle the lives of three interrelated families. Firstly, the Vorsters, a wealthy Afrikaans family under the patriarchal rule of Dr Walt Vorster. Vorster, whose wealth and power stem from his role as Managing Director and Chairman of the Board of Walco International – a vehicle manufacturing company that employs many other characters on the programme. Secondly, the Naudés, the working-class Afrikaans family of Vorster's wife Louwna. Thirdly, the Willemses, a working-class Afrikaans, coloured family that often receives financial support from Walt Voster, owing to an illegitimate child that was born from an illicit affair between Johan Vorster (Walt's son) and Margaret-Rose Willimse. In keeping with the genre, much of the plot developments deal with interpersonal relationships between these families and their individual aspirations for achieving or maintaining wealth, success, and so-called healthy family values.

# The love child of M-Net and Franz Marx

Despite the enormous success of *Egoli*, its history long precedes the first broadcast (Marx 2013). Early in the 1980s, Marx already proposed the idea of a locally produced soap opera, dealing with the social complexity of daily South African life, to the *Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie* (SAUK; South African Broadcasting Corporation or SABC).<sup>6</sup> The SAUK, however, reacted with scepticism, fearing that their audience might not respond positively to a programme that transgresses the historically cemented boundaries between language and racial groups (Marx 2013). M-Net's Head of Local Production, Leon Rautenbach felt, however, that 'it wanted to be more open and daring' (cited by Louw 1999:8). In 1989, this young broadcaster put the development of its own news bulletin on hold and opted to redistribute funding towards the production of a local drama, and Marx's proposal for a soap opera seemed to be the perfect fit (Louw 1999:8).

3. This article approaches the notion of a so-called "New South Africa" as a popular, yet problematic mythology, from a critical perspective raised by Chandra Frank (2014: [sp]), who argues that 'the use of the word "new" ... becomes problematic as we need to critically question the claim that South Africa is now a completely new country and for whom'.

4. One has to acknowledge that *Egoli*'s reflection of its immediate reality presents itself as much more "sanitised" than that presented in *Generations*, which also premiered in 1994. *Egoli*, however, vastly overshadowed *Generations*' reach in terms of viewership numbers.

5. Robert Morrell (2007:619) argues that the hegemony of white men as a 'racially exclusive fraternity' was entrenched by the fact that 'white men alone had the vote until 1931, white men were predominantly employers, law-makers, decision-makers, heads-of-households, possessors of bank accounts, possessors of jobs or income-generating positions and provided with ... compulsory schooling'.

6. The state-owned *Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie* (SAUK) was established as the only national broadcaster in response to the National Broadcasting Policy of 1936, and remained under the control of the Nationalist government throughout the period of apartheid. The SAUK was therefore widely considered as an important role player in the dissemination of apartheid discourse until 1991 (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:117, 133).

Since its inception in 1985, M-Net strategically formulated its brand identity around its status as the only alternative and independent broadcaster in the country. In anticipation of the economic consequences of a new democratic dispensation that would inevitably lead to the development of new audience markets, M-Net established itself as an ambassador for diversity. With its multi-coloured logo, echoing the concept of a united "Rainbow Nation", M-Net configured its identity in line with the endless range of possibilities posed by the magical idealism of show business in a New – integrated – South Africa (M-Net 2007).

According to M-Net CEO, Koos Bekker, '[*Egoli*] was meant to become the focal point' of M-Net (cited by Louw 1999:9), serving as a platform for the broadcaster's construction of a utopian mythology that imagines a peaceful and prosperous future for all. The aspirational veneer typically associated with the soap opera genre provided the perfect scopic field within which to conjure romanticised images of a so-called New South Africa. Yet, judging from the composition of the primary full-time cast, it is evident that these early depictions of a promising future focused mostly on its implications for white South Africans.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that the narrative unfolding aimed to present a romanticised future that still lay on the brink of the horizon, *Egoli*'s creators tasked themselves with imagining a world that overlapped significantly with that of the viewer (Louw 1999:13). Through a strategic synchronicity with actual locations, real-time events, and the incorporation of local celebrities in the full-time cast, *Egoli* constructed an on-screen world that was familiar, relatable – and trustworthy. With a representational

7. M-Net initially identified the target audience of *Egoli* as a 'white, Afrikaans-speaking married lady, 35-45, middle income, between jobs while bringing up her (teenage) kids' (Van Heerden 1994:[sp]), and only later updated this description to include 'women of all nationalities from the ages of 25 [to] 45, with middle or upper income' (*Egoli* [sa]). It is therefore not coincidental that the programme – in its initial form – tends to affirm the so-called universal 'neutrality' of Whiteness as a category that transcends racial definition. The scope of this article, however, does not allow for an in-depth investigation of the distribution of power along the broader race-network represented in *Egoli* as it diversified in later years.

8. The world of *Egoli* is therefore constructed from an amalgamation of utopian ideals and the "real" world of its audience on the foundation of what Stuart Hall (1977:325) would refer to as common sense – 'the absolutely basic commonly-agreed, consensual wisdom'. For Hall (1977:325), such common sense meaning aids viewers to order the social world in simple but meaningful terms, as such meaning does not require logic, reasoning or argumentation, since it is 'spontaneously available, thoroughly recognisable [and] widely shared.' Hall (1977:325) posits, however, that despite the fact that such common sense meanings might appear natural and self-evident, an analysis of textual content should approach them with a critical awareness that such meanings are always contingent to a specific history.



*We won't stop the magic*

FIGURE N° 1



M-Net logo 1994-2000 (Louw 1999:ii).

language that intertwined pervasively with the everyday life of its audience, *Egoli* created a field of perceived neutrality that seamlessly spilled into the domestic viewing space. John Fiske (1978:111) and Christine Gledhill and Vicky Ball (2013:335) posit that the familiarity of domestic viewing environments allows viewers to respond to soap operas in ways that are intimately meaningful to themselves, yet largely uncritical to ideological messaging.<sup>8</sup> This allows a broader hegemonic struggle for cultural meaning to interweave with the textual fabric of the soap opera through so-called 'soft strategies of persuasion, seduction, incorporation and interpellation' (Ang 1996:140). Ien Ang (1996:140) consequently proposes that 'the hegemonic does not dominate from without, but from within [the text]', through a process which Stuart Hall (1977:333) describes as successfully placing all opposing definitions of reality within the range of dominant ideals. In relation to John Fiske's (1987:95) distinction between "producerly" and "writerly" texts, the soap opera is thus clearly





FIGURE N° 2



*Egoli* cast 1992-1993 (Louw 1999:11).

situated as a “readerly” medium, with a thinly veiled predetermined meaning that requires very little effort to consume.

This “readerly” quality of the soap opera is reinforced by the stereotypical use of character tropes that, for Gledhill and Ball (2013:343), act as a ‘shorthand reference to specific cultural perceptions’ that despite their “flatness”, relate to the context within which they are produced. Marx (2013; translated by Jonker) seems to agree and in a conversation with the author elaborates on the men of *Egoli*:

Like a deck of cards, there must be a king of hearts, there must be a king of diamonds, a king of spades, a king of clubs. [They] need to satisfy different tastes. Because the sexual needs of women are different from those of men ... a woman is hooked by visuality, but then there needs to be more.

## The King of Diamonds: Gé Korsten as Dr Walt Vorster

At the age of 64, the well-known and respected opera singer, Gé Korsten, left the stage to take up the role of patriarchal tycoon Dr Walt Vorster. Vorster in many ways signifies the epitome of Afrikaner patriarchy – the protective yet domineering husband, devoted yet authoritarian father and the very image of corporate success as the Managing Director of Walco International, a position that he inherited from his own father, and subsequently passed down to his eldest son. To his many friends in high places, three ex-wives, five children and countless employees, Vorster is known as a strict but honest man with firm family values despite his background of bad marriages. As a patriarchal figure – a cultural construction that Kobus du Pisani (2001:163) contextualises as deeply entrenched in Afrikanerism – Vorster represents not only the head of the Vorster family, but also a bastion of old-world power that seems to overshadow all others in the city of gold.

The centrality of the patriarchal figure is by no means a unique conception on the part of *Egoli*. In its American variation, the soap opera genre typically makes use of patriarchy as a central point of reference for the development of inter-character relationships. Yet the patriarchal portrayal of Vorster proves to be of unique significance, specifically in relation to the political transformation that frames the programme. As the literal face of apartheid and therefore injustice and deceit, the white Afrikaner patriarch acts as a locus of guilt, disillusionment, and national betrayal.<sup>9</sup> The dismantling of apartheid revealed in many ways the falsity of the assumed homogeneity of Afrikaners as a cultural group, leading to an all-inclusive ‘crisis of identity’ (Swart 2001:75). According to Ndjabulo Ndebele (1998:24), ‘[t]he ordinary Afrikaner family lost the illusion of the heroism of the group [and now had] to find its moral identity within a national community in which it is freed from the burden of being special’.

As central to the societal arrangement of Afrikanerdom, the negotiation of patriarchy within a post-apartheid milieu serves as a vital component in the search for Afrikaner identity. The characterisation of Vorster thus serves as reflective of a broader negotiation of the cultural myth of patriarchy as it is re-membered, re-assessed, and re-written during this period of re-formation. Through the characterisation of Vorster one is urged to echo the question raised by Sandra Swart (2001): does the Afrikaner patriarch, caught up in the struggle to retain hegemony, adapt and re-invent itself, or re-entrench itself in order to legitimate the previous form of hegemony?

9. For Elsie Cloete (1992:42), the Afrikaner, even just in name, ‘symbolises for the majority of South Africans, a sinister signifier of oppression’. The ambivalent sentiments directed towards the notion of Afrikaner patriarchy are furthermore spurred by the specific naming of Vorster, who shares his name with President John Vorster, one of the primary patriarchal villains in the narrative of apartheid and the individual held responsible for the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela.

By giving fictional form to the discourse of patriarchy, its ideological underpinnings undergo a modification from the level of representation to that of figuration (Storey 2012:79), thereby producing a model of patriarchy that serves as constitutive towards a broader search for Afrikaner identity. But as opposed to being a mere model for reflection, one has to acknowledge the spectres with which the audience share the living room – the embedded understanding with which the audience approaches the archetypal image of Afrikaner patriarchy at that particular moment. In the case of Vorster, this image of the patriarch is doubly recognisable owing to the audience’s familiarity with Korsten. Even before his appearance as Walt Vorster, Gé Korsten was a household name to many South Africans, because of his ‘shockingly good looks and buckets of charisma ... he became the ultimate heart-throb for hundreds of thousands of mainly Afrikaans women, who travelled vast distances to hear and, more importantly, look at him’ (Ge Korsten [sa]). Korsten’s musical *oeuvre* is diverse in nature, but primarily centres on his contribution to the development of opera in South Africa. ‘People who would normally have run a mile at the mere mention of the word began flocking to opera houses to hear their idol’ (Ge Korsten [sa]). By the time of his first appearance on *Egoli*, Korsten was thus already widely known as an “accessible face” to so-called high-brow culture.

As a character, Vorster frequently appears passive, silent, or even absent from the screen, yet his patriarchal position remains “visible” in the generative effects of his disembodied power that affects the complete social sphere that comprises the programme. This generative effect is extended by the audience’s deep-rooted conception of patriarchy, as well as their adoration and respect for Korsten’s cultural appeal and celebrity status. A deeply entrenched mythical language of patriarchy and cultural capital consequently serve to scaffold Vorster’s social control from both on and off the screen.<sup>10</sup> In the episode broadcast on 18 March 1994, during the critical approach of the first general democratic election, the proverbial skeleton literally emerged from Vorster’s closet, bringing into question the legitimacy of this power and control.

10. Bourdieu (1984:258) claims that ‘the dominant class distinguish themselves precisely through that which makes them members of the class as a whole, namely the type of capital which is the source of their privilege and the different manners of asserting their distinction which are linked to it.’ For Bourdieu (1986:47), this capital when embodied as the ‘long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’ (a specific style of thought and behaviour) that relates to a particular legitimisation of its objectified form (a specific taste in cultural goods) can be described as cultural capital.

This discovery occurred during the renovation of the Vorster mansion’s poolside entertainment area. The side of the swimming pool accidentally collapsed, despite Vorster’s insistent instructions that the old pool should not be tampered with. A shocked construction team removed the skeleton wrapped in sheets and brought it into the house for further inspection. André and Sonet (Vorster’s son and daughter) immediately start treating their father with suspicion. Vorster’s behaviour hints at prior knowledge of this matter. He is portrayed after this discovery in the foreground, as central to the plot development, faced with the accusing stares of his children. Vorster’s pensive isolation frames him in the final shot of this scene as peering

left out of the picture frame, alluding to his looking back in time and the notion of recollection and memory. This incident momentarily serves to suspend the hegemony of his patriarchal rule, as his family as well as the audience is led to question his moral character.

As the mystery unravels in a narratological game of knowledge and revelation played off against assumption and omission, viewers learn that the body is that of Gert du Toit, the ex-fiancé of Vorster's older sister Monica, who was accidentally killed in a fight with the arch-patriarch Dewald Vorster (Vorster's father) and buried there in 1961. Throughout this plotline, Vorster is positioned in relation to both his family and the audience as a gatekeeper of the ominous truth surrounding this murderous crime. This position implies a sense of complicity and serves as a reflection of the critical re-assessment of patriarchal power. As the authoritative spokesperson of an older generation of Afrikaner men, Vorster is made responsible for revealing the hidden truths of the past, and faced with the consequences of his own implicit entanglement with guilt and shame. Despite the fact that Vorster is exonerated from any form of guilt regarding the suspicious murder, this turn of events leaves his character marked by the residual effect of the "sins of his father". In the absence of his own deceased father, the onus rests on Vorster to reconcile his family with the hidden truths of the past.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this burden of responsibility, Vorster is portrayed with a sense of moral clarity and dignity (in contrast to the demonisation of his murderous father), thereby restoring the hegemony of his position as idealised patriarch after the temporal suspension of his ennobled authority. In this light, one might be led to question whether this specific moment might be indicative of a broader desire for the redemption of patriarchy. Might this resolution reveal a longing for a restoration of the familiarity of the patriarchal status quo as buttress in the formation of a stable Afrikaner identity?

11. This moment of his confession can be read in line with what Miki Flockemann (2000:144) describes as a 'rediscovery of subjective experience' and a 'renewed validation of the personal and private sphere' in South African televisual media of this particular period. Flockemann identifies this sharing of personal experiences (culminating in the public testimonies before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) as the ideological formulation of a perceived shared narrative of a unified South Africa. Flockemann (2000:144), however, criticises such narratives for their tendency to oversimplify the reality of social relationships, specifically by means of this focal shift towards subjective 'reporting'. Vorster's exposé therefore pacifies a sense of national history by drawing attention to the singularity of his individual experience.

The stability of this status quo is brought into question radically once again when Vorster dies in a car accident after an unknown perpetrator tampered with the brakes of his Rolls Royce. The scene of his accident illuminates the central relationship between the patriarch, cultural capital, and wealth in a fast-paced montage sequence focusing on Vorster's face, the winding road, and the hood ornament of his Rolls Royce – a well-known symbol of class, status, and wealth. The specific choice of murder as the cause of death for Vorster suggests that patriarchy cannot come to a natural end – its dismantling seems to be essentially violent. Yet, the disembodied power of patriarchy is ironically affirmed even after Vorster's death through the reading of his will which manifests as a type of blueprint



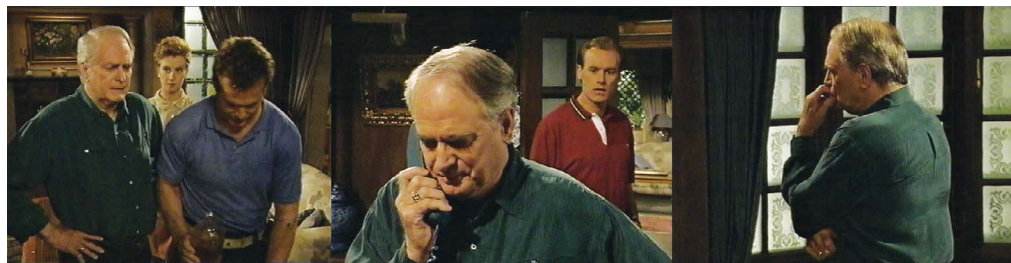


FIGURE N° 3



After the discovery of the skeleton (*Egoli*, Episode 510, Scene 3.2).

that details how Vorster's wealth and corporate (and consequently social-) power is to be redistributed after his death.

The characterisation of Vorster therefore suggests that the social stature of patriarchy – imbued with age and cultural capital enabled by wealth – leads to a form of hegemonic masculinity that transcends the limitations of corporeality. That power might be contestable, specifically in the case of the Afrikaner within this historical milieu, but through the affirmation of solidarity within the microcosm of the family and its traditional values, *Egoli* suggests (at that particular moment) that it should stand the test of time. It becomes evident, however, that the legacy of patriarchy emerges in *Egoli* not as the continuation of male domination, but as the inheritance of monetary wealth, the shimmer of gold, which seems to have been the stronghold of patriarchy all along. This affirmation of the power of this interweaving of wealth and cultural status is at its most evident in the dichotomous relationship between Vorster and Doug Durand – a character who literally takes on the role of the other man in his not so secret love affair with Vorster's wife, Louwna.

## The King of Spades: Steve Hofmeyr as Doug Durand

If Vorster is located in Marx's analogy as the "King of Diamonds" – the eternal creditor to success and wealth stemming from his patriarchal lineage – then Durand most certainly plays the "King of Spades", crested by the upside-down heart in the form of a labourer's implement. At first glance, the most distinct differentiation offered between these two characters is that of class. Durand is a base-level employee of Walco International; a test driver for their new vehicles who also dabbles in the world of professional race car driving – a career consistently funded



FIGURE N<sup>o</sup> 4



Vorster's accident. (*Egoli*, Episode 649 Scene 3.2).

by the latest in his succession of wealthy mistresses. Durand's behaviour and appearance stand in stark contrast to the other men in *Egoli*, who seem to mimic the patriarch in their dress, posture, social conduct, and professional ambition. Durand's attire is typified by denim, lumberjack shirts, and utilitarian boots that serve not only as a visual reminder of his working-class status, but also differentiate him as a visual focal point. The portrayal of Durand's romantic conquests – the wealthy women of the Vorster Empire – serves to extend further his visual differentiation. By offsetting his rugged physique with impeccably dressed, styled, and bejewelled women, *Egoli* draws attention to the transgression of class taking place, specifically in his "intrusion" into the Vorster residence, which serves as the visual backdrop for most of Durand's passionate encounters.

Despite Durand's abrupt visual impingement on the lives of the wealthy, any individual familiar with Marx's *oeuvre* would not be able to avoid relating the image of Durand to that of Bruce Beyers, the motorcycle-driving rebel, also portrayed by Hofmeyr in the Marx drama series *Agter elke man* (Behind very man; 1985–1988). The character of Durand seems to continue almost seamlessly from that of Beyers – an image already indebted to the "lubricious" media persona of Hofmeyr. As a character, Durand is by no means a "neutral image", but rather one loaded with pre-encoded associations familiar to the viewer. In an interview with Pearly Joubert (1992:[sp]; translated by Jonker) in the *Vryeweekblad*, Hofmeyr commented on the roots of his success as a celebrity figure:

It's probably all in the image – 27 years old and I sing and wear torn clothing and so on ... The girls who put up my posters on their doors – that's very nice ... My image, I have seen, is sometimes more important than my talent.

In contrast to Korsten, who is known and respected not only for his good looks but more for his contribution to the development of so-called “reputable” South African culture, Hofmeyr’s celebrity status is primarily accrued through tabloid sensationalism, reporting on his dubious sex life. Hofmeyr furthermore aligns his musical career with a non-critical attitude rooted in the “popular” (Joubert 1992:[sp]; translated by Jonker):

I am a regular guy. I like to party just like any other guy ... I can't write the intellectual stuff that someone like Coenie de Villiers writes and sings. I'm not part of the alternatives. I write and sing stuff that I like and that I can do. I don't like pissing people off.

Hofmeyr seemingly serves as the ideal platform for the depiction of a man of a lower-ranking class status because of the audience’s inclination to approach his image as an attractive veneer, without the expectation of encountering the disembodied rationality through which Vorster performs his patriarchal power. Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992:211) make use of the term “celebrity intertextuality” in order to describe this phenomenon, ‘where the presence of a film or television star or celebrity ... evokes a [particular] cultural milieu’. In this light, one might argue that Durand is read not as the representation of an actual instance of masculinity caught within a particular class position, but rather as a mere node within the complex network of “empty” significations surrounding the celebrity status of Hofmeyr.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast with Vorster, whose omnipresent patriarchal power extends far beyond his corporeality, Durand is captured in his flesh. One is reminded of this in his behaviour that is physically expressive, dramatic, and gestural, often occupying a large proportion of the picture frame (a mode of depiction more in line with the norm for female characters in soap opera). His physical interactions with other characters occur in quick movements that cut diagonally across the screen, often initiating physical contact with women through grabbing, embracing, touching, and covering the faces of his mistresses while kissing them. These reminders of Durand’s corporeality relate to Pierre Bourdieu’s description of the working class body as essentially instrumental – as a mere means to an end (cited by Edwards 2006:145). For RW Connell (1987:43), this historically constructed discursive distinction leads to “functional” sexuality in which sexual reproduction can (to some degree) be read

12. In relation to Baudrillard's (2007:53) statement that 'today the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network', one might argue that televisual representations are inevitably depthless, as a result of the infinite and complex network of signs through which the medium constructs and disseminates its meaning. Yet in the case of Durand this depthlessness seems emphasised (more so than in the case of Vorster) by his simulation of the overtly emptied image of Hofmeyr himself.

within the production chain as the physical reproduction of the workforce. Despite the oversimplification and somewhat out-dated nature of this argument, it serves to highlight how the working-class body has been culturally figured primarily in relation to sexuality and labour – its physicality. This emphasis on physicality is critically antithetical to the disembodied rationality awarded to dominant classes and, more specifically, to patriarchy (Edwards 2006:145).

John Davies points out that ‘as well as being the instrument of the economy of patriarchal capitalist success (... for men, succeeding in becoming rich and famous with women being one of the rewards) the body is also the site of primal pleasures in soaps’ (cited by Brown 1987:19). Mary Ellen Brown (1987:19) describes this pleasure as that of women having the enjoyment of watching men as the objects of romantic desire. In contrast to the disembodiment of the patriarch that avoids this visual objectification, the continual affirmation of Durand’s corporeality seems to invite such an objectifying gaze. This is particularly evident in moments where Durand’s body is displayed as pacified and fragile.

In Episode 655, a gang of vengeful terrorists attacks Durand in the reception area of Walco International. The final shot depicts his helpless body. His sensually exposed neck and the blood trickling down his face are posed and exposed for the immediate attention of the viewer. His closed eyes allow the spectator to look without the gaze being returned, rendering Durand’s body as a passive object. In his analysis of specific genres such as the Western, ‘in which masculinity is necessarily the object of consideration’, Steve Neale (1983:18) argues that the portrayal of violence circumvents the possibility of eroticising the male by placing emphasis on the hardness, toughness, and force of male bodies, reverting to the notion of male power. Despite being portrayed within the context of physical violence, Durand, however, fails to embody the ‘hardness and toughness’ of masculine strength and becomes somewhat ‘feminised’ through his passive fragility. This ‘feminine coding’ of Durand’s passive body is reaffirmed in a later scene depicting his injured body arriving at the Vorster home.

Durand stumbles into the front door in lurching and jolting movements, falling into the arms of his ex-mistress Louwna Vorster before losing consciousness and collapsing onto the living room floor. It proves significant that this event occurs as a disruption of Vorster’s funeral, taking place at the very moment of Durand’s arrival. In contrast with Vorster, who even at his funeral eludes corporeality through the omnipresence of his power and wealth still intact within the stately Vorster mansion, Durand is depicted as the objectified bleeding body, bearing physical traces of his lack of masculine power. The floral patterning of the Persian carpet





FIGURE **N° 05**



Durand being attacked in the offices of Walco International. (*Egoli*, Episode 655, Scene 1.2).



FIGURE **N° 06**



Durand arriving at Vorster's funeral after being attacked. (*Egoli*, Episode 655, Scene 2.4).



FIGURE **N° 07**



Kimberly Logan nurturing Durand back to health after being attacked. (*Egoli*, Episode 656, Scene 1.3).



that frames Durand's passive body in the last shot of the scene contributes further to the overt feminised coding of his pacified state. Durand's injured body consequently reminds one of Marion Young's (1990:150) description of the modalities of the feminine body as 'a mere thing – a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into movement, a thing that is looked at and acted upon.'

Durand's injured body remains passive in the following episodes, as Kimberly Logan – André Vorster's fiancé – attentively nurses him back to health as a prelude to their love affair that follows. Logan is portrayed repeatedly in moments of "erotic contemplation", silently looking at Durand's pacified body. This particular scene illustrates Marx's proposal that the men in the programme were inserted for the visual enjoyment of female spectators. Marx states (2013; translated by Jonker):

The characters of the series are all the women ... in 90% of all films that you watch, or American television the characters are the men and the bimbos the women - the eye-candy. Here it was different – the eye-candy was the men.

Durand clearly falls into this category of 'eye-candy' and therefore remains caught in a marginal position to the idealised body-transcending power of the patriarch. The social stature that Durand desires and aims to achieve through acts of sexual conquest remains elusive, because of the inability of these physical moments of passion to transform his social disposition into disembodied power.

Durand's powerlessness becomes most evident when placed in direct contrast to the patriarchal control of Vorster. In line with Connell's (1987:113) contention that – in patriarchal discourse – the threat of adultery 'has nothing to do with greater desire on the part of [the adulterer], it has everything to do with greater power', Durand's repeated attempts at seducing or "stealing" Vorster's wife exposes his desire not for sexual satisfaction, but for the power of the patriarch. His transgression of what Connell (1987:108) refers to as 'patriarchy's demand for monogamy', presents Durand as punishable under patriarchal rule. Durand is therefore cast as a sexual "criminal" who poses a threat to the accepted margins of sexual conduct, and therefore serves to legitimise the desirability of Vorster's patriarchal reign. For Michel Foucault, the elaboration of such symbolic margins of accepted sexuality demarcates the bourgeoisie within a 'noble code of blood' (cited by Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:168), which serves to subordinate the underclass as the bearers of various sexual and cultural dangers.

*Egoli's* portrayal of underclass masculinity therefore serves to cement the legitimised reign of Afrikaner patriarchy. Through a reliance on the vacuous celebrity image

of Hofmeyr, Durand appeals to the audience primarily as visual pleasure, without the expectation of much complexity or depth – therefore not only powerless against the eroticised gaze of the spectator, but also marginalised by the all-encompassing authority of the patriarch. In this way, the programme serves to emphasise the discursive relationship between the hegemony of patriarchy and wealth, and therefore affirms class status as the root of the idealisation of Vorster as patriarch.

## Concluding remarks

As a widely popular soap opera, invited into the privacy of the homes of many South Africans as a familiar and trusted friend, *Egoli* took part in the construction of a signifying economy that could imagine Afrikaner men in a New South Africa from within the midst of a grand-scale political transformation. With this aim in mind, this article's analysis centred on the representation of masculinities that served as distinct anchoring points within the programme's social matrix, in order to explore not only the mediation of gender, but also of social power relations and class.

As central to an understanding of *Egoli*'s production of a social gender order, the article interrogated the characterisation of Dr Walt Vorster as the vehicle for the programme's construction of Afrikaner patriarchy. His characterisation seems to oscillate between villainy and heroism. As in the case of the skeleton, it is revealed, however, that at this early point in *Egoli*'s production, the programme recurrently affirmed the ascendancy of a current order of Afrikaner patriarchy. *Egoli* therefore suggested that as a symbol of impenetrable wealth, class, and cultural sophistication, the patriarch would inevitably be redeemed -- regardless of the circumstances. The article furthermore argued that the familiarity of Gé Korsten, who portrayed this role, acts as an entry point for the audience's positive reading of this character because of the established cultural appeal of his public persona. The casting of Korsten at this mature stage in his career served not only to provide the audience with the comforting image of a well-known cultural icon amidst the uncertainty of the changing political climate, but furthermore served to redeem the cultural value of Korsten as an emblem of Afrikaans esteem. Through a reliance on celebrity-intertextuality, *Egoli* therefore legitimated established Afrikaner culture as a form of capital in the complex multiracial narrative of the New South Africa.

In contrast to the elevated cultural appeal of Korsten, Hofmeyr's celebrity status is, as he admits himself, figured almost solely on his rugged good looks. In the same light, the article claimed that the audience therefore encounters Doug Durand from a predisposition that expects to locate the pleasure of his character not within

the disembodied rationality ascribed to the patriarch, but rather in a visceral materiality, objectified for erotic visual consumption. By offsetting Korsten, as an emblematic symbol of established cultural sophistication, against the young pop star who seemed to represent a new-fangled, somewhat Americanised strand of Afrikaner culture, *Egoli* subtly promoted a mythological Afrikaner purity. Furthermore, this dichotomous relationship seems to instruct the audience that Afrikaans men can secure a position of power and ascendancy in the New South Africa only through the accumulation of wealth.

Approaching *Egoli* with the hope of encountering a radical renegotiation of cultural hegemony thus leaves one frustrated by the banality of the genre. *Egoli* tended to recycle old typologies, characters and narratives, pre-existing and ill-defined surfaces largely devoid of originality or specificity. This is largely owing to the programme's reliance on well-known celebrities in the composition of the full time cast. This specific casting strategy provided a subtle means of introducing well-established associations of cultural value that served, in the case of Korsten and Hofmeyr, to reproduce the status quo. This strategy of celebrity casting has since become a characteristic of the South African soap opera genre, yet further research is necessary to evaluate if this strategy is being employed recurrently as a mechanism to validate cultural hegemony.

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