MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTER, WIFE? INTERROGATING CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S IDENTITY – A STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND OUR PLAYS

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Performance Studies, School of Arts, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Durban

2022

DECLARATION

I, Devaksha Moodley, declare that

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Signed: [redacted] Dr. Miranda Young-Jahangeer

ABSTRACT

This thesis interrogates the gendered constructions and representations of Indian South African women (ISAW), South African Indian women (SAIW), and/or South African women of Indian descent's (SAWOID) identity through a study of such playwrights and their plays, including my own work. ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID lives are critically affected by the roles we are expected to perform in our families, namely those of daughter, sister, wife, and mother. Sylvia Walby (1990) distinguishes two key forms of patriarchy: public and private. Such a differentiation is particularly relevant to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who have long been confined to the private domain in South African Indian (SAI) communities and families for the purposes of patriarchal and cultural preservation (Govender, 1999, 2001). Thus, although great strides have been made in ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives, traditional patriarchal roles remain entrenched (Rajab, 2011).

Theatre, particularly in this study playwriting, offers SAIW like myself, an empowering public space to articulate our own subject positions (Govender, 2001). The study therefore adopts an autoethnographic and practice-based research (PaR) approach, methodological modes that are rooted in each individual's creativity and experiences. Autoethnography and PaR connect in my thesis through the play I have written and directed as a primary part of this study, *Devi* (2019). Furthermore, the research explores the theatrical work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID through a reflexive thematic analysis of interviews with selected playwrights and a textual analysis of their selected plays. In undertaking such a study, I unpack the politics of identity construction through a feminist poststructural framework. Principally, I assert that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), as conceptualised by French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971, 2006), especially those of family, religion and culture, are powerful ideological constructs. These ISAs strongly shape our experiences and the construction of our identities, which paradoxically, are both personally chosen but also socially regulated (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997; 2004). As a SAIW playwright, I am critically examining the specificity of the SAI (diasporic) community and how we continue to maintain traditional patriarchal values postcolonialism and post-apartheid. The often marginalised yet vital voices of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights challenge the predominant patriarchally embedded socio-cultural practices of SAI communities and families, offering a dynamic "re-representation of brown female identity" (Naicker, 2017: 39).

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Dr PK Desai and Dr SP Moodley. Mummy and Dad, my deepest thanks will never be enough. Everything, everything is because of you…

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SAI – South African Indian(s)

SAOID – South African(s) of Indian descent

ISAW – Indian South African woman / women

SAIW – South African Indian woman / women

SAWOID – South African woman / women of Indian descent

SAIT – South African Indian theatre

ISAs – Ideological State Apparatuses

RSAs – Repressive State Apparatuses

PaR – Practice-based Research

BA – Bachelor of Arts

KZN – KwaZulu-Natal

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GLOSSARY

Aji – "Paternal grandmother. Used mainly in Hindu homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 2).

Arre – "'Good Lord!', 'My, my' etc. Combines with terms for 'God' or 'father' with the same effect. Hence **Arre Rama**…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 7).

atma - soul

Aya – "Granny (paternal or maternal). Mainly Tamil homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 10).

Ayyo sami kadabale – "'Good Lord', 'My, my' etc.; exclamation of continuous pain, pity, sorrow, disgust, outrage, shock or sympathy" (Mesthrie, 2011: 10).

Ba – my maternal grandmother

– "Mother. May also be used by children to refer to a grandmother. Mainly Gujarati homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 12).

beti - daughter

bhajan(s) – "Hindu devotional song, Hindu congregational hymn, religious song sung in a group" (Mesthrie, 2010: 23).

bindhi – "Dot or small circular spot on a married Hindu woman's forehead. May also be worn as an ornament by unmarried women" (Mesthrie, 2010: 28).

Brahmin – "A person of the priestly caste, the highest in the traditional Indian social hierarchy" (Mesthrie, 2010: 33).

bread-ou – "A male of North Indian origin…Usually derogatory" (Mesthrie, 2010: 33).

bunny-chow – "A take-away meal comprising curry stuffed into the hollowed-out part of a half or quarter loaf of bread" (Mesthrie, 2010: 36).

coolie – "An Indian. Derogatory when used by members of other ethnic groups…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 55).

– A racist term used in South Africa against South African Indians.

Deepavali / Diwali – "The Sanskritised form *Deepavali* is favoured by Tamil Telegu speakers, whereas *Divali* or *Diwali* are characteristic of Gujarati and Hindi speakers respectively" (Mesthrie, 2010: 60).

dhal – "Split lentil soup, usually eaten with biryani or rice…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 61).

dharma – duty

– "…duty within a Hindu framework, social customs regarded as one's duty…moral and religious duty…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 63).

Janoi – Hindu rite of passage ritual for Gujarati Brahmin boys; The meaning of *Janoi* in Gujarati is sacred thread.

jathi – "Caste. Sub-caste, caste-grouping, ethnic group…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 110).

kala pani – "The waters of the Indian Ocean…Literally 'dark waters'…In traditional Hinduism one lost membership of caste and community by travelling across the oceans" (Mesthrie, 2010: 115).

kurti – traditional wear for women; a tunic-type top at hip or knee-length usually worn with tights.

Ma – my paternal grandmother

– "Granny, old lady…More common among Tamil speakers" (Mesthrie, 2010: 142).

mama(s) – my mother's brothers, my uncles (attached at the end of their names. For example: *Kirtimama*).

– "Maternal uncle, i.e. mother's brother" (Mesthrie, 2010: 146).

mandir – "Temple…Mainly Gujarati, Hindi homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 147).

mangal sutra – "Necklace of tiny black beads or thread worn by some Hindu brides from the time of marriage until the death of the husband" (Mesthrie, 2010: 147).

manja – turmeric powder

masi(s) – my mother's sisters, my aunts (attached at the end of their names. For example: *Padmamasi*).
– "Maternal aunt, i.e. one's mother's sister…Mainly Gujarati homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 150).

mousi – "Maternal aunt, i.e. one's mother's sister or her female cousins" (Mesthrie, 2010: 159).

nalangu – "Pre-nuptial anointing ceremony, held a day before a wedding, at which sandalwood paste and turmeric powder (see *manja*) are rubbed over a bride or groom's body. Mainly Tamil, Telegu homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 164).

Namaste – Greeting in Gujarati communities and families, especially to elders.
– "Greetings exchanged mainly by Indians of North Indian descent, upon meeting or leave-taking at any time of day. Also used by younger speakers first as a token of respect" (Mesthrie, 2010: 164).

Pappa – my maternal grandfather

Partasi / Purattasi – Fasting month from mid-September to mid-October every year for people of South Indian descent (Tamil and Telegu) (Mesthrie, 2010).

pithi – "Pre-nuptial ceremony held a day before a wedding at which turmeric powder is rubbed over a bride or a groom's body. Mainly Gujarati homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 184).

porridge-ou – "A person, usually male, of South Indian origin…Usually derogatory or jocular in the context of earlier slight rivalries between North and South Indians in KZN" (Mesthrie, 2010: 185).

punjabi(s) – Traditional Indian attire consisting of either tight or loose cotton pants and a long top worn over, "with short slits at the bottom end of each side…usually worn by females, especially young women, in colourful and fashionable styles" (Mesthrie, 2010: 201).

randee – prostitute in Hindi

raithu – "A sauce made of yoghurt with mint, green chilli or sliced fruit, usually cucumber or banana…Usually served with biryani and rice dishes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 192).
– In my family, we often have *raithu* with grated carrot that has been tempered and seasoned with onions, chillies, and spices in heated oil.

rakhi – "A sacred thread tied around the wrist of a brother by a girl during *Raksha Bandhan*" (Mesthrie, 2010: 193).

Raksha Bandhan – "North Indian festival at which Hindu siblings honour each other, the sister by tying a *rakhi* around the brother's right wrist, he by offering a small gift and the promise of protection" (Mesthrie, 2010: 193).

sahib – Meaning 'sir', respectful term used in colonial India to address and speak to Europeans, or men in authoritative or superior positions.

sari(s) / saree(s) – "A long wrapping garment worn by Indian women, especially but not exclusively by Hindus. One end is wrapped several times around the waist, the other end thrown over the shoulder and sometimes over the head as a veil" (Mesthrie, 2010: 206).

satsang – "Group recitals of Hindu prayers and devotional songs; a congregation gathered to worship and sing bhajans" (Mesthrie, 2010: 207)

Shakti – "Generic name for the Hindu goddess, implying her power and energy…The word Shakti means the power or energy of women. Shakti is often believed to be personified and expressed by divine females, those alter egos of every woman…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 210).

Shravan – Fasting and auspicious month of prayers and festivals for Hindu, especially Gujarati people.

soji – "A hot dessert made from semolina or cream of wheat…a traditional Indian wedding dessert" (Mesthrie, 2010: 220).

swaha / svaha – a chant during Hindu prayers in "which symbolic offerings…are made into a small fire" (Mesthrie, 2010: 97).

thanni – South African Indian card game

"A popular card game played in groups of four or (less commonly) six…" (Mesthrie, 2010: 233).

Thatha – my paternal grandfather

– "Grandfather. An old man (usually respectful)…Mainly Tamil, Telegu homes" (Mesthrie, 2010: 233).

Vanakam – Respectful greetings within Tamil communities and families, especially elders.

– "Greetings traditionally exchanged by South Indian Hindus upon meeting or leave-taking at any time of day. Usually accompanied by placing palms together at mid-chest level in the traditional Hindu way" (Mesthrie, 2010: 247).

EPIGRAPH

As an autoethnographer, visualisation mixes “the collection of your personal memory data through self-reflection and self-introspection with cultural analysis and interpretation…” (Chang, 2016: 81).

Brown Girl Beckoning
Artist and Poet: Devaksha Moodley

Here I stand, a brown girl, flowers blooming beneath me,
seeds sacrificed by my Ma and Ba
and my goddess, my mother.
The colours capture me, beckon me
but the climb is still too high
for me to reach the mandala magic.

"in a dream
i saw my mother
with the love of her life
and no children
it was the happiest i'd ever seen her"

what if by Rupi Kaur
(2017: 136)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As I sat quietly, for what felt like the first time in weeks amid the frenzy of rehearsals, to write my playwright and director's note for my production *Devi* (2019), I found myself reflecting on the meaning of my play, my thesis, my life really. I realised[1] that the most profound connection to all this could be found in one woman: my mother. There is no woman I contend with yet love and emulate more than my mother, a relationship that as we both age only becomes deeper. Indeed, this thesis is borne out of my identity as a daughter, birthed and raised from a lineage of Indian South African women (ISAW), South African Indian women (SAIW) and/or South African women of Indian descent (SAWOID)[2] who have formed my whole heart and being. I began this journey from within a deeply personal space but through my research and playwriting, I have widely explored the construction and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and experiences, resulting in this final study.

1.1: Motivation

When I was twenty years old, in the third year of my Bachelor of Arts (BA) studies at university, my maternal grandmother, my *Ba*[3], died after multiple operations and a long illness. This loss was a profound moment in my life for two reasons. My *Ba* was the first

[1] Throughout this thesis, I use British spelling except when quoting sources directly, where I retain the original spelling.
[2] As seen in my List of Abbreviations, these terms will be used throughout my thesis. In my study, concerning the construction of women's identities who are seen as and/or view themselves as South African and/or Indian, I established the categorisation and abbreviations ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. These terms are most effective and respectful of the various ways such women choose to self-identify. Furthermore, these terms are not interchangeable, since how each woman chooses to construct their identity must be acknowledged.
[3] Please see the Glossary for definitions and meanings of colloquial, italicised words used throughout the thesis.

loved one and family member whom I had ever lost. Her passing was my initial encounter with death and grief. Secondly, the Hindu, and in this case[4] Gujarati funeral, ceremonies and rituals my family undertook to mourn my *Ba* were also my first direct encounters with these religious and cultural customs. My *Ba's* death had an indelible effect on me, so much so that over ten years later, that experience has been the impetus for this thesis.

When my *Ba* died, as I began the final year of my BA degree, I was learning and being conscientised about the connections between our identities, our histories, our creative practices, and our socio-political and cultural environments (Baxter, 2013; Hall, 1997). I was learning about the second-wave feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Heddon, 2006: 132), and I was seeing, through my own family, the truth of this statement. I noticed in the planning of my *Ba's* funeral that there were minor disagreements, although significant enough to register for me, about who could do or pay for certain things. The implication of these disputes was that, regardless of who cared for my *Ba* or with whom she lived, only her sons and daughters-in-law were allowed to undertake certain rituals and customs. What had always lingered far back in my mind had come to the fore: A Hindu daughter's love, it seemed, was seen as secondary, perhaps because she is always inferior to her brother in her parents' eyes in South African Indian (SAI) Hindu culture (Carrim, 2016; Meer, 1972), or because she is seen as belonging to another family once she marries. These quarrels in my family were small but to me, the effects were shattering. For the first time in my life, I felt a discomfort about my family, religion, and culture. My *Ba's* death, the first loss of a woman in my life, unearthed the feminist in me, and so I began to question the practices that I naively used to accept as a part of who I and my family were.

1.2: Rationale

The lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are critically affected by the roles we are expected to perform in our families, namely those of daughter, sister, wife, and mother (Butler, 1999; Irigaray, 1985; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Walby, 1990). I have been raised all my life with the knowledge of a path that, while not forced upon me, has certainly been something hoped for and expected of me by my family: The path of marriage and

[4] SAI culture is diverse, with people of varied religions, lingua and cultures. This will be discussed further in this chapter and throughout the thesis. I am an SAI Hindu woman who is half-Tamil and half-Gujarati.

motherhood, which many young ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID find themselves facing, whether by choice, conditioning, pressure, or a combination of all these influences (Hall, 1997; Jagganath, 2008; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Weedon, 2004). From the moment I was born, I was a daughter and sister. I am a dutiful and caring child and sibling. Now, in my mid-thirties, the fact that I am not a wife or mother is somewhat of a concern for my family as their hope was that I would already occupy these roles. Hence, the title of my thesis. But what if I never get married or have children? Mother, daughter, sister, and wife: Is this all an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can be? If I do not take on these roles, particularly those of wife and mother, then in my culture, community, and family, do I even exist?

My research challenges these perceptions by interrogating the gendered constructions and representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity through a study of such playwrights and their plays, including my own work. This, crucially, is my research's overarching purpose. My intent is to critically explore, understand and recognise the diverse identities and experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID specifically through the lens of how we are represented in plays written by and about us.

In undertaking such an extensive study, I started from within myself, facing the existential question: "Who am I?" How do I define myself in relation to my family, cultures, societies, and the nation to which I belong? My instinctive answer is that I am an SAIW. However, one's identity is complex, fluid and vitally informs every aspect of one's life. The study of identity, and in turn the meaning of experiences like my *Ba's* death, became my lifeblood as I determinedly set out to deconstruct my existence. I learnt that how we define ourselves is not naturally decided; we each create and construct our own identities which are influenced by many social, cultural, and religious factors (Hall, 1997; Morley, 2019). Thus, my research firstly unpacks the politics of identity construction and specifically for this study, what it means to be an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

To begin with, SAI are part of both a diaspora[5] and a citizenry. Therefore, each Indian South African, SAI and/or SAOID has to contend with both their South Asian ancestry and

[5] Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID are of South Asian descent, meaning that one, and/or their family and/or their ancestors, are from one or more of "the seven-nation states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldive Islands…" (Bose, 2009: 5). However, being a part of the South Asian

their present, real lives in South Africa (Bose, 2009; Patel & Uys, 2012). As Pallavi Rastogi explains, "South African Indian identities are always configured by multiple determinants such as indenture, migration for commercial purposes, language, religion, gender and class" (2008: 11). Nonetheless, while diasporic connections must be considered, many writers argue that these links are peripheral and that SAI identity and life has absolutely been rooted and cultivated in South Africa (Bose, 2009; Naidoo, 1997, 2017; Pillay, 2017; Rastogi, 2008). Neilesh Bose (2009: 373) emphasises the specificity of SAI identity:

> However alive the world of Bollywood globalization and Indian dance may be in South Africa, the identity of South African South Asians has been developed wholly on South African soil, via intimate relations with…apartheid, and a specifically modern race consciousness in a world of South African blackness, whiteness, Colouredness, and Indianness[6].

I agree with Bose's argument and thus in my research, the term SAI is a grouping that encompasses nationality, race and culture. My thesis argues, as Bose (2009), Muthal Naidoo (1997, 2017), Devi Moodley Rajab (2011) and Kathryn Pillay (2017) also assert, that SAI culture and identity is precisely unique to and grounded in the everyday environments and realities of South Africa.

My study will primarily focus on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are Hindu as this is the religion I follow and my identity is central to the research project. It is indeed accurate to say that "South African Indians are marked more by difference than by similarity" (Rastogi, 2008: 11). We come from diverse religious, cultural, linguistic, social, political and economic backgrounds. Consequently, in researching the identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, it is important to recognise these diverse complexities and to avoid rigid stereotypes. We are by no means a homogenous group. There are ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are, religiously speaking, Hindu, Christian or Muslim. Culturally and/or

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diaspora, as Bose (2009: 5) astutely points out, is merely a term that "marks geography and does not coherently describe the various historical, cultural, and political experiences of the peoples in all of these locations." Catch-all terms, such as *Desi* (original emphasis) are simply "generalized diasporic identity" labels used "to describe diasporic South Asians" (Bose, 2009: 5).

[6] Various writers referenced in this thesis use the term "Indianness" (Bose, 2009; Frenkel, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rastogi, 2008; Vahed & Desai, 2010). Alternatively, postcolonial feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak denotes the term "Indian-ness" (1990: 39). Both these terms will be referenced and used interchangeably in my thesis.

linguistically, some of us are Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati or a mixture of these groupings. I, for example, am half-Gujarati and half-Tamil. Nevertheless, my thesis argues that within the differences that exist between us, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are connected by similar religious, cultural and socio-political experiences that shape our identities. Principally, I assert that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), as conceptualised by French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971, 2006), especially those of family, religion and culture, are powerful ideological constructs that strongly influence ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and experiences.[7]

1.3: Self, Other and Culture

To understand the relationship between one's identity and its connection to others within our cultural, social and political systems, Heewon Chang's conceptualisation of self, other and culture is useful (2016). She argues that in autoethnographic studies such as my thesis, the concept of culture cannot be separated from those of self and other. She bases her concept of culture on seven premises, of which the first three are most pertinent to understanding the interconnectedness of culture, self and other: Firstly, as individuals Chang asserts that we are cultural agents but that "culture is inherently collectivistic, not individualistic. Culture needs the individual 'self' as well as others to exist" (Chang, 2016: 21). Secondly, while culture repressively and symbolically operates through ISAs such as family, religion, education and the media (Althusser, 1971, 2006), this does not mean we are prisoners of culture; rather each individual exercises "a certain level of autonomy when acquiring, transmitting, altering, creating and shedding cultural traits while interacting with others" (Chang, 2016: 21). It is in these interactions between oneself and others that diversity

[7] While the autoethnographic methodological approach of my study necessitates that much of my analysis and findings are centered around the experiences and representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are Hindu like myself, this does not mean that such research has no relevance for, nor resonance with ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are of different religions, such as Muslim, Christian and/or even atheist. Firstly, over time ethnic and religiously mixed marriages have become more tolerated and accepted in SAI communities due to "education, social stratification and greater individual choice on marriage partners…" (Khan, 2012: 138). Therefore, religious and ethnic divisions in SAI communities are porous with shared experiences shaped by our common socio-political, cultural and especially familial ISAs (Althusser, 1971; 2006; Khan, 2012; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972; Radhakrishnan, 2005). Furthermore, whether one is an Indian South African, SAI and/or SAOID Hindu, Muslim, Christian and/or atheist, the history, experiences and identities of our families and ourselves, our collectively constructed "Indianness" is shaped by our distinctive SAI culture which is wholly informed by the oppressive systems of colonialism and apartheid, and our evolving post-apartheid contexts (Khan, 2012: 134; Naidoo, 2017; Vahed & Desai, 2010: 2). As Khan (2012: 148) notes, "South Africa is dubbed the Rainbow Nation with varying levels of diversity and new identities emerging post liberation. The family within the diaspora is not immune to such social changes…"

in cultures can be seen, what Chang calls "inner-group diversity" (2016: 21). This is evident in SAI culture which is made up of people from various religions, locales, subcultures, and economic and linguistic groups (Gopal, Khan & Singh, 2014; Maharaj, 2013). To each other, we are, as Chang (2016: 26) describes, "others of similarity" because in belonging to the same community, we hold similar standards and cultural values. Thus, Chang's third premise of culture is that despite inner-group diversity, what binds a cultural group together is a "certain level of sharedness, common understanding, and/or repeated interactions" (2016: 21).

ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are such a cultural group, connected by the religious, cultural and socio-political institutions that shape our identities. We are part of a culture, as Chang defines it, which is "a product of interactions between self and others in a community of practice" (2016: 23). In such communities, the practice of theatre provides a space – one that is rarely found for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID – in which to grapple with the effects of ISAs on our everyday lives and the construction of our identities. This is particularly germane in South Africa, a post-apartheid country seeking to "reframe the debates about 'difference', articulate new ways of being, reclaiming and redeveloping understanding of ourselves, through collective processes…and of connections between the past and present" (Baxter, 2013: 164-165).

1.4: Playwriting

The frameworks through which identity and representation can be studied are many; however, I have chosen to conduct my exploration through theatre, particularly playwriting. There are several reasons behind my choice of using both a theoretical lens on identity and the creative lens of playwriting: namely my personal affinity for theatre making; secondly, my belief in the importance and potential of the stage for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID; and lastly, to highlight and acknowledge the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights that is largely overlooked in South African theatre, literature, and society as a whole (Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govender, 1999, 2002; Govinden, 2008). This study therefore primarily employs the methodological approaches of autoethnography and practice-based research (PaR).

As a drama and performance studies student, one of my interests has always been in playwriting. Thus, throughout my postgraduate studies, I have written plays that first, are deeply personal and second, are developed in conjunction with academic research. Writing and directing my plays is how I interrogate both the personal and political in my life. The first play I ever wrote and directed, titled *Breathing* (2010), I produced as part of my BA Honours studies. My Masters research, in using the medium of theatre to confront and explore race relations between Indian and black South Africans, resulted in the writing and directing of my second play *Race Trouble* (2013). Now, my third play *Devi* (2019) (see Appendix A), is central to my doctoral study exploring ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities.

From their first arrival as indentured labourers under violent colonial rule to then living under the oppressive apartheid regime, theatre and playwriting "was the initial form of artistic expression and writings in English among the South African Indian women, and this first took root in the 1960s" (Chetty, 2020: 393). Over 160 years since the initial arrival of Indians in South Africa, and over 60 years since ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID began putting pen to paper creating plays, the body of work produced reveals a space in which such identities and experiences are freely explored and voiced, resulting in representations that challenge the patriarchal status quo of our communities (Govender, 2001). Playwright, actress, comedian and director Krijay Govender contends that theatre allows an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID a chance to represent themselves and "articulate their own subject position" (2001:33). Playwriting and theatre making, I believe, provide a space to share one's voice, to speak and express what we often cannot say or do in our daily life. This is especially applicable to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID since the reason theatre has not been fully explored by women in our communities is "mainly because the naturalised roles of women under the banner of culture and cultural preservation confine women to the private sphere" (Govender, 2001: 33). Theatre thus offers ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID a vital public domain within which to address our issues and reflect on our lives. Plays are inimitable, and powerful sources of representation for us. Therefore in my thesis, as a drama and performance studies practitioner and student, I have used the medium of playwriting and theatre to explore my identity and, within a broader context, the identities of my fellow ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

It is fair to say that there have not been many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, nor have their plays been properly documented or recognised in South African

theatre (Bose, 2009; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden, 2008; Govender; 2001). To my knowledge, there is no body of work that singularly gives an overview and analysis of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. Typically, the contribution of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights appears to be subsumed into – or merely mentioned – in larger discussions of South African Indian theatre (SAIT) or literature, thought of after novels and short stories, or deemed ancillary to SAI and/or SAOID male writers (Bose, 2009; Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden, 2008; Rastogi, 2008). Devarakshanam Betty Govinden argues that Indian women have been marginalised in the field of South African literature because they are viewed as a minority within a minority (2008). ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are considered subgroups in categories of minority writers, secondary to, for example, South African black male and female writers, and within the category of SAI writers, women are seen as secondary to male writers (Chetty, 2020; Govinden, 2008).

1.5: Contribution

My research therefore contributes to studies on identity politics and representation in South Africa by particularly focusing on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights. In using the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR, which includes myself as an SAIW woman and theatre maker, I am studying the identity construction, politics and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and about us within a feminist poststructural framework (Cixous, 1976; Davies & Gannon, 2005; Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1981; Weedon, 1997). I cannot, nor do I claim to, speak for all ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. However, by exploring my own identity, and its influence on my playwriting, I am critically questioning the broader social, political, religious and cultural contexts that have influenced my sense of self, who I am. These contexts are perhaps material, in both comparable and contrary ways, to other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and thus my thesis also contributes to studies on our lives and representation.

My thesis also challenges the marginalisation of plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Of course, I cannot textually analyse every play and playwright. However, along with autoethnographically analysing my own identity and play *Devi* (2019), I selected

three playwrights and six plays to examine in this research.[8] These playwrights are firstly Muthal Naidoo, the most prolific and renowned SAWOID playwright, who wrote her plays during apartheid. The plays I have chosen to examine in this research are Muthal's final play *Flight From the Mahabharath* (1990), as well as her trilogy *Three For Tea* (1977, 1983), which comprise of the one act comedy plays *Have Tea and Go* (1977), *The Divorcee* (1977) and *It's Mine* (1983). Krijay Govender is the second playwright I interviewed, studying her popular play *Women in Brown* (1999), which is arguably the most well-known post-apartheid play by an SAIW and/or SAWOID (Malimba, 2012; Naicker, 2017). The third playwright is Kamini Govender, whose work was written and staged in the most recent decade. In *She Put The 'I' in Punchline* (2013), a one-woman stand-up comedy style play, Kamini grapples with and reflects on her own life and identity. Within these selected texts, my research focuses on, as the title of my thesis indicates, the notable themes of marital status, motherhood, marriage, and family that I argue are cultural and familial factors that have much bearing on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives. The key texts have thus been chosen as they foreground my thesis' purpose and research intentions.

1.6: Key Research Questions and Objectives

My thesis has the following five key research questions and objectives that imbue every aspect of my study, from the theories and methodologies used to the questions posed to my interviewees:

1) What plays have been, and are being, written by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID?
   Objective: To establish and contextualise the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights.
2) How do the selected plays represent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and what can be understood about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity from these works?
   Objective: To examine the characters and narratives in these plays, and to reflect on their representational significance to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity.

[8] The three selected playwrights in my study, Muthal Naidoo, Krijay Govender and Kamini Govender will hereafter be referred to by their first names as their surnames are similar not only to each other, but also to other playwrights and writers referenced in this research.

3) How do women who are seen as, and/or who themselves may identify as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, including myself, construct our identities and how does this impact our work?
   Objective: To explore how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, including myself, define ourselves and how, in turn, our lives and experiences influence our playwriting.
4) In what ways do religion, culture, community and family influence the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and, in turn, their representation in plays?
   Objective: To investigate the significance and impact of traditional social, religious and cultural customs on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and how this is dramatised in plays.
5) Considering many writers' belief that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have been seen as "invisible" (Rajab, 2011: np), confined to the private, domestic sphere of life (Govender, 2001), and whose fictional work has been neglected (Govinden, 2008), how do plays and theatre by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID challenge these perceptions?
   Objective: To discuss if and how playwriting and theatre by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID is, or can be, an empowering form of expression for us.

The intention of these key questions is to address my research's core focus and overall goal, which is to critically examine the construction and representation of ISAW, SAIW and SAWOID's identities in plays written by and about us. These important texts, I hypothesise, hold specific and immense cultural value for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and should be recognised as such in South African theatre and literature, SAI communities and South African society as a whole. The chapters outlined below will answer my key research questions and develop my central research argument.

1.7: Autoethnographic Reflexivity

Before I set out the structure of my chapters, I must note the significance of autoethnographic reflexivity (Blanchard, 2018) in my study. It is integral to my research, and hence throughout the thesis, I explore and analyse my responses to all my data, whether from interviews, selected plays, secondary sources and/or my autoethnographic reflections. This is

especially pertinent in my data analysis chapters, as I simultaneously analyse both the responses from my interviewees, as well as my response to these answers. This enables "the interviewee and myself, and the reader audience, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under discussion" (Blanchard, 2018: 86). In autoethnographic studies, Angela Blanchard explains that as both the researcher and subject of one's work, one positions oneself within their research by writing oneself and one's personal story into the research, and "by writing reflexively about the research process, and by writing creatively as part of the research process" (2018: 84). I have taken up all these positions in my study: Firstly, my identity and life stories and secondly, my reflexive analysis of my research methods and process are discussed throughout my thesis. Thirdly, the play *Devi* (2019) – how I have written creatively – is a key part of my PaR process that also serves as a product of my research (Nelson, 2013). Blanchard (2018: 89) emphasises the unique qualities of artistic writing within autoethnography:

> Creative writing can access deeper levels of knowledge which other forms of academic writing may not reach…writing creatively may…illuminate research themes in a way which engages the heart and mind, as well as the intellect, of the reader/audience, to elicit a visceral response.

This was one of my intentions with writing and directing *Devi* (2019), with the hope that such an accessible text and production could reach and evoke in audiences a deep-rooted response to my work, especially my fellow ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

1.8: Outline of Chapters

Chapter(s):	**Description:**
One	Introduction
Two	Theoretical Framework
Three	Methodology
Four and Six	**Literature Review Chapters:** **Four:** History of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID **Six:** History of SAIT

Five and Seven	**Data Analysis Chapters:** **Five:** Analysis of interviews with selected ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID women in my family **Seven:** Analysis of interviews with selected ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, and their selected plays.
Eight	Reflexive Analysis: The feminist writing and staging of my play *Devi* (2019)
Nine	Findings and Conclusions

Figure 1: Chapter Breakdown

As outlined above, my thesis consists of nine chapters, each with a particular focus. I have chosen to begin each chapter with the poetry of Rupi Kaur (2015, 2017, 2020), that serves as an epigraph to each section of the thesis. Kaur, a Canadian, diasporic Punjabi Sikh woman explores, among others, the themes of mothers and daughters, matriarchal sacrifice, feminism, love, sisterhood and identity in her collections of poetry. I was drawn to and inspired by her work while writing my thesis. Thus, I have included her poetry in this thesis because Kaur captures, brilliantly, the key emotional connection or heart of each chapter of my thesis, and its purpose within my study.

Chapters two and three, in detail, respectively discuss and establish my research's theoretical and methodological frameworks. As my study examines ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity, an extensive understanding of the concept of identity itself is necessary. This is the purpose of chapter two in which I navigate the politics of my identity, presenting all the theories and concepts that have informed my understanding of how we construct our identities within the environments and institutions that shape our lives. There are a "range of competing theories of subjectivity and identity, variously derived from humanism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and feminism" (Weedon, 2004: 9). My research tackles the concept of identity by positing a feminist poststructuralist theoretical approach that primarily engages the work of French-Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1971, 2006), feminist scholar Chris Weedon (1997, 2004) and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997, 2005).

My journey navigating my own identity underpins the methodology of this study which is wholly qualitative within an interpretivist paradigm, and is presented in chapter three. As a playwright myself, by intertwining the personal and creative methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR, I have intensely considered and examined my own identity and experiences, principally through writing both my academic thesis and my creative project. As a methodological approach, autoethnography situates the researcher and their identity centrally within the research itself, displaying "multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 739). My identity as an SAIW has driven every aspect of my work, and is the heart of my study. Uncovering how this influenced the play, *Devi* (2019), I wrote and staged, as well as the research I conducted, is thus hugely significant to my thesis.

Autoethnography and PaR connect in my thesis because as Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis argue, "autoethnographers use personal experience to create nuanced and detailed 'thick descriptions' of cultural experience in order to facilitate understanding of those experiences" (2013:33). *Devi* (2019), while sprung from my personal experiences, is ultimately my artistic interpretation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and cultural experiences. Narrative autoethnography is therefore the primary method used in my study. This autoethnographic and PaR based method can be identified as an arts-based approach in which traditional autoethnographic writing is "represented as a narrative or story…often incorporating fiction" that "may be communicated as a short story, essay, poem, novel, play, performance piece, or other experimental text" (Leavy, 2009: 38-40). *Devi* (2019) is an example of such a text, one that is indeed informed by the autoethnographic process and writing that I have undertaken in this thesis, the PaR process and product of which is represented in the form of a fictional play.

My autoethnographic and PaR methodological approaches also determine my data collection, which involved two sets of semi-structured interviews. These data, as Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke conceptualise, were then reflexively thematically analysed (2019). Firstly, I interviewed nine ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID members of my family. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of not just my subjectivity, our particular familial connections, and/or the stimuli these women and our shared experiences have on my playwriting, but also to develop wider insights about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity and lives beyond only my viewpoints. The reflexive

thematic analysis of my interviews with the women in my family is the focus of chapter five. Secondly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID women playwrights, Muthal, Krijay and Kamini. I textually analysed (Given, 2008) a selection of their respective plays and my own play *Devi* (2019), in order to specifically explore how the ways in which our identities have been constructed impacts on our work in the theatre, and on the kinds of representative or countering characters and/or narratives that are present in our plays. Chapter seven, especially, is pivotal to my thesis as it addresses my key research questions: directly analysing the connections between ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights' identities, environments and experiences, to the narratives, characters and representation in our plays. My data analysis from both sets of interviews is discussed throughout the thesis but is particularly the focus of chapters five and seven. Both the respective sets of questions I asked of the selected playwrights and women members in my family can be found in Appendix G.

My research also includes an analysis of various secondary sources focusing on two interconnecting topics, the lives and histories of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, discussed in chapter four, as well as the history and state of SAIT, established in chapter six. While these subject areas inform my entire thesis, they are the focus of my literature review chapters four and six respectively. My research recognises that identity and how it is represented in theatre are two different things. However, one possible way to understand and interrogate the complexities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity is through the voices of its playwrights. Therefore, an examination and discussion of both SAI identity and SAIT must first be established.

In chapter four addressing SAI identity, the work of many writers who have researched and reflected on the lives of SAI, from the time of indentured labour in 1860 to present post-apartheid South Africa, have been studied (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Ginwala, 1985; Gopal et al., 2014; Kuper, 1956; Maharaj, 2013; Patel & Uys, 2012; Pillay, 2015, 2017; Rastogi, 2008). As an example, Rastogi, in her book *Afrindian Fictions: Diaspora, Race, and National Desire in South Africa* (2008), discusses the relationship between SAI writers' identities and their fictional work, therefore evidencing the connection between SAI identity and theatre. Specifically, writers who have focused on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID will be especially considered (Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

Rajab states that, “For large periods of our history in this country, Indian women were largely invisible” (2011: np); the work of the above writers has sought to challenge this invisibility. My research intends to do the same.

Chapter six addresses SAIT (within the broader context of South African theatre), the work of Dennis Schauffer (1992), Thomas Blom Hansen (2000), Rajendra Chetty (2002, 2020), Bose (2009, 2015), Muthal (1997, 2017) and Krijay (1999, 2001), among others, has been utilised. These writers discuss the definitions, types and limitations of SAIT. In addition, the writings of Govinden (2008) and Ronit Frenkel (2010) who have grappled with the marginalisation of the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID voice in South African literature and theatre have been referenced. Muthal contends that, “In the ‘Indian’ community…the search for identity is an ongoing process and underlies all cultural, social and political activities” (1997:31). The theatre is a space of cultural activity that in finding and challenging one’s identity, Krijay argues, “offers marginal groups, like South African *Indian* (original emphasis) women, an opportunity to represent their own positions, to oppose the appropriation and silencing of their positions by their male counterparts” (2001: 33). I, and several other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights have taken up this opportunity. Therefore, an understanding of SAIT, its history and present state in relation to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights is required.

My process and experience writing and staging *Devi* (2019) is also reflexively analysed. Of course, this is considered throughout my research but is the particular focus in chapter eight, where I discuss the feminist writing and feminist theatre practices that informed my writing and directing of *Devi* (2019). My discussion is framed through the lens of feminist performance theory and criticism, specifically three central frameworks that have been used by feminist scholars and theatre makers to “unpack the way gendered experiences are both represented on stage and also manufactured in performance in order to seem ‘given’ or ‘natural’ both on stage and in the world outside the theatre” (Solga, 2016: 4). These frameworks, which I have used to analyse my theatre making process, are firstly, the gendered nature of the spectator’s gaze; secondly, the politics of realism in feminist theatre; and thirdly, present debates around feminism and the impact this has on the personal and the political in feminist playwriting (Solga, 2016).

Finally, in chapter nine, I discuss and present my thesis' findings and conclusions. As Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell avow, this is effectively what I, as both the researcher and subject of my study, have learned about the "phenomenon" explored in my work (2016: 277). Due to the autoethnographic approach of my research, this phenomena includes myself; thus, my findings and conclusions consider what I have come to understand about my identity, and how my life has been changed by undertaking this study. This is important to reflect on as the transformative potential of autoethnography, for both researchers and readers/audiences is a unique benefit of such research (Bochner & Ellis, 2000; Ellis, 2004). I have framed and established my findings around the key research questions and objectives of my thesis that I have outlined here. Such framing is useful because as I have stated, these key questions and objectives have informed every aspect of my study, from the theoretical framework and methodological approaches used, to my data collection and analysis. Accordingly in my last chapter, my thesis' key research questions and objectives "function[s] like a map so the reader can follow," concisely and clearly, the presentation of my findings and conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 279).

To finish off, in briefly concluding chapter one, I have outlined my study's motivation, rationale, key research questions and objectives, and chapters. The next chapter forms and conceptualizes the critical basis of my study, my theoretical framework.

"you are one person
but when you move
an entire community
walks through you"

you go nowhere alone by Rupi Kaur
(2020: 144)

CHAPTER TWO: NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY – MY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1: Introduction

How would one identify oneself? The answer to this question is complex and unique to each individual. I, for example, identify myself as an SAIW. Another woman, of the same race and nationality as I am, may say that she is an ISAW. On the surface, these two answers may appear to be synonymous but, in fact, they reflect how each person defines who they are differently, deciding which parts of themselves are more imperative than others. I see myself first as a South African whereas the other woman sees her race and/or culture as an Indian as more important. Whatever identification we choose, it is not only the 'how' of identity that is significant, but also the 'why' of identity that needs to be considered. Jeffrey Weeks (1990: 88) astutely explains why identity holds such value in our lives:

> Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you…the stable core to your individuality…Each of us live with a variety of potentially contradictory identities…which of them we focus on, bring to the fore, 'identify' with, depends on a host of factors. At the centre, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others.

I say that I am an SAIW because I want to belong and to connect with others through a shared nationality, race and culture. This belonging is not a given or a fact of my life. Rather, it is all a construct that I have created, under the influence of, as Weeks states, many

"factors" (1990: 88). Therefore, I must ask myself the following: What does it mean to be an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID? What are the markers of our identities? As I established in chapter one, we are by no means a homogenous group and yet, commonalities and shared experiences, indeed markers, can be found within the religious, cultural and socio-political institutions that shape our identities. This construction or shaping of the identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID warrants investigation. It is a key critical question my thesis seeks to answer in order to theorise the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and their plays.

To understand the representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and about such women, a solid grasp on identity itself as a concept is required. A theoretical framework is thus needed when studying identity. As I noted in chapter one, my theoretical framework posits a feminist poststructural lens, primarily drawing from the philosophical, cultural and critical work of Althusser (1971, 2006), Hall (1997, 2005) and Weedon (1997, 2004). By combining the ideas of these critical thinkers on ideology, identity politics, representation and poststructuralism, I have developed a theoretical framework that allows for a comprehensive analysis of identity and representation. It is this framework that I have used in my research when interrogating constructions of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities, both in South African society and South African theatre, as our representation in plays is greatly influenced by and reflective of our everyday realities and experiences.

2.2: Identity Politics

The concept of identity is constantly under investigation. Weedon (2004:1) explains that it is a vital field of study:

> Identity is a key concept in the contemporary world. Since the Second World War, the legacies of colonialism, migration, globalization, as well as the growth of new social movements and forms of identity politics have put the question of identity at the centre of debates in the humanities and social sciences.

In poststructural thinking, identity is viewed as anti-essentialist, fluid and varied rather than fixed and singular. In my thesis, I share this perspective on identity, recognising it as a construct; we create our identities, we construct who we are, but this is not an autonomous process. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall states, "Who I am – the 'real' me – was formed in relation to a whole set of other narratives" (1997: 135). Hall's argument here is that our identity is shaped by many aspects such as the society or communities in which we live, the religions we profess and the cultural customs we follow. Furthermore, as David Morley explains, for Hall, constructing one's identity is not purely a matter of self-creation because some of the narratives we have to face come from perceptions others have of us (2019). As such, identity construction is a dialogic process "in which individuals attempt to develop a sense of their identity in (sometimes conflictual) interaction with identities thrust upon them by others" (Morley, 2019: 5). Thus at the outset, in developing a theoretical framework for conducting my research, an understanding of identity politics and poststructuralism must be established.

How are the theoretical paradigm of poststructuralism and the phenomenon of identity politics connected? The concept of identity politics arose in Western Europe and North America in the late 1960s and 1970s. As James Proctor explains, in its beginnings, identity politics had "many strengths and was particularly successful in placing black, women's and gay rights on the political agenda" (2004: 118). However, this initial conceptualisation of identity politics faced criticism for disregarding cultural, racial and economic specificity; for instance, in feminism, extrapolating women to be seen as a universal category rather than recognising the varied positions of women of different races, cultures and nations (Proctor, 2004). Morley notes that Hall's work "has long circled around the mutual imbrication of structures of class, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and politics" (2019: 8). Carolyn Byerly, Sam Harman and Ashely Lewis also point out that when Hall led the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies from the late 1960s, its intersectional approach to analysing race, diaspora, nationality, and gender was especially commendable (2016). Hall's writings are thus highly relevant to my thesis which explicitly examines the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, where the interplay of a specifically constructed race, nation, gender, culture and religion has been identified and studied. Similarly, the concept of intersectionality – an increasingly important facet of cultural studies and identity politics that particularly acknowledges differences of race, gender and class in feminism – is pertinent to my research (Davis, 2011).

Hall is the architect of cultural studies which is, "an interdisciplinary field of inquiry concerned with the intersection of power and meaning in popular culture" (Barker, 2010: 1). Crucially, he contends that while it is not possible to have wholly unified identities such as the 'working class' or, as is evident in the use of the various abbreviations in my thesis, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, Hall argues that in order to conceive of identity itself and to understand ourselves as individuals and society as a whole, we each have to connect with the different socio-political and cultural factors of our lives (Hall, 1997; Proctor, 2004). These factors are paradoxically both limiting and freeing: restrictive because we may be forced to categorise ourselves by what we are against, and liberating because it gives us a starting point from which to find our 'true' selves. Hall (1997: 136) expands on this juxtaposition in identity politics:

> But to say anything at all in particular, you do have to stop talking. Of course, every full stop is provisional. The next sentence will take nearly all of it back. So what is this 'ending'? It's a kind of stake, a kind of wager. It says: 'I need to say something, something…just now'. It is not forever, not totally universally true. It is not underpinned by any infinite guarantees. But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am.

This doctoral thesis and my play *Devi* (2019), in effect, constitute the 'something' I have to say. It is not a reflection of all ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and experiences nor does it seek to be a factual representation. My work, simply put, is my 'truth'. My research posits that the 'truth' we each seek for ourselves can first be explored and articulated through an understanding of identity within a feminist poststructuralist framework. Secondly, such work can be artistically expressed in the theatrical form of a play, which I further assert particularly gives ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID a space where they can freely voice and represent themselves. Approaching identity and identity politics with an awareness of its intricacies gives us a new kind of agency. We come to understand the complexities involved in constructing our identities: how they are both personally chosen but also socially regulated. A useful term that reflects such thinking, as explained by Davies and Gannon (2005: 318-319), is that we are each a subject-in-relation:

> The subject-in-relation is an ethical subject, who is reflexively aware of…the particular social, historical moments, and material contexts in which her ongoing

differentiation (becoming other than she was before) is made possible. She is thus capable of disrupting the signifying processes through which she constitutes herself and is constituted.

2.3: Structuralism to Poststructuralism

Before discussing feminist poststructuralism further, a foundational grasp of poststructuralism itself is needed. In *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Poststructuralism?'*(2007), Bernard Harcourt unpacks the tenets of structuralism and how poststructuralism is built from these principles. According to Harcourt, it is in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure that the four tenets of structuralism can be found (2007). Linguistics is the study of language and its structure. The first tenet of structuralism points out that the structure of language and its meanings can be found in not only its conscious phenomena but also in that which is unconscious, taken for granted and assumed as naturalised (Harcourt, 2007). Hall expands on the significance of Saussure's work when he explains that the linguist's chief achievement was in forcing us "to focus on language itself, as a social fact; on the process of representation itself; on how language actually works and the role it plays in the production of meaning" (1997: 34).

The second tenet of structuralism is that words and objects do not hold meaning independently of each other; rather they form an interconnected relationship, based on differences between terms (Harcourt, 2007). Furthermore, these relationships and differences are random, meaning they have no natural connection to each other and are constructed in society through language. Saussure (2011) is most well-known for his breakdown of the linguistic sign into two parts, the signifier and the signified: "The linguistic sign, as defined, has two primordial characteristics…The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (Saussure, 2011: 67). An example of this can be found in looking at aspects of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities, which are represented through different words and objects and the relationships between them. A significant factor in the lives of Indian women across South Africa, India and the world over is that we have been, and continue to be, defined by our marital status (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Jagganath, 2008; Seedat-Khan, 2012). This is represented in Hindu culture where for instance, wives wear a red dot or *bindhi* to signify their married status (Mesthrie, 2010). Widows, however, will never wear a red dot

but to signify their loss, some wear a black *bindhi*. This, I have observed, is mostly practiced amongst elder generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, such as my *Ma* who was a widow for the last twenty-six years of her life. Variously colourful dots are also considered acceptable for married and unmarried Indian women, part of our fashion. Ultimately, what particular *bindhi* signify only make sense in their relation to each other, their meaning based on the difference between what each coloured dot represents. My final touch when dressing in traditional attire is to place a coloured dot on the centre of my forehead. Choosing the prettiest *bindhi* is always an enjoyable thing to do. However, I sadly never shared this experience with my *Ma* because I only ever saw her place a tiny black dot on her forehead.

The third tenet of structuralism is that all these relationships of difference and similarity between signifiers and signifieds form a system or structure which, by recognising it as such, allows for these systems to be examined (Harcourt, 2007). This builds on the first and second tenets of structuralism which seek to refute the naturally assumed nature of language and representation. Saussure explains that, "A language constitutes a system…The system is a complex mechanism that can be grasped only through reflection; the very ones who use it daily are ignorant of it" (2011: 73). Thus, Saussure adds that due to the over-complexity of the linguistic system, any radical change in the system, while possible, is highly unlikely (2011). He states that, "language furnishes the best proof that a law accepted by a community is a thing that is tolerated and not a rule to which all freely consent" (Saussure, 2011: 71). This immutability of language can be found in ISAs where tension arises between fixed traditions and free action. When an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID goes against the conservative and normative expectations of her religion and culture by, for example, not marrying and/or having children, she cannot escape being defined in relation to these conceptions of traditional Indian womanhood that hold such paramountcy in our communities (Rajab, 2011; Weedon, 2004). She still has to construct an identity for herself in relation to these expectations, as non-identification only further denies her agency in her own life and community (Weedon, 2004). This reflects Hall's identity politics: In order to carve out an identity for oneself, one has to engage with the social, cultural and political influences in one's life (Hall, 1997; Morley, 2019; Proctor, 2004).

A structuralist approach breaks down and analyses social systems. Its fourth tenet, however, "that structural analysis can help discover general laws with universal character," is where it differs from poststructuralism (Harcourt, 2007: 5). Such a position is contentious

and, as Harcourt (2007: 5) notes, birthed "the poststructural break and the rejection of such notions of general laws." Poststructuralism, therefore, while building on the first three tenets of structuralism to denote patterns and constructions in social systems, does not hold these meanings to be universally true. Poststructuralists find meaning beyond the patterns and dominant characteristics of systems, questioning why these social institutions have come to exist in the first place. It looks for the ambiguities in systems and explicitly points out how social systems are constructed, not natural, and thus can be challenged and changed. Harcourt (2007: 18) expands on and surmises what poststructuralism asks:

> The central question that poststructuralists pose in their work is precisely how knowledge becomes possible at any particular time under specific historical conditions…How does the process of making a discourse 'true' shape the way we, as subjects, judge, think, categorize, desire the other? How is it that we turn ourselves into objects of study?

Saussure contends that the system of language, its structure and meanings are constructed, and that we are mostly unaware of the artificiality of this system, instead assuming that it is simply a natural part of our lives (2011; Hall, 1997; Harcourt, 2007). In the same vein, theories of poststructuralism lift the veil on what we assume to be innate about our identities and what we are not consciously aware of about ourselves and our societies. How we identify ourselves is actually fluid, constructed and socio-historically specific. Consequently, it is open to ambiguity and transformation. In the same way that whole nations and communities change over history and time, so too can individuals through their lives. An ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID may thus construct an identity and life for herself that need not be fixedly decided by the society she inhabits.

In discussing Harcourt's breakdown of the tenets of poststructural thinking (2007), I have also explored Hall's important concepts on identity and representation (1997, 2005). He explains that the theoretical revolution of the 1960s and 1970s introduced theories such as semiotics, structuralism and poststructuralism with a focus on language, discourse and representation. In terms of understanding identity and ourselves, Hall (2005: 225) expands on the critical impact of such theories:

> We can no longer conceive of 'the individual' in terms of a whole, centred, stable and completed Ego or autonomous, rational 'self'. The 'self' is conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, 'produced', in process.

For Hall as a cultural theorist, identity is not simple; rather, the self is always, in a sense, fictional or constructed, and communities of identification, such as nation or ethnic group, are arbitrary (1997). However, as far as Hall (1997: 137) is concerned, this should not detract from the study and meaning of identity:

> I also believe that out there other identities do matter. They're not the same as my inner space, but I'm in some relationship, some dialogue, with them…I have to deal with them, somehow. And all of that constitutes, yes, a politics in the general sense, a politics of constituting 'unities'-in-difference. I think that is a new conception of the self, of identity.

This idea is significant for my research which recognises that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are a diverse group. However, I am still connected to these women with whom I share, in Hall's terminology, 'unities'-in-difference. Such connections merit a critical analysis that can develop and contribute to studies on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and their identities. These connections must be interpreted within a specific theoretical framework which this chapter proposes and discusses. Hall argues that in considering new, poststructuralist notions of identity, we must also "look at re-definitions of the forms of politics which follow from that: the politics of difference, the politics of self-reflexivity, a politics that is open to contingency but still able to act" (1997: 137). These three terms: *difference*, *self-reflexivity* and *contingency* (original emphasis) are repeatedly found in Hall's writings. Proctor unpacks and succinctly explains their meaning (2004). Regarding difference, Hall rejects clear-cut binary oppositions and recognises "the 'many' within the 'one'" (Proctor, 2004: 119). I am one among many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID thus, my individuality and experiences are integral to the research I conduct on identity. This is connected to Hall's notion of self-reflexivity, which, as Proctor explains, "involves foregrounding the specificity of the position from which we speak" (2004: 119). Finally, the term contingency for Hall, as described by Proctor, "involves a sense of dependency on other

events or contexts…" (2004: 119). In other words, who we are, our identities, are contingent or dependent on the historically specific contexts, environments and circumstances out of which they emerge.

2.4: Deconstructing Binaries

Having established the connection between identity politics and poststructuralism, it is evident that one of the principle tenets this phenomenon and theoretical paradigm respectively share in common is that language and signs have multiple, fluid meanings and our identities, how we represent ourselves, are continually evolving through these significations. Identity is, thus, "a matter of representation forged from unstable meanings. Identity is not a thing but a becoming" (Barker, 2010: 5). In cultural studies, philosopher Jacques Derrida is one of the most influential poststructuralist writers (Barker, 2010). He challenged the notion of language and meaning as fixed. Working within a poststructuralist framework, Derrida is widely known for his concept of deconstruction which analyses the relationship between texts and their infinite meanings: "The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things – texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need – do not have definable meanings" (Caputo, 1997: 1). Thus identity, which is constructed through language, is fluid and not permanent. However, as Hall argues, in order to function and co-exist in society, one must engage with its language, and its cultural and political influences (1997). Therefore for Hall, while Derrida's deconstruction highlights the infinite multiplicity of meaning, this concept has its limitations. In order to move beyond the theoretical and tackle our socially, politically and culturally imbued lives, "deconstruction has to come back. It has to affect…the people and the relationships and the institutions and what they do in the real world" (Hall, 2013: 769). Hall's point here can, in fact, be seen in Derrida's own work as deconstruction notably uses the very language it seeks to unpack and scrutinise (Barker, 2004). As Derrida asserts, "Deconstruction is not a method or some tool that you apply to something from the outside. Deconstruction is something…which happens inside" (1997: 9).

Taking Saussure's point that any fundamental change to the linguistic system is unlikely, Derrida also recognises that the system of signs is crucial to our entire world (1997). He states that "the constitutive mark of any sign in general and of any linguistic sign in

particular is its twofold character: every linguistic unit is bipartite and involves both aspects" (Derrida, 1997: 13) Despite this entrenchment of binaries in our societies, deconstruction particularly sets out to dismantle hierarchical ones, "such as man / woman…that serve to guarantee the status and power of truth-claims by excluding and devaluing the 'inferior' part of the binary" (Barker, 2004: 47). Specifically considering the hierarchical binary of man and woman, poststructuralism posits that this binary and the societal expectations it implies are entirely man-made, not natural. With regards to SAI, the hierarchical nature of the binary between men and women in this particular community is that the former group's experiences and lives are privileged over the latter group in a patriarchal cultural system. Therefore, it is not innate for an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to become a wife and mother, a caregiver, while her husband is the head provider: this is culturally expected of her. She can, in fact, make her own path. Yet she often finds herself trapped. This patriarchal trap or system ironically continues to be "generated and sustained by its victims…each generation of women guarded it zealously and prepared the next to be imprisoned within it" (Meer, 1972: 35). Poststructuralism proposes a way out of this trap: Through an understanding of language, deconstruction, representation and identity as constantly intertwined and shifting, change, however slim the possibility, is still conceivable.

Finally, Weedon explains that "while different forms of poststructuralism vary both in their practice and in their political implications, they share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity" (1997: 19-20). In poststructuralist theory, the assumption is that language, meaning and subjectivity are all interwoven and indivisibly connected. They are also all, notably, socially produced and constructed. This means that firstly, our identity is not created in isolation but communally and secondly, our sense of ourselves is not instinctive; we are greatly influenced by societal factors in constructing identities for ourselves (Weedon, 1997). The latter point is crucial and is often overlooked in our everyday lives. The factors that influence our identities go unnoticed, and thus become habitual and normativised. Identity crucially has power and plays a role in repressive individual and social practices. As Weedon notes, "Often tied to racism, ethnocentrism, sexism and homophobia, exclusive forms of identity can lead to discriminatory behaviour towards others and violence of all kinds" (2004: 2). Thus, when repression is hidden or assumed simply to be inherent, it goes unchecked and subjugation persists.

2.5: Ideology

Althusser posits that identity operates through ideology which "is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (Althusser, 1971: 149). Althusser's notion of ideology is rooted in Karl Marx's understanding of the term. Marx "argues that the dominant ideas in any society are the ideas of the ruling class" (Barker, 2004: 97). Furthermore, Althusser (1971: 129) explains that for Marx, every society is "constituted by 'levels'…the *infrastructure*, or economic base…and the *superstructure,* which itself contains two 'levels'…the politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, etc.)." As the superstructure is contingent upon the infrastructure - the economic base - Marx's argument is that those disenfranchised, such as the working class in capitalist societies, suffer from "false consciousness" (Lewis, 2002: 27), meaning they are indoctrinated to believe views and ideologies that do not serve their interests (Barker, 2004). Althusser contends that such ideological views exist and are promulgated in state and societal institutions (Barker, 2004).

Althusser's work on ideology dismantles notions of society as natural and seeks to show that our communities are ideologically constructed on the basis of hegemonic power relations (1971, 2006). Similarly, Derrida's (1997) concept of deconstruction which aims to undo hierarchical binaries (Barker, 2004), Saussure's (2011) concept of the linguistic sign which seeks to make explicit that which is normativised in language, and Althusser (1971, 2006) who examines ideology and how it is institutionally constructed and propagated in society, all evidence a desire to expose the underlying structures of our societies that are often concealed. Ultimately, all these concepts highlight the constructed and thus changeable nature of identity and representation. Thus, the important work of these philosophers is significant to my research which examines the identity and representation of ISAW, SAIW and SAWOID in plays written by and about such women.

In describing the institutions that propagate ideology, Althusser refers to Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) (1971, 2006). RSAs are institutions such as the military, police, prisons, government and the law that function primarily by violence, whether overt or concealed, and operate in the public domain of society. The notion of violence here can also be non-physical (Althusser, 1971). A government, for example, can oppress through policy or laws. Alternatively, ISAs are

institutions that function primarily through ideology and operate in the private domain of society (Althusser, 1971). Examples of ISAs include religion, culture, family, education and the media (Althusser, 2006). Althusser contends that ISAs are used to exercise hegemonic control and uphold the ideology of "the ruling class" (1971: 139). This strong connection between ideology and hegemony, upheld through ISAs, exemplifies Marx's notion of "false consciousness" where "the interests of the ruling classes become part of a generalized social belief system" (Lewis, 2002: 27). Althusser's studies on ideology thus show that subordinate groups appear to willingly comply with their oppression "because they have absorbed the interests and beliefs of the ruling classes into their own common sense view of things" (Lewis, 2002: 27). For example, in looking at SAI social practices, a dominant patriarchal culture prevails precisely because it is upheld by the very subordinate group who is oppressed in this society, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

Althusser (1971: 138) clarifies further the distinction between RSAs and ISAs:

> The (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (original emphasis) (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology. (There is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus.)….In the same way, but inversely, it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology* (original emphasis), but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.)

Exposing the hidden repression imposed by ISAs can be linked to Derrida's deconstruction and poststructuralism in its purpose of dispelling the perception of identity as innate and to show that it is, in fact, a construction. Notably, there are two important points Althusser highlights about ideology and the subject in relation to RSAs and ISAs (2006). Firstly, while the system or beliefs of a particular ISA are constructed, Althusser asserts that "an ideology always exists in…its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (2006: 82). As such, the daily acts or rituals – from simply how we dress to how housework is divided in our homes – that are a part of our families, cultures and communities, are reflective of ideological practices that have a tangible effect on our lives and identities. This echoes Hall's point that

the socio-cultural influences in our lives, while artificial, have real life effects and thus we must contend with these factors (1997).

Secondly, the existence of ideologies is dependent on us as individuals who are hailed or interpellated as subjects in a continual cycle because, as Althusser explains, we "are *always already* (original emphasis) subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition…" (2006: 85). Furthermore, this recognition is paradoxical in the sense that we are both subjected to and have an agency in this identification process. As Althusser notes, "Experience shows that…the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon…" (2006: 86). Crucially, the intertwining of ideology and how we are hailed or interpellated as subjects, is naturalised in our societies so that often we are not conscious of nor knowledgeable about this process, or even of the concept of RSAs and ISAs. What Althusser's theories show is that by exposing our social reality as institutionally and ideologically constructed, rather than a given, unchanging fact of our lives, the consequent repression and control of certain groups of people can be challenged and overturned.

2.6: Patriarchy

My thesis proposes that the concealed subjugation enacted in ISAs such as family, religion and culture, are central to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and lives. Family is the most precious construction for SAI (Hansen, 2000), and this is rooted in patriarchy (Desai & Vahed, 2010). The concept of patriarchy has been engaged by feminist writers from the early twentieth century, "to refer to the social system of men's domination over women. Patriarchy has been a fundamentally important concept in gender studies…" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017: 99). Sylvia Walby differentiates two forms of patriarchy: public and private (1990). Both these forms are linked, as while in private patriarchy women are controlled in the home, their confinement in this sphere "is maintained by their non-admission to the public sphere…Patriarchal relations outside the household are crucial in shaping patriarchal relations within it" (Walby, 1990: 178). In turn, within public patriarchy, the household is still an influential site that affects women's subordination in educational, political and cultural institutions (Walby, 1990).

Lindsay Benstead (2021) contends that patriarchy is a multi-dimensional concept that is intersectional in nature, and that in order to understand and explain gender issues and relations, we must engage with feminist concepts such as Walby's (1990) notion of the public and private forms of patriarchy and Deniz Kandiyoti's notion of the "patriarchal bargain" (1988: 275). Firstly, Walby's (1990) distinction of public and private patriarchy is especially relevant to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who have, as Krijay argues, historically and culturally been patriarchally confined to the private, domestic sphere (Govender, 2001). Consequently, the stage offers what for us is a rare chance, the space to represent ourselves and be publicly heard (Govender, 2001)

Walby argues that in both forms of patriarchy - private and public - albeit at varying levels of significance, there are six key patriarchal structures present: paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state (1990). Of particular significance for SAIW are the patriarchal structures of housework, culture and sexuality. Significantly, as Kandiyoti theorises, women in such patriarchal systems are not passive in their resistance but rather active as they negotiate and strategise in any given society "within a set of concrete constraints…which may exhibit variations according to class, caste and ethnicity" (1988: 275). Women thus, in the face of oppression, make patriarchal bargains "that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 275). Benstead therefore explains that Kandiyoti's work is important as it emphasises women's agency and that although the notion of bargaining with patriarchy is constricting, it offers women space to "develop strategies and negotiate areas of autonomy; this can include the public or private domains or both" (2021: 241). The theatre is such a domain, a public one in which plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID often interrogate issues of the private domain, challenging the systemic patriarchy in our cultures, communities and families.

Another useful point about Kandiyoti's "patriarchal bargain" (1988: 275) is that it underlines the intersectional framing needed to understand the lives and struggles of diverse women in relation to their specific nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, locale and class (Benstead, 2021). Intersectionality suggests that when one belongs "to two or more minority identity groups, each elemental identity is inextricably linked to the other in complex ways that are not easily reducible…" (Benstead, 2021: 241). Broadly speaking, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are a part of two minority identity groups in terms of our race and gender. With regards to class and culture, we are not at all a monolithic group and thus

within the political and social system of patriarchy, men are not only dominant over women with more freedom, choice and control but so are "dominant classes and clans over non-dominant classes and clans" (Benstead, 2021: 241). For example, a wealthy ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID possibly has more freedom and choices than her fellow woman of a lower class. The richer woman can access the education and resources needed to prosper independently that the poorer woman cannot due to her economic circumstances (Vahed & Desai, 2010). I, for instance, am fortunate to be able to pursue my doctoral studies because I come from an upper class family. Significantly, the point to note from Kandiyoti's (1988) intersectional approach is that as patriarchal social, economic and political structures result in a repressive system where minorities with less power struggle to advocate for their equal rights, change is meaningless if the very structures of patriarchy that Walby (1990) notes – such as the state and culture – are not collectively transformed. Each structure upholds the other, in both the private and public domains of patriarchy (Benstead, 2021).

Upon their first arrival in South Africa as indentured labourers, Indian women were in an inferior position economically, politically and culturally (Desai & Vahed, 2010). They had virtually no rights in an inextricably patriarchally linked socio-political and cultural system formed for the benefit of both British rulers and even Indian men who sought to bend Indian women to their political and cultural will (Desai & Vahed, 2011). Thus, in studying the history of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID[9], it is evident that from the time of indenture under colonialism to apartheid and then post-apartheid society, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have had to negotiate their advancement and independence in a society that is conjointly economically, politically and culturally patriarchal (Carrim, 2016; Desai & Vahed, 2010; Jagganath, 2008; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). To note an example, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have made significant progress in the patriarchal structure of paid work: education and employment has given us opportunities to achieve and thrive as successful, professional women (Rajab, 2011). However, the notion and expectation remains that one's career, while a reflection of academic achievements and a source of pride for families, should not get in the way of or become a priority over one's obligations as a wife and mother (Jagganath, 2008; Meer, 1972; Rajab, 2011).

[9] The history of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID is the focus of chapter four.

Therefore, the necessity to bargain with patriarchy continues with, for instance, purporting that one needs to pursue a career to contribute substantial income to the upkeep or reputation of one's family. While this may be true, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID should be able to freely choose to study and have careers without needing to justify these as being for the family's benefit. Ultimately, even as gender relations in households have evolved, "women from different ethnic groups vary as to the extent to which they are engaged in these patriarchal production relations" (Walby, 1990: 89). Such variations must thus be analysed within an intersectional framework (Benstead, 2021). ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, while able to work outside the home, are still expected to ensure that their households are properly maintained and that their husbands and children are well taken care of, a theme the women in my family and I discussed in chapter five. We feel the pressure of such obligations and duties far more than western women (Rajab, 2011).

Regarding culture, notions of masculinity and femininity are "found in all areas of social relations; they are part of the actions which go to make up the patriarchal structures" (Walby, 1990: 90). There are practices and rituals in religions and cultures that have at their core patriarchal beliefs, perpetuated in a system that justifies such practices as being, "good for the woman, so that she might marry, be healthy or pure" (Walby, 1990: 101). One example is the rule of not allowing menstruating women to enter temples as they are unclean and impure, which I was forced to follow by my *Ma*. Another example, which highlights Walby's patriarchal structure of sexuality, is the chaste femininity that is expected from Indian women (1990). She therefore asks, "Why are women criticized for forms of sexual conduct for which men are considered positively?" (1990: 109). In India, absurd products such as vagina tightening creams are marketed to young Indian women as there is a pressure to be 'pure' until marriage (Vaidyanathan, 2012). Indian men can be sexually active without being monitored yet Indian women are expected to adhere to the construct of virginity because it has become normativised in Indian society. For SAI, notions of appropriate Indian identity, such as the need for Indian females to be well behaved and not promiscuous, pervade our communities (Radhakrishnan, 2005). Indeed, prominent anti-apartheid activist Fatima Meer in her brilliant writing *Women and the Family in the Indian Enclave in South Africa* (1972: 37) stated that, "Indian women in South Africa have been nurtured in an even more oppressed atmosphere than their sisters in India."

Significantly, often the very structures of patriarchy that Walby discusses, which serve to oppress women are, in fact, perpetuated and preserved by them (1990). For instance, I personally enjoy cooking and baking, especially learning recipes and skills from my mother. However, it is expected in my family that women must know how to cook, the goal being that I will one day have a household, husband and children to cater to. The point to note here is that cooking is not something I should feel forced to do because such work is the duty of a woman. My brother and male cousins do not face this same pressure and when they cook or bake, their work is pleasantly applauded. I express this in *Devi* (2019: 24)[10] when the sisters imitate older ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID praising their sons saying, "My son is so good, like one professional chef." Thus, while I may enjoy being in the kitchen, this is a part of my identity due to both a personal choice and a factor of social influence. I do feel a socio-cultural and familial pressure that as an SAIW, I must be efficient in the kitchen and it is one of the reasons why I have learnt how to cook and bake. This is just one example of where exploring identity in a feminist poststructuralist framework is necessary and useful (Davies & Gannon, 2005). In discussing the somewhat strained relationship between SAI mothers and their daughters, Meer (1972: 39-40) eloquently explains the damaging effects cycles of patriarchal practices have on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID:

> The wife/mother was primarily answerable for any breach of morality or convention, and such breaches were most serious, most offensive, and completely unforgivable when a daughter committed them. The tone of her family, the reputation of its members, and by extension, of the community depended on the example of the discipline of its women. The wife/mother, and later mother-in-law and grandmother was the key individual in cultivating and maintaining that discipline…Since the mother did not have sole responsibility for a son's conduct (the father shared this with her), she could afford to be relaxed in her attitude towards him, and the love she dare not show her daughters she showered on her sons. In the process, she unwittingly and ironically, but by social prescription, degraded her daughters and elevated her sons.

While ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have become more progressive than in the time Meer wrote her article, anecdotal evidence from my personal and familial experiences, my

[10] The page references for *Devi* (2019) are to the text of the play as found in Appendix A: Script of *Devi* (2019).

interviews with women members in my family, and my academic research all indicate that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID still struggle with living up to the perfect standards that are expected of them (Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Rajab, 2011). My *Ma* bore three daughters before having her only son, my father. She always had a more constrained relationship with her daughters, while my father remained her favourite child. When I reflect on this now, Meer's words echo in my mind and I feel my *Ma* may have felt pressured to demand more from her daughters than her son, who she could adore without worry. Sadly, all she was doing was perpetuating a patriarchal cycle that has adversely affected the lives of her daughters and granddaughters.

Kandiyoti also perceptively points to the preservation of patriarchy by women as part of their desire to hold onto what little control and power they have in their families (1988). In noting the nature of extended families and households, which are commonly found in SAI families, Kandiyoti explains that the internalisation of patriarchy by a woman is because the hardship and deprivation she experiences as a young wife and mother "is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law" (1988: 279). Therefore, historically and culturally, the cycle of patriarchy has been preserved by women because of the slight control they have over their own lives, even when that control is merely over other women. Kandiyoti (1988:279) expands on this complex issue:

> In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women. However, women have access to the only type of labor they can control, and to old-age security, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation.

Kandiyoti (1988) and Meer's (1972) work both highlight that Indian mothers generally would unconditionally love their sons rather more than their daughters, the latter of whom face a great deal of expectation in the classic patriarchal family structure. Historically and traditionally, many SAI families have lived in extended households with multiple families living together or with grandparents living with their children and grandchildren (Maharaj, 2013). Often, an older SAIW who is widowed will live with her son, his wife and their children. This is how I grew up with my *Ma* helping to raise my siblings and I all our

lives. While my mother and *Ma* had a fairly good relationship, as mother in-law and daughter in-law, there were certainly tensions in the household between them, with my mother usually having to yield to my *Ma* and her domineering ways. Indeed, upon reflection, the home was the only space, the domain of private patriarchy, in which my *Ma* had any control or authority in her life. She would also tell me about how she took care of her mother in-law and extended family as a young wife. Hence from the age of seventeen, my *Ma* lived a life of marital and matriarchal service and sacrifice. Thus, I can certainly connect her story with Kandiyoti's theories of patriarchal bargains, cycles and its preservation by women who "resist the process of transition because they see the old normative order slipping away from them without any empowering alternatives" (1988: 282). Profoundly, the sad notion of the oppressed becoming the oppressor is relevant here as these women also defy change because they face the frankly personal tragedy of having "paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 282).

Even where change has taken place, such as the erosion of the extended or joint family household and the economic advancement of women, the importance of family for SAI and the subsequent cultural and patriarchal subjugation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in this unit remains (Maharaj, 2013). In considering most of the marriages of my sister and cousins, the majority choose to live separately from their parents and/or in-laws. Furthermore, the elders also prefer to live on their own. However, families remain very connected and as is the case with my own family, we do live nearby to each other. Brij Maharaj expands on these complexities, ironically pointing out that although SAI family units are still close, they are also still oppressive with suicide, divorce and murder increasing in our seemingly religious communities (2013). In a scene from *Devi* (2019: 31 - 34), between the Posh Mother characters, I highlight the change in SAI family structures. Posh Mother 1 and 2 boldly say they have their own lives and do not live with their sons, signifying the shift away from extended households. Yet, at the same time, both the Posh Mothers continue to pass judgement on people's children in their community, especially daughters with Posh Mother 2 saying, "We must be grateful ours have not strayed so far. Some of these girls think they can do whatever they please" (Moodley, 2019: 32). The requirement of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to fulfil their moral and thus familial duties therefore prevails. Maharaj (2013: 96) expands on this historical and present quandary for us:

> The patriarchal structure meant that although Indian women in South Africa were economically active, they were subjected to high levels of exploitation in terms of race, class and gender, which has continued in the post-apartheid era. In addition to their economic functions, women are expected to do all the domestic chores as well as being responsible for rearing children.

For me, therefore, Mariam Seedat-Khan is clearly correct in her contention that "it is the practice of patriarchy that keeps Indian women 'subservient'" (2012: 39). The dominant ideology of patriarchy can be seen in the SAI family where the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's life is typically constrained by the normative, traditional and strictly circumscribed roles of mother and wife. There are, of course, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are not married and/or do not have children. We each construct our identities, making choices and decisions that are influenced by our respective contexts and circumstances. However, when we do not conform to the perceived standards determined by dominant ideologies, we differ from hegemonic identity norms and dis-identification or counter-identification occurs (Weedon, 2004). My research seeks to address such contrary identities and to challenge the dominant ideas of what an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID 'should be'.

2.7: Subjectivity and Identity

The poststructuralist notion of identity as a construction influenced by social, political, religious and cultural institutions has been established. However, whether we accept or reject hegemonic identity norms, active identification is necessary for us to function in society (Weedon, 2004). As Weedon explains, "Forms of identity are often internalized by the individual who takes them on" (2004: 6). How and why do we internalise these various forms of identity? Considering cultural theories of race, class and feminism, Weedon argues that to answer this question, we need to theorise the relationship between subjectivity, identity and agency. She (Weedon, 1997: 21) explains the meaning of subjectivity in a poststructural social reality, that it is "Unlike humanism, which implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject…" Rather, "poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the processes of political change and to preserving the status quo" (Weedon, 1997: 21).

It is in the ruling class's interest to perceive identity as immovable when, actually, it is flexible and constantly varying for each individual. Weedon's work is significant because she employs the concepts of philosophers like Althusser (1971, 2006), Foucault (1982) and Derrida (1997) and engages with their work from a feminist position and is conscious of the gender politics at play in our societies. This is relevant to my research which specifically explores ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's representation in plays written by such women. Furthermore, as Walby points out, the work of feminist poststructuralists is necessary as the above mentioned philosophers do not address gender relations much and thus, "the feminist intervention is an attempt at critique and reworking rather than simply adopting these approaches" (1990: 98).

Weedon (2004: 6) is influenced by Althusser (1971) and his concept of 'knowing subjects' and interpellation:

> Althusser theorizes the process of hailing, that is, the process of the constitution of the individual as subject within language and ideology, as fundamental to human societies…S/he becomes the agent of the ideology in question and subjected to it. This process of identification, Althusser argues, inserts individuals into ideologies and ideological practices that, when they work well, are lived as if they were obvious and natural.

I am hailed as a woman and as an Indian. I am both subjected to and have agency within these constitutions. The ideological practices that contain me are not natural but rather manufactured and thus they can shift, change and be defied. When interpellation becomes natural, then we do not question the ways in which we see ourselves and are seen by others, nor do we realise that the societies we live in are constructs. Consequently, hegemonic ideologies prevail. The feminist poststructuralist work of Weedon (1997, 2004), in employing Althusser's philosophy (1971, 2006), provides a framework in which to understand the constructed, unnatural state of the world. Once again, here, we see the importance of recognising that identity is not innate but rather a construction. Crucially, understanding this framework enables each of us to grasp that our identities and the world in which we live is, although difficult to achieve, open to change.

Furthermore, even though there may be a wide range of identities in a given society, not all of these identities are accessible to all people. On the basis of the discourses of class, gender and race, some forms of identity are exclusive to specific groups who aim to ensure that the status quo remains by perpetuating the idea that identity is fixed and inherent, dismissing those who do not conventionally 'belong' (Weedon, 2004). For example, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are pursuing the furthering of our education and careers, and while this is now accepted and encouraged[11], we are still expected, above all else, to get married and have children (Rajab, 2011). Even if an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID chooses not to get married or have a family, she will have to identify herself in relation to this. Weedon (2004: 7) explains why this is the case:

> Non-recognition and non-identification leaves the individual in an abject state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency. At best the individual concerned must fall back on subject positions other than the ones to which s/he is denied access.

Therefore, many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID do become wives and mothers, falling back, as Weedon argues, on subject positions that are available to them. This is not to suggest there is no appeal in marriage and motherhood. It must also be acknowledged that the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID has, broadly speaking, agency and choice in these roles. There are societies where women are forced into marriage, some even as children. In these cases, Althusser's concept of both RSAs and ISAs play a role in enforcing such subjugation (1971). However, in societies or cultures where marriage is seemingly optional, like that of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, Althusser's concept of ISAs are still significant (1971, 2006). As the character Kate says in Muthal's play *Outside-In* (1983), "Our choices are not really free" (Naidoo, 2008: 155). With regards to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, there are religious, social and cultural institutions that have influenced (some might say restricted) our lives. Therefore, in constructing our identities and sense of ourselves, agency is involved but these choices are greatly subject to and conditioned by the cultures and societies in which we live.

[11] ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID only started attending school and entering professional work spaces in the 1940s and 1950s. Notably, far less women were able to access these spaces than women can today. Prior to this, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID largely remained in their households, with only some working menial jobs that did not improve their socio-economic circumstances. Chapter four traces the history of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and the challenges they have faced, including empowering themselves through obtaining an education and having careers.

We are conditioned or induced to consent to the "rule of the leading groups in society" (Kellner & Durham, 2006: 3). This is the argument of Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, who explains "that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (2006: 14). Thus, the ruling classes ideas and beliefs "constitute a form of hegemony…which present the 'social cement' which unifies and holds together the dominant social order" (Kellner & Durham, 2006: 3). In SAI communities, a hierarchical patriarchal order prevails through manufacturing the consent of the very groups who are subjugated under this dominant system, namely ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. We see this in our everyday lives where patriarchal cultural practices are perpetuated by women, from my *Ma* making me feel ashamed about menstruating to women still largely solely facing the responsibility and pressure of feeding, caring for, and maintaining our families (Jagganath, 2008; Maharaj, 2013; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). These are fundamental traits, as Maheshvari Naidu asserts, that are culturally transmitted through generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (2011).

Gramsci considers an ideological structure to be "everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion" (2006: 16). Accordingly, this includes what Althusser (2006) defines as ISAs such as the media, education, culture, religion and family, institutions that Gramsci (2006) contends socially cement the ruling order of our individual and communal lives. The concept of RSAs and ISAs are thus relative to Gramsci's thoughts on ideology because Althusser's critical argument is that one's consciousness, experiences and subjectivity are "an effect of an imaginary relationship…constructed by…ISAs" that concretise social hierarchies, and induce "people to consent to systems of oppression" (Kellner & Durham, 2006: 6). Therefore, the influence of these systems with regard to how they falsely conscientise us (Lewis, 2002), and induce our consent (Gramsci, 2006), plays a significant factor in how we construct our identities.

The question thus arises: as ISAs have such influence over our lives and identities, how can oppressed groups challenge the "ruling intellectual and cultural forces" (Kellner & Durham, 2006: 3) of the societies that subjugate them? Gramsci (2006: 16) argues that what is required from such groups, for example ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, is to develop a consciousness that understands the historical specificity of their socio-political and cultural contexts:

> A spirit of scission…must aim to spread itself from the protagonist class to the classes that are its potential allies – all this requires a complex ideological labour, the first condition of which is an exact knowledge of the field…

I have realised, through my research, that having a comprehensive understanding of the fields of identity and feminist poststructuralism conscientised me about the construction and politics of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and experiences. Furthermore, using these frameworks to study our representation in plays written by us shows that such texts and the stage are indeed a resource that a class set like ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can use against the "formidable complex of trenches and fortification of the dominant class" (Gramsci, 2006: 16). This is relative to my key research question and argument that theatre can be empowering for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

2.8: Language

We connect to our societies, cultures and religions through and within language. Poststructuralist theory argues that language plays a key part in constructing our identity and reality. The founding insight of poststructuralism, derived from the structuralist linguistics of Saussure, is that "language, far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us. Neither social reality nor the 'natural' world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses" (Weedon, 1997: 22). As I have discussed, Saussure posited that language consists of chains of signs that have no natural connection with each other. Signs, made up of a signifier (aural, visual or written) and a signified (meaning), only have implications because of their relations to and differences from each other (Harcourt, 2007; Saussure, 2011; Weedon, 1997). Therefore language, like identity, is a construction. Crucially, it is not a transparent medium (Hall, 1997). And thus, as Derrida argues, the very language we use must be deconstructed and analysed since it exerts a great deal of influence over our lives and identities (1997). It creates, as Weedon elucidates, the social realities we inhabit (1997). Furthermore language, like our identities, is not permanent. As Hall (1997: 32) affirms, "Words shift their meanings. The concepts (signifieds) to which they refer also change, historically…leading different cultures, at different historical moments, to classify and think about the world differently."

It must be noted that the concept of 'language' within poststructuralist studies is very broad and inclusive. Hall (1997: 18-19) explains what this term encompasses:

> The writing system or the spoken system of a particular language are both obviously 'languages'. But so are visual images…and so are other things which aren't 'linguistic' in any ordinary sense…any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, 'a language.'

Different cultures and religions, for instance, have specific 'languages' that are communally understood by members of these respective groups. For Hall, culture is about "shared meanings" (1997:1). I, as an SAIW, am part of SAI culture in which common understandings are shared. Specifically, I am part of the Gujarati ethnicity, from my mother's heritage, and the Tamil ethnicity, from my father's heritage. 'Language' operates differently in each of these cultures. For example, at Gujarati funerals, it is expected that women must wear white or pale coloured traditional clothing whereas at Tamil funerals, brightly coloured traditional attire is acceptable. How do we mutually share such values? Through 'language'; but then, how are 'languages' collectively understood by members of a culture? How does it work? Through representation, or a representational system within which, as Hall (1997: 3) explains, meaning is constituted and conveyed:

> We give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.

Hall contends that, broadly speaking, there are three approaches to explaining how representation works: It is either reflective, intentional or constructionist. Firstly, with the reflective approach, the meaning and representation of objects, people, ideas or events in our actual world lies within these things and thus, "language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world" (Hall, 1997: 24). Alternatively, the second intentional approach argues that meaning and representation is found in the speaker or author: "Words mean what the author intends they should mean" (Hall, 1997: 25). This approach is generally flawed because communication is the purpose of language and "our private

intended meanings, however personal to us, have to enter into the rules, codes and conventions of language to be shared and understood" (Hall, 1997: 25). Meaning must be interpreted and this can only transpire through a common language or shared linguistic codes. However, interpretation is also subjective and thus, "the meaning we take, as viewers, readers or audiences, is never exactly the meaning which has been given by the speaker or writer or by other viewers" (Hall, 1997: 32-33).

The third constructionist approach recognises the public and social nature of language and argues that meanings, like our identities, are entirely created: "Things don't mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs" (Hall, 1997: 25). Culture and language, therefore, operate through representation. This, in turn, influences and reflects our particular identities. As Weedon explains, "Identity is made visible and intelligible to others through cultural signs, symbols and practices" (2004: 7). Evidently, the constructionist approach is the most useful and appropriate theory for poststructuralist studies on identity. The reflective approach to representation views language as a space where meaning is only revealed, rather than where it is created. The intentional approach fails to acknowledge that language is a shared medium where the speaker does not have absolute control or agency. The third constructionist approach rightly recognises that language, like identity, is constructed, and influenced by the contexts in which we live, all of which operate through the representational system of common languages, signs and symbols.

2.9: Historical Specificity

Understanding the significance of context is crucial to poststructuralism. Language and representation, beyond being constructionist, is also historically specific. This is a key aspect of poststructuralist theory and studies on identity. I have established, through Hall's notion of identity politics, particularly his concept of contingency, that context is central to grappling with identity (Proctor, 2004). I have established, through Althusser, that ideology impacts on identity (1971, 2006). Gramsci also states that, "'Ideology' itself must be analysed historically…" (2006: 15). ISAs ultimately entrench power for certain groups of people. Each individual's identity decides whether or not one fits into these groups. If a person does not, then they not at the top of what Derrida says are hierarchical binaries, which his concept of deconstruction seeks to dismantle (Barker, 2004). For instance, the ISA of religion, which in

my case is Hinduism, upholds a principle of hierarchical inequality (Fuller, 2004). As worshippers, we are lower deities that gesture in respect to our Gods and Goddesses, the superior deities. However, this "same pattern may be discerned in an entire range of interactions between people: a wife makes the gesture to her husband…" (Fuller, 2004: 4). As Hindu women, we are encouraged to aspire to be like the Goddesses we worship, such as Lakshmi and Sita, so our husbands will worship us. However, the dominant narratives associated with these women propagate that "the goddess who is a loving, faithful and subordinate spouse is explicitly represented as the ideal Hindu woman" (Fuller, 2004: 201). Thus, within the ISA of Hinduism, hegemonic teachings construct a patriarchal binary where respect for Hindu women is conditional upon an unequal structure, with men always being superior and not having to fulfil the same ideals.

In challenging dominant ideologies, such as patriarchy, it is important to remember the transience of history: change, however gradual, does happen. Our histories are reinterpreted in our ever changing contexts. Language and its meanings are not permanent since they are all produced within specific histories and cultures (Hall, 1997). Therefore, our identities are only permanently "subject to change, both from one cultural context and from one period to another…This opens up meaning and representation, in a radical way, to history and change" (Hall, 1997: 32). Weedon (1997:23) agrees with Hall's sentiments on identity, representation, language and history:

> We need to view language as a system always existing in historically specific discourses. Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, than language becomes an important site of political struggle.

2.10: Power

This notion of social power is significant and necessitates a discussion of the work of another influential poststructuralist writer, the French philosopher Michel Foucault (Barker, 2004). While Foucault never self-identified as a structuralist, his work stemmed from a structuralist framework in its concern with how we, as subjects, become objects controlled by

discourses that we are influenced to accept as 'true' (Harcourt, 2007). Barker (2010: 4) succinctly defines discourse as follows:

> A discourse is a regulated mode of language / knowledge that gives meaning to material objects and social practices. Discourse constructs, defines and produces objects of knowledge in an intelligible way while excluding other forms of reasoning as unintelligible.

Discourse is thus political, and culture, which is produced through discourse, is also political. The second-wave feminist slogan "the personal is political" is resonant here (Heddon, 2006: 132). How we each identify ourselves is not just personal, it is part of a cultural politics, "understood as the power struggle over 'naming' ourselves, that is, the power of discourse to describe and regulate cultural identities, social action, and resistance" (Barker, 2010: 5). Hence, while Derrida saw identity as a continual becoming, for Foucault power temporarily stabilises meanings and identity is thus a discursive construction regulated by power (Barker, 2010). As Hall establishes, in constructing our identities, we have to connect with the different socio-political and cultural factors of our lives, which are paradoxically both freeing and restricting (1997). Foucault (1982) goes further, arguing that the restriction in these factors is based on and perpetuated by powerful, hegemonic discourses (Barker, 2010). Foucault then was questioning what structuralists and thereafter poststructuralists took further: How and to what extent are our societies and identities determined by the languages we speak, the representations we signify, and the historical conditions in which we exist? For Foucault, the regulation of society and in turn, our identities, is executed through power which he contends is not just repressive but also productive: "it brings subjects into being" (Barker, 2010: 4). Foucault (1982: 778) thus argues that, "while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex."

In order to understand power relations, Foucault explains that we need to consider the ways in which such relations are resisted. Examples he highlights are the struggle of men's power over women and governments' administration over the ways people live their lives (Foucault, 1982). The common factors of these struggles are that they are transversal, immediate, and they have powerful effects because they are concerned with individuality and representation. By transversal, Foucault means that some struggles are not restricted to one

country and are shared across nations (1982). For example, considering the global Indian diaspora, issues I face as an SAIW may resonate with Indian women of other nationalities. This is especially evident in how the conservative construction of gendered identity in India influences SAI communities (Radhakrishnan, 2005). Conflicts in power relations are immediate because they are contested over us as individuals and what we are expected to represent. When an individual does not conform, "they attack everything which separates the individual…and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way" (Foucault, 1982: 781). The notion of a constrained identity can be found in Weedon's point that whether we identify, dis-identify or counter-identify with the subject positions that are available to us, we still have to negotiate with these conformist categories (2004). Furthermore, while Foucault understands that power is exerted by institutions, as Althusser (1971) argues, or by elite groups or classes, as Marx (Althusser, 1971) argues, Foucault (1982: 781) is more interested in the techniques used to exercise forms of power and how this impacts us as subjects:

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual…attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.

Crucially, there are several points Foucault is making here: Firstly, the power entrenched by the ISAs Althusser (1971, 2006) proposes are effective because they strike at our core as subjects, our identities and daily lives. Secondly, these power relations are insidious, seeping into our lives as if they are universal or 'natural' laws, an assertion that poststructuralists critically dispute (Harcourt, 2007). Of most significance is Foucault's (1982: 781) dual definition of the word "subject": We are paradoxically both controlled and knowing subjects. Therefore, our identities are, as Hall (1997) and Weedon (1997, 2004) argue, both intentionally constructed yet still subject to and influenced by societal factors that Foucault (1982) contends are upheld by complex discourses and power relations.

2.11: It is all a CONSTRUCT…so it can CHANGE

Like Hall, Foucault does not view language as an autonomous system (Barker, 2010). Rather, language, signs and symbols form relationships of communication and, "No doubt, communication is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons" (Foucault, 1982: 786). Thus, language is a way in which power is influenced or exercised. Foucault understands the contextual and historically specific nature of language, evidenced in the way he "explores the particular and determinate historical conditions under which statements are combined and regulated to form…a particular set of concepts that delimit a specific 'regime of truth'…" (Barker, 2010: 4). This notion of a "regime of truth" can be seen in Hall's observations regarding the contingency of identity politics: While communities of identification are arbitrary and/or the 'truth' of concepts or discourses are subjective, they are still significant to societal relations and, in turn, our identities (1997). Foucault goes further than Hall and emphasises that meaning or identity, while both self-constructed and socially regulated, is ultimately stabilised through the operation of power and discourse (Barker, 2010). Both Hall and Foucault's assertions seek to tackle hegemony by positing a poststructural understanding of identity, "so that key categories like class, race, and gender are not grasped as eternal forms but as discursive constructions" (Barker, 2010: 6).

All this is also underlined by Weedon (1997, 2004) and therefore it can be argued that because language(s), like our identities, are all constructed and historically specific, accordingly hegemonic ideologies and identity norms can be challenged, contested and hopefully changed. The fundamental premise of Marxist theory, which is the potential for transformation and revolution, stressing "the changeable character of social formations…" (Barker, 2004: 113), evidences this position. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness that the societies in which we live are constructed, rather than naturalised, means that transformation can take much time and often, complete fundamental change is unlikely. Nonetheless, what is necessary is the first critical step of conceptualising and employing a theoretical approach that actively points out that our very existence and functioning in society is constructed, through and within ideological structures and repressive power relations (Althusser, 1971; 2006; Foucault, 1982; Gramsci, 2006). Crucially, with this understanding, we realise that the transformation of our lives and identities is indeed possible.

2.12: ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID – Diaspora? Third World? Subaltern?

This chapter has established that a central tenet of poststructuralism and identity is the significance of context: that who we are, our identities, as well as the language(s) we speak are subject to both the historical and present environments in which we live. In South Africa's history, while colonialism and apartheid were different legislative systems, they both operated through discrimination and oppression implemented on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, language and class. The legacy of this history – this past – is that it lives "beyond its time through dominant institutions and persisting epistemes, and that continues to inflict real violence on the social life of subaltern social groups in the present" (Neilson, 2021: 762). As such, it is necessary to recognise the implications of these times on the experiences of diverse South Africans. Particularly in my research, the journey of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID must be traced from their first arrival to the present, and this must consider the historically specific contexts in which I, my family, and my ancestors have lived. Specifically, the theoretical lens through which such experiences must be analysed is significant.

Postcolonial feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that it is important to develop, "a reading method that is sensitive to gender, race and class" (1987: 81). In her influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' she argues that because women are subjected to and objectified by the effects of patriarchy and imperialism, "the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman'…" (1993: 102). In light of this, subaltern women must not merely be characterised or defined by others, such as the coloniser, but rather, they should speak for themselves about their own struggles and politics. However, Spivak finds that this is not possible "since the subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous and cannot invoke a unified voice" (Barker, 2004: 193). Furthermore, as David Neilson explains, Spivak contends that subaltern women's voices cannot be articulated nor heard as "their lived experience of exploitation is blocked from development by the hegemonic ideology that denies exploitation" (2021: 761). Thus, subaltern women's consent is induced (Gramsci, 2006), and such women are falsely conscientised (Lewis 2002), through RSAs and ISAs (Althusser, 1971, 2006) into accepting their subjugation.

However, the terms 'third world woman' or 'subaltern women' are questionable and cannot, for instance, be generally applicable to all women who live in third world countries or who are minorities. Critics of the first term argue that it is problematic because such

"composite 'Othering'" discounts "the enormous material and historical differences between 'real' third-world women…a self-consolidating project for Western feminism" (Gandhi, 1998: 85). Thus, the marginalised subject, referred to as 'third world women', is identified in this way by and in service of the centre of western feminism (Gandhi, 1998). This is relative to Derrida's concept of deconstruction which seeks to undo hierarchal binaries, in which the inferior part, in this case eastern or African feminism, is devalued through the construction of language and terms such as 'third world' or 'subaltern' woman (Barker, 2004).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty cautions that 'third world women' cannot be viewed as a monolithic subject and that when this is produced in western feminist texts, "these distinctions are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent" (1993: 200). Therefore, 'third world women' are habitually seen as poor, uneducated, tradition-bound and victimised while western women are seen as educated and modern with the freedom to make their own decisions and control their own bodies (Mohanty, 1993). Regarding the term 'subaltern', Spivak is referring to the oppressed subject (Gandhi, 1998). Considering the oppressive systems of colonialism and apartheid and the historical consequences thereof, along with the patriarchy and sexism embedded in SAI communities, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can be seen as 'subaltern' subjects. However, this classification must also consider the vast differences between us in terms of tradition, culture and class. Our lives are paradoxically both similar and different.

Just reflecting on my own self provides anecdotal evidence of why such fixed comparisons between western and eastern women are problematic. I am a modern and privileged SAIW who is educated and, while there are certain pressures or expectations that I face in my culture and religion, I have autonomy over my own body and decisions. This, however, is not the case for all those who, broadly speaking, are viewed as 'third world women' or 'subaltern' women. In actuality, women across the world whether they are considered geographically a part of the 'third world' or not, live in oppressive environments. For example, abortion rights in the United States of America remains a contentious struggle for American, seemingly 'first world' western women (Ghildial, 2021). Therefore, terms such as 'subaltern' or 'third world' are clearly not reflective of the diverse experiences and identities of various marginalised women, and in the case of this research, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Nonetheless, we must still engage with these established terms, by

continuing to challenge and unpack their effects on, as Gandhi points out, the "real" women impacted by such labels (1998: 88).

In discussing and referring to people who are of Indian descent with regards to their ancestry, race and culture, Spivak explains that for those Indian people "who are spread out over the world, for different kinds of historical reasons, they are diasporic…" (1990: 61). Moreover, I, like many people of the Indian diaspora, live within both eastern and western contexts: eastern in terms of my religious and cultural diasporic ancestry, and western in terms of my education and society (Khan, 2012). South Africa is a multicultural society with citizens of all races and religions yet it still follows western norms, such as a Christian calendar and western-centric education due to the lasting impact of colonialism and apartheid. Context and historical specificity is thus important and must be factored into any analysis around identity (Mohanty, 1993).

One way to bridge the boundaries between the East and the West is through feminism. Mohanty agrees with Foucault's concept regarding the politics and power relations within discourse, stating that "feminist scholarly practices exist within relations of power – relations which they counter, redefine, or even implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship" (1993: 197). However, this too is beset with complexities that Uma Narayan analyses in her book, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third-World Feminism* (1997). She explains that just as each nation has a gendered identity, each nation also has a specific feminist history and discourse. Therefore, Narayan emphasises that in the inevitable and vital, "growing transnational 'exchange' of feminist scholarship and information… solidarity among feminists depends on all of us better understanding such issues of 'context'…" (1997:88). We must thus always be aware of and deconstruct the terms we use when analysing and representing women who are hegemonically viewed as 'subaltern' and/or 'third world', such as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

2.13: Representation

Spivak is uneasy about intellectuals or academics as the knowing investigators writing about or speaking for (un)knowing subaltern subjects. Gandhi (1998: 2) expands on this dilemma of representation:

> Spivak places us squarely within the familiar and troublesome field of 'representation' and 'representability'. How can the historian/investigator avoid the inevitable risk of presenting herself as an authoritative representative of subaltern consciousness?

Neilson adds that Spivak's contention is that the "possibilities of an authentic discourse for Indian women…is blocked and misrepresented in the discourses of intellectuals and researchers who are…just second-hand observers" (2021: 761). Spivak's concerns about representation are reflective of poststructural thinking. In fact, she locates her work within poststructuralism, asserting that, "I see my charge as teaching post-structuralist theory" (Spivak, 1990: 70). Representation is bound in the languages and cultures of our societies which, in turn, are greatly influenced and sustained by complex power relations (Foucault, 1982). Spivak recognises this and thus rejects the notion of language as a transparent medium: "The idea of a neutral dialogue is an idea which denies history, denies structure, denies the positioning of subjects" (1990: 72). Furthermore, Derrida has been a major influence on Spivak's work (Barker, 2004). She agrees with his assertion that we have to work within the very systems we seek to deconstruct, stating that "we cannot get away from the structure of the sign. That's why we have to look at the ways in which we are bound in it" (Spivak, 1990: 44). Spivak therefore has clearly established poststructuralist positions regarding language, identity, context and representation: She is "deeply suspicious of any determinist or positivist definition of identity…it seems to me that like everyone else I am absolutely plural" (1990: 38). Spivak also agrees with Hall's assertion that while our identities are ever changing and multiple, in order to critically engage with identity and representation, one has to connect with the social, political and cultural categories in their lives. She explains that, "definitions are necessary in order to keep us going, to allow us to take a stand" (Spivak, 1987: 77).

I disagree with Spivak's argument that 'subaltern' subjects cannot be unified due to their heterogeneity (Barker, 2004). Within our diversity, the 'unities'-in-difference that Hall argues connects us, do greatly affect our own identities and voices (1997). And it is in exploring these 'unities'-in-difference that I contend that 'subaltern' subjects can speak, starting firstly from our own respective identities. In order to advance and champion diverse voices, Spivak (1990: 62) herself argues that what is crucial is not necessarily who is

speaking but rather that this is done with a sensitivity to and awareness of one's position and context:

> If you make it your task not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programmes of study, but also at the same time through a *historical* (original emphasis) critique of your position as the investigating person, then you will see that you have earned the right to criticize, and you be heard.

The problems of representation in terms of who can speak for whom is an issue I have had to deal with directly in my research and playwriting. No one can fully speak for another; but one can speak for oneself and this is what I have done in my thesis. Spivak's point regarding the heterogeneity of subaltern women is correct. Hence, the methodological approach of autoethnography is useful as it foregrounds and integrates the researcher's subjectivity (Ellis, 2004). My research recognises the diversity within SAI communities and therefore works firstly from an autoethnographic standpoint. However, as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, we are not incapable of speaking for ourselves due to the heterogeneity within our grouping. Spivak asks, "With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (1993: 80). I find that she answers this question herself, as seen in her response to often being associated with the word marginal: Spivak counters this by stating that, "In that kind of situation, the only strategic thing to do is absolutely present oneself at the centre" (1990: 41). Thus, when we are marginalised by our race, gender and/or class, we must, as Spivak says, place ourselves and our voices at the centre. We must, as Krijay says, utilise the platform of theatre to articulate our own subject positions (Govender, 2001).

2.14: Intersectionality

In considering language and its social, cultural and political construction, a vital question to ask is that if terms like 'third world' or 'subaltern' are insufficient, what theoretical lens is useful to study the connections between identity, feminism, religion, nation, culture, race, gender and class? Spivak contends that the prime task of feminism "is situational anti-sexism, and the recognition of the heterogeneity of the field…" (1990: 58). The concept of intersectionality is thus an appropriate way to examine the lives and identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as it recognises that for feminism to be an effective

movement, it must acknowledge the differences between women and the divergent experiences and struggles they have. Intersectionality was first conceived by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 and as Davis (2011: 45) explains, it is seen as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship:

> This is because it touches on the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism – the long and painful legacy of its exclusions. Intersectionality addresses precisely the issue of differences amongst women by providing a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it.

The notion of multiple positioning, evident in the abbreviations I have used in my thesis to acknowledge and respect the various ways we choose to define ourselves, is significant as intersectionality not only recognises differences between women. It also posits that within each of us, all the factors that impact on our lives - such as our race, gender, nationality, culture and class - are connected both in terms of how we construct our identities and in how we are perceived and subjugated in our societies. As Vivian May (2015: 3) explains, intersectionality "approaches lived identities as interlaced and systems of oppression as enmeshed and mutually reinforcing: one aspect of identity and/or form of inequality is not treated as separable or as superordinate."

Moreover, just as autoethnography is a methodological approach that centres the researcher's context and identity, intersectionality too can be engaged by any feminist scholar "willing to use her own social location, whatever it may be, as an analytic resource rather than just an identity marker" (Davis, 2011: 46). I am precisely doing this in my research. Within interrogating the constructions of my identity, I am examining the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as a group, while acknowledging the cultural and class differences between us. My life as an upper class SAIW in post-apartheid society, for example, is quite different to the lives of working class SAIW who lived in an apartheid society or who were not educated (Vahed & Desai, 2010). Context, representation and historical specificity matter. Intersectionality embraces this and thus fits well within a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework.

Language is also considered to be a dimension of intersectionality that warrants investigation as the multitudes and divisions of languages have marginalising effects (Lutz, Vivar & Supik, 2011). In other words, language is not neutral, power relations exist within and through language, and thus, it must always be questioned. Furthermore, intersectionality recognises that identity categories such as race, gender and class cannot be understood in an essentialist way. At the same time, these categories do exist and are profoundly inscribed in the histories and societies in which we live (Hall, 1997), and have to be interrogated when exploring our identities (Lutz et al., 2011). Ideology, language, discourse and representation therefore all powerfully dominate and impact our lived realities. Identity consequently, as broadly seen in my research through the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, is a continuous intersectional field of study.

2.15: Gender

Poststructuralist and intersectional notions of identity are thus incredibly complex, paradoxically involving both choice and conditioning, both historical specificity and constant fluidity. A clear theoretical framework, as Weedon (1997: 18) explains, is hence needed to study the construction of identities, particularly women's identities:

> In order to understand why women so willingly take on the role of wife and mother, we need a theory of the relationship between subjectivity and meaning, and meaning and social value. We need to grasp the range of possible normal subject positions open to women, and the power and powerlessness invested in them.

Here the work of another philosopher, Judith Butler, is significant. Influenced by Derrida and Foucault, Butler is a feminist thinker who has theorised gender and the body as performative (1999). She aligns with poststructuralist thinking in that she also recognises the "ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification" (Butler, 1999: 51). However, while language, signs and meanings are arbitrary, Butler also understands, like Hall and Spivak, that identity categories such as gender "are necessary fictions that must be interrogated" (Barker, 2004: 18). These cultural constructs or fictions are not just needed as a "stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics" (Butler, 1999: 163). They are necessary for our cultural survival (Butler, 1999). This parallels Weedon's argument

that non-identification or non-recognition is not an option: one must identify with some subject position(s) in order to live and have agency in society (2004). Gender is therefore a social construct that exists only through repeated and performative acts of gender. Butler asserts that these repetitions are a matter of ensuring our continued existence, or we can face severe consequences. As she explains, "We regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (Butler, 1999: 178). Therefore, just as Foucault (1982, Barker, 2010) argues that power relations are not just repressive but also productive, for Butler, "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences…This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (1999: 178).

This can be seen in the gender normative expectations ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID must contend with in their daily lives. Even the ways we dress, while seemingly freely chosen, form a part of the performance of our genders. For instance, traditional Indian attire does not consider the needs of women who are not thin, like myself. Often, the tight pants that are a part of *punjabis* struggle to fit around my legs. I find *saris*, the quintessential outfit for an Indian woman, to be cumbersome as they are long pieces of material that have to be wrapped around one's body several times, held together only by safety pins. This makes it difficult to walk with the constricted wrapping and walking causes chafing between my thighs. Through comedy, I pointed out these body image issues in *Devi* (2019) when Kavya says that clothing like *punjabi* pants "are not made for women with…legs" (Moodley, 2019: 15). Neha adds that *punjabis* are at least better than *saris*. She says, "I just cannot move in one, no matter how easy people say it is. And no thigh gap in a *sari*! Got to put my Spanx on beneath my underskirt" (Moodley, 2019: 16).

In spite of my discomfort, I have still worn *saris* because I want to be a part of my culture which expects me to do so. Smitha Radhakrishnan asserts that SAI culture requires ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to be well behaved and chaste as, "This construction relies on women to signify a patriarchal, heterosexist Indianness…" (2005: 217). Such signification is symbolised through garments like *saris* (Malimba, 2012). In order to survive in our communities, to not be disowned or ostracised by our families, we are pressured to adhere to the normative cultural constructs of our gender. Of course, the severity of such burdens differs for each individual woman. In my own family, fortunately, the pressure is not extreme for women members who counter-identify or dis-identify with conservative gender norms

and practices. On the other hand, broadly speaking in SAI communities, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are, for example gay, face much prejudice and cannot be open about their sexuality (Moodley, 2011). Such women therefore often have to repeatedly perform heteronormative gender acts, including, for example, how they dress, to ensure their cultural survival (Butler, 1999).

ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID often feel pressured to not just get married, but not to marry outside their race or caste, or not to get divorced (Jagganath, 2008; Seedat-Khan, 2012). My own parents when they wed over forty years ago did not know if they would be allowed to do so. I have noticed this is why they never speak about any kind of proposal. At the time, they did not think a Tamil man and Gujarati woman could marry each other. Fortunately, my grandparents' gave their blessing, an unusual occurrence at that time. Indeed, for many years, the only half-Tamil, half-Gujarati people I have known are my siblings and I. It is only in recent years that I have attended wedding functions where a Tamil and Gujarati person are marrying each other. In *Devi* (2019), I deliberately had the sisters be a mixture of Hindi and Tamil ethnicity in order to reflect the diversity that has come about in SAI families and communities (Gopal et al., 2014). I also highlighted, however, the continued prejudices that prevail, as in the scene with the Posh Mothers gossiping and criticising the marital choices of younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Moodley, 2019: 31-32). Such choices are still against what is normatively expected of our gender in our communities. When I was a young journalism intern at the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper in 2011, I wrote an article on the increasing number of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who were choosing to divorce their husbands (Moodley, 2011). After the article was published, I was shocked to receive a call from an SAI male reader of the newspaper, who proceeded to aggressively berate me regarding what he deemed to be the promoting of Indian women's actions that are shameful. Upon reflection now, I know that I should not have been surprised because in conservative SAI culture when ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID counteract and counter-identify to what is expected of them, it is seen as an affront and can, as Butler (1999) argues, lead to harmful consequences for those who resist.

There are many people who, despite the stigma they may face, do defy and destabilise gender norms. They face such prejudice because while there is no 'true' gender identity, the reality created and perpetuated in society is that there is one due to, as Butler argues, the

continuous social performances we enact (1999). What poststructural thinking and Butler's work seek to unmask is that gender and sex are social constructs that are not binary, and each individual, while clearly conditioned by societal influence, can still reject or embrace such categories when constructing their own identity. As Butler explains, the potential for gender transformation can be seen "in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (1999: 179). A parodic form Butler cites is the performances of drag queens and kings, who in expressing the masculinity or femininity that society deems they should not, subvert gender norms (Barker, 2004). In several plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, namely Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999), the female characters explicitly play male characters in order to expose the hypocrisy and double standards in SAI communities.

Weedon's dis-identification and/or counter-identification is a process many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including myself, have to undertake in order to defy the sometimes stifling conservatism that pervades our communities, which is justified by claiming that such tradition is a part of our religion and culture. Seedat-Khan argues that for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, these practices and pressures "are instrumental in confining them in a variety of ways to a subordinate position within the family…" (2012: 43). She (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 44) expands on the consequences of this continued traditionalism, which she astutely points out is actually upheld by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID themselves:

> Remnants of conservatism still remain under the guardianship of Indian women in South Africa 150 years later. It is this conservatism that lends itself largely to the notion of today's Indian women in South Africa.

2.16: Feminism and the beginnings of Feminist Poststructuralism

One approach to counter the patriarchal dominance found in SAI culture is through the lens of feminist thinking. Feminism is a politics that challenges and aims to change existing power relations between men and women. It engages the personal and subjective which can be defined as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997: 32). The understanding of subjectivity as being constantly in process within

specific and varied environments is critical to poststructuralist theory and differs markedly from the humanist concept of the individual as fully aware, unified and rational. As Weedon asserts, "The political significance of decentring the subject and abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change" (1997: 32). Our identities and subjectivities therefore can, and are, being redefined. Even within our seemingly rigid cultures and communities, as Seedat-Khan explains, "Indian women themselves have been responsible for socially constructing new roles and identities" (2012: 42). Weedon (1997: 32 – 33) expounds on this process of navigating the politics of one's identity:

> Having grown up within a particular system of meanings and values, which may well be contradictory, we may find ourselves resisting alternatives. Or, as we move out of familiar circles, through education or politics, for example, we may be exposed to alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience which seems to address our interests more directly…The collective discussion of personal problems and conflicts…leads to a recognition that what have been experienced as personal failings are socially produced conflicts and contradictions shared by many women in similar social positions. This process of discovery can lead to a rewriting of personal experience in terms which give it social, changeable causes.

Within my identity as an SAIW, I have gone through and continue to experience this process of understanding myself and negotiating the politics of my identity in relation to the world, contexts and environments in which I live.

Accordingly then, the theory Weedon ultimately proposes to navigate the politics of identity is feminist poststructuralism. French feminists Luce Irigaray (1985), Helene Cixous (1976) and Julia Kristeva (1981) are considered to be the mothers of poststructuralist feminist theory (Tandon, 2008). Kristeva explains that there are three phases of the feminist movement: the initial 'universalist' and socio-political approach was beneficial in women's struggles for equal pay as well as contraceptive and abortion rights; the second phase, by undertaking "a veritable exploration of the *dynamic of signs* (original emphasis)" (1981: 19), delved into the significance of socio-cultural identification and historical specificity while also recognising the plurality and irreducibility of identity.

Kristeva then argues that the third phase of feminism is a mixture of the first and second, with even more focus on the construction and effects of language (1981). Davies and Gannon explain that this third phase or 'third feminism' - a mixture of the first liberal feminism and second radical feminism - can be seen as feminist poststructuralism which, "troubles the binary categories male and female, making visible the constitutive force of linguistic practices, and dismantling their apparent inevitability" (2005: 318). Pinggong Zhang explains that Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray are focused on language, and with insights of poststructuralists such as Derrida and Foucault, these French feminists are concerned with the unquestioned binary logic found in language and its effects on the distinction(s) made between men and women (2018). The feminine voice then, can only be located and nourished if it is "subverted by a different sort of language. This different, revolutionary language is for each of these thinkers a female or woman-identified language: a language celebrating women's identity" (Zhang, 2018: 250).

The seeming inevitability of fixed identity categories to which we must all ascribe, and which are upheld through language, is what feminist poststructuralism seeks to undo. Irigaray (1985: 210) profoundly articulates why the dominant term in any binary - men over women, white over black or rich over poor – wishes to preserve the status quo as the natural and normal way of life: in order to hold power and control:

> We haven't been taught, nor allowed, to express multiplicity. To do that is to speak improperly. Of course, we might–we were supposed to?–exhibit one "truth" while sensing, withholding, muffling another. Truth's other side–its complement? its remainder?–stayed hidden. Secret…That doesn't suit their desires….what interests them? What keeps them busy? Always repeating the same operation, every time. On every woman.

What further interests feminist poststructuralists such as Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous, which Althusser (2006), Gramsci (2006) and Foucault (1982) also interrogated, is how language and power "works not just to shape us as particular kinds of beings, but to make those ways of being desirable such that we actively take them up as our own" (Davies & Gannon, 2005: 318). This chapter has discussed my own life and sense of self in relation to the social conditioning and regulation of my identity. It is, as Weedon explains, difficult to forego the subject positions society makes available to us (2004). Feminist poststructuralism

offers a way for me, and other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, to have agency in our communities and our identities through establishing a theoretical framework that understands gender and sexuality not as inevitable but rather as determined by societal and language structures. Davies and Gannon (2005: 319) elucidate on this vital point:

> The agency that feminist post-structuralism opens up does not presume freedom from discursive constitution and regulation of self (Davies, 2000). Rather, it lies in the capacity to recognize that constitution as historically specific and socially regulated, and thus as able to be called into question.

How do we question and challenge fixed binaries, and in turn the presumptions and expectations that arise from these divisions in our societies? Davies and Gannon (2005) suggest that this can be taken up through writing, as it can resist, subvert and even disintegrate the very discourses by which we are constituted. Indeed, Cixous emphatically states in the beginning of her formative essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976: 875) that, "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women into writing."

In discussing the concept of feminist writing, Cixous notes that "it is impossible to *define* (original emphasis)…which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system" (1976: 883). I find Cixous, and her fellow feminist poststructuralists, to be making a distinct point here with regards to feminine writing and language. Irigaray contends that the social inferiority of a woman is underpinned by her inaccessibility to language "except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women" (1985: 85). Kristeva too argues that language is the key social bond yet women are not able to actively participate in this "sociosymbolic contract" (1981: 25). Ultimately, these feminist poststructuralists are taking the first step in combating the problem of the system of language by recognising that it is not a neutral nor an invincible antagonist (Cixous, 1976). Thus, Cixous (1976: 887) passionately states that we should not fear language just because it is "the language of men and their grammar":

> We mustn't leave them a single place that's any more theirs alone than we are. If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man…it is time for her to dislocate this "within," to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers,

> containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.

Cixous thus, like Derrida, also argues that we must work within the very system(s) of language that constrains us (1997). Kristeva too contends that exploring oneself, as a subject and a woman, within what she terms the "sociosymbolic contract" of language, results in active research "by women in the human sciences…to shatter language, to find a specific discourse, closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract" (1981: 24-25). Therefore, as Zhang (2018: 253) explains, engaging with language and activating our voices as women through feminist writing, "women language," stimulates a space for change:

> As a "counterattack" to the discourse of patriarchy…Through this writing of women, by women and for women, the creation of concepts of woman culture and the establishment of new social institutions are probable.

Such emancipation, Cixous urgently believes, can be achieved within language, vitally through firstly connecting the mind to the body through writing and secondly, taking up space and speaking up (1976). In my thesis and my playwriting, by using my own identity, life and experiences in conjunction with the methodological approach of autoethnography, I have sought to speak for myself in ways I never have before. The revolutionary significance of feminist writing, and its connection to language and the body is that it enables "women to enter history" (Zhang, 2018: 253). Indeed, in both the fields of South African humanities research and South African theatre, women like me are rarely, if ever, studied and explored. Thus I, and other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID researchers and playwrights, have had to seize the occasion to speak, entering into history ourselves (Cixous, 1976).

2.17: Writing and the Body

In regards to the body Cixous states that as women, "We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty" (1976: 885). This is certainly felt by Indian women all over the world. Whether our sexuality or bodily functions such as menstruation, Indian women's femininity has been controlled and

defined by men through the system of patriarchy (Benstead, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988; Meer, 1972; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Vaidyanathan, 2012; Walby, 1990). I explore these issues considerably in *Devi* (Moodley, 2019). Significantly, such writing is as much a bodily experience as it is an intellectual practice. Moreover, while this connection may not be apparent to us, the oppression of a woman is one in which her whole being is marginalised (Cixous, 1976). Thus, Cixous ardently asserts that the mind and body are inextricably connected and that by writing about oneself, one's body is heard (1976): "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (Cixous, 1976: 880). As Sissel Lie (2012: 44) explains, what Cixous expresses to us through her writings is that "Medusa's laughter is a way of taking control, as she signals to women that there is no reason to feel shame or fear with regard to our sexuality and creativity."

Plays are written to be staged and performed. This is what I did with *Devi* (2019) and it was in this process that I actively engaged and connected with the bodily experiences explored in the play, which were largely based upon my life. The purpose of such work is not just to entertain but also to enlighten and advocate for change. Similarly, the intention of feminist poststructuralism, as a theoretical framework and lens, is to show that as our societies are entirely constructed and not innate, then people, civilisations, social orders and identities can change. Hence, feminist poststructuralists, like Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, strive to do this with their work because critically, "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*" (Cixous, 1976: 879). Thus, the construction of language built and maintained through ideological power relations, which we remain largely unaware of must, through writing, be taken up, deconstructed and changed by women as "only if the unconsciousness has a chance to influence our thinking is it possible to change history" (Lie, 2012: 49).

Weedon, therefore, in her advocation of feminist poststructuralism, is influenced by the powerful feminist poststructuralist writings of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. These feminists understood the power of discourse and language that Foucault (1982, 1998) also posits. Thus, Weedon is also influenced by Foucauldian theory which is important to understanding feminist poststructuralism (1997). In his discussions on power, Foucault argues that there are multiple power relations that have different forms and that, "they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration – or, between a dominating and a dominated class…" (1998: 451). This can be seen in Althusser's concept of ISAs (1971) and how they entrench power for certain groups, what Cixous refers to as the

"privileged signifier" (Cixous, 1976" 892). With this in mind, Foucault says, "If I tell the truth about myself, as I am now doing, it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations that are exerted over me and I exert over others" (1998: 452). Consequently, while Weedon notes that there are different forms of poststructuralism, she is particularly focused on Foucauldian theory which she states is arguably of most interest to feminists as it "looks to historically specific discursive relations and social practices" (1997: 23).

2.18: Conclusion – My Theoretical Framework

Feminist poststructuralism is evidently an ideal theory within which to question, examine and interpret one's identity. Weedon defines feminist poststructuralism as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (1997: 40). Using historically specific analysis, feminist poststructuralism helps us to understand where our experience comes from and in so doing break the "illusion of full subjectivity" (Weedon, 1997: 40). My thesis seeks to break the illusion that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's roles as mothers or wives, for example, are wholly and freely chosen; rather, they are influenced by specific and dominant ideologies. Feminist poststructuralism is thus the core of the theoretical framework of my research that interrogates the identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and about us.

A theoretical framework, ultimately, is the scaffolding or underlying structure of one's research which "consists of concepts or theories that inform your study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 85). While the terms conceptual framework and theoretical framework are frequently used interchangeably, Merriam and Tisdell argue that the term theoretical framework is preferable as this "seems a bit broader and includes terms, concepts, models, thoughts, and ideas as well as references to specific theories" (2016: 84). In this chapter, I have analysed the concepts and theories of many academics, philosophers and writers whose work on cultural studies, identity, language, ideology, power, gender and feminism has greatly informed my theoretical research. I thus concur with Merriam and Tisdell's point (2016). Accordingly, this chapter is built and crafted from multiple concepts and theories to

form my own theoretical framework for my study, which I have thoroughly discussed and established in this chapter.

Moreover, theory permeates "the entire process of qualitative research. The very questions you raise derive from your view of the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 89). Therefore, my theoretical framework not only underlies and affects all aspects of my research, from the literature studied to the data collected and analysed, it is also a reflection of my worldview, particularly my understanding of identity, its construction and politics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, the simple diagram below, which summarises my study's poststructural understanding of identity, has proven useful in conducting my research. This diagram, which highlights the specific components of identity that my research engages, will be referenced throughout my study, and will perhaps also be beneficial to readers of this thesis:

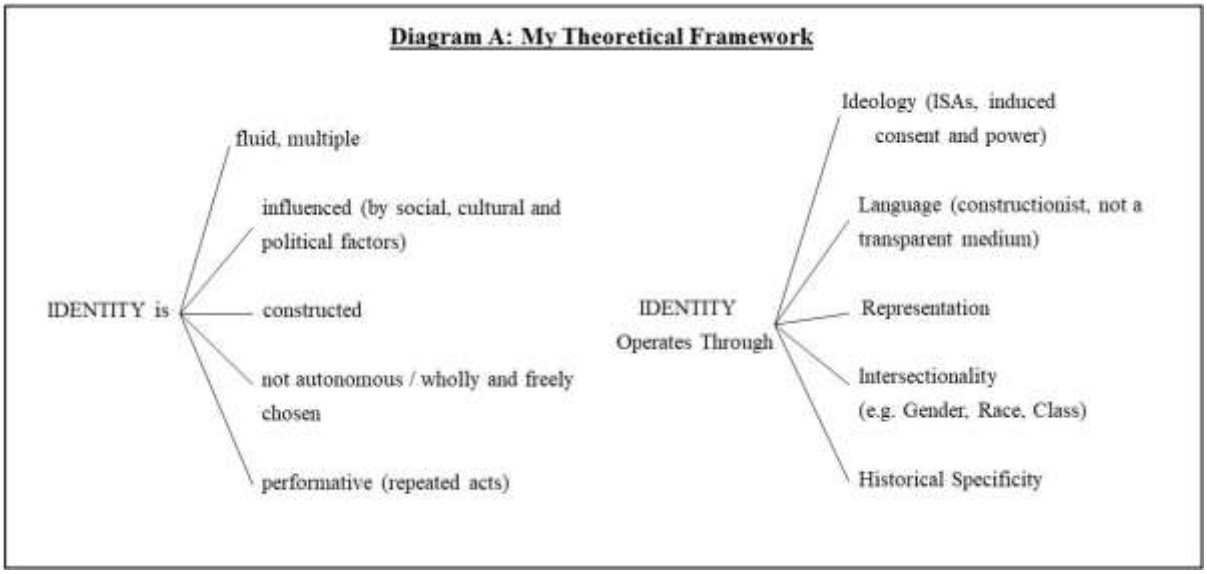

Figure 2: Diagram A: My Theoretical Framework

To conclude, this chapter has discussed in detail the concept of identity and how one can theoretically navigate its politics. It has posited that a feminist poststructuralist theoretical approach is the best way to tackle the very intricate concept of identity which, crucially, defines who we are in the world in which we live. The framework I have put together is complex and allows for a comprehensive study on identity, employing primarily the work of critical thinkers Althusser (1971, 2006), Weedon (1997, 2004) and Hall (1997, 2005). The theoretical, philosophical and feminist works that inform the basis of feminist poststructural

thinking have also been established and discussed in this chapter, namely the writings of Derrida (1997), Foucault (1982, 1998), Spivak (1987, 1990, 1983), Cixous (1976), Kristeva (1981), Irigaray (1985) and Butler (1999). Their work ultimately conceives of identity as not fixed but rather variable, influenced and conditioned by the social, political, religious and cultural institutions in which we exist. Furthermore, coming to an understanding of our unique individuality is not an autonomous process nor is it wholly freely chosen. Our identities, ultimately, are constructs that are socially produced.

This chapter has demonstrated that identity operates through ideology and has power (Althusser, 1971, 2006; Gramsci, 2006), that it is always historically specific (Weedon, 1997) and that it is constituted within language which is a constructionist and representational system of common signs and symbols (Hall, 1997). Vitally, using the feminist, intersectional and poststructural theoretical framework that this research proposes ensures that hegemonic ideologies and identity norms that subjugate certain groups of society can be contested and denounced. My doctoral research, by interrogating constructions of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity through the creative practice of playwriting, aims to challenge the dominance of patriarchy and conservatism that impacts on our lives with the intention of creating a space where countering identities are acknowledged and equally embraced. The next methodology chapter discusses how my research sets out to do this, through primarily the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR.

"it is a part of the
human experience to feel pain
do not be afraid
open yourself to it"

evolving by Rupi Kaur
(2015: 152)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1: Introduction – Qualitative Research

The key derivative word to take from the term 'qualitative research' is the word 'quality.' Such research, at its core, focuses on experience, meaning-making and understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is done through a range of research approaches and methodologies, all with the aim of striving "to understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting and making meaning in our lives" (Ellis, 2004: 25). Yet, despite these noble intentions, the validity of qualitative research is often questioned. As Angen notes, "for a time, qualitative methods were accepted only as an exploratory approach to inquiry that required further validation by quantitative methods" (2000: 378). However, some parts of the human experience cannot be understood only through objective and reductionist methods (Angen, 2000). Furthermore, the question of who can speak for a group is rightfully challenged: "The 'crisis of confidence' inspired by postmodernism in the 1980s introduced new and abundant opportunities to reform social science and reconceive the objectives and forms of social science inquiry" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011: 273). I cannot authoritatively speak for one ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, let alone all of us. I can, however, speak about myself and, in shedding light on my experiences in conjunction with academic research, I have produced a study about our identities and representation. It is these connections drawn between the self and society that validates my research. Angen (2000: 392) eloquently articulates why qualitative research is credible:

> The etymological of valid is the Latin word *valere*, which means to be well, strong, powerful, or effective, and to have worth or value. Thus, validity does not need to be about attaining positivist objective truth, it lies more in a subjective, human estimation of what it means to have done something well, having made an effort that is worthy of trust and written up convincingly. Doing effective interpretive research requires that we do something meaningful that furthers our understanding and stimulates us to more informed and, hopefully, more humane thought and action.

This has been the intention that has fostered my work. While I began my research with my own set of ideas about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities, I did not have all the answers, and sought to develop a comprehensive study that would offer a representation of us, through the particular lens of playwriting. This led me to forming my theoretical framework in chapter two. With this in mind, the methodology, methodological approaches and methods used in this research are underpinned by and reflective of my feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework, encapsulated in Figure 2. The methodology undertaken in this research is thus absolutely qualitative within an interpretivist paradigm. The two main methodological approaches of my research are autoethnography and PaR, which are fully intertwined in conducting and writing this thesis. The methods I have used include narrative autoethnography, through writing and staging my play *Devi* (2019); a reflexive thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with my interviewees, namely selected women members of my family, and ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights; a textual analysis of selected plays written by us; and an analysis of secondary sources.

3.2: Interpretivist Paradigm

To begin with, the construction of my own and other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities must be explored within an interpretivist paradigm, which posits that our reality, as we know it, is constructed "through the meanings and understandings garnered from our social world" (Angen, 2000: 385). Understanding cannot be ascertained without context, as Angen (2000: 385) goes on to explain:

> Because we cannot separate ourselves from what we know, our subjectivity is an integral part of our understanding of ourselves, of others, and of the world around

> us. Consequently, the researcher's values are inherent to all phases of the inquiry process (Creswell, 1998)…the methods used should emerge from the inquirer's evolving understanding, and to a written account that relies heavily on a persuasive literary style (Mishler, 1990).

My life, my understanding of the world, and my subjectivity regarding the communities I am a part of are imperative to my research and cannot be objectively separated from it. Thus, the specific historical contexts, namely colonial, postcolonial, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa: these social, religious and cultural contexts within these varying times and their effects on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including myself, have been considered. This ties into my theoretical framework of identity being subjective, historically specific and socially produced (Hall, 1997).

Regarding the persuasive literary style Angen (2000) argues is necessary in interpretivist studies, the methodological approach of PaR that I have employed in my thesis is relevant. Research that is conducted through artistic practice is best suited to qualitative enquiry, because of the affinities and similarities between playwriting, performing, "and the craft of qualitative research" (Leavy, 2009: 136). Both qualitative researchers and playwrights, as Patricia Leavy (2009) asserts, share the same goal: perceptively writing about the human condition. Through playwriting, I sought to engage with myself and with ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as a group: what is our history, how are we connected? Involving a practical or creative project that influences and is directly a part of the academic research being conducted (Nelson, 2013), PaR can be seen as "knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community" (Conquergood, 2003: 312). The play *Devi* (2019) that I wrote, directed and staged constitutes my practice, which then allowed me to creatively interrogate and express the findings of my research. It is thus both a process and product of my research (Nelson, 2013).

3.3: Autoethnography

3.3.1: Beginnings

Ellis succinctly draws the connection between self and society when she explains that through her research, "By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (2004: xvii). No ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can fully claim to represent us all, simply

because we are of the same race and gender. Thus, in order to develop a researched and broader understanding of our lives and experiences, I have selected autoethnography, which "is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis et al., 2011: 273) as my primary framing methodological approach.

David Hayamo is credited with originating the term autoethnography over forty years ago, when he referred to anthropologists who studied their "own people" (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 739). The "crisis of confidence" from the mid-1970s in social science found that such empirical research had limitations: erasing subjectivity, the voice and influence of the researcher; failing to see the inextricable connections between language and representation; and between the complex contingencies of race, class, gender and culture on our lived experiences and identity. Furthermore, the possibility of multiple and interpretive perspectives, knowledges and truths all resulted in growing literature from philosophers, deconstructionist, poststructuralist and feminist theorists which challenged and broadened the possibilities of the human sciences (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 735). It is these changes or turns in qualitative research that facilitated the development of autoethnography as a methodological approach.

Jones et al. (2013) thus argue that there are four interrelated historical trends that can be attributed to the formation of autoethnography (2013). Firstly, the limits of scientific knowledge were recognised and consequently, there was a growing appreciation for qualitative research. It is necessary to emphasise the significant connection between autoethnography and qualitative research because it is indeed a methodological approach that is wholly qualitative. Quantitative research usefully offers a snapshot or broad view of social life, general knowledge garnered from data on large groups of people, yet what it "is less adept at is accounting for or describing the particular, the micro and the situated elements of our lives" (Jones et al., 2013: 26). Qualitative research, especially autoethnography, seeks to find the opposite, richly studying the particular and personal in order to discover what this means with regards to understanding our broader cultures and societies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As human beings, we are ever-changing in response to our individual contexts. Qualitative research (Jones et al., 2013: 27) allows for an exploration of these experiences:

> Qualitative research…embraces the idea that we are creatures who are never fully and completely knowable, even to ourselves (Mead, 1962). Qualitative researchers, therefore, embrace the contingencies of knowledge and the unique experiences of individuals – contingencies and experiences often disregarded in large-scale social scientific research projects.

I believe that there is no methodological approach more suited to understanding the contextualised and individual experiences that qualitative research aims to study than autoethnography, which seeks to explore the 'I' in society in order to learn more about the 'we' in society.

Secondly, the ethics and politics of research also gave rise to autoethnography. There is a concern in both quantitative and qualitative research about the ethics and responsibility required of researchers working with human participants. Particularly, there is a "crisis of representation" to consider: Is it fair, for instance, for ethnographers to intimately study a cultural group, and then leave to publish research on these cultural members (Jones et al., 2013: 28)? What authority do we have to represent others? Furthermore, how genuine will this representation be, considering that individuals will react and behave differently if an outsider, in this case a researcher, is studying them? Autoethnography offers a unique approach, allowing individuals to represent themselves authentically and in turn, shed light on the larger cultures and societies of which they are a part, since it "recognise[s] the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process" (Ellis et al., 2011: 274). Of course, autoethnography is not wholly free from moral responsibilities. There are specific relational ethics to consider with autoethnographic research, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

A third historical trend that led to the emergence of autoethnography was "a greater recognition and appreciation for narrative, the literary and aesthetic, emotions and the body" (Jones et al., 2013: 26). The lived experience - human stories - were often absent in research projects. In response, autoethnography created a space where such research was not just encouraged, but actively required. Here, the link between PaR and autoethnography can be seen. Performance studies, like autoethnography, is a mode of investigation grounded in "active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection" (Conquergood, 2003: 312). Without engaging with autoethnography, I would not have been able to produce my

research. My textual studies, personal introspection, interviews and particularly the creative practice of making *Devi* (2019) generated a fully embodied experience. This journey began with telling my story but ultimately, it became *a* story of *a* (my emphasis) SAIW. I emphasise *a* because my work is just one reflection, among many, on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

The increased significance of identity politics and social identities was the fourth factor contributing to the development of autoethnography (Jones et al., 2013). As Rahul Mitra explains, the standpoint of the researcher "shapes in intractable ways the methods and sites of study" (2010: 3). My identity and lived experiences have guided every step of my research. Just as an interpretivist paradigm posits that meaning cannot be gleaned without context, the researcher's identity clearly influences their respective research. Therefore social factors such as, "race, class, age, gender, sexuality, religion, and health, among others – impact what and how we study as well as what we see and how we interpret what we study" (Jones et al., 2013: 30). Once again, autoethnography is ideal as a method for exploring this relationship since it is "a research framework that starts with lived experience and shared meaning between researcher and researched, mingling identity with practice" (Mitra, 2010: 7). The researcher cannot be separated from the research: This is the core of the methodological approach of autoethnography.

3.3.2: The Self and Culture

The connection between culture and the individual is at the root of autoethnography (Chang, 2016). As Adams and Manning explain, "The primary assumption of autoethnography is that (general) culture flows through the (specific) self; a person cannot live absent of or from cultural influences" (2015: 352). Thus, when one writes about oneself, one is actually also writing about larger cultural experiences, practices and values. As I share my own life, I am providing, as Adams and Manning (2015) assert, first-person details of my culture, broadly speaking SAI Hindu culture. These in-depth details, in turn, can "help us understand and critique the social strictures and processes constituting that culture" (Allen & Piercy, 2005: 162). Additionally, autoethnography is a well suited methodological approach in feminist research as such scholarship is personal, reflexive and fully embraces the researcher's identity and experiences (Allen & Piercy, 2005). In telling and analysing our own stories, we come to understand the connection between ourselves and our cultures, and the ways in which we, and our research interviewees, experience prevalent cultural and social constraints in our communities (Allen & Piercy, 2005).

This is certainly the autoethnographic process I underwent in probing my own memories and stories for my research. In reflecting on and analysing my own experiences, and those of my research participants, I developed a critical understanding of the lives and identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. The potential for such reflexive insights that autoethnography provides is therefore vitally important as not only does this make us better researchers but also supports "our efforts of social change, which is, after all, the ultimate goal of feminist practice – to change oppressive social conditions, regardless of our epistemological paradigm" (Allen & Piercy, 2005: 159). Autoethnography is thus an apt methodological approach for my research, grounded in my identity and experiences and developed within a feminist poststructuralist framework.

3.3.3: Orientations

Notably, there are different orientations to autoethnography, namely analytic, interpretive-humanistic, critical, and creative-artistic autoethnographies (Adams & Manning, 2015). Often, these orientations overlap as is the case with my research which is a combination of both a critical and creative-artistic orientated autoethnography. Feminist and postcolonial thinking informs critical autoethnographies which use "personal experience to offer accounts of contentious and unjust cultural values, practices, and experiences…and/or silent or suppressed experiences in research and representation" (Adams & Manning, 2015: 353). Creative-artistic autoethnographies in using techniques such as composite characters and character development, dramatic tension and narrative voice, "create dramatic and evocative accounts of personal and cultural experience" (Adams & Manning, 2015: 353). My research, by interrogating the identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, seeks to call attention to our lived experiences, particularly the religious and cultural issues we face in our communities and families that are often not openly discussed and validated. The way in which I have sought to undo this silence is through the writing and staging of *Devi* (2019) which centres the experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. My work is therefore both a critical and creative-artistic autoethnographically orientated research.

3.3.4: Distinguishing Characteristics

While the deeply subjective nature of autoethnography may seem incompatible with traditional academic research, it is not, as critics may suggest, simply personal writing similar to what one might pen in a diary: "While all personal writing could be considered examinations of culture, not all personal writing is autoethnographic" (Jones et al., 2013: 22).

Autoethnography has distinguishing characteristics that establish it as a form of research. Firstly, it purposefully comments on and critiques culture and cultural practices. This is done through engaging personal stories and intentionally highlighting the relationship between these experiences and the relevant culture, religion and/or society (Jones et al., 2013). For instance, my personal experience with puberty and menstruation is directly related to my religion Hinduism and my Tamil cultural roots. The shame and prejudice that I experienced coming of age is largely because of the religious and cultural customs that I was made to follow, primarily by my *Ma*, such as not being allowed to enter a temple when menstruating. In my research, I took these personal memories, reflected on and interrogated them to understand the socio-cultural issues at play here.

Carolyn Ellis (2004) suggests exercises one can do when engaging in autoethnography.[12] One example is to write a vivid memory of something that happened to one a long time ago. I did this, recalling what happened to me when I got my period for the first time, and the details from these memories I then further explored in my research and creative practice of playwriting. I also interviewed my fellow women family members, particularly asking them how they felt about the menstrual customs in our family, culture and religion. Additionally, I analysed literature that discussed menstrual taboos (Bhartiya, 2013; Chirwa et al., 2021). The culmination of all this research was expressed in *Devi* (2019) where menstruation and the varied cultural reactions to it were depicted in a farcical scene (Moodley, 2019: 19-24). The point to note here is that although imbued with my personal memories, *Devi* (2019) is not just my personal writing. It is born out of my autoethnographic research, analysis of interviews and a study of relevant literature. Based on extensive research, *Devi* (2019) is an exploration of the issues and stories of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, experiences that are often disregarded in our cultures, communities and even in South African theatre.

Jones et al. (2013: 22 -23) explain a key difference between autobiographical and autoethnographic writing:

> If an author experiences an epiphany, reflects on the nuances of that experience, writes to show how the aspects of experience illuminate more general cultural

[12] I will expand further on these types of exercises that I undertook in chapter eight.

> phenomena and/or to show how the experience works to diminish, silence, or dent certain people and stories, then the author writes autoethnographically. If an author writes to tell a story to illustrate a sad, joyful, or problematic experience but does not interrogate the nuances of this experience in light of general cultural phenomena and cultural practices, then the author writes autobiographically.

Writing *Devi* (2019) eighteen years after my first menstrual cycle, I experienced the epiphany Jones et al. (2013) describe above. I was able, through autoethnography, to create the response to my *Ma* that I wish I had the knowledge and strength to have given back then. This scene and the process that it took to create it is just one example, in my research, of utilising the personal to analyse wider SAI culture. I used my personal experience of menstruation to understand and critique the culture around menstruation in Hinduism and the resulting harmful impact this has on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. I sought to undo the silent acceptance inculcated in us, with this scene in particular reflecting my resistance to the patriarchal and prejudicial customs of my religion and culture.

A second distinguishing characteristic of autoethnography (Jones et al., 2013: 23) is that it makes contributions to existing research:

> Autoethnographers strive to write accessible prose that is read by a general audience, but they also try to construct the work so that it steps into the flow of discussion around a topic of interest to researchers.

Devi (2019) is a play that is constructed and based around all the research and creative practice I have done for this thesis. However, notably, my study will perhaps be engaged with by a narrower audience consisting of interested students and academics. Thus, the most penetrable way for my research to reach the general public, the "accessible prose" Jones et al. (2013: 23) say autoethnographers strive for, is through the scripting and staging of *Devi* (2019). The play would not exist without many writers and scholars whose work I studied for my thesis (as discussed in my literature review chapters four and six), or the material gleaned from my interviews (as discussed in my data analysis chapters five and seven). Therefore, my play and thesis go hand in hand and, as is indicative of autoethnography and PaR, it is both a process and product of my research (Jones et al., 2011; Nelson, 2013). Furthermore, with *Devi* (2019), I have mutual artistic and academic objectives. There are only a few ISAW,

SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and largely, our work remains unpublished and unrecorded (Govender, 1999, 2001; Govinden, 2008; Frenkel, 2010). Similarly, as I argued in chapter one, scholarly research focusing specifically on our work is rare. Thus, my intention, in relation to both my play and thesis, is to contribute to existing – and hopefully continuing – research on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID identities more broadly, and on our plays more specifically.

A third distinguishing characteristic of autoethnography is that it embraces vulnerability with purpose (Jones et al., 2013). Autoethnographers delve into their deepest personal and painful feelings and memories not just for catharsis, but also precisely because in regards to research, autoethnography is beneficial due to the direct openness that it requires from the researcher. Ellis et al. (2011) state that largely there is a consensus that neutral, objective and impersonal research is untenable. Hence, autoethnography provides a unique platform for enriching, genuine research because it is an approach "that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist (Ellis et al., 2011: 274).

Ellis perceptively explains that while it may not seem difficult to write about one's life, it is actually very hard and when done honestly, arouses a lot of fears, self-doubts and emotional pain (2004). The potential catharsis from undertaking autoethnography can be both helpful and hurtful; indeed, "just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore – that's when the real work begins" (Ellis, 2004: xviii). Yet the benefits of autoethnography are both individually and collectively rewarding because as one comes to understand oneself more deeply, one in turn understands others as well: "Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world" (Ellis, 2004: xviii).

Ultimately, in researching for this thesis and writing *Devi* (2019), I did, in some respects, undergo a personal catharsis of my own, what autoethnographic researchers assert is an intense yet significantly rewarding process particular to such studies (Jones et al., 2013; Ellis, 2004). To start with, I had to face my own personal problems, issues that I usually keep private. For instance, a concern that I expressed in *Devi* (2019) was the expectation of marriage. The character Vidya is unmarried and her single status, in an argument with her married sister, is thrown in her face. I had to ask myself why this was significant to me, not just on a personal level but also because it is a common pressure that affects ISAW, SAIW

and/or SAWOID. Marital status is certainly a factor that impacts our lives and the construction of our identities (Jagganath, 2008). I had to reflect on and admit to myself that I personally feel this pressure, and think about how not being married or even in a relationship has affected me. In SAI communities, a strongly held belief is that a person, especially a woman, can only be happy if they are married. It is seen as one of the highest barometers of achievement, success and happiness in our culture. If one does not get married, the unspoken thought is that of judgement and/or pity. Single SAI are thus seen as lacking and missing out on what is seemingly the most important part of our lives.

Often, the constant question posed to my cousins and I by our elders is, "And when are you getting married?" That such a personal question can be so boldly asked speaks to the naturalised expectations of our communities. In answering, I mask the hurt I feel by laughing it off and politely replying as best as I can. However, when I interrogate this hurt, I realise that it is twofold: I am hurt because others see my singleness as pitiable, and that I lack something, which is to them a vital happiness in life. But I am also hurt because, perhaps, I also feel this response myself, at least in part. I can see, then, how Weedon's (1997) notion of identity as being communally created and socially produced is evidenced. I can identify as single and be relatively comfortable with my status, but this identification is also impacted by and experienced through a socio-cultural context in which I am expected to be married.

What I have realised is that while marriage may, on the surface, appear to be the most acceptable option for an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, I do not want to get married for the sake of it. Still, I also have to admit that a small part of me does indeed wish to get married, someday, not just to please my family but also because of what I hope it could bring to my life. This paradoxical yearning and refutation of marriage is emblematic of how in constructing our identities, we are still so deeply influenced by the socio-cultural institutions of our lives (Althusser, 1971; Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). As such, even in knowing that marriage is nothing more than a socio-cultural and religious construct, I still wish to be a part of this popularised institution and still, as Weedon explains, find myself being defined in relation to it (2004).

Crucially, the catharsis or epiphany I experienced is that my hope for the possibility of marriage is not due to an emptiness or unhappiness that I feel. Because, through my autoethnographic exploration and research, I have realised that actually, I am quite a content

and joyful person and that a relationship would only enhance my life, it would not make my life. This is a key difference and realisation that, while perhaps semantic for some, has meant all the difference in the world to me. I hope for a love that is spontaneous, deep, supportive and unconditional. Furthermore, while I cannot explicitly know or measure the impact my work will have on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID nor is it the aim of my research, I do hope that the self-revelations I experienced in writing my thesis and *Devi* (2019) will resonate with other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, whether single, married, divorced or widowed: social identity categories we continue to be defined by in our communities (Jagganath, 2008).

Autoethnography therefore has therapeutic value and there is nothing shameful about this (Bochner & Ellis, 2000). After all, this is what such research can do, functioning "as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation, for the author as well as for those who read and engage the text…" (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 747). I thus agree with Jones who emphatically states that the personal, relational and ethical risks of autoethnography are worthwhile and "necessary not only for our research but also for living full lives…" (2013: 19). Lastly, the fourth distinguishing characteristic of autoethnography is that it seeks to have a reciprocal relationship with audiences, with the hope of compelling a response from them. Ongoing conversation of the work presented is an aim of autoethnography, as Jones et al. (2013: 25) explain:

> Indeed, the choice to make a self vulnerable to the kind of critiques we noted earlier is often made with the hope that audiences will engage with and respond to our work in constructive, meaningful – even vulnerable – ways.

When I first wrote *Devi* (2019), I was reluctant to share it, as I had my own self-doubts about my playwriting capabilities. Once I let this go, however, and received positive and constructive feedback from my supervisor, for the first time, I got to experience a response to my work. This went even further once I began rehearsing with my cast. The four actors, all ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID with their own stories, elevated my text not just through their talent, but also through sharing their own life-stories. Finally, the audience response to *Devi* (2019) was more than I could ever have imagined. While they enjoyed the humour, the characters and their relationship as sisters, it was the connection and relevance the audience found in the issues the play addressed that proved most significant. The audience responses, along with my cast's passionate engagement with the play, signalled to me that I was not

alone in my experiences and observations about being an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. We are indeed connected and *Devi* (2019) offered a platform for us to come together and engage with each other about our shared experiences and concerns.

I am not naïve enough to think that fundamental change can come from one play or thesis. The famous idiom, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink" is important to note here. It is not possible to know absolutely if one's art changes a person's perspective or actions nor is this the primary aim of autoethnography. Ongoing, meaningful conversation and response, in whatever form that may take for the reader and/or audience is the autoethnographer's hope (Jones et al., 2013). The stage presents a space for identity categories to be challenged and renegotiated. It asks the audience to examine what their life is like versus what they would like their life to be (Leavy, 2009). Such questions were raised in *Devi* (2019), and the audience did respond in these moments. For instance, in the menstruation scene, a white string is placed onstage to signal the spaces the Daughter cannot enter as she is menstruating. At the end of this scene, the Daughter defiantly pulls the string and gives it to Ma (the character), symbolising her rejection of these traditions. In our last performance, the audience clapped and vocally reacted when this happened, showing their agreement with my opposition to this custom. Such a reaction reflects the impact theatre can have as it creates a visceral and intimate connection between the audience and the performance of the play they are watching. In the theatre, one cannot change the channel or passively sit, one is actively engaged as an audience member, taking in what is in front of one's very eyes. The response discussed here is an example of how *Devi* (2019) led the audience to water, presenting issues to them, through performance, compelling a direct response from them. In that moment, unlike the horse, they chose to drink.

3.3.5: Autoethnography and Performance

There is a link between autoethnography and performance. Leavy (2009: 140) expands further on how both the methodological approach of autoethnography, and the form of performance both have consciousness-raising and subversive potential, drawing connections between ourselves, our experiences and our socio-political and cultural contexts:

> Performance…fosters the 'sociological imagination,' allowing participants to reveal and explore the link between historical processes and their individual

> biographies…promoting this kind of critical self-reflection and consciousness-raising is a political act with the potential to challenge normalized viewpoints.

This is exactly what autoethnography seeks to do, using personal experiences to illuminate cultural experiences, thereby engaging with audiences about our shared concerns and stories. When I conceived *Devi* (2019), I started from within myself but it became far less about me and far more about the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as a whole. As such, while it is not a goal of my research, I do hope that the personal growth I experienced through my research and creating *Devi* (2019), will inspire the audience which consisted of many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, to seek their own personal liberation. Indeed, potential improvement is one of the ways in which autoethnography can be seen as a valid research method (Bochner & Ellis, 2000).

3.3.6: Autoethnography and Validity

The trustworthiness of research results are often questioned, especially in qualitative research which therefore must be done in a rigorous and ethical manner to ensure validity and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Nonetheless, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) do note that terms such as validity and reliability are contested and not absolute in their definitions. Bochner and Ellis, too, assert that the meaning of validity depends on the individual and the context of their research (2000). They (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 751) thus argue that autoethnographic research is valid in its earnest pursuit of verisimilitude:

> Language is not transparent and there's no single standard of truth. To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own.

My research is a valid study on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and representation because I have conducted detailed analysis and reflections that are, as Bochner and Ellis (2000) assert they must be, authentic. Moreover, I am open regarding the subjectivity of my viewpoint and the influence it has on my research. The subjectivity and multiplicity of language, identity and experience that feminist poststructuralism posits, is

embraced in autoethnographic research. The value and validity of my research thus lies in its openness, honesty and potential enrichment for the reader, interviewee and researcher (Bochner & Ellis, 2000).

3.4: Practice-based Research (PaR)

3.4.1: Defining Practice, Research and PaR

Nelson (2013: 3) explains that both the fields of research and the arts have similar intents, the "desire to address a problem, find things out, establish new insights." Furthermore, while such drive has historically been a part of the arts, Nelson adds that "it is relatively recently that it has been necessary to posit the notion of arts as 'Practice as Research'" (2013: 3). In discussing PaR, Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds first unpack what practice and research respectively mean, noting that these terms are not interchangeable and must be clearly differentiated (2018). Practice is effectively the act of *doing* (original emphasis) something and in regards to academic studies, practice steps beyond the realm of the theoretical and applies or uses a method or idea (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Creative practice is "the act of creating something novel with the necessary processes and techniques belonging to a given field…and realizing them in some form as artifacts, musical compositions, designs or performances" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018: 64). In my thesis, the given field and its processes that I have worked within are playwriting and theatre. The artifact or performance I created is the script and staging of my play *Devi* (2019). Candy and Edmonds state that research is a methodical investigation that must be original, contextualised, and that it is undertaken with the aim of attaining new knowledge and new understandings (2018). It "is frequently used to denote both a process and a product: the process of seeking out new knowledge and the knowledge itself" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018: 64). Ultimately, the point Candy and Edmonds are asserting is that practice is one part or aspect of an investigative study, and that when the two distinct streams of practice and research operate together as complementary and interdependent processes, a special relationship is created that generates new knowledge (2018). They thus define PaR simply as "an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018: 63).

3.4.2: Practice-based approach – Playwriting and Directing

I began my doctoral study with the aim of examining the critical construction and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities in plays written by and about us. The practice-based approach I engaged to find this new knowledge was writing and staging my own play, *Devi* (2019). The practice of playwriting and directing, as well as reflecting on this in my thesis, is the PaR process of my research. The end practice-based product or artifact of my study, the outcomes of my research as Candy and Edmonds (2018) say, is the script and performance of *Devi* (2019). Theatre is live and is meant to be viewed in person. Recordings of live performances cannot fully capture the energy, atmosphere and theatricality of such artistic experiences. Nonetheless, practice-based PhDs necessitate a submission of one's creative work in some form and so "while it is demonstrably difficult to achieve a truly complete experience…it is important that access to the closest realization of the work is provided" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018: 65). The staging and live performances of *Devi* (2019) are temporally fixed; only my cast, audiences, crew and I were a part of and watched this work in its fully realised form. The artifacts I have therefore submitted in this thesis, in order to represent as closely as possible a real sense of my creative work, are the script, programme and production photos of *Devi* (2019) (see Appendices A - C), as well as detailed descriptions and reflections on the performances written in this thesis.

It is also important to note that for the purposes of my thesis, it is the practice of playwriting and the written script that is the most significant artifact of my research. I am specifically exploring ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity through the lens of such playwrights and their plays, including my own work. The practice of directing and staging *Devi* (2019) is thus secondary to the practice of writing the script. However, it is still important to my research as this process greatly aided in writing my final script, adding more depth and rich detail to the play. In fact, the goal of producing my play was not just to fully realise it in its theatrical form and to reach an audience, but also to further develop and edit my script, based on the rehearsal process and performances. As such, the *Devi* (2019) script, attached as Appendix A, is my final post-production script that includes all the nuances and additions that were written in as a result of the directing and staging process. The experience of taking *Devi* (2019) from printed page to the stage also greatly contributed to my interrogation of the key research questions of my thesis, outlined in chapter one. Particularly questions concerned with the representation of SAIW, SAWOID and/or ISAW in plays written by such women, and with how playwriting and theatre can be empowering form of

expression for us. Therefore, while the practice of playwriting and the written script is the primary practice of my research, the practice of directing and staging my play is still a vital part of my research methodology as it greatly affects my final play script and my research findings.

The practice of playwriting is undervalued in research and play scripts, as creative components of PhDs, are research artefacts in their own right (Baker, 2018). As Dallas J. Baker (2018: 176) asserts, such works explore the very issues and questions undertaken in the thesis itself:

> An initial research question informs the writing of plot, characterisation, setting, dialogue and more…the knowledge produced by exploring that idea permeates every aspect of the play….the research problem can be clearly identified as a theme of the work. Indeed, it becomes clear that these themes are apparent to readers and audiences whether or not they are aware of the research question or idea informing the writing of the play.

I concur with Baker's points here (2018). When writing *Devi* (2019) I knew that the inciting incident of the play would be the death of a mother and her daughters' coming together in their shared grief. This idea came from the death of my beloved *Ba*. Crucially, it was this experience, and all that I saw my family go through with her funeral plans and prayers, that led me to question and study the gendered expectations and representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, in the form of both a doctoral thesis and a play. In my own family, I have a brother and my mother has four brothers. However, in *Devi* (2019), I deliberately only had women characters, the Naidoo sisters have no brothers and their father died twenty years ago, after which their mother raised them by herself. I did this in order to centre ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's experiences and relationships. The male presence, even so, is evident in *Devi* (2019) through exploring and highlighting the patriarchal prejudices ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID women face in their religion and culture. This is all written and staged from my perspective, which is informed by my detailed research and key questions, as well as my experiences and identity as an SAIW playwright.

Devi (2019) is thus an example of, as Baker contends, research questions informing the plot and characterisation of a play. For example, I portray the issue of daughters being

told they cannot perform the last rites for their parents as this is only an act for sons to do. Indeed, Naicker in her research recollects the painful memory of how neither she or her sister could perform the final funeral rites for their father as they were women (2017). In terms of characterisation, in *Devi* (2019), Vidya, the oldest sister is single and unmarried, Nitara is married but hiding her marital troubles and looming divorce, Kavya is happily married and Neha, the youngest sister, has a white boyfriend. Such characterisation reflects a broad range of relationship circumstances ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID find themselves in, and the pressures we experience with regards to our marital status from our family and communities, which as several studies show, continues to be a prevalent issue in our lives (Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Naidu, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rajab, 2011; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). Overall, what these few examples from *Devi* (2019) point out is that it is infused with, as Baker asserts, my thesis key research questions and themes (2018). This can be seen in the plot, characters and dialogue in my play.

Furthermore, themes such as marriage, motherhood, history, and the connections between mothers, daughters and sisters that *Devi* (2019) explores, were apparent to the audiences for the play. *Devi* (2019) is very clearly a play that challenges the patriarchal status quo in SAI communities. This was understood by the audiences watching, most of whom were not aware that my play is a part of my PhD. Thus, *Devi* (2019) is an example of the "accessible prose" Jones et al., (2013: 23) say autoethnographers strive for in their research. Baker states that the knowledge produced from play scripts are non-theoretical, performative, embodied and affective (2018). Such knowledge is an alternative and accessible way of knowing that informs "us about material realities and lived experiences that we may never have understood otherwise" (Baker, 2018: 177). Through PaR and writing *Devi* (2019), I am able to express what all the theoretical and literature research I have done for this thesis, means for myself and my fellow ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's real, daily lives. Moreover, the lens through which I have explored our experiences in my research is specifically as a playwright. Thus, the representation *Devi* (2019) reflects and its potential reach shows that it is indeed a vital component of my research.

3.4.3: The R in PaR…

There are various terms used to describe PaR including practice-led research or, as this thesis uses, practice-based research. Nelson states that these are all workable usages but specifically practice-based research "draws from, or is about, practice but which is articulated

in traditional word-based forms (books or articles)" (2013: 10). My research draws from and is about the practice of playwriting and theatre but it is also expressed in the traditional academic form of a doctoral thesis. Furthermore, not all arts practices constitute research. In most cases, Nelson argues, additional material such as complementary documentation and writings are needed to "enhance the *articulation and evidencing of a research inquiry* (original emphasis), the work itself constituting substantial evidence but not the only evidence" (2013: 20). Indeed, Candy and Edmonds state that "it is important to recognize that practice-based research *is* (original emphasis) research and not practice alone. This means that reporting in a PhD submission requires a written thesis…" (2018: 68). For my research, the written thesis, script and performance of *Devi* (2019) must be examined together in order to fully understand the nature and objectives of my research inquiry. Thus, the term used in this thesis will be practice-based research (PaR). Candy and Edmonds differentiate practice-led research from practice-based research on the important variant that the former research mainly leads to new understandings about the practice undertaken itself while the latter research is focused on how the creative artifact produced contributes to new knowledge (2018). In other words, If my research was practice-led, then the focus would particularly be on the practice of playwriting, directing and contributing new knowledge on these artistic mediums. But my research is practice-based because it is in the artifact of my play *Devi* (2019) that I have engaged with all my research data and findings on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities.

There has traditionally been a separation between arts practices and arts research. However, as more artists have worked and studied at tertiary academic levels, practice and research have merged together. This has not always been met with acceptance, with questions arising about what constitutes knowledge in research (Nelson, 2013). On the one hand, arts practitioners feel that their art should speak for itself while some arts scholars, Nelson explains, see PaR as a disreputable methodology that could possibly mar newly-established media and arts subdisciplines (2013). Furthermore, in regards to non-arts disciplines, for these academics with their entrenched quantitative and qualitative methods, PaR is "a challenge to some of the fundamental assumptions about 'research' and 'knowledge'" (Nelson, 2013: 4). While qualitative research largely analyses data through words, it is fundamentally about understanding our lives and how we make meaning from these experiences. However, the meanings we create and express are not only through words but also through symbolic and artistic mediums such as music, dance, photography, visual art and

theatre (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, "there has been much more of an emphasis on how creative expression can be a part of qualitative research efforts…" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 65).

Merriam and Tisdell explain that there have been debates as to whether arts based research is particularly unique or if it is simply a set of approaches that can be used in qualitative studies, from ethnographies and narrative studies to grounded theory and action research (2016). I would agree with the counter argument to this which is that arts based research, such as PaR, is indeed unique as it "has its own methodology and extends the paradigm of qualitative research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 66). PaR is not just a research approach that can be added as an addition to one's methodology; it shapes entirely the steps and journey one takes in conducting their research. The practice and creation of art through research, in my case *Devi* (2019), and the impact it has - both as a data collection and analysis (process), and as a representation method (product) - is central to my qualitative research methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.4.4: Documenting the P in PaR…

There is a concern that in PaR, the recording or documentation of performing arts practices, seen as imperative in academic research, can never authentically capture the performance itself. As discussed, this is not possible in theatre and live performance which is immediate and exists in the moment (Leavy, 2009). The script and programme of *Devi* (2019) and photographs from our final dress rehearsal (see Appendices A - C) have been attached to this research only as a kind of evidence, and should not be mistaken as a reflection of the production itself. However, this should not be seen as a disadvantage or weakness of PaR as "performance-based methods can bring research findings to life, adding dimensionality, and exposing that which is otherwise impossible to authentically (re)present" (Leavy, 2009: 135). Leavy adds that there are many research purposes, namely discovery and exploration, education and consciousness-raising, as well as empowerment and emancipation, that the use of performance in social research can serve (2009). She (Leavy, 2009: 135 – 136) details the strong connections between performance and research, especially in regards to methodology:

> Although often considered a representational form, performance can be used as an entire research method, serving as a means of data collection and analysis as well as a (re)presentation form. Moreover, theories of performance are often entangled with

methodological practices. Performance is therefore an investigation *and* (original emphasis) a representation (Worthen, 1998).

Devi (2019) really did bring my research findings to life; writing and staging this work was an exploratory, educational and empowering process for me, my cast and the audiences who watched the performance. Furthermore, the play while clearly a form of data analysis for me is, in fact, far more. Leavy explains that "data collected via more traditional qualitative methods, such as ethnography and interview, can be translated into performance texts in many different ways" (2009: 136). This is clearly seen in *Devi* (2019) which is entirely suffused with my research and its methods: my textual research (an analysis of secondary academic sources and primary sources of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID); my own lived experiences and work as a playwright (my autoethnography); and the data gathered from my semi-structured interviews, especially with the women members of my family. Therefore, (PaR) like autoethnography, offers an ideal methodological approach for my research purposes. These methodological practices connect in my thesis through *Devi* (2019), a script and performance that is simultaneously a representation and analysis of my data, effectively a crystallisation of my research findings.

3.4.5: PaR in South Africa – Challenges and Potential

PaR has a history that spans at least two decades and possibly originated in Finland in the 1980s, emerging in the United Kingdom around the same time as well. Nelson states that, "The timing of the emergence of PaR varies between the arts domains and in different geographical territories" (2013: 12). In South Africa, the approval of PaR has been frustratingly slow. South African playwright and academic Temple Hauptfleisch suggests that there are four conceivable approaches to the concept of research in the arts (2009). Firstly, arts research can involve a study of works of art in conjunction with arts theories. Secondly, arts research can be a study whereby broader socio-political and cultural issues are explored through artistic means. Thirdly, arts research can contribute to the development of new techniques and processes for creating art, expanding on the range and nature of various art forms. And fourthly, arts research can develop new instruments and technologies for producing art, such as advanced lighting systems (Hauptfleisch, 2009). I would categorise the second approach as practice-based because the focus is on how the art form, such as a play, is the artistic medium in which topical social issues are engaged with whereas the third and fourth approaches are practice-led as these approaches focus on the studying and

development of art forms. In regards to my research, the second approach is relevant as I am exploring the identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID through the artistic medium of writing a play. The script and production of *Devi* (2019) is, as Hauptfleisch (2009) argues, and as both PaR and autoethnography purport, both a process and product of my research.

Indeed, a PaR or practice-based research example that Hauptfleisch proposes is that "A playwright writes a play to explore a social issue and the play is publicly performed and/or published. Here playmaking is a *research process* and the findings are provided *in the play* (original emphasis)" (2009: 45). This is exactly what I have done with *Devi* (2019). However, as Hauptfleisch (2009) and Nelson (2013) explain, such PaR is only seen as legitimate in academic institutions if the artistic practice and output is interpreted in a written and formal published document. Thus, I cannot just be the creator of my work, I must also be the observer and the researcher of it (Hauptfleisch, 2009). I have done this through both creating *Devi* (2019) and writing about it in this doctoral thesis. This was not a problem for me as such introspection is required in order to answer my research questions. Being the creator, observer and researcher for my thesis is necessary as the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR together require creativity, reflexivity and critical analysis. Using both PaR and autoethnography in a research project is not confounding as these approaches combine well in drawing connections between ourselves, our societies and how this is challenged and represented in art. Indeed, Merriam and Tisdell state that much arts based research are "written as autoethnographies in which the researcher is examining aspects of her or his cultural identity through engagement in one or more of the arts" (2016: 70).

Despite the clear connections between artistic practice and research that Nelson (2013), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Candy and Edmonds (2018) point out and discuss, the acceptance of PaR in the academy is not as straightforward. As Hauptfleisch explains, "complex as the process of arts research is, the issue of what constitutes an acceptable *outcome* or *output* (original emphasis) in the arts is even more problematic" (Hauptfleisch, 2009: 45). He states that while most South African universities accept PaR to some extent, these institutions refuse to recognise such creative outputs as equivalent to formal articles or books (Hauptfleisch, 2009). Fortunately, progress has been made since Hauptfleisch's article, written twelve years ago. In 2017, a policy on creative outputs was mandated by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). This policy acknowledged the bias against certain arts and humanities disciplines, for instance music and drama, noting

that such artistic work has gone unrecognised as creative outputs in academic institutions. The purpose of the new policy, in terms of section 3(1) of the Higher Education Act, "is to recognise and reward quality creative outputs and innovations produced by public higher education institutions" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017).

While these are positive steps in the academy with regards to the funding and support of creative outputs, the examination of PaR in South African universities is still not ideal. Baxter explains that, "the thorny question remains of how to evaluate and reward the research outputs of creative arts practices…" (2013: 171). As established, my research requires this formal written thesis to be read in conjunction with *Devi* (2019). Furthermore, my research is practice-based precisely because it is a combination of practice and analysis with the purpose of researching ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity and representation in plays. Yet my script and production, my creative output, is viewed more as a kind of case study to my thesis, rather than as an equally substantial and artistic component of my research. The PaR artifacts I produced and the academic written thesis simultaneously work together to generate and contribute new research knowledge and understandings. For other PaR researchers, their artistic practice is even more central to their work yet this is not correspondingly supported by the academy. Hence this indicates that in South African academia, PaR is not wholly being accepted yet. Veronica Baxter echoes my point in stating that, "Certainly PaR is currently one of the least rewarding ways to earn research kudos in academia in South Africa" (2013: 171).

This is unfortunate as PaR has rich and unique potential in South Africa (Baxter, 2013). Our country's fractured history, as a result of colonialism and apartheid, means that in our present, democratic South Africa, our identity as a nation, society and as individuals needs to be renegotiated (Baxter, 2013). Theatre allows artists, with their audiences, to engage with identity communally (Baxter, 2013). As I have established, I had this opportunity with *Devi* (2019). In regards to SAI people renegotiation is vital as, during apartheid and now post-apartheid, we have and continue to contend with the affirmation and acceptance of our nationality as South Africans (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Pillay, 2017; Rastogi, 2008). The unique potential of PaR (Baxter, 2013) is reflected in my play where, after the short scene on indenture, through a series of monologues and tableaux, I traced the history of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, showing the audience the conditions of their lives, highlighting when progression was made and where it has been stifled. I had the

cast create various tableaux, from showing how unjust divorce proceedings were in the time of indenture for women, to showing the beginnings of women being able to work and study, to the subtle changes in the domestic structures of SAI families (Moodley, 2019: 30-31). What this expressed to the audience was that our pasts influence our present and this history is significant to understanding the circumstances and concerns of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID today. As Baxter avows, PaR is an ideal way to reconstitute South African identities, serving "the South African theatre-making fraternity better than other methodologies, because the society is geared towards lived and often communal experience as a way of knowing" (2013: 164). Through my autoethnographic, textual and artistic research, along with the practice of playwriting and directing, I was able to use the shared space offered by theatre to explore, challenge and reconstitute ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities.

As discussed earlier, it is difficult to truly measure the impact of artistic work on an audience. However, theatre can, "be used as a means of research to uncover issues and attitudes that may otherwise be glossed over or missed by more established research methods" (Baxter, 2013: 166). I believe this is its unique potential which I have found in my own work. Many academics, such as Hilda Kuper (1965), Meer (1972), Hansen (2000), Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed (2010), and Seedat-Khan (2012), have written about SAI and how the family is the most important institution in our lives. Moreover, these writers articulate how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have been expected to be 'decent' and conservative in order to maintain their families, of which they bear the most responsibility. I found, from conducting my study, that while ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID do feel that they are very much expected to maintain their households and families, they are not conscious of the connections this has with the historically patriarchal set-up of our families and societies. I myself only came to this realisation through researching, interviewing, writing and staging my play.

In *Devi* (2019), I sought to make the audience see these connections. At the end of the tableaux tracing the history of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, the Curator says, "But still, above all, no matter what, we had to be 'decent' and we had to keep our families together. For a good Indian family must have 'moral' women" (Moodley, 2019: 31). This example shows how PaR, as Baxter explains, strives to "make conscious that which we know unconsciously" (2013: 163). Overall, these examples that I describe from *Devi* (2019) reflect

how new knowledge, the purpose of all research, only came about through "performative inquiry", writing and staging my play (Baxter, 2013: 166). And this would not have arisen without the methodological approach of PaR, evidencing its vitality and richness as a research practice. Baxter (2013: 174), once again, aptly describes the less than ideal state of PaR in South Africa, and why, in spite of this, it must continue to be advocated for in our academia:

> In South Africa, the questions surrounding PaR are complex, and speak as always about the nation in the process of becoming…despite slow and sure progress, we still have some way to go in South Africa before the value of PaR and the distinctive kinds of knowing it produces are fully recognized to be of benefit to all – within the academy and in broader culture where its potential, as indicated, is so great.

3.5: Narrative Autoethnography

Sarojini Nadar in her article *"Stories are data with Soul" – lessons from black feminist epistemology* (2014), looks at the values of feminist research particularly in African contexts. She argues that there are three vital contributions that feminist epistemology makes to research practice. Firstly, in research the process is as important as the product. Secondly, both the research participants and the identity of the researcher are equally significant (Nadar, 2014). I certainly resonate with these points as autoethnography wholly embraces my identity as the researcher, and PaR focuses on the creative process, just as much, if not more, than the final production (Ellis et al., 2011; Nelson, 2013). The third contribution Nadar highlights is that feminist epistemology puts a "human face" on bodies of knowledge, putting at the forefront that such knowledge can never be formed neutrally or objectively (2014: 20). Nadar (2014: 20 – 21) further claims that while there are several research methods that have been developed within feminist scholarship to give research a "human face", one of the deepest and most insightful ways to do this is through narrative, or story research:

> Feminists boldly declare that story is a legitimate and scientific part of research – the telling of stories, the listening to stories, the construction of stories in a narrative in order to represent research findings – all of these processes are constructed as

legitimate components of the research process and an essential part of feminist epistemology.

In this thesis, I have told my life stories; in my interviews with my interviewees I have listened to their stories, and I have taken these narratives and written them into a play to represent my research findings. Thus, in both thesis and play, I am very much the "human face" of my research (Nadar, 2014: 20). Bochner and Ellis write that, "Feminism has contributed significantly to legitimising the autobiographical voice…Many feminist writers have advocated starting research from one's own experience" (2000: 741-741). However, while narrative research as an authentic method is becoming increasingly popular, Nadar argues that this does not mean it is easily accepted as scientific in the predominantly male and white academy (2014). There is a gendered and positivist bias against narrative research which views the use of stories within research as "soft" and "feminine" (Nadar, 2014: 21). Nadar rightly asserts that such thinking is based on masculine and feminine stereotypes, a false dichotomy (2014). As poststructural thinking establishes, gender and its connotations are entirely constructed, performative, and multiple rather than inherent, natural or binary (Butler, 1999; Davies & Gannon, 2005). Furthermore, narrative research is not "soft": It is valuable feminist thinking that in fact calls into question "the purported 'scientific' methods of data collection which claim to be value-free, emotion-less and objective" (Nadar, 2014: 21).

The phrase "stories are data with soul" Nadar explains comes from qualitative researcher Brene Brown who, when challenged to articulate what exactly she does, stated that, "I am a storyteller. I'm a qualitative researcher. I collect stories; that's what I do. And maybe stories are just data with a soul" (2014: 22). Nadar goes on to say that narrative research "combines the science of knowing with the art of knowing" (2014: 27). The points Nadar makes here are significant to understanding and validating my research methodology. In using autoethnography, I have started from within, drawing from my 'soul' to conduct my research. I have supported these stories with data from interviews with playwrights and women in my family, detailed theoretical analysis and a vast study of relevant literature on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. In using PaR, I have taken all these analyses, stories, and sources and produced a piece of art, a play that presents not just my research findings and body of knowledge, but once again, my 'soul,' to the audience. It is thus through narrative, as a research method, that I have authentically undertaken and represented my research.

Specifically, the PaR method that I engaged with can be identified as narrative autoethnography (Leavy, 2009) in which I took all of my research and expressed it creatively in *Devi* (2019). The question could be asked regarding whether this creative practice is necessary to my research. Could I not just express my findings in this thesis, would this not be sufficient? Yes, I am studying these constructions through the lens of playwriting, including my personal work and experiences, thus the pragmatic need for PaR as a methodological approach is evidently required. However, as Nelson points out, for a PaR PhD, the proposed enquiry must involve practical knowledge that can primarily be gained and expressed through practice, through doing rather than abstractly conceiving (2013). In the same way, autoethnography is something that one does; it is a continuous practice (Ellis, 2004). Thus, in order to answer the key questions I set out in this thesis, I had to take on the practices of autoethnography, playwriting and directing simultaneously to examine and formulate my research findings. My research objectives therefore could only be achieved through both the methodological approaches of PaR and autoethnography, using the method of narrative autoethnography.

Leavy (2009: 4), articulates how and why narrative autoethnography is an effective method of research:

> Researchers often fictionalize aspects of the work in order to create characterisations (which may be composites), as a means of situating the piece within a particular cultural and historical context, to evoke mood or emotionality...In autoethnographic writing, fiction is therefore employed as a means of emphasizing particular partial truths, revealing social meanings, and linking the experiences of individuals to the larger cultural and institutional context in which social actors live. In this respect, this form of experimental writing can help qualitative researchers *bridge the micro and macro levels of analysis* (original emphasis) and accentuate particular aspects of their work (such as subjugated voices).

In the narrative autoethnographic process of writing and staging *Devi* (2019), I was able to highlight particular relevant issues that I found through my research. For example, the history of indenture revealed many insights about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that continue to have effects on our lives today. When playwriting, I had to capture this vulnerable and subjugated position which I did through a short scene between the Indentured Woman,

Indentured Man and British Colonial Officer. The Indentured Woman faces unwanted sexual advances from the British Colonial Officer and is offered protection through marriage from the Indentured Man, who tells her, "You don't want to be a rice cooker, selling your body for food there. I can protect you" (Moodley, 2019: 29). The Indentured Woman has to make the choice about accepting this protection and is seen looking between the Indentured Man and the British Colonial Officer. She takes the Indentured Man's hands, because she is powerless and must accept his proposal, regardless of whether she wants to or not. A "rice cooker" was a term used to describe Indian women who were forced to prostitute themselves for survival during indenture (Desai, Vahed, 2010: 6). The use of this historical and colloquial term in my play is an illustration of how, through PaR, I infused my creative writing with the academic literature I studied. This is evident throughout *Devi* (2019), especially with the Curator who explores the history and lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID through a museum-like prism, drawing connections between the past and present (Moodley, 2019: 6).

The short scene about indenture is one example of how narrative autoethnography was an effective method of research for my thesis. I created composite characters, based on my studies of this historical and cultural context, in order to emphasise the inferior position Indian women held upon their first arrival in South Africa. This, in connection with the other concerns addressed in *Devi* (2019), expresses how this initial subjugation, although to a much lesser extent, continues to persist in ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives in a predominantly patriarchal culture and society. Ultimately, without studying and reflecting on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including my own and my families' experiences, I would not have been able to draw all the connections I found in our shared cultures and lives, and between our past and present. It is through writing, directing and staging *Devi* (2019) that I was able to accentuate and crystallise my research findings, bridging, as Leavy explains, "*the micro and macro levels of analysis* (original emphasis)" (2009: 4). Therefore, narrative autoethnography is an effective method in my study, combining the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR.

3.6: Data Analysis

3.6.1: Semi-structured Interviews

In terms of the data analysis aspect of my research, I have engaged with some of the common techniques for analysis that Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True argue are useful for

feminist researchers (2010). They assert that a feminist research ethic must be self-reflexive, looking at not just what data we analyse but at how we analyse this data (2010). Ackerly and True (2010: 178) firstly discuss what we mean by the term analysis:

> Analysis allows you to interpret the results of the research you have undertaken in terms of your central question or puzzle and your theoretical framework. It is, in short, the mechanics of creating an argument.

The questions I asked my research participants were constructed with my central research objectives and feminist poststructural theoretical framework in mind. This, as Ackerly and True state, aid in developing argument or hypotheses (2010). They further astutely point out that even before one begins analysing data, one has actually already begun analysis, on the basis of the questions asked of participants (Ackerly & True, 2010). In other words, researchers already have an idea of what themes will be relevant to their research objectives and thus have geared questions towards these thematic areas. This is particularly evident in semi-structured interviews where the aim is not merely to collect data, rather "we converse with our research subject-participants, probing their understandings, comparing the research participant's analysis to existing theories and not merely requesting more information" (Ackerly & True, 2010: 178-179). I conducted semi-structured interviews with my interviewees, and certainly agree with Ackerly and True's points here (2010). I based my questions on discussions I wished to have on relevant thematic areas related to my research, and allowed for open-ended conversation should the interviewees' responses encourage further questions.[13] This leads to gathering as much data from the interview as one can, and enables one to "co-produce" the data with one's interviewees (Ackerly & True, 2010: 179).

Some of the common techniques for analysing data that Ackerly and True claim are beneficial to feminist research include description, comparison, contextualisation, casual inference and writing (2010). These techniques are general analytic tools that all researchers use. However, I must note here the significance of writing. Ackerly and True explain that many academics consider writing to be a form of analysis itself (2010). Thus, while one may analyse one's data by making notes or mind maps and highlighting common themes, once

[13] The various sets of semi-structured interview questions that I asked of my participants, namely the three ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and nine women members of my family, can be found in Appendix G.

one begins writing one's data analysis as chapters, one's analysis will deepen and one will possibly find more research findings than one expected. Ackerly and True (2010: 197) describe the nuances involved in writing and research:

> The writing process is often a thinking process that suggests new categories and ways for structuring our analysis…converting your initial analysis to written text is a dynamic act mediated by the power and limits of language that may lead you to see new themes in your data.

In writing my entire thesis, I certainly had such an experience. The more I wrote, the more connections I made, resulting in far richer and detailed analysis and findings. This is a norm in feminist research which "expects that analysis happens every time you write…as you weave together the story you tell from your data" (Ackerly & True, 2010: 198). While the writing and research process is always an evolving one, where investigation occurs throughout, there is a point at which one has to coalesce all their data and analysis into a plausible argument (Ackerly & True, 2010). This is relative to many poststructuralist thinkers who contend that to exist and challenge our societies' social parameters, we do have to come to a point and define ourselves in relation to these artificial strictures (Butler, 1999; Hall, 1997; Spivak, 1990; Weedon, 1997, 2004). In analysing the data from both sets of my interviews, with the playwrights and women members of my family, I conducted a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I also undertook a textual analysis (Given, 2008) of the selected plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including my own work, to develop my final research arguments and findings.

3.6.2: Textual Analysis

In chapter one, I established the selected texts to be analysed in this thesis. These playwrights and their plays were chosen because they broadly cover a wide range of time, from the contexts of both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, Muthal is the most prolific and established SAWOID playwright, who wrote extensively during apartheid in South Africa. I could not study all of her plays and thus selected *Have Tea and Go* (1977), *The Divorcee* (1977), *It's Mine* (1983) and *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990) as these works deal most closely with ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and lives. Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999) is very well known and was the only play by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that I was exposed to in my undergraduate studies. Her work

was also one of the first post-apartheid plays by an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Kamini's one-woman play *She Put The 'I' in Punchline* is a recent work that reflects South Africa's post-apartheid context through the eyes of a SAWOID, herself. Her play and research was, like mine, autoethnographic and practice based, and thus is relevant to this thesis. Other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and plays will be discussed in this thesis but the above mentioned plays are my primary source texts.

The term textual analysis refers "to a variety of primary qualitative methodologies or models" (Given, 2008: 865). These include poststructural analysis, which is the approach I have undertaken in my study of the playwrights' respective plays. In conjunction with the feminist poststructural theoretical framework of my research, I have thus analysed the plays and the playwrights' responses to my questions with due consideration of feminist poststructural notions of identity construction, language, society and representation.

Data can indeed be analysed and presented through the form of a play. Firstly, many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, including my selected interviewees, began creating theatrical work in the university and research space. The connection then between qualitative research and playwriting is apparent. Moreover, Johnny Saldana asserts that there are many similarities between qualitative research and playwriting noting that both aim "to create a unique, engaging, and insightful text about the human condition" (1999: 60). These similarities mean that those working in the field of theatre are already equipped with the skills needed for qualitative research (Saldana, 1999). For example, in the same way that theatre artists must be able to analyse character and subtext, qualitative researchers have to study their participants or interviewees, and their verbal and non-verbal responses. Furthermore, theatre artists have storytelling skills and the ability to think metaphorically, conceptually and symbolically, which are important for the in depth analysis and narrative writing required in qualitative research (Saldana, 1999). Therefore, "theatre practitioners, through the nature of their training, already possess several prerequisite skills for qualitative enquiry…" (Saldana, 1999: 67). Saldana (1999: 61) thus states that when qualitative research is presented in the form of a theatrical play, one is playwriting with one's data, explaining that just as qualitative researchers take all data they have analysed to construct their argument in their research, so does a playwright in creating their art:

> Plays do not structure themselves…Playwrights employ both technical craft and creative artistry to arrange language and action for the stage. Just as some qualitative researchers fashion a story, a playwright fashions a plot – an overall structure – and from that, he or she develops a story-line.

As I have established, one's play is ultimately a reflection of one's data analysis and findings. I have discussed how my theoretical research, my autoethnographic research, and my data from interviews have influenced and driven the plot, characterisation, style and setting of my play. Research and practice are thus inextricably connected and in particular, it is the practice of playwriting and the play form that gives access to another, albeit less traditional but more creative, type of data analysis.

Saldana specifically discusses how the particular aspects of a play, such as character, monologue and dialogue can represent one's research data (1999). Characters, for instance, can retell or represent one's own or one's participants' stories. In *Devi* (2019), the character Vidya and her status as single and unmarried reflects my experiences with this cultural and personal issue. With regards to writing, Saldana says that monologues "reveal social insight with carefully selected detail and, if successfully written and performed, generate emotional connection with the audience" (1999: 63). In the menstrual taboo scene (Moodley, 2019: 19 - 24), the Woman, breaking out of her advertising persona after becoming increasingly frustrated with the Ma's controlling and old-fashioned behaviour, lays bare all the stigma ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID endure. I found that audiences did emotionally connect with this bold monologue, applauding the confrontation and challenging of cultural customs we are induced to silently obey.

Dialogue, Saldana explains, can be "artificially constructed from several sources of data gathered from different sites, from different participants, and across different time periods" (1999: 64). This is evident throughout *Devi* (2019) which is creatively written with the use of various sources, from religious scripture, historical research, participant interviews and my own memories and experiences. For instance, my *Ma* when deeply shocked or upset, would always exclaim and say "*Ayyo sami kadabale*." This colloquial South Indian phrase invokes God to express one's pain, shock, pity or sorrow (Mesthrie, 2011). As a homage to my *Ma*, in *Devi* (2019), when one of the Auntie characters is stunned by the Bride's freedoms and choices in her life, she exclaims in shock, saying this to her (Moodley, 2019: 8). Another

example is in the scene where Devi meets the Goddesses in the afterlife, and Durga recites to her from the ancient, religious Hindu and Sanskrit *Manusmriti* text the following line: '*yatra naryastu pujyante ramante tatra devataha'* which translates to 'Gods are pleased when women are worshipped' (Moodley, 2019: 14). The point of this line in the play is to highlight that although Hindu religious scripture denotes that women are meant to be honoured and worshipped, the cultural and religious reality is that such revering is only done if Indian women are obedient and fall in line as "the guardians of *dharma*, custodian and transmitter of patriarchal values" (Ghosh, 2018: np). What these few examples reflect is that *Devi* (2019) is an artistic work that is very connected to and intertwined with all the theoretical, literature, autoethnographic and primary source interview research I have done for this thesis. As a qualitative researcher and playwright I thus have, as Saldana (1999) says, narratively written with my data.

As textual approaches involve close analysis of texts, in qualitative research "often only a small number of texts is required to create an adequate data set" (Given, 2008: 865). Given defines textual analysis as, "a method of data analysis that closely examines either the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse" (2008: 865). Hence, in each of the selected plays, its respective styles, settings, contexts, characters and plots have been studied to understand firstly, the meanings behind each playwright's works. Secondly, commonalities and patterns in the chosen plays regarding constructions of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities have been compared and contrasted. For instance, each play's characters have been examined in order to explore how – and to what extent – social, religious and cultural institutions (Althusser's notion of ISAs) influence ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives and identities (1971, 2006).

It must be noted that the meanings I have interpreted and analysed from the plays are just one understanding of these works, which have multiple potential meanings. There is no one correct interpretation of a text, nor does textual analysis attempt to find this. Poststructural analysis looks for patterns and constructions in texts, but does not hold these meanings to be universally true (Harcourt, 2007). Such patterns and constructions can be found, through textual analysis, by looking at particular textual characteristics. Given (2008: 865) expands on this point:

(What topic or issue is being addressed? How is the audience addressed? What is the central theme or claim made? Is there evidence or explanation to support the theme or claim? What is the nature of this evidence or explanation?), and the wider context of the text (How does the text relate to other texts in the same genre or format?).

Historical and author specificity are also features of poststructural and intersectional notions of identity (see Figure 2). Texts have multiple and varied meanings that are dependent on the socio-cultural and historical contexts out of which they emerge, and on whom creates the work under analysis. This necessitates an examination of the authors of texts, in this case, the playwrights who I interviewed for my thesis (Given, 2008). These interviews were done with the intention of learning how these playwrights identify themselves, how their identity has influenced their playwriting, and their thoughts on South African theatre and the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. My interviews were semi-structured and intended to be conversational. However, as Muthal and Krijay do not live in Durban, they requested that my questions be emailed to them. I thus had to send all my specific questions to them in written form and could not have as open-ended a discussion that would have been possible in person. I was able to interview Kamini in person, as intended. Nevertheless, both types of interviews were beneficial and I gathered ample data, the analysis of which will be primarily discussed in chapter seven.

3.6.3: Reflexivity

In my detailed comparative textual analysis of the chosen plays, I have thus considered Given's central points regarding textual characteristics, as well as the specificity of context and the writer's voice (2008). The method of textual analysis also requires researchers to be self-reflexive, reflecting on how their own perspectives influence their interpretations. Reflexivity is crucially important and increasingly recognised in qualitative research, challenging "the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective" (Berger, 2015: 220). The position of the researcher is complex and their experiences and thoughts may affect their data collection, analysis and findings (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). Thus, as researchers, we must engage with all our research reflexively. This, as Berger (2015: 220) notes, involves "self-appraisal…turning of the researcher lens back on oneself to recognise and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research…"

In autoethnographic studies, reflexivity is indeed necessary as knowledge produced in such research is dependent upon and centred around the researcher's subjectivity, identity, and experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Blanchard asserts that autoethnography and reflexivity are both a kind of "self" writing (2018: 84). They simultaneously work together and are fundamentally intertwined "co-constructing meanings" in my research (Berger, 2015: 221). Hence, "autoethnography requires a high level of researcher reflexivity; writing about what I have done, and why, throughout the research process…" (Blanchard, 2018: 87). This is the process I have undertaken throughout my thesis. Whether engaging with my theoretical framework, methodologies, academic literature, plays and/or data analysis, I have reflexively examined and responded to these texts with an awareness of the influence my identity and experiences have on my interpretations and findings. Furthermore, the PaR methodological approach of my thesis means that I must textually analyse my own play as well. I do this throughout the thesis, particularly in chapter eight. Along with Muthal, Krijay and Kamini, I am the fourth playwright that is being examined in this thesis. *Devi* (2019), the third play I have written, and in turn my identity, history and experiences that influenced the writing of this work, is a self-reflexive process that is a vital part of my autoethnographic and PaR research (Blanchard, 2018).

3.6.4: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The interviews conducted with the chosen playwrights, and the women members of my family, have been studied through the qualitative and interpretive method of reflexive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). While perhaps not as solidified as other methodological approaches, the strength of thematic analysis lies in its variability: "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 78). Most analysis is thematic, yet it is either referred to as something else, such as content analysis, or it is not acknowledged as any method at all (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To do the latter is inadequate and diminishes the work of the researcher and the vitalness of the method itself. Themes do not simply 'emerge' from data: they are developed through the researcher's selected questions and the analysis of the answers. This process is crucially done by the researcher who critically and reflexively thinks about the data and creates thematic links. Therefore, just as playwriting and narrative autoethnography are

methods that dynamically involve the researcher, so too does thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006: 80) explain:

> Analysis is exciting because 'you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews'. An account of themes 'emerging' or being 'discovered' is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers.

Themes are not discovered but rather "actively crafted by the researcher, reflecting their interpretative choices…" (Braun & Clarke, 2016: 740). The metaphor of baking a cake is used by Braun and Clarke to describe the process of developing themes because making a cake is a method with particular requirements thus "the cake isn't waiting to be 'revealed' – it comes into being through activity and engagement, within set parameters" (2016: 740). Ultimately, there are different approaches to thematic analysis and one must use the approach that suits one's research purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As established, a reflexive thematic approach is ideal for my research (Blanchard, 2018). Braun and Clarke have further developed their research on thematic analysis and have labelled their approach as "reflexive" because they felt that their earlier research, which referred broadly to thematic analysis (2006), did not fully articulate the processes involved in constructing themes in qualitative research (2019). Thus, for Braun and Clarke, reflexive thematic analysis is "creative, reflexive and subjective, with researcher subjectivity understood as a resource…rather than a potential threat to knowledge production" (2019: 591).

Specifically, it is important to note Braun and Clarke's points on developing themes in reflexive thematic analysis (2016, 2019). Constructing themes in one's research is a fluid yet rigorous process and "clarity around what a theme is, and what it represents, is vital for quality TA" (Braun & Clarke, 2016: 741). Themes are "patterns of *shared meaning* (original emphasis) underpinned or united by a core concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2019: 593). Such patterns of meaning are found across data sets or thematic areas that crucially, are relevant to one's study with regards to how these meanings address one's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2016). For instance, my questions and discussions with the playwrights about the challenges of creating new work in the South African theatre industry, and whether they feel that theatre can be an empowering medium for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID,

addresses my key research question of how the stage space defies the "invisible" (Rajab, 2011: np) perception of our lives and the neglect of our artistic work (Govinden, 2008). Reflexive thematic analysis, thus, involves considerable analysis and subjectivity that begins from the moment one conceives their key research questions (Ackerly & True, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The themes which one constructs, and which vitally lead to one's final research findings, "are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (Braun & Clarke, 2019: 594).

In my interviews with the playwrights, I asked each of them some identical questions and then asked them different questions related to their specific lives and work. For instance, the first question I asked was "How would you identify yourself?" This needed to be asked from the outset, as how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities impact their playwriting is a key research question of my thesis. Furthermore, as established, identity is individual and constructed, thus although I may identify as an SAIW, another woman of the same race and gender may identify herself differently. This, in fact, turned out to be the case with Muthal, who responded that she identifies as a South African woman. Thus, I always refer to her as a SAWOID in my thesis. I analysed the data from all three interviews with the playwrights to comparatively examine how their responses were different and/or similar in relation to the relevant themes we discussed, such as South African theatre and the representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in it. These are just some of the themes I developed from my data. I also further related this to my own reflections as a playwright. It is these reflexive thematic analyses that are discussed in chapters seven and eight of this thesis.

The second set of interviews I undertook for this research were with women in my own family, each with a different relationship to me and across a wide age range. I interviewed my mother, my sister, three of my aunts and four of my cousins. These interviews were conducted with the intention of exploring my own subjectivity and experience, and to study my family members' insights around identity in relation to themselves, and me, as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Studying one's family members is uniquely suited to autoethnographic work. Adams and Manning (2015: 351) explain the strengths of this method when it comes to analysing those closest to us:

> As a research method, autoethnography can offer novel and nuanced insights about how family members think, act, navigate, and co-author their social worlds. By turning the research lens towards the self…researchers can use autoethnography to ask unique questions about family life, questions not necessarily possible with other research methods.

I will discuss more on the usefulness of using family members as research participants in autoethnographic research in chapter five. However, I must note here that in interviewing the women in my family, I was, as Adams and Manning (2015) contend, able to have conversations about both topical, as well as interpersonal and familial issues, that we have never openly discussed before. Such issues, if they ever come up in conversation in our family, are simply not directly called out, and are rather glossed over as generally the expectation is to not speak up or cause conflict. Examples of this would be the persistent questioning of prospective marriage or the level of our cooking and cleaning skills as women. However, framed within autoethnographic research and a private interview space, I was able to converse with my cousins and sister, for instance, about how these pressures affect us. The research space offered safety and openness to both myself, and my interviewees, as we shared our personal thoughts and experiences. This is not a space that we always freely have in our daily lives, as is evident in several studies that have interviewed ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Naidu, 2011; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). For this reason, the stage I avow, also offers a space of free expression for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Govender, 1999, 2001).

3.6.5: Purposive Sampling

In terms of the sample of participants I chose to interview for my research, with regards to both the playwrights and women members in my family, it must be noted all these women were deliberately selected, on the basis of certain criteria, to be interviewed. Therefore, this data collection and analysis was, as Merriam and Tisdell explain, a purposive sampling (2016). Basically, there are two types of sampling, namely probability and nonprobability sampling. The probability type is a random sampling of the group under investigation, and is more suited to quantitative research which from a statistical perspective generalises the "results of the study from the sample to the population from which it was drawn" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 96). Nonprobability sampling, on the other hand, is more suited to qualitative research. This is because qualitative research problems are not looking at

numerical data, at how much an issue or event occurs, or how many people are involved. Rather, such research seeks to unpack what exactly transpires, the relationships at play and the implications of the issues, events and people being examined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The most appropriate sampling strategy in qualitative research is thus nonprobabilistic, and the most common form of such sampling is purposive or purposeful as it "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 96). Hence in this thesis, I purposely selected research participants that would shed insight on my research themes and key questions. These themes and questions, in turn, were developed with my feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework, as well as my autoethnographic and PaR rooted methodology in mind. Merriam and Tisdell explain that ultimately the sample one selects is dependent upon one's research problem, which frames one's entire thesis and effectively asks the question "What do I want to know in this study?" (2016: 76). Therefore, for my study, I had to interview ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and analyse their work. Furthermore, as a playwright myself, and in deeply interrogating my own identity, I thus interviewed the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that I am the most connected to, and whom have greatly shaped who I am, my family.

The value of purposeful or purposive sampling is that it emphasises gaining specific and in-depth understanding of the study under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, when choosing research participants and case studies, the factors used to determine these selections are very important as "the criteria you establish for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 97). In other words, purposefully sampling play texts, interviewees, playwrights and/or women family members, allows me to identify "information-rich cases" that logically and potentially can give me the most comprehensive data needed to analyse and determine my research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 97).

I have discussed why I specifically chose to interview Muthal, Krijay and Kamini and to analyse their plays for my research purposes. These playwrights fit my criteria for purposeful sampling because of the wide range of time periods their work was created in, the prominence and content of their plays, my own academic connections to their work, as well

as their stature as artists in South African theatre. In terms of the women in my family, my purposive sampling criteria was to interview both elders in my family, such as my mother and aunts, and those a part of my own generation, such as my cousins. In interviewing the latter, I chose participants from 21 years to 38 years old in order to understand and reflect on the concerns and experiences of women of as wide an age range as possible in my family. I also ensured that I interviewed members of both my mother's Gujarati family and my father's Tamil family. While I could not interview every women member of my family, I did interview my mother and sister as these are the SAIW I have the deepest connection with, and with whom I have spent almost every day of my life. Lastly, from my cousins and sister to my mother and aunts, I interviewed women in my family who were either married, single, dating or divorced. I selected a variety of participants in this regard, in order to collect data on the significance of one's relationship status, which evidently has a substantial effect on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives and identities (Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008).

Marriage and motherhood, in fact, is one of the most prominent themes that I found in my analysis of my data. Through these interviews, I shared my own life and asked women in my family to do the same. I asked each interviewee the same general questions and also specific questions related to their lives respectively.[14] Regarding the specific questions for each interviewee, I had these in mind when going into each interview. For instance, when interviewing my aunt who is divorced, I knew to broach this subject with her. Moreover, with semi-structured interviews, the initial questions asked often lead to further questions, discourse and thus richer data. This is the benefit of in-person interviews which fortunately, I was able to do with all the women in my family that I purposely sampled for my research. We were able to engage with each other dialogically, based on my semi-structured interview questions, which then evolved as our conversations led us to various discussions.

In analysing this data, with the method of reflexive thematic analysis, I looked for commonalities, differences and patterns in our experiences and beliefs. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Like my interviews with the playwrights, this data amounted to sets of transcripts, meaning such thematic analysis "can be accomplished using very low-tech materials such as a pencil and paper, coloured sticky notes, or coloured felt pens"

[14] The general questions posed to my selected women family interviewees can be seen in Appendix G.

(Given, 2008: 121). Given does explain that for audio interviews, further findings can be found by listening to the pauses, rhythms and inflections of recorded conversations (2008). However, I analysed the interviews with both my family and playwrights using the low-tech method, as Given says (2008). I uncovered and developed enough extensive data sets and analyses. Furthermore, all the data I collected from interviewing women in my family really added to my research findings and the writing of *Devi* (2019).

Like textual analysis, thematic analysis in qualitative research is subjective, context dependent and produces multiple meanings which are influenced by the researcher's own perspectives (Given, 2008). This is intensified when interviewing family members as there is already an existing relationship between interviewer and interviewee that will inevitably impact the data collection and analysis. However, this should not be seen as a flaw, as neutral or objective research is evidently not realistically possible (Ellis et al., 2011). The playwrights I interviewed were not given the option to remain anonymous in my thesis (see Appendix F) as firstly, their names are already in the public domain and secondly, as an objective of this research is to highlight and recognise ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, anonymity would not achieve this. Furthermore, as established in chapter one, these playwrights are referred to by their first name as they have similar surnames with each other, and with other playwrights and writers referenced in this research. Therefore, data from my interviews with them are referenced in-text in this thesis as follows:

Playwright:	In-text Reference:
Muthal	P1
Krijay	P2
Kamini	P3

Figure 3: Playwright Interviewees

The women in my family who were interviewed, however, were allowed to remain anonymous. Most did not choose this option and were comfortable being named in my research. What I had to stress to them was that even though they could remain anonymous, their relationship to me could not be hidden. Thus, total anonymity would not be possible as our relationships have significantly informed my study. They understood this and consented to being interviewed (see Appendix F). As Adams and Manning note, "With

autoethnography, de-identification becomes increasingly difficult, especially if others are referenced in, or tied to, an author's experiences" (2015: 361). This is clearly the case with my thesis, and so it is here that the specific relational ethics of autoethnographic research must be considered. Nobody exists in isolation; we have connected lives with our family and friends. Hence, "when we conduct and write research, we implicate others in our work" (Ellis et al., 2011: 281).

This is heightened in autoethnographic research because as we delve into our personal experiences, we deeply involve our loved ones in our studies. Unlike traditional interviews, questioning family is complicated because they are not impersonal 'subjects' and thus autoethnographers "have to be able to continue to live in the world of relationships in which their research is embedded after the research is completed" (Ellis et al., 2011: 282). With this consideration, as well as the ethical principle of truthfully describing and analysing the data from my interviews with the women in my family, I have kept in mind these crucial "relational concerns" throughout my research and writing process (Ellis et al., 2011: 281) . Therefore, while I have the consent to name almost all of the family members I interviewed, I have chosen not to, and will refer to them in this thesis in terms of their relationship to me. I have also noted the age of each interviewee when we had our interviews between June and August 2019, as well their respective marital or relationship status at this time, as these were the significant purposive sampling criteria for my data capturing and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data from my interviews with them are thus referenced in-text in this thesis as follows:

Family Member Interviewed:	In-text Reference:	Age (at the time of interview)	Relationship / Marital Status (at the time of the interview)
Mother	F1	64	Married
Sister	F2	37	Married
Aunt 1	F3	53	Single
Aunt 2	F4	66	Married
Aunt 3	F5	68	Divorced
Cousin 1	F6	38	Married

Cousin 2	F7	28	In a Relationship
Cousin 3	F8	28	Single
Cousin 4	F9	21	Single

Figure 4: Family Interviewees

3.6.6: Relational Ethics

Researchers using the method of narrative autoethnography also have to take into consideration how family members will feel about how they have been represented in the researcher's art. Dee Heddon (2008: 2) expands on this complex matter:

> Works tightly focused on inequality in relation to identity, though primarily *auto*biographical, are again often auto*bio*graphical (original emphasis), as the 'personal' is related to the wider cultural and social context, making reference to others almost inevitable – mothers, fathers, lovers, friends, enemies.

For example, I have to grapple with how I have engaged with and represented my *Ma* in my plays. My *Ma* greatly impacted my life and lovingly helped to raise my siblings and I. However, she was also a woman with whom I clashed due to our different beliefs. Ethics hold great importance to autoethnographers and thus many are vigilant about "relational ethics" and "who could be implicated in and/or by their representations" (Adams & Manning, 2015: 361). Therefore, such researchers use pseudonyms, fictional or composite characters to protect their family as much as possible (Adams & Manning, 2015). This is what I did when writing *Devi* (2019). I never directly created a character after one of my family members nor did I write in events or stories exactly as they happened in my family. In both *Race Trouble* (2013) and *Devi* (2019), I created characters who were reflections of my *Ma*. In the former, I criticised her racist behaviour while in the latter, I challenged her devotion to ritualistic and cultural customs, particularly her strict order that I could not enter a temple when menstruating. Although I did not overtly represent my *Ma* in these works of fiction, my family clearly knew to whom and what I was referring, as we share similar experiences and memories. For *Race Trouble* (2013) my *Ma* did not watch the production, which was odd as she has watched many of my performances; however, I was afraid of how she would react. My *Ma* was ailing in her health at the time and this honestly became a convenient reason for me to excuse her from attending the performance. With *Devi* (2019), even though my *Ma* had passed away by this time, I still was concerned about what her response would be to the play.

As Heddon (2008: 1) states, "Because our lives never stand free of the lives of others, we are faced with our responsibility to those others whenever we write (perform) about ourselves."

The question that ultimately arises from this ethical dilemma is whether or not it is morally worth it to use others, even indirectly, in one's work? Heddon says that this question is impossible to answer as the political efficacy of theatre cannot be accurately measured (2008). Despite the inability to know if theatre can truly bring about fundamental change, the value of autoethnographic work can be found in its principles. Yes, it may be individually therapeutic for the researcher to write their personal stories (Ellis et al., 2011). This may appear to be a selfish aim of autoethnography. Firstly, however, the person who risks themselves the most in autoethnography is the researcher. Not only do I have to share my deeply personal thoughts and experiences, my life and work is open to scholarly and artistic critique (Adams & Manning, 2015). Secondly, the rewards of autoethnography such as its healing value can also reach those, like family, who directly influence one's writing, as they especially can resonate with the work. This can further benefit larger audiences or readers who engage with writing and art, as the primary intention of autoethnography is to understand our larger cultural experiences through analysing our personal experiences (Jones et al., 2013). Autoethnography and PaR allow for a cathartic witnessing to take place between audience and artist, researcher and reader, with the hope of opening the door to conversations and renegotiation, a reconstitution hopefully of our lived experiences and identities (Baxter, 2013). As Ellis et al. (2011: 280) argue, in autoethnography, researchers do not only work with others to "validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances."

In particular regard to my *Ma*, I express in *Devi* (2019) and this thesis, that I understand her worldview, and that the rigidity of her beliefs was what she needed to hold onto in her life, which was far harder than mine has ever been. Significantly, it is in undertaking my autoethnographic and PaR research, and through writing my thesis and *Devi* (2019) that I came to this deep-rooted realisation. I was able to let go of the anger towards my *Ma* and experienced the cathartic and healing value that autoethnography can have (Jones et al., 2011). My *Ma* and I grew up in entirely different times and circumstances, and I acknowledge that she was doing what she felt was right for me. However, this does not mean I should not challenge and question her in my work, in order to show how the reactionary thinking of our elders needs revision today. Some solace I could find to my ethical dilemma

with my *Ma* was the response of the artist Robbie McCauley who, when she was asked whether it was fair to stir her fathers in their graves in her performance dealing with the rape of her great grandmother, simply responded, "I'm not sure they are resting there" (Heddon, 2008: 2). This profound answer reflects how I feel about *Devi* (2019) and my thesis. If I am troubled by the patriarchal norms of our culture and society, then so are my family, friends and community. They may not realise it, they may reject it but we share similar experiences and histories that cannot be denied. By deconstructing these connections between us, through autoethnography, PaR and semi-structured interviews, we can begin to construct and embrace a new sense of our cultures, our lives and ourselves.

3.7: Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has extensively outlined the methodology of my thesis, which is wholly qualitative within an interpretive paradigm. The methodological approaches of my thesis are autoethnography and PaR, both of which have been well established in this chapter. The methods I have used in this research have also been discussed: namely, narrative autoethnography, through writing and staging *Devi* (2019), and semi-structured interviews with ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and women members of my family. This data has been reflexively thematically analysed, along with a textual analysis of primary sources: a selection of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including myself. Lastly, I have studied and referenced secondary sources, relevant literature to this thesis' contexts and themes. All these methods, underpinned by my theoretical framework (see Figure 2), simultaneously work together with the purpose of critically examining the identities, lives and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and about such women. Ellis (2004: 30) perceptively articulates the motivation behind such a complex exploration, one that brings together both social and artistic research and practice:

> Working from an orientation that blends the practices and emphases of social science with the aesthetic sensibility and expressive forms of art, these researchers seek to tell stories that show bodily, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual experience…Their goals include: 'one, evoking emotional experience in readers; two, giving voice to stories and groups of people traditionally left out of social

> science inquiry; three, producing writing of high literary/artistic quality; and four, improving readers', participants', and authors' lives.'

This statement by Ellis reflects the goals of my thesis which I have strived to achieve using the methodology outlined in this chapter. These aims are to represent and give voice to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID; to produce a play that is of a high artistic standard; to evoke personal and emotional connections with readers and viewers of my work; and to hopefully enrich the lives of these readers and viewers, my interviewees and indeed, myself, the writer and creator of this study. As Allen and Piercy astutely note, "If I do my job well, my experience connects with that of the reader, and the reader can reflect on…his or her life and the issues it raises through my own sharing" (2005: 162). This is what the research of narrative autoethnographers sets out to do. I have endeavoured to do this job through and within a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework, and an autoethnography and PaR rooted methodology that I have thoroughly established in chapters two and three. My application of these theories and methods to my relevant literature, data analysis and artistic practice will be detailed and discussed in the succeeding chapters.

"when it came to choosing
she asked me to be thankful
for the choices i had that
she never had the privilege of making"

lessons from mumma by Rupi Kaur
(2017: 122)

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LIVES OF ISAW, SAIW AND/OR SAWOID – OPPRESSION AND EXPECTATION FROM THE PAST AND INTO THE PRESENT

4.1: Introduction

As I encapsulated in Figure 2, both the subconscious and deliberate construction of identity is, for each individual, a constant and ever changing journey. Furthermore, this process is not independent as "one's identity is not simply a personal construction but is shaped and influenced by the social structure and context within which one lives" (Carrim, 2016: 442). To explore my own identity and its construction, and more broadly the identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and centrally about us, I must examine the markers or shared commonalities found in our lives and experiences. To do this, I have to first trace the history of Indian women in South Africa because as Seedat-Khan avows, "The contextualisation of the Indian woman cannot be understood in isolation. It needs to be explored against the backdrop and history of her journey" (2012: 46). This journey begins in 1860 with the first arrival of Indian indentured labourers in Port Natal, then under British colonial rule, leading up to present day post-apartheid South Africa. In 2010, the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa was widely commemorated in the country. In the article *Tracing the Journey of South African Indian Women from 1860*, Seedat-Khan (2012: 46) asks the following question about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID:

> Have culture, religion and the collective experience of their 150-year journey from indentured labour to 2010 strengthened them and contributed to the Indian women we see today, or have these experiences boxed them into age-old gender practices?

This is one of the critical questions my thesis, and specifically this chapter, seeks to address. I should note that it is not my intention to provide a detailed history of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID from 1860 to the present since this is not the aim of my research. Rather, I seek to ascertain, in particular, how our history, culture, religion, families and society have institutionally affected our lives. In doing so, one possible answer to Seedat-Khan's astute question will be established.

4.2: Indenture

4.2.1: Beginnings

Indentured labour from India to South Africa began on 16 November 1860, with the arrival of 342 Indians aboard the Truro (Desai & Vahed, 2012). Indenture was not undertaken lightly by Indian people. This is due to the concept of *kala pani*, which literally means "black water" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 439). In Hindu culture, it was considered taboo to traverse the ocean, as Desai and Vahed (2010: 56) explain:

> For Indians, the sea was the *kala pani* and the act of crossing it was considered contaminating and defiling for the soul. It was held to lead to the 'dispersal of tradition, family, class, and caste classifications, and to the general loss of a 'purified' Hindu essence.'

Nevertheless, largely due to impoverished conditions in India, many Indians became migrant labourers in South Africa. Indentured labour was an oppressive system whereby workers were contractually bound to unknown, often harsh, employers in unfamiliar, hard labour jobs (Ginwala, 1985). There were also Indians who came freely, such as educated and Indian traders who were known as "passenger" Indians: "Though victims of the same forces that had driven the indentured to South Africa, the passenger (so called because they paid their own passages) Indians were more fortunate" (Ginwala, 1985: 5). The book *Inside Indian Indenture: A South African Story 1860 – 1914* (2010) by Desai and Vahed provides an expansive and richly detailed analysis of the first advent of Indians, to what we now know as the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), in South Africa. Over 160 years later Durban, KZN's largest city where I was born in and live, "has the highest concentration of Indians outside of India" (Khan, 2018).

Desai and Vahed (2010: 2-3) expand on the experiences of indentured Indians in South Africa:

> Some were defrauded into migrating, others chose to make a new start in Natal; some established family, the attempts of others ended in failure or tragedy; some prospered while others lived in abject poverty; many simply endured the hardship of indenture; some collaborated, a few chose to fight; many, too many, took their lives; most made Natal home, others returned to India; many others tried to go 'home', only to return.

Despite the severe conditions and terms of indenture, which required labourers to eventually return to India, as well as the subsequent restrictions placed on the migration of non-indentured Indians, it is clear that many did not leave, choosing to build their lives and families in South Africa. Critically, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID played a key role in this foundation. However, historically and, I would argue presently, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are unseen in South Africa (Rajab, 2011). To address this invisibility through studying our lives and identities, one has to start at the beginning, "with the stories of the women who sailed on the ships from India" (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 39). Thus, in order to contend with the gendered issues and functioning of our communities and families and, "the social construction of what it means to be an Indian women in South Africa today…" (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 39), we must acknowledge and understand ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's history,

4.2.2: Circumstances for Indian women

In the case of Indian women, from before they boarded the ships, through the voyage across the seas, and eventually to their arrival and time in South Africa, they were in extremely vulnerable positions. One of the reasons for this was that far more Indian men were travelling to South Africa than Indian women. Indeed, Desai and Vahed's research found that, "The majority of the 152,641 migrants who arrived between 1860 and 1911 were young males in the 18-30 age group. The average male:female ratio was approximately 64:28, while fewer than 20 per cent of the indentured comprised families" (2012: 23). The result of this gender imbalance was that many of the women were exploited and sexually abused as they were outnumbered by Indian men (Jagganath, 2008). Meer (1972: 37) describes the many

hardships Indian women faced through indenture as unwanted cargo accompanying valued male workers:

> Those who found employment earned five shillings a month and half of male rations and those who remained unemployed became a drain on the meager amenities of the men they partnered. As labourers on contract, they could not leave the estate without permission, and little sympathy was shown for their indispositions due to menstrual disorders or childbirth. Because of the scarcity, they became focal points of male sexual jealousies, and so the source of evil-male conflict and violence. They were often obliged, out of economic need or fear, to cohabit with a number of men simultaneously, without the protection of marriage, and for the explicit purpose of gratifying male lust. Children born from such relations became their responsibility.

Ultimately, Indian indentured women depended on their male counterparts for their lives. This included white male authority figures such as employers, doctors, ship captains and crew members, who would also often physically and sexually abuse them, evidencing that European men too were predators (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Furthering this oppression was that Indian women were derided and blamed in their struggle for survival. Women who were desperate for food, and thus attached themselves to men were labelled as "rice cookers" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 6). In Natal, many Indians lived in grass huts: thus, the term "grass widow" was used, the inference being that such a woman has loose morals and causes serious problems (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 202). If Indian men were sick and could not work, they would not be paid, and so their wives were sometimes forced into prostitution as "their means of subsistence" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 206).

Wife murders were not uncommon. Legally, Indian women found little to no help. Regarding marital issues, the law was one-sided as a man could "charge another man with seducing his wife or his unmarried daughter or he may charge his wife with adultery but it does not say a wife may charge her husband with adultery" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 213). In accusations of abuse against employers, the abusers word was sacrosanct and these white men were not punished for their crimes (Desai & Vahed, 2010). In Joanne Joseph's recent novel *Children of Sugarcane* (2021), this is in fact one of the plot points: the character Shanti, an indentured Indian woman in Port Natal is arrested for the murder of her abusive master, a white British man who repeatedly rapes and impregnates her. Ultimately, the negative

labelling and representation of Indian indentured women as indecent was persistent while the pressures they faced, "as workers, house-keepers, wives and mothers in poverty and poor living conditions went unrecognised" (Desai &Vahed, 2010: 21). Rather, "emphasis was placed on their lack of morality as the basis for not being able to build long-lasting relationships" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 21).

Considering the even harsher conditions Indian women faced under indenture, it is pertinent to explore why some of them decided to come to South Africa in the first place, as Shanti does in Joseph's novel (2021). Kandiyoti's theory of the patriarchal bargain is relevant here because Indian women had to negotiate within the constricting patriarchal systems of colonialism, Indian culture and indenture (1988; Benstead, 2021). As Seedat-Khan states, "The indentured Indian women whether, single or married, made choices" (2010: 41). These choices and bargaining were difficult and limited, no matter the direction Indian women took, whether remaining in their homeland or crossing the seas to South Africa. Initially the indenture system typically did not bring an Indian man's wife and children with him. Furthermore, although only conditionally recognised by the colonial state in 1907, polygamy was an accepted practice in Hinduism and Islam (Desai & Vahed, 2010). As a result, Indian men and women formed relationships from the time they were travelling on the ships to South Africa, regardless of whether or not the men in question were already married. Within such relationships, Indian women were in an inferior, vulnerable position with virtually no rights (Desai & Vahed, 2010).

Bearing in mind the clear double standards placed on indentured women as well as the *kala pani* and the serious consequences it was said to have on one's respectability as a Hindu, indenture was still considered a better option for some Indian women than life in India, especially for those who were single or widowed. As Desai and Vahed explain, "Hindu women in nineteenth-century India 'had socially confined roles that were well-defined in subordination to men'" (2010: 21). Thus, women without husbands had a "nonhuman status" and respectable single women, it was purported, would never emigrate (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 21). Seen as invisible in Indian Hindu culture and communities, widowhood was considered "the ultimate scourge of Hindu womanhood" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 40). Therefore, single and widowed Indian women saw indenture as a chance to "escape the patriarchal gender order in India and their subordinate roles within it…Migration presented an opportunity for women to renegotiate gendered identities" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 204).

This is the wish of the character Shanti who comes to South Africa at the age of 15 to escape her father's order that she must get married (Joseph, 2021). However, such hopes were far from achievable for, "as families congealed and extended in Natal, so patriarchy and 'exclusions', either remembered from the past or forged anew, were reinscribed" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 22). My argument is that this evinces the point that Indian women have had to contend with the pressures of their marital status for centuries (Jagganath, 2008; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). Hence, in purposively sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) my family interviewees (see Figure 4), and in making *Devi* (2019), marital status was factored into my selection, and informed my questions, analysis and writing.

4.2.3: Family, Morality and Control

Colonial rulers only saw the indentured as units of labour and at first there were no laws to govern marriage, divorce, adultery, dowry and polygamy amongst the indentured. However, this would change as for white and Indian men, Indian women had to be reined in. South Africa as a new land of possible opportunity or change for Indian women was soon quashed in order to maintain the patriarchal and colonial status quo. This reflects how ISAs (such as family, culture and religion), and RSAs (such as the law, bureaucracy and military or police), powerfully, ideologically and repressively operate in our societies to exercise control over our lives and identities (Althusser, 1971, 2006; Foucault, 1982; 1998). Therefore, even though "the indentured space was a dangerous site for rupturing the patriarchal order…over time, the story would be that of legislation to reinscribe the gendered patriarchal order, or approximations of it, and re-institute 'stable' family" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 204).

The building of family life was compromised by the rupturing of families back home in India and in Natal. This fracturing was due to the large gender disparity amongst the indentured labourers, long work hours under extreme conditions and housing that did not allow for privacy between couples (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Relationships between indentured men and women were fraught with tension and violence with the former having traditional expectations of the latter, "such as 'acceptance of fate, glorification of motherhood and virginity, deference to male authority and, above all, worship of the husband'" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 207). When Indian women challenged such expectations, extreme violence was commonplace with many women being brutally assaulted and murdered. As I have discussed, the law was biased against women but there were a few Indian women who valiantly fought

and were able to successfully seek justice. Nonetheless, women "who persisted in their claims despite the reluctance of authorities to prosecute them, were the exception…" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 214). On the whole, colonial officials and systems were intent on perpetuating the narrative that Indian women were immoral (Desai & Vahed, 2010).

This narrative was engendered by both British colonials and Indian men who shared, I would argue, one common goal: to suppress any kind of rebellion from Indian women. Public bars were prohibited from supplying liquor to Indian women. Only Indian women, not men, had to be registered stating whether they were "'married', 'single' or 'concubines…'" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 210). Once again, this points to the importance of marital status for Indian women, they had no choice but to identify with these subject positions as they were the only ones available to them (Weedon, 2004). "Valid" marriages were registered from 1872 which at least gave Indian women "a proper status" in the eyes of men (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 210-211). Still, Indian women who were second or third wives in polygamous marriages were not recognised by the law until 1907. Magistrates or the Protector of Indian immigrants did not have the authority to dissolve marriages for either Indian men or women. Only the Supreme Court had the power to grant a divorce, which largely Indians could not afford (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Indentured women were thus in an even more helpless position as most could not remarry if their husbands abandoned them. Ultimately, Desai and Vahed explain that, "The state wanted to bind women in marital unions under male control and feared that divorce would increase the number of 'vagrant' women, which would constitute a 'moral' problem" (2010: 214).

In spite of these hurdles, more Indian women sought divorces than men during indenture, a point which strikes me considering that over a century later, I found the same factor evident in my newspaper article on SAI divorce rates (Moodley, 2011). The reason for the lack of provisions regarding divorce and Indian women's rights in their marriages, as Desai and Vahed (2010) astutely observe, is that indenture was about control, with both British colonials and Indian men needing to control Indian women for their respective needs and systems. Marriage was a way for the British to use Indian men to suppress and regulate the lives and actions of Indian women. In turn, the vulnerable position of Indian women in the indentured system benefitted Indian men, who for the purposes of patriarchal and cultural preservation (Govender, 1999), upheld their dominance over Indian women. Our identities are intersectional and impacted by the mutually reinforcing systems that shape our racial,

gendered, class, political and historical contexts (May, 2015). Therefore, I assert that colonialism and the indentured system contributed to the formation of the ISAs of SAI culture and the SAI family. What was and is still critical to these institutions are the roles and behaviours expected of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. The SAI man, for instance, who called to complain about my newspaper article, felt that such writing promulgates behaviour of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that is, as the ISAs of our community dictate, inappropriate.

4.3: Roles and Duties

In enduring the brutal system of indenture, there was a great reliance and emphasis on building family. The indentured who survived and the roots they built were thus the beginnings of what is the key feature of SAI society today – family. Kuper (1956: 15) explains the following about the SAI family:

> The Indian population of South Africa is composed of people of diverse religions, languages, and customs, so that in most situations it is misleading to generalize about the 'Indians'…Despite the diversity, there is one institution – the family – which has certain characteristics common to all sections of the Indian people so that one can speak, albeit with reservations, of the 'Indian family'. It is regarded by all as the main social unit of Indian life, the centre in which the individual receives his foundation in social values and behaviours.

What role do ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID play in the ISA of the SAI family? What values and behaviours are we expected to uphold? Meer states that from the second decade of the twentieth century, "Indian family life in South Africa settled into traditional conservatism, and women assumed full responsibility for maintaining that conservatism" (1972: 37). Indian women upon their first arrival in South Africa, struggling to survive, were labelled as prostitutes, "rice cookers" or "grass widows" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 6-202). Marriage and duty to one's husband and family in a settled, conservative culture, as Meer (1972) says, was thus seen as the only respectable and viable path for them. Kathryn Pillay explains that our "self-image is controlled by the boundaries of…the categories available" to us (2015: 126). Therefore, whether we conform, dis-identify or counter-identify (Weedon, 2004), we are each

a “subject-in-relation” (Davies & Gannon, 2005: 318), and our identities are paradoxically both personally chosen and socially regulated. Vitally, such awareness, derived from feminist poststructural theories and notions, gives us a new kind of agency. I therefore have learnt that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID historically have had to construct their lives and identities within the ISAs of SAI culture and family as moral matriarchal figures, mandated to maintain their families and their homes. They had very limited choices. Critically, the ramifications of this narrative and these expectations engendered around ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are still felt today (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Jagganath, 2010; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). Crucially, SAI men are not only relieved of this responsibility but they are also free from the restrictions that come with it. Thus, Desai and Vahed warn that we should not idealise the Indian family, “for inscribed in family life would be the reassertion of patriarchy and the oppression of women in the household” (2010: 217).

One of the reasons ascribed to needing ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to remain dutiful and centrally focused on the care of their households and families is for the preservation of SAI culture. Meer notes that such rationality, which seeks to excuse the oppression of women, is based on “the need to protect an encysted and embattled minority culture from the alien culture in which it finds itself…” (1972: 33). Critically, it is ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who “have often been in collusion with” perpetuating such beliefs and practices (Meer, 1972: 33). Therefore, in the years after indenture ended, and leading up to apartheid, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID still lived very restricted lives, underlined by not just racial oppression but by the traditions, religions and culture of SAI. These ISAs were ardently held onto by SAI, as Seedat-Khan (2012: 43) expounds:

> ‘In an atmosphere of hostility and rampant discrimination where the “browned skinned Indian” was caught between the native African and the domineering Afrikaner, the Indians’ only mooring for identity and self-respect was religion and culture’ (Ratnam 2000).

Meer therefore argues that the restrictive patterns created by the enclosed culture of SAI, a minority group, have aided in the oppression of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID not just by SAI men, but by the women themselves (1972). Even the world’s most famous Indian activist, Mahatma Gandhi, who fought for the liberation of Indian people in both India and

South Africa, held traditional beliefs regarding men and women. Seedat-Khan (2012: 37) notes the following argument Gandhi made:

> Men and women are equal in status but are not identical, man is supreme in the outward activities of a married couple, and home life is entirely the sphere of the woman. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well ordered society the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management, the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

Gandhi's clearly defined ideas about the separate and distinct roles Indian men and women should adopt in their lives was – and still is, although to a far lesser degree – a widely held concept. Religion was used as a justification for such thought; or more accurately, it can be said that religion was deceptively used as a form of subjugation. The development of Hinduism was codified by Manu, the archetypal first man of Hindu mythology. Meer (1972: 34) states that his compilations continue to influence Hindu life, most severely against women:

> Whatever their status before – and early Vedic sources record that they were the equals of man, sporting, debating, politicking, and taking plural husbands – Manu constrained them to home and hearth and made them the wards of males.

For Muslim women, the Quran gave them property rights, control over their earnings and equal rights to divorce. However, the laws that followed contradicted this and the lack of education and training for females meant that they became dependent on males. Therefore, while religion provides evidence for the equal treatment of men and women, "it is the practice of patriarchy that keeps Indian women subservient…The Indian patriarch in the family skilfully used religion as a form of oppression" (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 39). Furthermore, consent to abide the limitations of religion and culture, like confinement to the domestic space, was falsely conscientised and induced through the manufacturing of notions that such practices are for the benefit of the family unit and for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID themselves (Gramsci, 2006; Lewis, 2002). Thus, women like my *Ma* were forced "to turn to religion as a form of comfort and solace" (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 39). This is the patriarchal

bargain they made, which they held onto zealously (Benstead, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988; Naidu, 2011). Yet, what this engendered is a cycle whereby ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID continue to preserve detrimental patriarchal cultural practices (Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Seedat-Khan, 2012). The terrible irony of this cover up is that most ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, especially elder generations like my *Ma* and *Ba*, do not even realise the cruel cycle they are perpetuating. Meer (1972: 35) powerfully details the "tragedy of this conspiracy":

> She herself was never aware of it. So intense were the social strictures conditioning her role, so weighty and valued the precedents that had founded it, so compelling the myths that propagated it, and so unanimous the public opinion supporting it, that she accepted her designation as sacred and extolled and revered every part of it. Thus the system was generated and sustained by its victims, and each generation of women guarded it zealously and prepared the next to be imprisoned within it.

I, like many other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, am a victim in this system. Yes, we do have self-determination within the ISAs that structure our lives. However, this agency is conditional. As Pillay brilliantly explains in her study on the transmission of racial identity in South African families of Indian descent, "Although not denying agency, agency is confined to the script and can be viewed relative to the constraints posed by society" (2015: 128). My *Ma*, a woman who firmly believed in certain behaviours that Indian girls must follow, imposed these ideals onto her daughters and granddaughters. It has taken years of introspection to stop following some of the practices she demanded of me, as these customs are clearly nothing but the upholding of a patriarchal culture that has harmful effects on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. I certainly will strive not to pass this culture on to future generations of women in my family.

4.4: Changing Times

How did positive transformation occur in the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID? Entering the workforce and education played a vital role in this. After the First World War, a few women began to work outside the home but their poor education and the insularity of SAI culture, particularly its limiting of women to the private domain, meant that they were still largely dependent on their husbands for economic and social support. The impact of the

Second World War, which necessitated the need for women in the workforce, brought about change in the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as they became engaged in wage labour as self-employed hawkers, domestic workers, cooks and market gardeners (Seedat-Khan, 2012). However, these were still low paying jobs and thus ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID sought to change their socio-economic circumstances. Significantly, one's class was and still is an intersectional factor that impacts Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID educational and career opportunities. In discussing identity and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa, Vahed and Desai (2010: 6) point out the irony of monolithically perceiving and categorising all SAI "under the all-inclusive label 'Indian'" when in reality, "Poor Indians from township schools compete with rich Indian children with unlimited resources for limited spaces in schools, universities and on the job market." Thus, the evident diversity found in SAI communities and people is indeed determined by class. Crucially, a commonality that I assert can be found within the various subclasses of SAI communities and cultures is that the pursuit of women's educational and career aspirations are centrally framed as being beneficial for one's family in SAI culture. As Khan (2012: 141) explains, during apartheid, it "became inevitable for mothers to find unskilled and semi-skilled employment to supplement rising household costs." Furthermore, Seedat-Khan (2012: 44) avows that Indian women's "resourcefulness and familial responsibility strengthened their resolve to find solutions…Their perseverance, resilience and courage passed down from generation to generation of Indian women."

It was only around the 1940s that SAI girls started attending school and at this time, "though a large proportion still leave school round the age of puberty, an ever-increasing number are receiving high school and university education" (Kuper, 1956: 26-27). My *Ma* was married at 17 and had her first child at 19 years of age. My *Ba* married in India at the age of 19, moved to South Africa and bore eight children. They did not receive any education beyond school. My mother, on the other hand, married at the age of 26 after qualifying as a medical doctor. I am 34 years old and pursuing my PhD. This anecdotal evidence shows that progress in the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID has been made, particularly through education and career opportunities, spaces of the public domain. As Jagganath (2008: 7) states, "It was the gradual introduction of formal education to Indian girls in South Africa that showed a change in the thinking of Indian families at the time."

Education and politics go hand in hand. Thus during apartheid, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID were able to unite with women across the colour line in their shared experiences of oppression and suffering. Seedat-Khan explains that, "Women as mothers, sisters and daughters provided the mechanisms for their families and each other to effect change in an apartheid state" (2012: 44). However, due to the largely insular lives ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID led, it is perhaps true to say that among their counterparts, they were the most stagnant group politically and occupationally during apartheid, as Rajab (2011: np) explains:

> Though higher education records paint a different picture, their qualifications didn't always translate into job opportunities or positions of high status. And although they fought alongside their men in the Satyagraha struggles, the taboos of culture, religion, and other societal norms kept them locked in the restrictive duties of domesticity.

Meer explains that Indian women in South Africa have united as women, not necessarily to liberate themselves from patriarchy, but to serve social and welfare needs. I argue that she (Meer, 1972: 46) perceptively highlights how historically Indian women's groups in South Africa have aided in sustaining the traditional gender roles constructed within the ISA of SAI culture:

> Men cannot object if their women wish to leave their homes to serve community needs, and women who might otherwise become conscience-stricken at the thought of neglecting the family feel justified in extending their concern beyond its limits.

Meer's point here about Indian women needing to rationalise their actions as always being in the service of others, while their male counterparts are not similarly burdened, points to the hierarchical binaries that Derrida (1997; Barker, 2004) and feminist poststructuralism seek to deconstruct and dismantle (Davies & Gannon, 2005). ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, especially our elder generations, have been falsely conscientised and induced to accept that all our actions must be for the purpose of maintaining our families and preserving our insular culture (Gramsci, 2006; Lewis, 2002; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012). For example my *Ma*, the most patriarchally abiding Indian woman I have ever known, was a part of a Women's Circle for much of her life in Greenwood Park, where my family and I first lived. Part of this

area was designated for Indian people to reside in under the Group Areas Act[15] during apartheid (Maharaj, 1992). Such elderly SAIW's groups in communities focus on fostering strong social bonds through meetings and cultural functions while also helping those in need through charitable acts and fundraising events. These groups form an important socio-cultural role, however their patriarchal underpinnings and implications must be critically analysed.

I know *Ma* always enjoyed these gatherings and remained a member until her death in 2014. She felt it was one of her treasured of opportunities to be with her peers and community. Nevertheless, upon critically reflecting now, I find that my *Ma's* Women's Circle group was one of the only spaces in the public domain that she had outside of her life in our home, the private domain. She and my *Ba* were never able to study, work or build a life for themselves that was separate from us: their families and communities were constructed as their main purpose. Generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID like my mother and myself have thus been able to make significant strides in our lives, through changing educational and career opportunities our ancestors never had. Yet, I still contend that while the strings have indeed loosened, the patriarchal grip of the ISA of SAI culture which so tightly bonded my *Ma* and *Ba*, still tethers us today.

4.5: Independent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID?

Regarding the impact of education and careers, Meer concludes that it "has undoubtedly introduced feelings of independence in the South African Indian woman…" (1972: 45). However, complete individuality was and is still not possible. Firstly, historically the type of professions ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID took on was significant as certain careers, such as medicine, nursing, office work, teaching and the law were more acceptable than unskilled work which was seen as less prestigious. When entering professional work spaces in the late 1950s, teaching was one of the most popular career choices, partly because it was considered complementary and practical for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's roles as wives and mothers (Jagganath, 2008). Thus, education and employment was always

[15] The Group Areas Act was enacted in the 1950s as part of apartheid legislation which assigned different race groups separate residential and developmental areas. This resulted in the removal of African, Coloured and Indian South Africans from land deemed for white South Africans to separate, inferior areas. The consequences of this act are far-reaching and still felt today in post-apartheid South Africa. Many areas remain largely segregated by race, such as Reservoir Hills and Chatsworth in Durban which, for example, are still substantially populated by SAI. Greenwood Park is an area in Durban that my father's family resided in from the 1960s.

conditional, and secondary to the primary purpose of marrying and taking care of one's family.

The freedom and democracy of post-apartheid South Africa has, "allowed for a renaissance among women achievers in the Indian community" (Rajab, 2011: np). ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID today do have more freedom regarding our education and career choices; however, we are still confronted with cultural expectations that we cannot avoid. I, for example, have had to contend with the perception in the SAI community that my chosen field of study and career, dramatic arts, is unstable and not as reputable as becoming a doctor, lawyer, accountant or engineer. Furthermore, while I fortunately have the support of my family in regards to my career pursuits, I still have to address the matter of my unmarried status often with them and my community. Therefore clearly, the freedom ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have post-apartheid is still constricted by the parameters of the ISAs of SAI culture and family. This can be seen in Rajab's statement that "the gestalt of the Indian professional women's life, in comparison to her Western counterpart, appears to be much more heavily filled with obligations and duties" (2011: 173).

Notably, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are still expected to fulfil what are deemed their most important role in life: being a wife and mother. These are the subject positions available to us, that we must contend with in regard to all aspects of our lives (Weedon, 2004). As Gerelene Jagganath says, "Even within the context of marriage, an educated woman was more an attribute that brought value to the marriage rather than recognition of her independent identity" (2008: 7). Additionally, there are new needs and wants in marriages, families and extended families that require both parents to be employed (Meer, 1972; Khan, 2012). Thus, it is acceptable for an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to work because it is for her family. However, her career must not take precedence over marriage and motherhood. In fact, gainfully employed wives "exert themselves to play out the roles of successful housewives and career women simultaneously" (Meer, 1972: 45). I have seen this first hand in my own mother, a highly qualified paediatrician and neonatologist, who has worked herself to the bone in both her home and workplace for over forty years. When women like myself are not married, within this counter-identification or dis-identification, we are still identified and judged by our lack of marriage (Weedon, 2014). Jagganath (2008) explains that the value of women in patriarchal SAI society is always viewed in relationship

to men. Hence marriage is the ultimate goal and, "motherhood is the ideal of womanhood" (Kuper, 1956: 27).

Not only did Indian women have to bear children but it was imperative to bear sons. I do not see it as a coincidence that my *Ma*, who favoured her male descendants, only stopped having children after her fourth child was a son, having already borne three daughters. As Meer hauntingly states, "A barren woman smoldered in the fire of her curse and a mother of daughters dropped with shame" (1972: 34). Furthermore, in preserving family tone and morality, daughters were strictly expected to behave, while misbehaviour from sons was tolerated. Mothers thus had harsher relationships with their daughters than with their sons (Meer, 1972), like my *Ma* and aunts. This reflects how patriarchy is a cycle that is perpetuated by its own victims.

An ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID is therefore expected to go from being an obedient daughter and sister to a devoted wife and mother. The Marriage Law Amendment Act of 1935 prohibited girls under the age of 16 and boys under the age of 18 from getting married. The most popular age for marriage, "is 16 to 20 years for girls, and 19 to 24 for boys" (Kuper, 1956: 24). Over time this has changed, with both Indian South African, SAI and/or SAOID men and women usually marrying at later stages in their lives. Nowadays, "Indian women per se are generally marrying between the ages of 24 and 35 years" (Jagganath, 2008: 4). One reason for this is that, "Unlike their mothers, Indian women in contemporary South Africa are pursuing careers even before marriage" (Rajab, 2011: 173). Nevertheless, as I have established in this chapter, marriage and all the requirements that come with it is still seen as imperative to SAI family and culture. In post-apartheid South Africa, in which ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives have considerably changed from their elders and ancestors, how do these ISAs influence the experiences of both married and unmarried ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID?

Two studies, by Nasima Mohamed Hoosen Carrim (2016) and Jagganath (2008), provide insights into the challenges ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, both married and unmarried, face in their families and communities today. Marital, status, as I established in chapter three is a significant factor that is purposefully considered in my study, and in Carrim (2016) and Jagganath's (2008) work. Carrim's research examines the life stories of single ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who bear the financial responsibility of taking care of their

families. This is an indication of a significant shift in the lives of Indian women who, in the past, were not able to get an education or have a career in the first place. Carrim (2016: 441) expands on these changes:

> Increasingly, Indian women (in India and worldwide) enter the workforce because of adverse conditions in their homes, and unmarried daughters assume breadwinner roles in many natal homes…These socio-economic changes are challenging the gender roles and identities of the traditional family model…

Despite the challenging of conservative gendered identities, the patriarchal status quo remains steadfast in our families and communities. Carrim thus argues that it is ironic that Indian women have more authority in their workplace and financial power in their homes and yet, such women are subordinated by and within cultural and patriarchal gender roles that they are expected to perform (2016; Butler, 1999). Carrim's interpretivist study, which consisted of in depth interviews with unmarried Indian women who work as managers in corporate South Africa, shows that although single ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are providing for and taking care of their parents and families - a task formerly only expected of sons - they still did not have autonomy and power in their own homes. Particularly when an Indian woman's father has died and she now bears the responsibility of looking after her mother, it is ironically the maternal figure who continues to expect submissiveness from her daughter. For example, "their mothers still consulted their brothers about important decisions despite their not being breadwinners in the family, which ultimately placed the women in subordinate positions" (Carrim, 2016: 453). Again, this shows how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are stuck in a patriarchal cycle of subjugating themselves.

The women Carrim interviewed at times resisted the traditional patriarchal system in their homes; at other times, however, they acquiesced to appease their family (2016). The shackles of tradition are difficult to shake off. It therefore remains a constant struggle for us to negotiate our identities and live our lives as freely as we possibly can. This is a battle that many women, of all races, classes and cultures, fight (Benstead, 2021). However, it is important, as my study on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID does, to analyse and understand the intersectional significance of our diverse experiences, especially in relation to the socially and politically constructed factors of race, gender, class and culture (Davis, 2011; May, 2015). It is through such framing that I have argued and established in my thesis that marital

status historically has been – and remains – an issue that has strongly shaped ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives and the construction of our identities.

The desire to live independently is one of the reasons that some ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID leave their homes to work overseas. This is the focus of Jagganath's study which looks at the increasing numbers of Indian women who seek employment outside of South Africa (2008). The study does not just focus on those who are single, but also those who have children and are married, divorced or widowed. These designations are in fact how Jagganath analyses her data, clearly showing that an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's marital status is still a considerable factor of her life and identity (2008). Jagganath identifies many political and economic factors that explain why such women choose to migrate, noting the violent crime in South Africa, the lack of job opportunities due to affirmative action, the desire to gain international work experience, and earn more income than one would at home (2008). Significantly, family and cultural pressures are also factors that influence some ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's decision to leave the only home they have ever known (Jagganath, 2008).

For the single ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID sampled in Jagganath's study, they left South Africa to escape the expectation of getting married (2008). In some cases, the women had the support of their parents who wanted them to have a better quality of life but for others, their parents felt it was against their religious and family values to be unmarried and to travel alone (Jagganath, 2008). Many of these women, like the breadwinners in Carrim's study (2016), sent some of the money they earned home to their families, regardless of whether their parents approved of their choices or not. Contrastingly, married women, as Jagganath (2008: 125) points out, had more support for their decision:

> Generally, the social acceptance…for this decision appeared to be based on their marital status, the pursuit of more money for the local household, and the possibility of emigration for the family at a later stage.

Perhaps unbeknownst to their families, these ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID women also saw emigration as not just an "economic escape route" but also a "social escape route," away from family and cultural pressures (Jagganath, 2008: 125). Ultimately, their actions, and those of unmarried single Indian women who work overseas, reflect a shift in the thinking of SAI daughters, wives and mothers: There is a rebellion and refusal to conform to the

conventional roles expected of them (Jagganath, 2008). As Jagganath profoundly surmises, "Today, the transnational professional represents the polar extreme of the illiterate, vulnerable and exploited indentured labourer of the sugar plantations" (2008: 15).

4.6: Conclusion

This chapter has extensively studied the lives of Indian women from the time they sailed to South Africa in 1860 to 2023 today. What answer then, can be given to Seedat-Khan's question regarding the advancement of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID over the last 162 years (2012)? It is clear, firstly, that tremendous progress has been made, and thus Seedat-Khan (2012: 38 -39) rightly champions indentured Indian women:

> They were single, married, orphaned, outcast, mothers, sisters, daughters and wives. Their journey was a difficult one, filled with violence, oppression, deprivation and suffering. Some suffered in silence while others challenged the system to the bitter end.

Without the struggles of these women, I would not have the freedoms I am blessed with today. I can make choices regarding my relationships, my career and my life that my mother, grandmothers and ancestors never had. However, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are still stuck in a patriarchal system of oppression that we ourselves are guilty of perpetuating. This system was made and sustained through the RSAs of colonialism and apartheid laws, and through the ISAs of Hinduism, SAI culture and family (Althusser, 2006). Ironically, what ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have so ardently built and protected is also what continues to confine us today; what continues, as Seedat-Khan says, to box us "into age-old gender practices" (2012: 46). These boxes are that of mother, daughter, sister and wife: As ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, we must not only conform to these patriarchally and culturally constructed roles but we must do so willingly, attentively and dutifully in spite of our own individual aspirations, and in spite of the fact that SAI men are hardly held as much to the same standards as fathers, sons, brothers and husbands. It is up to younger ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, like myself, to break out of these moulds. Meer (1972): 44 – 46) in the 1970s could already see this happening:

> The traditional pattern is changing and has already become obsolete for a large proportion of the teen-age generation. The traditional, however, is not yet outmoded; it co-exists with the emergent new, and the two are presently in conflict…Whether her rebellion succeeds or not, the woman who has attempted to free herself has had her eyes opened, and she will never play the traditional role in the way it used to be played.

The game is changing. My eyes have been opened. By deeply exploring my own identity in my thesis and my play *Devi* (2019), through theatre I am striving to faithfully represent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's experiences. One autoethnographic way I set out to do this was by interviewing my own family members, the women with whom I am most connected, to gain insight into our lives and subjectivities. This data analysis is the focus of my next chapter.

"remember the body
of your community
breathe in the people
who sewed you whole
it is you who became yourself
but those before you
are a part of your fabric"

honour the roots by Rupi Kaur
(2017: 146)

CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEWING THE WOMEN IN MY FAMILY – SHARED EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS

5.1: Introduction

Hansen (2000) asserts that family is the most precious construct for SAI, which I can attest to as a product of such a culture. Furthermore, the impact of family in autoethnographic research is significant because as Adams and Manning emphasise, "At its core, autoethnography invokes a person's relationships with others and with society, even when the focus is not explicitly on these relationships" (2015: 352). I thus interviewed members from both my maternal (Gujarati) and paternal (Tamil) families for my thesis, in order to explore the significance of the mixing of these cultures and languages on my familial experiences and identity. In chapter three, (see Figure 4), I established the purposive sampling criteria considered when selecting the nine women in my family that I interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted one semi-structured interview with each of these women, in person, posing a set of both general and specific questions relative to their respective lives which provided "information-rich cases" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 97).[16] The duration of each interview varied, between ten and twenty-five minutes, and it is the reflexive thematic analysis of these "information-rich cases" that is the focus of this chapter (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

[16] My interview questions are contained in Appendix G.

The autoethnographic methodological approach often is a delicate balancing act whereby there must be sufficient academic rigour integrated with deeply personal story-telling and subjectivity. Blanchard explains that this combination is a strength of the research rather than a limitation as it does not undermine the academic focus while richly adding detail and validity (2018). What this demands, though, is "a high level of researcher reflexivity, and requires that the researcher be visible in the research" (Blanchard, 2018: 84). Hence, throughout my data analysis chapters, I have engaged with the responses of my interviewees, infusing and reflecting on my own experiences and viewpoints on what they have shared. The interviews with my family members were deeply engaging and insightful, as the private research and interview space provided safety and openness for us to converse about themes that we usually avoid. Such a space has historically and culturally not been available to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, whose voices have been silenced in and confined to the private domain (Carrim, 2016; Govender, 2001; Jagganath, 2008; Naidu, 2011; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). The stage – the medium of theatre – uniquely offers us a chance to break that silence (Govender, 1999, 2001).

Thematic analysis can be undertaken with the use of simply paper and coloured pens (Given, 2008). In analysing the transcripts from my interviews with the women in my family, I employed such a process which allowed me to reflexively thematically analyse my data through note taking, creating mind maps and developing data sets. All this contributed to the construction of the thematic areas of analysis noted below (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). These themes are relevant to my key research questions and ultimately to establishing my research findings. Indeed, these key questions are indispensably connected to the very questions I asked my interviewees as the purpose of our conversations was to discuss the socio-cultural, political and familial issues that have informed my entire thesis, through the framing of the feminist poststructural theories and the autoethnographic and practice-based methodologies that underpin my research (Ackerly & True, 2010). What this chapter examines is twofold: firstly, how the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID I am closest to have shaped my experiences, identity, subjectivity and, in turn, my playwriting as an SAIW. Secondly, the chapter addresses a key question of my thesis by analysing and providing insight into how ISAs especially impact our lives and representation in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Thus, in my reflexive thematic analysis, I developed and established the following eight thematic areas or data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), which inform the structure of this chapter:

- Constructing Identities
- Representation: Roles of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID
- The ISA of Family: Marital Status, Marriage and Motherhood
- Historical Specificity: Past to Present
- The ISAs of Religion and Culture: Traditions and Customs
- Feminism: What is it to you?
- Intersectionality: Sisterhood
- My Ideology: My Values

5.2: Constructing Identities

The very question I posed to myself at the inception of my study was the first question I asked the women in my family: "How would you identify yourself?" I received an array of responses, each revealing about the construction of our identities in terms of our nationality, culture and family. A significant and distinctive aspect was the generational difference in responses between the older and younger interviewees. While the younger generation, namely my Sister and Cousins, all firstly asserted their birth place of South Africa as a part of their identities, in the older generation some of my Aunts referenced their connections to India, familial and historical, as foremost in their self-identification. Aunt 2, whose parents (my paternal Tamil grandparents) were born in South Africa, identified as "*an Indian woman living in South Africa…Because I feel this is where I'm living, but I'm Indian and I should have been in India…my roots are still in India*" (F4).[17] My *Ma*, Aunt 2's mother, also held special reverence for India as the 'motherland' although she and her parents were born in South Africa. She, instead, seemed to root her "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373) with India, not South Africa. Aunt 1, my Gujarati Mother's sister, also stated that she is an "*Indian woman living in South Africa…Because my parents were originally from India…I was born in South Africa. But I have a strong Indian background due to my parents*" (F3). My maternal grandparents were natives of India, and my Mother and her siblings are first generation South Africans. Yet interestingly, my Mother's answer differed to her sister, as she simply stated that she is a "*South African Indian woman…because I was born and bred in South Africa*" (F1). My Sister too answered similarly, offering that she is a "*South African Indian*

[17] All quotes directly from my interviews will be in italics in order to distinguish this data from the other quoted references used in this thesis.

woman…Because that's my nationality, I was born here. Our grandparents are from India but this is home" (F2).

My identification as an SAIW is therefore indicative of the influence of the SAIW in my immediate family, my Mother and my Sister, with whom I am deeply connected. The difference in answers between my Mother and her youngest sister, Aunt 1, I anecdotally attribute to the age gap between them and their divergent experiences. When my mother married and moved out of the family home, Aunt 1 was only fifteen years old. Aunt 1 also lived with my Indian grandparents, my *Ba* and *Pappa*, until their deaths thus sharing a home with them for most of her life. Aunt 1 is single and has never married. After becoming a teacher, she has lived with her parents, brother and sister in-law for most of her life. She is 56 years old and has never lived on her own. This is a cultural norm in SAI families, as Carrim (2016: 448) explains:

> Cultural identity plays a significant role in channelling single unmarried daughters' lives. Although they may be breadwinners in their families they are not allowed to live and travel on their own (unless for work-related matters) or have identities separate from their family identities.

Carrim's statement does not wholly reflect my Aunt 1's life. She has, for instance, extensively travelled. However, she did in conjunction with my *mama* as the eldest son, take on the responsibilities of looking after their elderly parents, and in her family home is the primary breadwinner. While it is a common practice in SAI families for elderly parents to live with their eldest son and daughter in-law, this responsibility also falls on unmarried daughters (Carrim, 2016). Married daughters take care of their in-laws. This was certainly the case in my family, where my *Ma* lived with us, under the care of her only son, my father, and her daughter in-law, my Mother. Thus Carrim's (2016) point that unmarried ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives and identities are tied to the culturally patriarchal system of the SAI family is exemplified in Aunt 1's life. I also feel the pressure and responsibility of having to care for my parents, who are now older, particular in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and precisely because I am single. My sister is married with two young children. My brother is in a long term relationship and lives in another city. So the onus falls on me as an unmarried, single woman to look after our parents. Carrim notes that most of the women that participated in her study were raised during apartheid in which cultural values and norms

were more strongly adhered to (2016). Thus, she explains that "A younger cohort can be used in a future study to ascertain if there has been a shift in the cultural prescripts of the Indian community" (2016: 458). Ultimately, I believe that there has been a shift. ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID do live on their own, and if I or even my Aunt 1 were to choose this path now, there would be no moral or cultural objection to this from our family. However, what has not changed, for us, is Carrim's point regarding family obligations and how this inseparably tethers our identities and lives to the cultural expectations of our families (2016). As Lau argues, for unmarried single Indian women, "there is a pattern of societal and familial obstruction, be it in practical terms, or in psychological, social and emotional terms" (2010: 273).

The above in depth analysis reflects familial experiences through autoethnographic "*insider accounts* (original emphasis)" of family life, providing insightful findings about the broader culture or community (Adams & Manning, 2015: 356). Moreover, in the construction of our identities, we are always in a push and pull process, deciding which factors of our societies, cultures and families we connect with most. Thus, even when we come from similar backgrounds, like my Mother and Aunt 1, our identities are never exactly the same. Although not wholly autonomous constructions, as a "subject-in-relation" (Davies & Gannon, 2005: 318), we do have agency and choice (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). This is evident in each of my interviewees' responses to how they construct their identities. They have each been influenced by their respective families, upbringings and experiences. However, they have decided how they identify in relation to these contexts. Thus, as Figure 2 in my theoretical framework chapter establishes, our identities are paradoxically both personally chosen, and socially and culturally regulated.

Our identities too change over time and are fluid (Hall, 1997). This is reflected in Aunt 3's response when she explained that her identification as an SAI evolved over time as previously, she "*identified as Indian because of the Apartheid system that kept us in Indian units but increasingly, I see myself broadly as South African*" (F5). This speaks to Muthal's point that the cultural grouping and identity of Indians in South Africa has its roots in the culture of apartheid and its segregation policies (P1). The Group Areas Act engendered communities of Indian insularity resulting in SAI being perceived as, and feeling like, their culture and identity was fixed and separate to broader South African culture and identity (Pillay, 2017; Rastogi, 2008). Such perceptions have persisted as my interviewees mostly

seemed unaware of the specificity of SAI culture (Pillay, 2017; Rastogi, 2008), and tended to view their Indian culture and South African nationality as two disparate, rather than intersecting social factors that influence their identities. Cousin 4 asserted that she is an SAI because "*I'm South African first, Indian as culture*" (F9). Cousin 3 associated her Indian culture with that of our maternal Gujarati grandparents while alternatively associating her paternal Hindi family with South Africa as they, like my paternal Tamil family, were born in South Africa (F8). Hence she explained that because of her heritage she is "…*like a bit of both*" (F8). This echoes Sujata Patel and Tina Uys's point that SAI, in constructing their identities, have to contend with an ancestral history that is migratory and thus diasporic, alongside their current lives that are grounded in a specific SAI culture (2012). The influence of the Indian diaspora and in particular notions of 'motherland' India (Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rastogi, 2008) are apparent in SAI culture and communities. I found evidence of such influences in my interviewees' responses, particularly the older generations, whose ancestral roots continue to predominate in their identity (F3; F4). While the younger generations of my interviewees are not bound by these roots as much, it still clearly forms part of how they construct and negotiate their identities (F6; F8; F9).

Two salient points emanate from the above narratives. Firstly, the notion of a pure "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373), perceived as coming from the 'motherland' India, prevails even though such a concept is false and an artificial construct (Naidoo, 2017; P1; Spivak, 1990). The connections my *Ma* had to India were "mythic resonances…there is rarely a desire to return even in a 'spiritual' sense" (Rastogi, 2008: 10). On my first and only trip to India with my Mother, Sister and Aunt 1, there was certainly a yearning from us all to return home to South Africa. As Rastogi explains, "this split from the Mother Country validates the South Africanness of Indians as their perception of the subcontinent is always inflected by South African history, culture and politics" (2008: 165). Secondly, what SAI have actually constructed, broadly speaking, as products of our environments, is a unique 'South African Indianness' or SAI culture (Bose, 2009; Rajab, 2011). Therefore, my argument in this thesis is that 'South African' and 'Indian' should not be perceived as two disparate terms, as SAI people and culture are not foreign nor should we be treated as "other" (Pillay, 2017: 82). However, the responses of my interviewees, both young and old, reflect that there is a feeling, within our own communities, and among our fellow South Africans, that our SAI culture is not viewed as a part of the fabric of our national cultural identity. This is

understandable considering the acceptance of South African(s) of Indian descent (SAOID) in their own country, as Pillay (2017: 82) explains:

> In 1948, 'Indians' were still not considered citizens and 'repatriation' remained an option for the state. It was only in 1961 that 'Indians' were officially recognised as a permanent part of the population, when all attempts to repatriate them had failed…Nevertheless, more than a century after the first arrival of indentured labourers, the perceptions of 'Indians' as 'immigrants' and 'other' endured, despite 'Indians' being given official status as a permanent 'population group'.

In this light, the responses from Aunt 1 and Aunt 2, and even the links my *Ba* and *Ma* had to India, despite being South African citizens and raising their children here, are understandable as for much of their lives they lived in a country in which they were not accepted. To counter such perceptions, SAI fiction writers, such as playwrights, through their work have sought to interrogate "the systemic erasure of Indians in public discourse, inserting Indian cultural practices into national life, and infusing literary conversation with Indian linguistic and cultural codes" (Rastogi, 2008: 10). For example, some SAI writers refuse to italicise vernacular and colloquial words in order to naturalise the use of such "Indian languages in the national psyche" (Rastogi, 2008: 10). In this thesis, I have not done this for the purposes of academic accuracy and examination.[18] However, notably, while words are italicised in the script of *Devi* (2019) (see Appendix A) for academic purposes, these words were not explained in the performances. The meanings behind the language were conveyed by the performers and understood by the audiences. While it can be argued that most of my audiences were made up of SAI, the language of the play resonated with them, and even those in the audience who were not of Indian descent, precisely because they herald from South Africa. Language constructs and represents our social realities (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997). And our daily realities are grounded in South African life. Thus, Indians from other countries would not connect with my play as strongly because the culture, language and experiences in *Devi* (2019) are rooted in South Africa.

[18] Vernacular and colloquial words have been italicised in this thesis and my script of *Devi* (2019) (see Appendix A). The meanings of such words can be found in the Glossary.

The second point to note is that the awareness of this rootedness, the specificity of SAI life and culture, is seemingly a reality to which SAI are either indifferent or unconscious (Rastogi, 2008). This is evident in the responses of my women family interviewees. What causes this dissociative thinking between nationality and culture is that the colonial and apartheid historical binary of black and white has prevailed in South Africa and thus SAI "have a profound unease about their place in South Africa, an apprehension exacerbated by their religious, linguistic and cultural difference" (Rastogi, 2008: 16). Conversely, ethnic pride transpires in SAI communities which can be racist, exclusionary, and which perpetuates a "Bollywoodization" of Indian identity and an imagined "rags-to-riches history of Indians" (Rastogi, 2008: 167). I have certainly noticed such thinking in my family, where the romanticism of Bollywood representation, and a lack of acknowledgement of the complexities and consequences of SAI racial hierarchical positioning in apartheid South Africa, is prevalent (Durrheim et al., 2011). Such issues will be discussed further in chapters six and seven but it must be noted here that SAI and/or SAOID playwrights, such as Muthal, deliberately created indigenous plays that were about or contextualised South African politics and culture (Hansen, 2000; Naidoo, 2012). Thus, a vital purpose of SAI writing, and indeed SAIT (Naidoo, 2017), is "to affirm the South Africanness of Indians and the Indianness of South Africa in the here and now" (Rastogi, 2008: 21).

Lastly, the majority of interviewees noted their gender, as a woman, in regards to how they would identify themselves. A variety of responses were given from "*I'm a South African Indian woman*" to "*I'm an Indian woman living in South Africa*" to "*first and foremost South African woman and then, yes of Indian origin*" (F1; F3; F6). Gender is therefore a significant part of our identities and everyday lives. The normative expectations, performative acts and representations, as Butler (1999) theorises, that come with the social construct of gender, are particularly relevant to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Thus, understanding the roles we play was key to my discussions with my family, and as such is the next thematic area to be discussed.

5.3: Representation – Roles of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID

The second question I asked all my interviewees was to tell me what the words, 'mother', 'daughter', 'sister' and 'wife' instinctively mean to them. All their answers

revealed that these roles are very important. Some participants noted that they take on such roles in their daily lives. My Sister stated that she is "*a mom to my two boys…I am a wife as well*" (F2). My Mother simply answered, "*I've been all of them*" (F1). Cousin 3 explained that as a daughter, one wants to emulate how our mothers were as daughters and "*do the same things like respect your family you know, care for your siblings, care for your cousins, that's the daughter type of role*" (F8). Thus, all of the women in my family, whether we are mothers, daughters, sisters, wives (or combinations thereof), see family as a very valuable part of our lives. Significantly, my analysis of my interviewees' instinctive responses to these words was that they all saw being mothers, daughters, sisters and/or wives as organically part of who they are as women. As Aunt 3 explained, "*it's all the feminine aspects of a woman, that a woman imbibes…*" (F5). Furthermore, what mothers and sisters represented to my interviewees was enlightening. The words "*amazing*", "*your whole world*", "*unconditional love*", "*role model*", and "*caregiver*" were used to describe mothers (F2; F6; F8; F9). Aunt 1 explained that her mother, my *Ba*, "*has made me who I am*" (F3). Many interviewees also noted their close relationship with their sisters and that these women are friends with whom they can share their lives (F2; F3; F7; F8).

The above data points to two important ideas. Firstly, the pivotal matriarchal role of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in the family unit continues to be the nexus around which the SAI family revolves and depends on to function (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Maharaj, 2013; Rajab, 2011). This, as I argued in chapter four, has been the case since the time of indenture, in which Indian women were solely expected to maintain their families and homes. In my family, it is certainly the women upon whom we depend and without whom, there would be few gatherings and little connection. Kuper's paper on the SAI family was written over sixty years ago, yet as Khan attests, her analysis on "Indian family life has as much relevance today as it did before" (2012: 134).[19] Kuper's statement that "it is the women who keep

[19] Khan (2012) discusses the South African Indian diaspora, for instance the history and structures of SAI Hindu families versus SAI Muslim families. He echoes Kuper's point (1956) that while "observations suggest some social differences within the different groupings of Indians within the diaspora…certain aspects are common" (Khan, 2012: 134). Therefore, just as Kuper (1956) asserted in the 1950s, Khan (2012: 134) too contends that "despite the diversity prevalent within the Indian diaspora, the family as a social institution has certain characteristics common to all sections of the diaspora so one can speak without reservation of the 'Indian Family.'" Furthermore, as I discussed in chapter four, Meer (1972) and Seedat-Khan (2012) highlight how the ISA of religion in SAI communities historically has, and continues, to be patriarchally used to subjugate Indian women in their cultures and families. Thus, while the autoethnographic lens of my study necessitates a focus primarily on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are Hindu, like myself, the findings and representations found in my work are still relative, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree, to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are, for example, Muslim and/or Christian.

relationships alive" is thus still resonant today (1956: 21-22). Such a role is not without its burdens and so while we may cherish our families, we must heed Desai and Vahed's warning not to idealise the SAI family as it is structured within a patriarchal system that constrains ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives (2010). My Sister articulated this feeling best, asserting that "*They want us to have careers and be successful, but they also want us to run perfect homes, be able to cook everything, and have everything in order all the time*" (F2). Cousin 3 also pointed to how we follow in our mothers' footsteps and take care of our families (F8). This is certainly a responsibility I take on, one I sometimes feel is too much pressure but that I cannot give up. I am always organising get togethers, family functions and helping family members. Aunt 3 even said to me in our interview that she worries that I am too giving to all in our family and that I must rather think about my own life a little more (F5).

While I do agree with Aunt 3, I am not always given the space to focus on my own life. Although they are doing so unknowingly, my family takes up this space. Furthermore, because I am single and do not have children, my time is seen as more freely available to others than, for example, my Sister who is seen as having more obligations because she has fulfilled the roles of becoming a wife and mother. She has done her 'duty' and until such time as I do the same, my time can be used on other family matters. As Carrim astutely points out, for single unmarried daughters, their identities "remain submerged in relation to the needs, demands and identities of their families" (2016: 446). Thus, for the type of woman I am categorised as, "financial independence does not necessarily lead to social and domestic independence…independence and autonomy remain relatively theoretical…" (Lau, 2010: 273). Ultimately, this is the impact that societal factors, specifically the ISA of family, have on our lives and identities (Althusser, 2006). They greatly influence our everyday life and sense of self. As Cousin 2 insightfully explained, the words 'mother', 'daughter', 'sister' or 'wife' really mean, "*Everything, because these are the people that form part of – build up your identity and form part of who are and make you who you are, so it's vital to every part of my being*" (F7).

The second point to note from this data is that the binary distinctions between men and women, and what these genders stereotypically represent, continue to be popular notions that remain largely unquestioned in our communities (Derrida, 1997; Zhang, 2018). There was no dissent from any of my interviewees about the roles and representation of women as

mothers, daughters, sisters and/or wives. In fact, this was embraced as wholly part of our cultures, families and identities. While such roles and representations are indeed indicative of SAI culture(s) (Carrim, 2016; Desai & Vahed, 2010; Jagganath, 2008; Naidu, 2011; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010), what was not apparent to my interviewees was that these cultures are entirely constructed (Barker, 2010; Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997, 2004). There are no roles or ways of being a woman that we absolutely have to follow. Cultural meanings are created, constructed and contextualised through and within language and representation (Hall, 1997; Proctor, 2004). But as Saussure shrewdly stated, we are largely ignorant about the systems of language we use daily that govern our lives (2011). The language constructed around women for instance, as wives and mothers, as maternal nurturers above all, is paramount in representations of women (Lau, 2010). This dominance is what feminist poststructuralism seeks to dismantle (Davies & Gannon, 2005) in order to challenge the seeming inevitability of fixed identity categories. Plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID counter hegemonic narratives, offering representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as subversive, authentic characters that challenge gender norms and the expectation of tacit acceptance that prevails in SAI Hindu culture (Govender, 1999; Govender, 2013; Moodley, 2019; Naidoo, 2012).

Crucially, the change feminist poststructuralists and playwrights seek can only happen "in the daily rhythms of life when courageous people break outside the circle of the status quo" (Allen & Piercy, 2005: 157). We should not have to fall back on only the traditional subject positions that are available to us (Weedon, 2004). We must, as Irigaray (1985) avows, be able to express our truths and our multiplicity. However, this is difficult in cultures and communities that are constricted by gender norms and maintenance of the status quo. SAI culture(s) and families are certainly suggestive of this issue. Data from my interviews evidences this, as marital status, marriage and motherhood, in fact, is one of the most prominent themes that I established in my analysis of the interviews with my family.

5.4: The ISA of Family – Marital Status, Marriage and Motherhood

Kuper, writing in the 1950s, explained that in SAI families marriage is seen as natural and necessary, and motherhood is the next ideal step to take as a woman (1956). Decades later, are the same notions still prevalent in SAI communities and families? This is a theme

that I addressed with my interviewees as we discussed their respective thoughts on the choices, expectations, pressures and stigmas that come with marital status, marriage and motherhood in their lives, in our families and in our larger communities. A key finding from my analysis of this data set or thematic area is that all my interviewees, young and old, felt that while presently ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are not forced to get married and have children, this remains the norm and expectation in our culture and family. As my Aunt 3 simply said, "*Generally, that has always been the case*" (F5). For instance, my Sister (F2) shared her views on this theme generally and in relation to her own life:

> *I do think people expect it, but no, I didn't feel pressure because it sort of happened naturally for me. It happened at the right time in my life, and I wasn't as some people say getting older, and not interested in marriage, etcetera. So I didn't feel pressure, but I do see there is a lot of pressure on other young Indian females to get married.*

My Sister's answer here reflects both the personally chosen and socially regulated parts of constructing our identities and lives (Hall, 1997). My Sister got married a few months before her 28th birthday, after she had studied and qualified as an anaesthesiologist. Her husband, the same age as her, is also a specialist doctor. They met at university. Generally speaking, my sister's journey has been ideal in the eyes of the SAI community. She got married at an appropriate age (Jagganath, 2008) which even she knowingly pointed out was not seen as "*getting older*" (F2). My Sister also got married after studying, establishing her career (Rajab, 2011) and becoming a doctor, one of the most respected professions in SAI communities (Jansen, 2009). In the eleven years that my Sister has been married, she has taken the next expected step and become a mother, having sons no less, which, historically, in SAI families has always been celebrated (Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972).

Furthermore, my Sister was interested in marriage and thus did not feel pressured as it was something she personally wanted in her life. Personal desire is significant, which I acknowledged in chapter three when discussing the possibility of marriage and how it could enhance my life. Cousin 1, in discussing marriage and motherhood, also professed that, "*I felt it personally because, that was something I wanted*" (F6). However, what is striking from my Sister's answer is that she sees her marriage as simply a "*natural*…" part of her life rather than recognising the influence of our family, culture and community on her making this

decision (F2). This is expected as we are largely unconscious of firstly, how much we are impacted by the ISAs of our lives and secondly, how these systems are artificial constructs which exist within complex power relations that, in turn, make us both controlled and knowing subjects (Althusser, 2006; Barker, 2010; Foucault, 1982; Hall, 1997). Thus, my Sister and some of my Cousins have indeed chosen marriage as a path for their life and identity (F2; F6; F7). However, they are also subjects controlled by ISAs and RSAs in which power is insidiously wielded so that constructs, such as marriage, are purported to be a 'universal' or 'natural' way of life (Althusser, 1971, 2006; Barker, 2010; Harcourt, 2007).

Cultural norms are engendered in these seemingly 'universal' or 'natural' ways of life, yet such expectations are actually constructed and systemically perpetuated through ISAs namely family, culture, religion and the media (Althusser, 2006). Naidu (2011: 90) describes the influence of expectations and norms, for example marriage and motherhood, as cultural transmission that occurs through socialisation, especially in families:

> Preferences, beliefs and norms, which anthropologists refer to as learned behaviours or, put loosely, 'culture', are partly transmitted through generations and acquired by learning and other forms of social interactions…This arguably plays an important role in determination of many fundamental traits.

All my Cousins and Sister stated that the expectation of marriage for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID certainly exists in our families and culture (F2; F6; F7; F8; F9). Cousin 4 who was 21 years old at the time of our interview, for instance, responded to my question about the expectation of marriage and motherhood frankly saying "*Yes, hundred percent…The fact that they have already suggested setting me up to meet people, to possibly get married to…He's, like, this person's son, he's a doctor, aren't you interested? I'm like he's thirty, not interested*" (F9). Cousin 2, who was in a long term relationship at the time of our interview and is now married, stated that while motherhood and marriage is something that she genuinely wants, also acknowledged that "*it's a thing that is there, like you always conscious about it, whether you ready to do it now or not…I always knew that there was a time in my life where I would have to be open to this idea…*" (F7). Cousin 2's use of the words "*have to*" in relation to marrying and having children is telling, revealing how marriage and motherhood are represented as roles ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID must

consider, and more often than not take on, in SAI culture and families (Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

Cousin 1 married when she was 38 years old, which in SAI communities is seen as a somewhat late age to wed (Jagganath, 2008). However, Cousin 1 explained that she only wanted to get married if she found the right partner (F6). She actively looked for this companion, agreeing to set-ups made by her friends and family over many years until she met her now husband. She noted the pressure felt from friends and extended family. Even when explaining that her parents did not necessarily push her, Cousin 1 still said "*Of course I did have a mom who would say it would be nice if you were married*" (F6). Such comments have an effect, as I can attest: One feels as if they are not becoming who they are expected to be, a wife and mother, regardless of whether this is a possibility or even something that one wants in their respective life. These identity categories are thus socio-cultural factors with which ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID must contend, dis-identification is not an option (Weedon, 2004).

Choice was not always an option; Indian women often had to marry and rear their families for their survival during indenture (Desai & Vahed, 2010). In subsequent decades, even as educational and career opportunities expanded for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, traditional conservatism remained entrenched (Meer, 1972). Thus, in my Mother and Aunts' generation while one could now refuse to marry a suitor, arranged and semi-arranged marriages were still customary, and "it was not common practice for young couples to make their own choices, unless they were from homes that were more liberally minded" (Singh & Harisunker, 2010: 47). My families, on both my mother's and father's sides, are a representation of the more progressive families Anand Singh and Nadene Harisunker describe (2010). This is evident in the responses of my interviewees who all felt that our family is more accepting and broad-minded than in the larger SAI community (F1; F2; F3; F4; F5; F6; F7; F8; F9). Over forty years ago, my Tamil father and Gujarati mother were able to marry each other, in spite of a culture and a community that at that time did not embrace the mixing of different ethnic and linguistic castes or groups (Gopal et al., 2014; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). Cousin 2 and Cousin 3 are also mixed, as their father is Hindi and their mother, my *masi*, is Gujarati. In reflecting on the present, Cousin 2 recently married a Tamil man thus her future family will be even more diverse. Many of my cousins also have partners, fellow SAI, who come from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. My brother

has stepped out even further and is in an interracial relationship, as are several members of my father's extended family. One of my Mother's cousin's is in a same sex relationship. While there may be family members who hold old-fashioned views on these matters, there is no outright objection or disownment from anyone and generally, there is a culture of acceptance. As my Sister stated in our interview, "*in our family we're quite liberal and we've got quite a range*" (F2).

I have never seen Aunt 1 with a partner nor has she ever seemed interested in a romantic relationship. Being a single SAIW, as I am, is difficult because there is a constant expectation and reference to marriage and the question of when one is going to take this step. Aunt 1, who is now 57 years old, does not get pestered about marriage as much as myself, as I am of the age where it is time for me to get married while Aunt 1 is seen as well past this stage. However, jokes are still made in our family about Aunt 1 having a wedding, thus showing that no matter how much a woman can establish herself as single, she will always be identified by others in relation to her lack of a partner, and the institution of marriage (Weedon, 2004). This is portrayed in *Devi* (2019) when Posh Mother 1's first response about an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID getting a job at the United Nations is, "Amazing, so accomplished. She never married eh?" (Moodley, 2019: 32). I asked Aunt 1 (F3) about being single and she explained that she did not feel pressured to marry as she had family support, which she acknowledges was not the case for all ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID at the time:

> *I think it's my family in particular who respected the fact that I made a choice, it was mine, and they supported me with that. However, I can't say the same for everybody else. I do know people that came from families, colleagues, friends, who had to get married.*

Aunt 1's statement that she "*made a choice*" is significant because it reflects the role that personal choice plays in the construction of our identities and lives (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). However, the influence of ISAs such as culture and family is important too, and has a different impact on each individual (Althusser, 2006). As Aunt 1 noted, some of her friends did not have the choices she did (F3), thus for them the ISAs of family and culture have regulated their lives and identities more intensely. Nonetheless, for us all the effects of socio-cultural institutions on our lives are undeniable and powerful. We are all subjects that must carve and construct our identities and lives within our respective societies' power relations

and systems (Foucault, 1982). We can make choices, as my Aunt 1 did, but ultimately these choices will always be conditional to our environments, and in the daily act of living and breathing our identities, we have to navigate these complexities (Butler, 1999).

Sometimes what we personally desire fits the conventions of the time, as both my Aunts 2 and 3 felt with regards to their marriages. They explained that they married in their early twenties, the norm at the time (F4; F5). However, their own parents, my *Ma* and *Thatha*, were not necessarily supportive of this as they felt they were too young and wanted them to get educated first (F4; F5). Aunt 2, reflecting on her choice to marry early in her life, emphasised that she should have pursued tertiary studies first but at the time she "*thought having a…getting married and having a boyfriend, getting married and having a picket fence was everything I wanted*" (F4). My Aunt 2's use of the popular idiom of a "picket fence" to describe married life shows the impact that conventional representations of conventional constructs, such as marriage, have on our lives. Aunt 3 did study further qualifying as a teacher specialising in remedial education. She eventually divorced. This happened when I was very young, and I have no memory of these events. I only recall growing up with my Aunt 3 and her sons, my older cousins, often together in our house as part of our extended family. In my Aunt 3's case, being educated and establishing a career was crucial to her independence and providing for her children. The choice she had in divorcing is not one that culturally would have been afforded to elder generations of women in our family as such an option historically was extremely difficult for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to access (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Kuper, 1956). Even so, with choice, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID still have to contend with the stigma that surrounds issues such as divorce in our culture (Jagganath, 2008). I asked my Aunt 2 (F5) about her personal experience regarding this, and she responded:

> *Personally, I didn't feel the stigma, I didn't want to relate to that kind of stigma, but my mother did. My mother took exception to this having…A daughter that's divorced, and all that, but my father was more broadminded. He said there was no such word as divorce in the Indian language, but he said that I had a right to do it if necessary.*

There are two significant points of analysis that I developed from this data. Firstly, my *Thatha's* reference to language reveals the importance of how meaning is constructed and

constituted in our cultures and communities within and through these linguistic systems (Derrida, 1997; Hall, 1997; Harcourt, 2007; Proctor, 2004; Saussure, 2011). Furthermore, my *Ma's* objections to divorce (more so than my *Thatha's*), reflects the ways in which patriarchal structures are engendered and perpetuated by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in our cultures and families (Benstead, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Walby, 1990). For instance, I remember at *nalangu* ceremonies, my Aunt 3 would not bless the bride or groom because she was divorced. This is usually only done by married women and is a custom that my *Ma* would expect all to abide by, including herself, as she was a widow. This always made me uncomfortable; Aunt 3 dealt with it simply stating that widows or divorcees carrying out such customs is viewed as bringing bad-luck on the bride or groom (F5). She did admit that she was affected by such stigma and did not want to partake in Cousin 1's *nalangu* because of this. However, Cousin 1 disregarded this outdated custom and called our Aunt 3 to the stage. Aunt 3 explained that Cousin 1 told her to not "*worry about such a thing and I did perform the rite*" (F5). I remember this moment because it was a moment of change. Recently, at Cousin 2's wedding, all of us whether single or married partook in her *pithi* ceremony. Only one woman, an elderly widow chose not to, showing that while progressive change is taking place amongst younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, old fashioned thinking still persists in the older generations (Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

Among my generation, individual choice is thus far more acceptable and embraced (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). This is clear in my own family where, for instance, all those in my age group have made their own choices when it comes to their educational and career pursuits, as well as their romantic relationships. However, ever present are the roles of marriage and motherhood which are still prized above all else in our culture, communities and families. As Singh and Harisunker explain, "although higher education levels were appreciated…commitment to domesticity and motherhood sought a higher value…" (2010: 47). This is not to say that education and career advancement are not significant nor expected of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID presently (Rajab, 2011). Both Cousin 2 and Cousin 3, who are twin sisters, discussed their parents determination that they attain a high level of education in order to have a successful career (F7; F8). Cousin 2 (F7) expands on this, particularly her mother's wishes for she and her sister to be self-sufficient women:

> *They always wanted you to go as far as you can…especially for your own independence as a woman…for your own sense of self-worth, I think that was for my*

> *mum a very important thing…She always wanted us to be independent; also not just with regarding work, just for example being able to learn how to drive a car so that you can never have to one day be relying on someone to do that.*

My parents have also instilled the goals of education and independence into me. However, what is always seen as the next step to take after attaining an education and starting to establish one's career in SAI communities is the step of marriage. In fact, an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's educational level is seen as a precursor or valuable attribute for marriage (Jagganath, 2008) and "a career is now being viewed as augmenting one's marriage chances" (Rajab, 2011: 173). Thus, in reality, while we are encouraged to become independent, at the same time we are still pressured to enter into matrimony. Autonomy and marriage are by no means mutually exclusive, and companionship is valuable. However, in SAI culture a woman's education and career is represented and framed within the construction of marriage and motherhood, rather than being recognised as part "of her independent identity" (Jagganath, 2008: 7).

Cousins 2, 3 and 4 even partook in a saltless fast over several years, known as *Jayaparvati Vrat* in which young, often Gujarati, women "observe fast in order to seek blessings from Goddess Parvati for a blissful married life and their would-be husband's long life" (Rai, 2020: np). Neither I nor my Sister have ever observed this fast as our Mother never asked us to follow it. Nonetheless, I did get the sense from my Mother that she would like me to partake in *Jayaparvati Vrat* once my younger cousins began observing this fast. The push and pull, I have found, that my Mother feels when it comes to her liberal values versus her traditional upbringing is a conflict that many women experience as the relationship between one's religion and one's feminism can be fraught (Fox-Genovese, 2008; Sugirtharajah, 2002). This push to and pull away from tradition clearly influences the construction of my Mother's identity which, in turn, has an effect on how she has raised her daughters. Ultimately, while I observe many of our fasts such as *Shravan* and *Partasi*, the *Jayaparvati Vrat* fast is not one I would partake in as I am not amenable to the concept of fasting for a future husband and his long life, especially when men are not asked to do the same for their would-be wives. Cousin 3 explained that for her, fasts are about discipline, one's wellbeing and cleansing oneself (F8). I do agree with her on these points. However, she herself (F8) recognises the double standards inherent in the *Jayaparvati Vrat* fast:

> *I do understand that women do pray for those types of things and men don't, so I also disagree with the fact but I think it just comes from, you know, past practices that people didn't question*.

I have heard my family sometimes joke that Aunt 1 did not observe the *Jayaparvati Vrat* fast while all her now married sisters did. Such anecdotes and practices simply perpetuate patriarchal systems in SAI culture that rather should be questioned and possibly abandoned. Indeed, Maharaj writes that even in the post-apartheid era where ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are economically active and independent, there is still a traditional representation of women as martyrs who must make sacrifices for their husbands and families (2013). Maharaj adds that when such women have even slightly contested patriarchal structures, "Males sometimes reacted violently to what they perceive as an undermining of their authority" (2013: 96).

Moreover, on top of the expectation of marriage and motherhood which are abundantly clear in our culture, the process under which we take on these roles is also conditional in our communities. The notion that the steps one takes in life must firstly be marriage, and then secondly motherhood, is highly prevalent and can be seen as some of the fundamental traits that Naidu argues are culturally transmitted through socialisation and from generation to generation in families (2011). The roles of wife and mother are thus still judged according to conventional cultural standards in our communities. Several of my interviewees felt that while our family is more open-minded and accepting, there is still a stigma associated with being divorced and more especially with having children outside of wedlock (F2; F3; F4; F7; F9). Aunt 2 in reflecting on what would in the past be considered shameful, expressed that, "*at my time, when we were young, if we had a baby and was not married…*" (F4). This thinking has not changed much (Jagganath, 2008). In considering our current socio-cultural and familial environments, my Sister acknowledged that in our family, "*We've got people who are divorced, and single parents, or never married. I think maybe they might frown if you had children without being married*" (F2). It is here that Muthal's play *It's Mine* (1983) written forty years ago, is revelatory as its central character Sunitha chooses, from the outset, to have her baby without marrying the baby's father, and in spite of her parents' objections.

Clearly, as evidenced by my interviewees' responses, even in the 21st century, there is a stigma around becoming a mother if one is not married to the father of their children. Of course, some advances have taken place. Cousin 1, for instance, at the age of 32 had her eggs frozen because "*had I not gotten married I think I would have because for me I wanted to be a parent at some point*" (F6). She (F6) thus does find that there are judgements and stigma in regards to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's marital and motherhood statuses, but feels that slowly things are changing:

> *People have changed the way they have thought. More people are single parents now. I have friends who are, who've had sperm donors, because they just didn't find the right partner. They felt they wanted to have children.*

While Cousin 1's statement does reflect evolving thinking in our communities, it still reveals the seemingly inextricable link that is made between marriage and motherhood. These roles are represented in our societies, cultures and families as though one cannot exist without the other (Althusser, 2006; Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). Cousin 1 herself stated that she was first waiting for a prospective marriage before she would lastly consider single motherhood as an option (F6). Additionally, as Cousin 2 asserted in our interview, "*in the South African Indian community…they always question you if you don't have a child especially if you're married for a while*" (F7). In Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999) we see Pritha's dual struggle, first battling to conceive and second, being scared to even admit to her husband and in-laws that she does not want to have children. Pritha's mere thoughts are inconceivable in SAI culture where women are expected to become wives and mothers, the one path we seemingly must walk in our lives thus fulfilling our roles in the ISA of the SAI family (Althusser, 2006; Kuper, 1956; Seedat-Khan, 2012). Feminist poststructuralism aims to break down the concretisation and naturalisation of such ideas (Davies & Gannon, 2005) so that we can see how our environments are constructed through discursive and repressive power relations (Foucault, 1982).

Interestingly, regarding her married son's decision to not have children, just his many dogs, Aunt 2 responded that she has accepted this "*because I know his temperament and everything. He copes wonderfully well with the dogs and if he doesn't want a baby, it's his life*" (F4). Yet when I asked Aunt 2 about her married daughter, who has a son and at the time of our interview was working part-time, she responded that "*She's multitasking and*

managing wonderfully well" (F4). Aunt 2's responses here reflect the different domestic and familial expectations that are asked of sons and daughters, which Meer strongly discussed in her seminal paper (1972). While it is indeed true that parents want their sons to bear heirs for the family name in SAI culture, Meer's point that there is more forgiveness and acceptance of a son and his actions, and that daughters are burdened more with the weight of family responsibilities does also still ring true in our cultures and families today (1972; Maharaj, 2013; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012).

Ultimately, cultural norms continue to dominate the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as, "Despite the transcendence of social restrictions, there is still a tendency…to abide by normative expectations of domesticity, especially in the rearing of children, cooking and household arrangements" (Singh & Harisunker: 48). In the responses of several of my interviewees, while there was a great appreciation for the cooking and household skills that have been passed down from our mothers and grandmothers, there was also an acknowledgement of the pressures and expectations that come with this, one that my interviewees particularly felt (F1; F2; F9). Cousin 1 (F6), conversely, does not see such expectations as a pressure, rather as something that she genuinely wants to do:

> *We have just grown up with ladies that have cooked really well…So that is sort of an integral part of our lives as you know. All our functions revolve around food…fortunately most of us just like doing it…it's just, I mean my dad is old school to use an example. And I think he always says you know, did you do, have you cooked for your husband tonight? So I think he grew up in that sort of era so, but I mean it is not a pressure…I like to do it so I do it.*

Cousin 1's points here are somewhat contradictory because while it is clear that she enjoys cooking, she still alludes to the expectancy that she undertake this task from her father, for her husband and family. Therefore, irrespective of her personal desire to cook is the clear cultural trait that housework is primarily a woman's job in SAI families (Maharaj, 2013). The prevalence of such expectations and pressures is indisputable in SAI culture (Maharaj, 2013; Naidu, 2011; Rajab, 2011). Accordingly Cousin 1's thoughts, once again, reflects how our identities and lives are self-constructed but also undeniably impacted by our social, cultural, religious and familial institutions (ISAs) (Althusser, 2006; Hall, 1997). When I asked my Mother about what pressures and expectations she feels our family places on us as women,

she responded that, "*They expect you to know how to run a house. They expect you to know how to cook. They expect you to still have a career*" (F1). What is ironic about my Mother's answer is that she herself has perpetuated such pressures and expectations onto my Sister and I, thus revealing how patriarchal structures continue to be reinforced by women (Benstead, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Walby, 1990).

My Mother, for instance, has always inferred to us that homemade food is best, which is now always in our conscious when we have get-togethers. My Sister and I both recognise our Mother's influence; when we have stayed up late, exhausted, preparing for functions by baking special cakes, cooking large meals, wrapping gifts or putting together decorations, we remark that we have become just like our Mother. However, we do not alter our behaviour, as these traits have been culturally transmitted and ingrained in our family (Naidu, 2011). Our brother does not face the same pressures. He has learnt cooking and cleaning skills, but this only occurred once he moved out of the family home. In our house, he was only ever expected to do a few chores. Thus, there is still a steep imbalance between what women versus men do in SAI homes (Maharaj, 2013). There is more equity in some SAI households but as my Sister (F2) explains, this is usually the exception rather than the norm:

> *I am fortunate that my husband does all the work with me, from washing dishes, to errands, to buying groceries, to sorting out the kids. I have some friends where that is not the case, and they really struggle, even though they also work full time jobs, and are raising kids.*

My brother in-law, in recent years, has also avidly taken up cooking and I have seen how he and my Sister both prepare their family's dinners. Nevertheless, my Sister's use of the word "*fortunate*" is telling. It reveals how the ISA of the SAI family is still conventionally constructed with designated roles, to the extent that a man undertaking domestic tasks is so unusual that a woman should feel grateful when her husband helps her, rather than him being seen as an equally contributing parent and member of the household (F2; Althusser, 2006). Indeed, Maharaj in his analysis of South African Hindu families post-apartheid explains that, "In addition to their economic functions, women are expected to do all the domestic chores as well as being responsible for rearing children" (2013: 96). When I reflect on my own parents' relationship, my father does not know how to cook. However, he equally cleans and takes on household chores and errands. These are not tasks he grew up doing, as my *Ma* never

expected this from him. My *Ma* would tell me about how hard she had to work taking care of her husband, children, in-laws and extended family. And yet, she never sought to change the dynamics in her family. In fact, she would actively maintain the very practices that seemingly exhausted her.

For example, it is customary that a wife or woman will dish out and serve her husband or male member of the family their food at mealtimes. This is not a wrong practice, provided that it is not demanded or forced under threat, a situation Pritha faces in *Women in Brown* (1999), as her abusive husband Des becomes angry if she does not have his food ready on the table when he comes home from work. Such an act must be the choice of both the man and the woman. For instance, there are times when my father dishes his own food and there are times when I or my Mother serve him. I am happy to do this for my father, as I view it as a gesture of respect, love and thanks for all that he does for me. My brother in-law, on the other hand, has always preferred to take his own food and my *Ma* would always pester my Sister to serve him. This would lead to arguments and frustration on my Sister's part that our *Ma* could not understand that this did not make her a bad or lesser wife. Naidu argues in her study on marital violence in SAI homes, that we must "understand the role that (other) women play in perpetuating gender inequalities and hierarchies between men and women" (2011: 88). My *Ma* was certainly a representation of the type of woman Naidu speaks of (2011).

Their attempts, however, are not wholly successful, as younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID continue to make strides, albeit incrementally, in the domestic set-ups of our families and cultures. Cousin 4, for instance, one of the youngest members of my family faces constant questions about the lack of housework and cooking that she undertakes. In our interview, when I asked about the pressures and expectations our family places on us as women, her response (F9) dealt with this issue:

> *So because we're in this, like, modern world, then we are supposed to be like strong, independent, that type of thing, but with that there's that cultural thing of, okay, you still need to know how to cook, clean. All of those things that make you a domestic type wife…and then also the expectation…to get married…a guy will be interested if you're able to cook, clean, all of those things yeah that's bull shit.*

Cousin 4 also acknowledged that one day she would need to cook and clean more, particularly if she ever moved out of the family home and lived on her own (F9). Should she not be helping out more in her home now, seeing as she is an adult and is perhaps being idle in this regard? Yes; however, I also view my Cousin 4's actions and thoughts as a rebellion against our culture and family. She also significantly does not associate domesticity with becoming a wife. She does not perpetuate this stereotypical representation, which is something that neither I, nor my Sister, or Cousins 1, 2 and 3 have been able to do (F2; F6; F7; F8). When my *Pappa* died, I took charge of one of our family meals during the ceremony week, and the first thing my *mamas* jovially said to me upon tasting my food was that I am ready for marriage now because I have shown that I know how to cook. I was 23 years old at the time and simply laughed in response. Thus, at the young age of 21, Cousin 4 shows that today there are younger and younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are challenging the familial roles and representations of women in our culture. Such countering is marginal and slow but nonetheless in motion. Ultimately, there has been progression, as seen in my parents' marriage, and even more evidently in the equity of my Sister's marriage, as well as in Cousin 4's rebellious thoughts and actions towards domesticity. However, the patriarchal structure, as Maharaj (2013) asserts, largely remains entrenched.

There is thus a dichotomy evident in the lives of middle to upper class ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID[20] who now clearly exist in societies where we, broadly speaking, have the freedom to choose our partners, to study further, establish careers and to travel. These are opportunities that our grandmothers never had. However, such prospects are predicated, in our culture, on two conditions: firstly, that we still get married and then have children, and secondly, that within these roles we abide by the gender normative expectations that have been culturally transmitted in our families for centuries (Maharaj, 2013; Naidu, 2011; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012). Furthermore, what the data analysis from my interviews, academic literature and my own autoethnographic research finds is that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID firstly feel that the pressure and expectation to get married and bear children is

[20] I make the distinction of middle to upper class ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID here for two reasons: Firstly, this reflects the class demographic of my women family interviewees. Secondly, lower middle class or working class ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, while broadly speaking also have a choice in their romantic and/or marital partners, do face some limitations in regards to education and travel that arguably women of a higher class do not. As Vahed and Desai (2010: 6) note, in post-apartheid South Africa, "inequality within racial groups" is significant with class divisions among SAI "becoming wider and starker." For working class Indian families, "Class and colour act as a powerful ceiling to their options. Many, for example, have a high school education but not the money to get into tertiary institutions or compete with middle class Indians who…have…resources" (Vahed & Desai, 2010: 8). Class is therefore an intersectional factor that must be examined.

highly prevalent in our communities. Secondly, in regards to cooking and cleaning, we tend to still abide by and perpetuate domestic gender roles and expectations. Singh and Harisunker explain this phenomena by arguing that amongst my generation, the radical divergence in lifestyle that has taken place, often, is actually in reference to making our own education, career and marital partner decisions (2010). However, what has prevailed is a "continuity in conforming to gender roles and expectations…" (Singh & Harisunker, 2010: 48). As Cousin 4 said to me, "*If you look at the females from our cousins, a lot of them lean more towards the traditional side…the way I used to classify the older generation, that's the way they are now*" (F9). Therefore, marital status (particularly if one is single or divorced), marriage, and motherhood, as well as the fixed roles constructed in these clearly patriarchal concepts, deeply impact the life and construction of each ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity.

5.5: Historical Specificity – Past to Present

Seedat-Khan's argument (2012) that we must examine the contexts, backgrounds and journeys of the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who came before us is especially relevant in autoethnographic research, and in the context of the interviews I had with the women members of my family, as our lives have all been deeply impacted by our mothers and grandmothers. These are the women who raised us and with whom we spent most of our lives, sharing homes and histories. I have talked extensively throughout this thesis about my *Ba* and *Ma*, precisely because they have had such a significant influence on my life as the two foremost matriarchal figures in my family. While there are ethics to consider when reflecting on and representing those who have passed away, autoethnography also shows how personal stories are wholly familial and thus inevitably involve others (Adams & Manning, 2015). The potential risks of such autoethnographic studies can still be a therapeutic and rewarding process for both researchers and interviewees as while they "simultaneously find the ability to tell and share their stories…an account can reveal other aspects of family relations that may be important…" (Adams & Manning, 2015: 361 – 362).

This is the process I underwent in the interviews with the women in my family. I found that in discussing *Ba* or *Ma*, I received poignant responses about these two women, their lives and my interviewees' respective relationships with them. Firstly, all my interviewees responded resoundingly in the affirmative when I asked if they felt that ISAW,

SAIW and/or SAWOID today, particularly the women in our family, have more opportunities, choices and freedom than our mothers, grandmothers and ancestors had in the past (F1; F2; F3; F4; F5; F6; F7; F8; F9). Cousin 1 (F6) discussed her mother's experiences in comparison to her own:

> *My mom was speaking and said how they had, you know follow a certain way of living…they had to live with their in-laws and so I think in that way things have definitely changed. You know we are much more liberated.*

The trait of joint or extended family households is indeed less common now in SAI culture (Maharaj, 2013). I portray this in *Devi* (2019) when Posh Mother 1 remarks that, "We let them live on their own. The hell my mother in-law gave me. That's why I don't live with my son and his wife. I didn't want to be like that, breathing down their necks" (Moodley, 2019: 32). In my family, it is more common in my generation that married women, such as my Sister, Cousin 1 and Cousin 2, do not live with their mother in-law.

Cousin 2 reflected on her *Aji's* life of raising eleven children, and expounded that, "*It's just extremely different and like my Aji always used to tell us like you guys can do so much that we couldn't do…I think the sky is the limit for us, honestly*" (F7). Cousin 3 astutely pointed out that our grandmothers "*literally just had to get married at a young age and just have a lot of children…they obviously couldn't fulfil a lot of dreams that they had*…" (F8). Aunt 1, for example, told me that my *Ba* wanted to go to high school but could not because there were no high schools or universities in her village in India for girls, only boys were allowed and my *Ba's* parents were not prepared to let her leave the village by herself (F3). Aunt 1 explained that for my *Ba* this "*was one of her grouses, that she never had the opportunity to study further, yet she would have loved it*" (F3). My *Ba* ensured that her daughters were never denied an education. This can be seen in my Mother's statement that "*they made compromises for me. When the time came for me to study, I was given the time to study*" (F1). My Sister's response also echoes the advancement in opportunities that has arisen for women in our family, compared to our *Ma* and *Ba*, noting that we are encouraged to study, and to travel and work overseas (F2). My Sister added that we have such possibilities because, "*We are lucky our mother had very liberal parents so she had all these opportunities too. But I would say definitely our grandmothers were expected to just marry and have kids*" (F2). Both my *Ba* and *Ma* had arranged marriages at a very young age, and

had their first children before they were even 21 years old (F3; F4). In the historically specific cultural context in which my *Ba* and *Ma* were young, marriageable women, their roles as wives and mothers were determined, enforced and naturally expected (Kuper; 1956; Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

My *Ma* was the eldest sister of seven siblings, and several of her brothers and sisters became teachers or doctors. All *Ma's* siblings also viewed her as a maternal figure in their lives as from a young age she took care of them. When *Ma* passed away and we were looking through her possessions, I found her youngest brother's medical graduation photo which he gave to her with a note thanking her for all she had done for him. Yet my *Ma* did not complete high school, she went up to standard six which was the norm at the time (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). Singh and Harisunker expand (2010: 44) on the circumstances and expectations that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, such as my *Ma*, lived under as young girls:

> In the late 1930s and 1940s high schools were few and far between and were the domains of mainly younger boys…Their education was restricted to domesticity, including the art of rearing and caring for younger siblings…Studying was a hurdle against familial responsibilities and went against the tide of the conventionalisms that Indians recreated for themselves in South Africa.

My *Ma* was given neither the time nor the opportunity to further her education. In fact, she often looked after her sisters' children while they went to work. She spent her entire life taking care of family members, from her husband to her in-laws, to her siblings and their children, to her own children and then her grandchildren. My *Ma* wished for her daughters to get an education, even if some of them ended up choosing not to pursue tertiary studies (F4). My *Ma* fulfilled the roles of wife and mother because those were truly the only options she was given. These are the ways in which she was hailed, as Althusser (1971) says, and in which she ultimately constructed her identity (Weedon, 2004). Upon reflecting now, which has brought up a great deal of emotion within me, I have become sensitised, as Allen and Piercy argue, to the struggles of those, such as my *Ma*, that are a part of my feminist autoethnographic research (2005). I have come to understand that every day my *Ma* made me lunch for school or ironed my uniform, she was ensuring that I had more options in life than she did. This is the therapeutic reward of autoethnographic research that Adams and Manning's assert is possible for both researchers and interviewees in such studies (2015). It

was only through the interviews with my Aunts 2 and 3, and analysing this data that I came to a deeper understanding of my relationship with my *Ma* as well as our family relations and history (Adams & Manning, 2015).

I found that some of my interviewees, in sharing their stories, shared revelations about our family relations and experiences (Adams & Manning, 2015). For instance, Aunt 3 and *Ma*, although close, always had a difficult relationship. In truth, my *Ma* had a tenuous relationship with most of the women in her family because she was deeply set in her ways and usually demanded that we follow these ways without question. My *Ma* also, as Meer so perceptively noted about SAI mothers, was far harsher on her daughters than on her son (1972). Yet in my interview with Aunt 3 (F5), she expressed remorse about her relationship with *Ma* :

> *My mother, I mean I had lots of different, you know, I used to tackle her on many issues, but I still felt that, I still regret that maybe I shouldn't have handled my mother the way I did. I didn't understand her value systems at times and rebelled.*

Prior to our interview, I had never heard Aunt 3 say anything like this. I thus found her words to be enlightening for both of us. Throughout this entire study, I have indeed come to understand that my *Ma* and her "*value systems*", to use Aunt 3's phrase, was all she knew (F5). *Ma* was a product of her time, born and brought up in a politically oppressive society and in an intensely culturally patriarchal system (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972). Within these institutions, gender norms and familial customs, some of the fundamental traits of SAI culture, were transmitted to my *Ma* by her own mother, mother in-law and ancestors (Naidu, 2011). She then ardently strived to preserve such values through us, her daughters and granddaughters. However, succeeding generations grow up in changing, albeit gradually, cultural contexts. Therefore, what was tacitly accepted in my *Ba* and *Ma's* generations is not in my Mother and Aunts' generation, and so on in my Sister, myself and our Cousins' generation (Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

Language, representation, meaning and identity is therefore, as my feminist poststructural framework posits, historically specific (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Context is crucial to understanding how we construct our identities, particularly the ways in which specific ISAs such as family, culture, religion and the media of our times ideologically and

symbolically operate, as these institutions greatly influence our experiences, individualities and lives (Althusser, 1971, 2006; Hall, 1997). Furthermore, feminist and autoethnographic research, along with the reflexive thematic analysis of my family interviews in this chapter, is indeed useful for exploring and understanding the connections between culture, history and our identities as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Allen and Piercy (2005: 158 – 159) expand on this point:

> When we tell and analyze our own stories, we begin to see how their content is derived from our culture. As we learn about ourselves and our own culture-bound constraints, we learn more about those binding…the participants in our research. We become sensitized to their struggles as we reflect on those struggles in our own lives. This…helps us in our efforts of social change, which is, after all, the ultimate goal of feminist practice – to change oppressive social conditions…

5.6: The ISAs of Religion and Culture – Traditions and Customs

Gopal et al. (2014: 36) argue that based on the South African Hindu respondents in their study, "there appears to be a strong indication that religious traditions and festivals play an important source in sustaining religious identity." There is thus an interconnection in SAI Hindu communities between religion, culture, traditions and customs. Some of my interviewees, for instance, generally conflate religion and culture, the thinking behind this being that our Hindu religious values are manifested in and expressed through our cultural customs (Singh & Harisunker, 2010; F4; F7; F8). The women in my family, when asked about traditions and customs, noted observing religious occasions, fasts and praying daily as some of the customs they follow in their lives (F4; F7; F8).

Gopal et al. (2014: 32) explain that, "South African Hindus, like their counterparts in India, perform various domestic rituals on different occasions. These differ from one linguistic group to another and have, of course, changed over time." One daily ritual that is common to both Tamil and Gujarati households is lighting a lamp each morning and praying (Gopal et al., 2014). This is a daily ritual for my parents. However, I do not pray every day; I usually only do so when I want to, or on religious occasions. I do believe in God and properly

observe fasts but I find that perhaps I am more a cultural Hindu than a religious one. Nonetheless, I do contend that I should pray more, not because of any religious expectation, but for the guidance and spirituality that I need at this time in my life. The doctoral journey is all consuming, one that places the rest of one's life in limbo and thus I have considered prayer to be calming and centring during this process. Cousin 2 notes the value that prayer has in her life (F7). In describing herself as conservative and traditional, she said that "*I believe in all my prayers…I do them every day…I don't pass my views…I just do it for myself because it makes me feel good*" (F7). Studies show that religion is a particularly significant factor for South African Hindu women as it defines "the relationships that Hindu women keep, the beliefs that they choose to indoctrinate their children, the food that they eat, and the partners that they choose in marriage" (Singh & Harisunker, 2010: 41).

Even dress codes are cultural expressions of religious values, with the *sari* specifically being a symbol of marriage and morality in SAI Hindu culture (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). My *Ba*, for instance, wore a *sari* daily, both because this is a cultural custom she practiced in India as a young woman and because among her generation, it was expected that a woman's body would be covered from her neck to her feet (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). Of course, in South Africa's changing socio-political and cultural environments, dress codes have become far more flexible. However, tension still remains between younger and older generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Singh & Harisunker, 2010: 43) on this issue:

> Traditional dress codes and personal choices have become fertile ground for contestation between individual women's upward mobility and familial/community expectations about their identities and the responsibilities that they carry as custodians of family values.

For instance, there is a preference for jeans, or the comfort of sweatpants or track suits over dresses or skirts (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). I do prefer pants as they are more comfortable, but I enjoy wearing dresses and skirts as well. Cousin 4, one of the youngest in my family, by contrast, usually only wears dresses on special occasions and her favourite outfit is jeans and a hoodie. Family members, including myself, always react when she is in a dress or traditional wear, remarking on how pretty she looks. This is reflective of the conventional femininity that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are expected to represent and

symbolise through their clothing and which, as can be seen by my own reaction to Cousin 4, are an example of patriarchal cultural traits perpetuated and engendered by women (Benstead, 2021; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Walby, 1990). 'Languages' are not just spoken or written words. In poststructural studies, 'languages' are any signs - including expressions, gestures, objects, sounds and images such as clothes – that function as signs signifying meaning in specific 'linguistic' systems for specific communities (Hall, 1997). Therefore, as Singh and Harisunker note in the statement above, traditional attire also symbolises ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's roles as the moral bearers of the family unit (2010). Traditional clothing, such as *saris* or *punjabis*, are a representation of decency and morality, values which women, far more than men, are expected to uphold for the preservation of the SAI family (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012).

Cousin 4 represents younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are breaking away from the conservative expectations around clothing (Singh & Harisunker, 2010), which indicates a rebellion against what these dress codes symbolise. Cousin 4 is the only interviewee who made a distinction between religion and culture. She explained that she picks and chooses "*which customs and traditions I follow…I think, like spirituality and religion and that stuff is important…culture is just sort of the way people are living, and…that's man-mad*e" (F9). Cousin 4's statement reflects a poststructural understanding, conscious or not, of societies and cultures as she points to how these ISAs are constructed and not innate (Althusser, 2006; Barker, 2010; Hall, 1997). However, she does not see religion(s) as constructed, yet these are also man-made ISAs (Althusser, 2006). Perhaps this is due to the spiritual, all-knowing and divine notions found in religion(s). We are, therefore, induced and falsely conscientised (Gramsci, 2006; Lewis, 2002) to believe that our religious texts and beliefs are sacred and gospel. Nonetheless, Cousin 4's point is noteworthy as we are largely ignorant of how languages, and our cultures that are constituted within linguistic and symbolic systems, construct and structure our entire lives (Saussure, 2011).

Several interviewees also connected traditions with family, asserting that this is why customs were important to them (F1; F5; F6). Some valued family more than traditions, such as my Sister who responded that, "*I'm not a fan of ritual…the family is important. That is what is important to me*" (F2). My Mother contended that traditions and customs "*brings a family together*" (F1). Cousin 1 explained that traditions and customs are important because it's "*the only way sometimes to help our future generations be a little in touch with our, to*

keep our family going…So for me personally, I like tradition. I like family stuff" (F6). The connections drawn by my interviewees between family and religious and cultural traditions is accurate as "one of the most important contexts for learning the Hindu religious culture is the home or family unit, where children are taught by example…by their parents and relatives" (Gopal et al., 2014: 29). Furthermore, as Gopal et al. (2010) point out, most religious functions are mainly initiated by women in the home.

In the interconnections between family, religion and tradition, there is, once again, evidence of how it is the labour and responsibility of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to maintain religious practices, customs and family bonds, a clear feature of our patriarchal familial structures since the time of indenture to the present (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012). In households with older women, grandmothers like my *Ma*, matriarchs significantly influenced customs such as "when families fasted, what they consumed on those days, how the food was prepared and at what times it was consumed" (Singh & Harisunker, 2010: 41). In my home growing up, my *Ma* made us steadfastly follow *Partasi*. Moreover, in my family, it is indeed the women who spearhead religious functions, putting in most of the work preparing for the prayers, ceremonies and meals in which we all, men and women, partake. Gender norms and roles in the patriarchal structure of the SAI family therefore continue to prevail through traditional religious practices and cultural customs (Gopal et al., 2014; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). This is how the ISA of religion ideologically represses subjugated individuals such as women. However, such repression is usually concealed and in the case of SAI Hindu women, their back breaking work and sacrifices are perpetuated under a veil of acceptability, necessity and worth for the worship of God and the wellbeing of the family (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Fuller, 2004; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012).

While all interviewees responded that traditions and customs are important, to varying extents, in their lives, several interviewees pointed out that this does not mean they follow all rituals uncritically and without question (F1; F2; F3; F9). Aunt 1 explained that she still follows quite a few customs "*but not blindly. The ones that have been instilled in me, and the ones that I believe in are the traditions that I follow. I won't just do something just for the sake of it*" (F3). My Mother responded that traditions and customs are very important because "*each tradition and each value has got something significant behind it. So whatever that significant thing is, by keeping or maintaining that tradition, you teach it to the generations*

to come – to maintain it" (F1). In order to sustain an embracing of Hinduism amongst younger SAI, the rigid rituality practiced by elder generations, such as my *Ma*, is no longer enough as "younger people are searching for a religion that has a lot of reflection, is logical and rational and not just one that is ritualistic and based on blind faith" (Gopal et al., 2014: 38). Hence, studies reflect that certain customs and traditions should be adapted or discarded (Maharaj, 2013). When I asked my Mother if she agreed with this, as religious and cultural practices must adapt as its people do, she responded in the affirmative, saying "*Obviously…You have to change it*" (F1). My Mother's open-minded viewpoint here is not one that is shared widely in SAI communities. For instance, this is not an opinion that my *Ma* would ever have supported.

To expand on this point, I will now discuss the custom of Hindu women not being allowed to enter a temple while menstruating as this is one of the customs that has been controversially practiced and resisted in Indian communities across the world (Bhartiya, 2013). Menstruation in many of the world's religions is stigmatised and not openly discussed. Menstruating women are seen as something to be ashamed of, as impure and unclean (Bhartiya, 2013). Therefore, on top of going through puberty, young women have to contend with undoubtedly harmful cultural perceptions. In Hinduism, menstruating women are further viewed as sinful, which Chirwa et al. (2021: 159) explains is based on religious mythology:

> As with the curse of Eve, menstruation is seen as a burden of guilt – in the Hindu faith this was a sin committed by a male warrior named Indra, who killed a three-headed demon, a Brahmana, who happened to be enlightened. Indra felt guilty about the murder and asked a group of women to take a third of his guilt. They agreed, and that guilt appears as the menstrual flow.

Once again, just as in the mythological stories of Sita in the *Ramayana* and Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* – stories which are treated as meta-narratives in our religions and cultures (Singh, 2009) – Indian women are made to bear the consequences of men's actions. The Hindu mythological story of Lord Indra has resulted in centuries of menstrual taboos and oppression for Hindu women. It is not just the custom of being barred from a temple; during menstruation some Hindu women, depending on the extent to which their family follows traditional practices, cannot enter their kitchen at home, have sex, bathe, wear flowers or sleep during the day (Bhartiya, 2013). It is even believed that if a menstruating woman

touches a pickle, it will rot or that if her shadow falls over the holy basil plant, it will die (Bhartiya, 2013). Such beliefs may seem ludicrous but they have real effects on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives. Vitally, the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights challenge the patriarchal status quo that is entrenched in our religion, cultures and communities. Muthal, for example, counters the dominant representations of Draupadi in her play *Flight from the Mahabharath* (1990), and in *Devi* (2019), I also created alternative versions of Sita and Draupadi, where they freely and openly voice the ways in which they have been unjustly persecuted as women.

For the first time, my Mother shared with me in our interview that as a young woman, her own *Ba* never allowed her to enter the kitchen while she was menstruating to cook or eat and this made her feel awful (F1). She explained that, "*You were given your meals. Like an outcast*" (F1). In reflecting on my own adolescence, my Mother and I mostly discussed menstruation from a health perspective as she is a doctor. Largely, Hindu women do not discuss the menstrual cycle and its cultural significance with their daughters, or even each other (Bhartiya, 2013). The shame we are made to feel results in a silence between women on menstruation. As a result, the stigma and taboos continue, and Hindu women's struggles with these customs remain prevalent.

I have reflected on the issue of menstrual taboos throughout this thesis as my experience menstruating as a young girl was deeply traumatic because of the shame and stigma that my *Ma* made me feel about this natural and biological bodily process (Chirwa et al, 2021). When I first started menstruating, I was so mortified about having leakages that would mess my underwear, I hid these garments in my cupboard and then would sneak them out to throw in our rubbish bins at home. Ultimately, it took many years for me to shed the culturally ingrained stigma around menstruation that my *Ma* had vehemently passed onto me (Naidu, 2011). In my interviews, I thus directly asked all my interviewees about their stance on the temple 'rule' in our religion and culture, questioning their opinions of this custom and whether or not they follow this practice in their lives. All my interviewees responded that they did not agree with the custom of being barred from entering temples while menstruating (F1; F2; F3; F4; F5; F6; F7; F8; F9). However, this did not mean that these women then chose not to follow this custom. Some still abide by it while others no longer follow what they view as an outdated, wrong and baseless practice.

Just as there was a difference in the responses of the younger and older generations when it came to how they identify themselves, I established the same finding in regards to the question of how my interviewees felt about being prohibited from going to temples when menstruating. The younger generation, my Sister and Cousins, responded that while they obeyed this prohibitive custom as young girls, now as adult women they no longer choose to follow this 'rule' (F2; F7; F8; F9). The difference in the responses of the older generation, my Mother and Aunts, is that while they do not find this menstrual custom to be acceptable, and they were not happy as young girls to follow such practices, still today in community temples they continue to abide by the 'rule' (F1; F3; F4). My Mother stated that, "*In my temple I don't follow it, but I can't control what another temple's laws are. So I will respect what that temple says. But within my temple, I don't have to worry*" (F1). My Aunt 1 (F3) went further, saying that although she is not happy about not being allowed to enter a temple while menstruating and that this custom does not even make sense, she still abides by this 'rule' in both her local community's temple and at home:

> *I do follow the custom, because I belong to a community, and if that's what they believe in I am not going to break the rules…Even at the temple at home, because that's what my mum did, and that's how we were raised, and we believed it.*

My Aunt 1's statement that she will not break the 'rules' of her community reveals how marginalised groups, in this case Hindu women, are falsely conscientised to believe that the very practices and systems that oppress them are for their wellbeing and the greater good of the community (Lewis, 2002). This is how ISAs, such as religion, culture and family, are able to exercise control in our communities: The subordinated seemingly comply with their oppression because they have absorbed the ruling class's belief systems, in this case the patriarchal ISAs of Hinduism and the SAI family, as their own (Althusser, 1971; Lewis, 2002). Furthermore, what is ironic about my Mother and Aunt 1's responses is that they speak of the 'rules' of our local Gujarati temple, however, there is no 'rule' visibly written anywhere at this temple, or any temples in South Africa that I have been to, which state that menstruating women cannot enter. There are precepts about dress codes for men and women and these are displayed prominently. Bhartiya, whose survey was conducted with girls in India, does write that in this country "The boards outside the temples read: 'Ladies in monthly period are not allowed'" (2013: 524). This is not the case in South Africa. However, the mythic resonances of India, the 'motherland', are preserved in SAI communities through

cultural customs that are grounded in and perpetuate conservative and oppressive gender norms (Radhakrishnan, 2005; Rastogi, 2008). Older generations, such as my *Ma*, culturally transmitted all the menstrual taboos and customs of both diasporic and local communities, and passed these traits down to my Mother and Aunts generation, which they, in turn, have tried to pass down to my generation: my Sister, Cousins and I (Naidu, 2011).

I have used the word 'tried' because as established from the responses of my younger interviewees, none obey the custom and enter temples, whether at home or in their community, while menstruating (F2; F6; F7; F8; F9). Additionally, I can see changes even in my Mother's generation. She never, for instance, told my Sister and I that we could not enter the kitchen while menstruating, like she was made to as a young woman. Bhartiya's study, particularly her survey of girls in India, "shows that girls nowadays don't follow this rule earnestly…Only 4% felt that we are impure during our menstruation and should feel guilty while praying" (2013: 525). Cousins 2, 3 and 4 responded that as young girls they followed the custom and did not enter the *mandir*. However, as adults they questioned the 'rule' and feel that menstruation is natural and having a bath makes them clean enough for the temple (F7; F8; F9). Cousin 3 also pointed out that we can still go to the temple when we have eaten meat or drank alcohol (F8). This is not considered unclean enough to block entry, "*so I do not believe that if you have your period you should abstain from the temple. It's about having a clean heart*" (F8). Nonetheless, because such Hindu practices have been culturally transmitted as fundamental traits to abide by (Naidu, 2011), it is difficult to shake off the feeling that one is breaking the 'rules' or doing something wrong, as Cousin 2 (F7) explains:

> *I've gone into my mandir, being on my period and at first when I did it…You feel a bit like hey, something hectic can happen and then you actually say to yourself you are praying with a good, clean heart, you are praying with good intentions so if something bad had to happen to you because you are on your period which is normal for girls, God actually made you that way, you're supposed to bleed, then I think there's something really messed up. So I don't actually believe in that…I'm not going to let something like menstruating stop me.*

Cousin 2's experiences here are very relatable as I went through the same emotions when I began to defy the custom, whether at home or at my local *mandir*, experiencing in effect double the shame and stigma. Even though not entering temples while menstruating is

"*absurd*" as Cousin 1 says (F6), or "*bull shit*" as Cousin 4 says (F9), it is as if my *Ma's* voice was in my ear, first shaming me for bleeding and then further chastising me for taking my naturally menstruating body into a temple space. My *Ma's* stance on what menstruation represented to her is antithetical because while she stigmatised it, she also, as is customary in Tamil culture, made me celebrate my first menstrual cycle with a small ceremonial prayer and function at home. Such practices are common, "the first blood is a cause for joy and womanhood, a source of pride. Ceremonies involving food, family, friends, bath and gifts are customary" (Bhartiya, 2013: 525). I do not remember my ceremony fondly. I was bewildered and uncomfortable. Nothing was explained to me, and when I look back on photos from the function, I am not smiling and can see my unease with the entire situation. This is not unusual as "some find the very traditional idea…uncomfortable. They struggle with the idea that everyone around them will know that they've started their period" (Chirwa et al, 2021: 159).

I remember when I first started menstruating, my Sister and Cousin 1 called me to talk to me about how I was feeling. I was shy and did not respond much, nor did they share a great deal about their experiences. Upon reflection now, we should have conversed more, which Bhartiya asserts is crucial to breaking silences around menstruation (2013). Perhaps we all felt the discomfort and shame we were raised to feel about our periods and thus found silence to be our only option. In my interview with Cousin 1 (F6), I now asked about her experiences with the Tamil customary menstrual ceremony:

> *Yes I had the prayer…just immediate families, immediate Aunts…You do feel a little conscious and but then again I, it was something that I never questioned…Maybe you were more accepting at that age…I just went with it, and I think if I would have a daughter…I would still probably do the prayer and take the importance of the prayer but I would not enforce strict rules because I feel that's man-made rules…*

The man-made rule Cousin 1 is alluding to is that she, along with Cousins 2 and 4, believe that Hindu women were barred from entering temples in the past because there were not proper sanitary products available then (F6; F7; F9). Bhartiya also states that this is a belief many girls in India hold as well (2013). Indeed, a lack of adequate sanitary products was a factor in the difficulties menstruating women experienced, with Spivak describing that during her time as a young girl in India in the 1950s, menstruation was "a heavily shaming event. You used to have to wear these diapers that you fabricated out of old torn saris and

bedsheets, and the like…there were no sanitary napkins or Tampax" (1991: 232). My Sister stated that she thinks another reason menstrual rules began is because it was not just about "*being unclean, but that you were supposed to rest, and not do things then. So I don't think it was all negative. But no, I don't agree with it*" (F2).

What is not evident in any of my interviewees responses is an awareness of the connection between sinfulness and menstruation found in Hindu religious mythology, and how this serves to justify the stigmatised representation of menstruation as a woman's shame, guilt and impurity (Bhartiya, 2013; Chirwa et al, 2021). In terms of representation, how groups, such as women, are constructed and conventionally seen in communities, have far reaching and real effects on each woman's individual life and identity (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). Language, furthermore, constitutes our socio-cultural realities, constructing the customs we practice in our daily lives (Weedon, 1997). The language and therefore representations around menstruation in Hinduism are damaging, ostracising and toxic (Bhartiya, 2013). Yet menstrual taboos remain dominant in the patriarchal ISAs of Hinduism and the SAI family (Althusser, 2006). Crucially, menstrual customs are preserved by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, especially elder generations such as my *Ma*. Patriarchal structures are thus often maintained by the women who are subjugated in these systems (Benstead, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1990). Nonetheless, what the responses of my interviewees show is that the tide is slowly changing, with younger generations of women rejecting traditions and customs that are outdated and oppressive (Bhartiya, 2013; F2; F6; F7; F8; F9). As my interviewees expressed, we can be custom-bound and value traditions, but these traditions and customs must have purpose and meaning, and they must be open to change and transformation in order for the preservation of our religion of Hinduism, and our most precious construction of all, the family (F1; F2; F5; F6; Gopal et al., 2014; Hansen, 2000; Maharaj, 2013; Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

5.7: Feminism – What is it to you?

In my family, I am often referred to as a feminist. When I am hailed this way, I do not dis-identify (Althusser, 1971; Weedon, 2004). However, what always strikes me is that family members sometimes refer to my feminist identity in a mocking or disparaging way. In conservative cultures, such as SAI communities and families, feminist beliefs and practices

are not always welcomed. Negative perceptions and stereotypes of feminists as man-hating women are persistent and "feminists as a group of politically engaged women are still routinely smeared in the media and mocked by commentators…for being angry over 'nothing'" (Solga, 2016: 12). Therefore, as feminist theatre scholar Kim Solga contends, the term feminism remains controversial (2016). This was certainly evident in the responses from my interviewees when I asked each of them firstly, what feminism means to them and secondly, if they identify as feminist.

What I established from my interviews is that while the women in my family hold feminist beliefs, this does not mean they all wholly embrace the term feminism or even identify as feminist (F1; F3; F7; F8). Only my Sister and Cousin 4 responded that they see themselves as feminists (F2; F9). My Mother, on the other hand, responded that feminism is good because it is about fighting for equal, female rights and "*things have improved a lot…When I worked, there was no such thing as maternity leave…And those things have changed…for the better. And that's because people fought for it*" (F1). She stated, however, that she does not see herself as a feminist because her husband takes care of her and thus she is not independent (F1). For instance, if my father can drive my mother where she needs to go, then this is what she prefers. My experience is completely different; once I was able to drive, I loved the freedom and independence this gave me to go wherever I needed to, whether travelling for short or long distances. Cousin 2 pointed out that her mother wanted she and her sister to know how to drive so they would not have to rely on someone to transport them (F7). However, while all of my aunts and *masis* are capable of driving and do so in their own areas, their husbands are almost always driving them over long distances. In fact, I have barely ever seen some of my *masis* and/or aunts behind a steering wheel.

Nonetheless, simply because my Mother, her sisters and sister in-laws embrace the idea of their husbands looking after them, does not mean they cannot identify as feminists. As Pilcher and Whelehan emphasise, "Underpinning most feminist thinking is the principle that no one should feel they lack the entitlement to call themselves 'feminist' for any reason" (2017: 53). There are a multitude of feminist positions which emerge from diverse cultural perspectives (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). Therefore, feminist values and practices must be understood in conjunction with various women's historically specific cultural contexts (Steyn, 1998). Frenkel writes that a challenge for South African feminism "has been to incorporate varying traditions within a woman centred agenda that respects different ideas of

tradition" (2008: 3). Thus, the customs of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID serving their male family members meals or being driven around by their husbands are not necessarily anti-feminist. Steyn also highlights the voices of African women who avow that their cultural practices, such as carrying their babies on their backs, water on their heads, or working at home does not mean they are not feminists (1998). Feminism as a political movement began through the prism of western white women's experiences (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). Notably, when this is the lens through which African feminism and diverse South African women are seen, this ironically results in the same domination and oppression of women that all feminists are committed to dismantling (Frenkel, 2008).

Each social group or demographic's cultural issues and feminist issues cannot be separately analysed, these themes are wholly interwoven and intersectional. This is clearly evident in this chapter where I have analysed, to name a few, the cultural themes of marriage, motherhood and tradition within a feminist poststructuralist framework. Such themes must be explored within this framework because it considers the diverse cultural realities of the women who live and construct their identities in these specific communities (Steyn, 1998). I was surprised with my Mother's response in regards to identifying as a feminist. Through my autoethnographic research, I have realised that I am a feminist precisely because of my Mother. For all that she has taught and given me, and in how she lives her life, my Mother, to me, absolutely has feminist values which she passed down to my Sister and I. Thus, my Mother should not be afraid or think that there is no space for her in feminism (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017).

Although a lot of women are uncomfortable with the word 'feminism', feminist practice can be found in their beliefs and actions (Solga, 2016). As Frenkel explains, "Many women in South Africa, as in the rest of Africa, eschew the label 'feminist' for different reasons but still carry out a broad feminist agenda" (2008: 2). I found this to be the case with several of my interviewees. Aunt 1, for instance, discussed the actions she has taken in her job that she considers to be feminist such as standing up for female staff and students when unfair treatment occurs (F3). Her thoughts and actions reflect, as Frenkel (2008) says, a feminist agenda, however Aunt1 still responded that she only partly sees herself as a feminist (F3). Additionally Cousin 2 responded that she interprets feminism as autonomy for women, "*I don't feel like hey, I'm going far away…I need my dad, I need my boyfriend…if I want to go somewhere I can do it. I feel that's the feminism in me*" (F7). Yet in responding to whether

or not she identifies as feminist, Cousin 2 who does see herself as conservative and traditional, was indecisive saying, "*I don't know like – I don't think I'm as – like some things…*" (F7). Cousin 3 explained that, for her, feminism is about not feeling inferior to or controlled by men, being independent and knowing that one can achieve one's goals (F8). However, even though she has these beliefs, she "*wouldn't say I'm a feminist…I haven't had the experience where people have made certain remarks…I'm not anti-feminist but…I think if a situation was thrown at me or a comment was made towards me I would probably react…*" (F8).

There is therefore clearly a great deal of reticence with identifying as a feminist even when one has feminist values. I am not suggesting that it is mandatory for my interviewees to identify as feminists; each woman constructs their own identity, and decides which of the labels that others and ISAs try to apply to them, are applicable to their life (Althusser, 2006; Hall, 1997; Morley, 2019; Weedon, 2004). However, what is concerning is how views of feminism, particularly radical feminism, in society have been ridiculed and misunderstood to demonising and homophobic levels (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017).

Cousin 3's statement that she has not had any experiences where she has felt mistreated or marginalised because of her gender as a woman (F8) reflects neoliberal contexts and thinking (Solga, 2016). Basically, young women, such as Cousin 3, as individuals have made so many advances in their educations, careers and personal independence that this creates an "illusion of gender fairness and equity" which erases their "ability, as individuals, to see problems that still linger in the bigger picture" (Solga, 2016: 8). Cousin 3 thus, perhaps, does not see the connection that the themes we discussed in our interview, such as customs, roles of women and marital status, are explicitly issues of both SAI culture and SAI feminism. Hence feminist poststructuralism is vital, as this framework problematises the fixed meanings that are attached to gender in our societies, and asks "broader questions about how meanings and truths are generated in social discourse…" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017: 55).

A last point of analysis on the theme of feminism is that several interviewees also contended that they believe men and women have different traits and roles (F4; F5; F6). While Aunt 2 responded that feminism is about doing what one wants and standing up for

oneself, she did say that it is also about "*being lady-like*" (F4). Aunt 3 (F5), in her response, differentiates between the feminine and masculine, holding this binary to be of importance:

> *I don't buy into the general trend that feminism buys into…I still feel you're innately a woman…men are a certain way…I believe in women's rights, but not, how can I put it, not like this kind of, trying to compare with men at all times and wanting to imitate men in every way…*

Cousin 1 does not see anything negative about feminism, she feels it is about equal rights, choice and that women do not only need men, relationships between men and women are reciprocal (F6). She (F6) also contends, however, that there are different roles for women and men:

> *In terms of feminism I believe, I am not a person where I am pro girl power and I need women to only do this you know. I feel that there is a role for a man. If you choose to have him in your life and there is also a role for a female*.

From Aunt 2, Aunt 3 and Cousin 1's responses, the gender binary between men and woman, and what these distinct roles represent, evidently remains dominant in the ISAs of SAI culture and the SAI family. This is also found in the other interviewees' remarks on, for instance, unquestioningly observing fasts for a husband (F7; F8), or considering a father's parenting as "*fortunate*" (F2), and/or in continuing to abide by customs that only prohibit women from entering temple spaces (F3). As Derrida (1997) asserts, binaries are hierarchical and in the man/woman binary, women are the devalued inferior half . Although gender is fluid and a construct, gender differences are so entrenched and hierarchically opposed in our patriarchal cultures and communities that "the masculine principle is always the favoured 'norm' and the feminine one becomes positioned as 'Other'" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017: 57). Thus, ISAW, SAIW, and/or SAWOID, including myself and my interviewees, when we uncritically and involuntarily perform heteronormative gender roles (Butler, 1999), we are in effect perpetuating gender norms that neither serve nor benefit our position in our societies and families. We are continuing, as Seedat-Khan says, to box ourselves "into age-old gender practices" (2012: 46). Such practices are extremely difficult to undo, both within our communities as a whole and within ourselves, as cultural customs are deeply embodied. This is why feminism, especially feminist poststructuralism, is vital to analysing ISAW, SAIW

and/or SAWOID's cultural experiences because such movements and frameworks, respectively, are "committed to changing the social positioning of women" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017: 53).

5.8: Intersectionality – Sisterhood

Pilcher and Whelehan explain that patriarchy as a fundamental concept in gender studies aims "to identify the bases of women's subordination to men" (2017: 99). I have argued that in the case of SAI culture, one of the bases under which women are subordinated to men is ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID themselves. In analysing the interviews with the women in my family, it is clear that in our family and daily lives we are, perhaps unconsciously, reinforcing patriarchal structures. On the other hand, what I have always observed and deeply appreciated about my family is the strong and close bonds that exist between the women in it. There is indeed a profound connection of sisterhood and kinship between all of us, as mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, nieces and cousins. All my interviewees asserted that they highly value these relationships (F1; F2; F3; F4; F5; F6; F7; F8; F9). Some also have deep connections with their peers and friends who are ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, noting that their shared experiences in similar professions and as mothers, continues to foster their bonds (F2; F6). My Sister explains that, "*There is definitely a strong community. I have very close friends…that I'm in contact with almost every day*" (F2). Cousin 1 states that "*it's a real support structure…A sense of sisterhood and especially more so, I don't have a sister, so…for me that is really important*" (F6).

In regards to specifically familial relationships, firstly a finding I developed from this data set is that several of the women in my family hold their relationships with each other to be an absolutely vital, indispensable part of in their lives (F2; F3; F7; F8). My Sister believes that "*every girl should have a sister, it is really important. If not a sister, at least a close girl cousin*" (F2). Aunt 1 considers the connections and relationships with the women in her family to be central to her identity and life. She states that, "*These relationships are very important to me, they make me who I am. They give me a purpose, a meaning in life, a reason to be here, to exist…*" (F3). Cousin 2 and Cousin 3, who are twins, also spoke of how much they value their relationship with each other (F7; F8). Cousin 3 responded that she and her sister have a special connection, they can sit in silence and still understand how the other

person is feeling (F8). Cousin 2 stated that "*if I didn't have my sister my life would just – I wouldn't actually have like a proper purpose, I would just be like a floating soul*" (F7).

Secondly, many interviewees felt that the women in their family represented a network of support, learning and reliability for each other, which they hold as very important to their lives (F1; F4; F7: F8). Cousin 2 explains that the bonds in our family mean everything to her because "*they are all the people in your life who you've looked up to…Whatever I do, them to be included in it is very important to me and we rely on each other for support and advice on a day to day basis*" (F7). Cousin 3 stated that in our family we have a "*whole culture of like sisterhood and aunts and mums to support us…you can learn from each person…it just helps you to become who you want to be because there's so much inspiration from them*" (F8). I feel the same as my interviewees when it comes to the relationships we have with each other. These are bonds that I deeply cherish because of the sisterhood and support I have with these groups of women. Therefore, in the construction of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and lives, the relationships and bonds between women are clearly significant.

While such strong connections are valuable, these ties must also be critically analysed. Meer writes that, "Indian women in South Africa have realised the need to bond together as women, not so much to liberate themselves from a male-directed society as to serve social needs" (1972: 46). Thus, while our bonds, especially the relationships between women in families, are a part of SAI culture, sadly what is also clearly apparent in this culture are its strong patriarchal structures (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). In reflecting on the expectations and representations of Indian women since the time of their arrival in South Africa in 1860, through to the journeys of my own *Ba* and *Ma*, it is not surprising to me that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have and continue to develop deep connections with one another. As I have established, we are by no means a homogenous group. However, within our heterogeneity, we are clearly connected by the constructed ISAs of religion(s), the SAI family and SAI culture that shape, and in many ways subjugate, our lives (Khan, 2012; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012).

These connections have brought ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID together in solidarity. This is what intersectionality, which recognises the multiple positions and differences between women, is grounded in "rather than sameness, as a basis for working

collectively to eradicate inequalities" (May, 2015: 34). It is true that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have fought for their and their fellow South Africans' political liberation from oppressive colonial and apartheid rule (Meer, 1972; Hiralal, 2021). However, what has not been fully realised is our cultural liberation. While we have made strides in terms of our educational, career and marital choices, within these options we are still bound by age-old and patriarchal gender practices in our families, culture and daily lives (Seedat-Khan, 2012). Moreover, these practices are heavily engendered and preserved by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID themselves. Consequently, I argue that our intersectional solidarity needs to go much further, to counter the gender inequalities and stereotypical representations that persist in our communities.

5.9: My Ideology, My Values

In SAI communities, cultural beliefs, norms and behaviours, effectively cultural values, have stood the test of time and have been transmitted, as Naidu says, through generations (2011). Singh and Harisunker state that Indian women, such as my *Ma* and *Ba*, who were born and raised in the 1930s and 1940s, would have clung to the conformist values they were brought up with for the rest of their lives while recognising, with reluctance, the changes between themselves and their daughters and granddaughters (2010). Such values have been enculturated within and through the ISA of family, which Althusser (2006) contends is one of the most effective and dominant ideological apparatuses (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). In consideration of all the themes I discussed with my interviewees, the last question I therefore posed to them asked the following: what values about being a woman and about being Indian do they want to pass onto the women in their families?

I received a range of responses, with some interviewees stating that they want the women in their family to know that they can achieve their goals, stand up for what they believe in and that one should always be "*true to yourself*" (F3; F4; F6). Aunt 1 responded that she would like to tell the women in her family to "*never be ashamed of being a woman. Do believe that as a woman you can achieve and can do anything…And never see yourself as inferior to the male race either*" (F3). Some responses were not as progressive about womanhood with, for instance, Aunt 3 stating that grace is an important value and for her a "*woman means to be graceful*" (F5). She expands on her point here adding that she wants her

nieces to "*just live gracefully, you know, accepting their present situations, being joyful, living in the moment and being supportive with their families…*" (F4). The language used by Aunt 3 reinforces "dominant ideologies of gender difference and the qualities of ideal-type femininity" (Pilcher & Whelehan: 133). Her response reflects stereotypical expectations of women, as lovely, smiling, uncomplaining ladies, reminiscent of the deeply unfulfilled and stifled character Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* (1879). Nora, memorably, because of how trapped she was in her marriage and family, left her home at the end of the play. I thus related far more to my Mother's response that what is most important to pass along is not necessarily our cultures and customs, but rather the morals and ethics we have been brought up with, as taught by her example, which she hopes we carry forward (F1).

Several interviewees also noted the importance of passing down family values (F2; F9). My Sister responded that the values she wants to practice and encourage would be "*A strong culture of family, by being there for one another…To look after your elders…make sure you foster good bonds with your cousins, because they really are your first friends. I think that's the most important*" (F2). Another finding I established from this data set is that my Cousins 1, 2 and 3 as well as my Sister want to pass on cultural values, such as home cooking and taking charge and care of the family, to their children and/or future children (F2; F6: F7; F8). This is in spite of acknowledging and discussing the pressures and expectations that come with marriage and motherhood in our family and culture. Cousin 1, rather, sees our Indian origins as a blessing that "*we can take out so much of good from…it's got so much of culture and that's what I love about being Indian*" (F6). Cousin 2 stated that she would not want her future children to buy takeout all the time, adding that "*My granny and my mum always cooked a meal from scratch*" (F7). Cousin 3 (F8) responded that she definitely wants to pass on the cultural practices and work ethic she has seen in the elder women in our family:

> *The whole Indian culture, I definitely would want to pass that on, the traditions that we follow…you have to like basically be able to multitask all the time…helping your family first and then at the end of the day like, you know, thinking about yourself….just being the support structure. I think it's a good rule to want to be – like I definitely want to be like my mum and her siblings.*

Singh and Harisunker's point that younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID still tend to abide by normative expectations of family life is thus evidently true when analysing the responses of the younger women in my family (2010). I confess that my actions also align with this thinking. The fundamental cultural traits that have been passed down to my Sister, my Cousins and myself have a stronghold on us because we cherish our families and recognise the role we have to play in preserving these bonds. These are responsibilities that, as Cousin 3's response bittersweetly reflects (F8), requires ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to put family first and themselves second. As Cousin 2 asserts, this is what our Mothers and Aunts have set us up for: "*we're going to have to hold it together one day and I think that we will*" (F7).

Patriarchy is a central concept in gender studies because even as historical and social change occurs, patriarchal systems, while also not unchanging, still have a stronghold in our communities (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). There is consequently "such a thing as 'patriarchal ideology' which encourages men and women to act in conformity with certain types of behaviour and to have certain life expectations which they act upon in their material lives" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017: 80). The construction and identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are clearly deeply impacted by "patriarchal ideology" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017: 80). Our role as the sole bearers of family connections and unity has been expected since the time of indenture (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Ultimately, the myriad of expectations involved in this role, those of women's decency, sacrifice and familial labour, continue to shape and weigh on our lives, as evidenced by the thorough analysis in this chapter. Therefore, while much change has taken place in the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, I argue what has not changed is that without us, our SAI families that we have come to know and love, and which is the cornerstone of our culture, would surely not survive.

5.10: Conclusion

This chapter has reflexively and thematically analysed the data I collected from the interviews with women in my family, structured around eight thematic areas (Braun & Clarke, 2019), namely Constructing Identities; Representation: Roles of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID; The ISA of Family: Marital Status, Marriage and Motherhood; Historical Specificity: Past to Present; The ISAs of Religion and Culture: Traditions and Customs;

Feminism: What is it to you?; Intersectionality: Sisterhood; and My Ideology: My Values. I interviewed these women because one of the key objectives of my thesis is to explore the impact that ISAs, especially those of family, culture, religion and community, have on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives, analysed through a feminist poststructural lens, and secondly how, in turn, this is dramatised and represented in plays written by such women. Chapters four and five addressed the first part of this objective. The second part will be addressed in chapters six, seven and eight.

Another key objective of my research is to ascertain how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights' identities influence their playwriting. As a playwright myself, my identity and experiences directly shape my work, and specifically in the case of this thesis, my play *Devi* (2019). Through the autoethnographic methodological approach of my research, I have been able to explore, in depth, my family and my own experiences, theorising and connecting the accounts in this chapter to the broader patriarchal structures of SAI cultures, religion(s), particularly Hinduism, and SAI families. It is important to consider the identities and experiences of family in autoethnographic research because personal stories are invariably familial stories as well (Ellis et al., 2011). Consequently, the interviews with my family, and our shared histories and experiences, are a significant part of my autoethnographic and PaR methodological approaches, principally in my use of the method of narrative autoethnography to write and stage *Devi* (2019). I will examine this, and more broadly how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights' identities and lives impact their respective work, in the succeeding chapters.

"now
is not the time
to be quiet
or make room for you
when we have had no room at all
now
is our time
to be mouthy
get as loud as we need
to be heard"

Rupi Kaur
(2017: 238)

CHAPTER SIX: SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN THEATRE (SAIT) – MARGINALISED HISTORY, COMPLEX IDENTITIES AND VITAL REPRESENTATION

6.1: Introduction

Renowned English theatre and film director Peter Brook famously wrote that, "A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (1968: 7). Theatre thus provides an environment in which to express one's voice and for it to be heard by others. The gift of playwriting is to offer those brave enough the power to speak their 'truth'. However, even in a space (ideally) of artistic expression and freedom, marginalised communities and identities do struggle to make their presence known onstage. Within the landscape of South African theatre, the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's voice is an example of such non-recognition (Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden, 2008), a situation that mirrors the sidelining and under-representation of our voices in South African society (Rajab, 2011). ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are rarely given the space to articulate our respective subject positions in our communities and families. Theatre, as Krijay contends, is one space where notions of identity

can be challenged and located, since it offers a platform for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to liberate our voices and represent ourselves (Govender, 2001).

As has been established, the aim of my thesis is to interrogate constructions of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities, as created and represented in plays written by us. Thus, in chapter four I offered a detailed analysis of the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID; here I want to consider how SAIT has developed and represented these lives, those of my ancestors, elders, family and fellow brown women. Specifically, in this chapter, I am exploring our voices and representation, both in what is classified as SAIT and in South African theatre more broadly. Tackling this complex topic requires an understanding of the history of SAIT with particular reference to the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and plays.

6.2: SAIT – Definition

Dennis Schauffer argues that investigations into the contributions of SAI to the evolving concept of indigenous South African theatre is "the single most neglected area of theatre research in South Africa" (1992: 84). In using the term SAIT, it must first be noted that we are generally talking about theatre made by, about and usually for SAI. Due to the apartheid system and its segregation of races under laws such as the Group Areas Act, Indian people were designated as a separate community and thus, the cultures and communities that SAI developed from the time of indenture were fortified by the apartheid system. Theatre, similarly, has often been segregated and classified by race. However, such categorisation is problematic as neat, boxed identifications on the basis of race, for example, which is a social construct, are not reflective of the diverse reality of our experiences and identities as South Africans. Furthermore, such exclusionary classifications may create perceptions that theatrical work by SAI is relevant only to this community; it may even be seen as outside of, or foreign to South African theatre as a whole. Nevertheless, the legacies of colonialism and apartheid mean that a discussion of SAIT as it has emerged in this particular context, is necessary. Schauffer (1992: 84) aptly sums up why such categorisations are important and needed:

> The plain truth of the matter is that various groups have made unique and valuable contributions to the cultural life and consciousness of their respective communities through the medium of theatre and the arts in general and one does need labels of some kind to differentiate, analyse or compare one group's contribution – not as set against another – but as distinct from and proceeding from different origins, with different developmental lines, and different social and artistic criteria by which to be judged.

Schaffeur's point echoes Hall's argument that although identity categories are arbitrary, they still impact our daily realities and identities (1997). Therefore, one must contend with such factors when examining the identity politics involved in SAIT. From the current state not just of SAIT but also of South African theatre as a whole, there has generally been a decline in support with artists struggling to draw audiences to the stage (Meersman, 2012; Pinto & Mann, 2016). Given this situation, we would be remiss to forget that for SAI, our ancestors considered this medium of entertainment to be life-sustaining (Desai & Vahed, 2010).

6.3: Religious Theatre

From the first arrival of Indians in South Africa, theatre was an important part of life; initially, this was largely for religious purposes since "Wherever the indentured went, they established religiously oriented theatre, especially what became known as the 'Ramayana' tradition – an important part of the Hindu canon which was acted out regularly" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 307). The indentured, due to the concept of *kala pani,* felt that their prospects should they return home to India would not be promising. Hence they saw themselves in Rama, who was also exiled from his homeland (Desai & Vahed, 2010).

When Indians first arrived in South Africa as indentured labourers, the religion and culture they carried with them from India were key to creating a sense of home in a foreign land (Shukla, 2013). Theatre, as one such element, consequently became a crucial outlet for religious and cultural expression, and was a central feature of Indian life during indenture. Desai & Vahed (2010: 307) describe the performances of the indentured:

> In the evenings and on weekends, groups would gather to communally sing verses of Hindu epics while musical instruments such as the *tabla* (drums), accordion and harmonium were played, or they would sit up all night to watch abridged versions of these plays enacted as drama. Religion, entertainment and theatre were intimately linked in these activities. Drama was a leisure outlet as well as a forum for social bonding.

While not overtly political, British colonialists in South Africa still objected to the theatrical works and ritual festivals of the indentured. Desai and Vahed's detailed study of indenture highlights several important points regarding indentured life and theatre in South Africa (2010). Firstly, the colonial regime considered such performances to be too loud and heathenistic, a distraction that displayed bad conduct. Secondly, the need for the indentured to have any entertainment or independence, even in their spare time was disregarded (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Despite these obstacles, as Desai and Vahed argue, indentured Indians protested for their religious freedom and festival celebrations (2010). They made costumes, played music, sang songs, ritually danced and staged plays. Religious and ancient stories provided hope to the indentured that their hardships would end (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Thus, significantly, the need for culture and art, for theatre, was a part of indentured Indians sustenance and survival in South Africa.

Theatre in this time also grew beyond staging religious mythology and became a way for the indentured to express their views on their current lives in their new home country, South Africa. According to accounts that Desai and Vahed discuss, it was not only religious performances that the indentured enacted (2010). In their new socio-political and cultural environments, indentured Indians addressed the complexities of following India's caste system in an entirely different nation and context, the politics and abuse of the poor by the rich under a colonial regime, and even contesting cultural relations between men and women These themes were reflected in indentured Indians' theatre and music in South Africa. Significantly, I argue that while comedy and entertainment are an especially popular focus in SAIT, there is still artistic work that explores SAI socio-political and cultural circumstances, particularly in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights. Desai and Vahed's study (2010) shows that the roots of this theatrical focus can be found in the performances of our ancestors who came to work as indentured labourers in South Africa.

A discussion on the importance of religious stories, namely the *Ramayana*, that foregrounded the first type of theatre ever made by SAI is necessary because these ancient myths significantly influence SAI culture and SAIT, especially in regards to the identities and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Rituals and traditions have been passed down from generation to generation: the *Ramayana*, for example, maintains its popularity and is the reason for the celebration of *Diwali*. Hindus in South Africa light lamps and burst fireworks to guide and celebrate Rama and his wife Sita's return home, after defeating the evil Ravana of Lanka. Usha Shukla terms the devotion to the *Ramayana* in South Africa as a "Rama Ethos" and states that the most valuable finding of her study is, "the discovery of the extent of love and devotion for Sri Rama that subsists in the Hindu psyche in South Africa" (2013: 90). The binary of Rama as a strong, heroic husband and Sita as a devoted, chaste wife is deeply ingrained in Hindu culture in India and in its diasporic societies such as South Africa (Moodley, 2020). Critically, the projection of Rama and Sita as the ideal husband and wife is problematic.

The issue with traditional enactments of ancient texts like the *Ramayana*, is that they propagate conservative and submissive representations of Indian women. With images of Sita as the archetypal woman, a dutiful, loving and subordinate wife, such expectations are then placed on Hindu women, even within a SAI context. Indeed, Meer affirms that, "Indian societies in South Africa have not abandoned 'the Sita myth'" (1972:37–38). This can be seen in post-apartheid plays by SAI, some twenty-six years since Meer's claim. Playwright Aldrin Naidoo's *Mooidevi's Muti* (1998) is a satirical and farcical take on the real life divorce of Amichand and Ashadevi Rajbansi. Amichand Rajbansi was the most prominent SAI politician, as leader of the Minority Front political party in a democratic South Africa.[21] In a performance of *Mooidevi's Muti* (1998) that Hansen (2000: 256 – 257) watched, the real

[21] Amichand Rajbansi canvassed for votes in SAI communities, where he was especially popular. As Tharuna Devchand writes, "when people remember the toupeed Tiger, they think of the man who visited the Verulam market…and who could fill the Chatsworth stadium with thousands of supporters" (2011: np). As leader of democratic South Africa's foremost Indian political party, Rajbansi's identity and representation as an SAI therefore mattered a great deal. This can particularly be seen amongst working class SAI who supported Rajbansi until his death in 2011. As Vahed and Desai explain, for working class SAI "life opportunities…remain constricted and this may increase the pull of…cultural brokers and ethnic politicians like Amichand Rajbansi whose party, the Minority Front, claims significant support among working class Indians" (2010: 9). This support, "which previously took large chunks of the Indian vote in KwaZulu-Natal" has indeed declined in the past decade due to instability within the Minority Front party since founder Rajbansi's death (Singh, 2016: np). Nonetheless, within SAI communities, class is certainly a factor that influences one's political preferences and allegiances (Vahed & Desai, 2010).

Amichand Rajbansi came onstage, telling the audience that his wife's actions were wrong and that, as an Indian woman, she should behave like Sita:

> Ashadevi, are you prepared to abandon everything, children, husband, grandchildren for the sake of money? You should do like Sita [the virtuous wife of Lord Ram in the epic Ramayana] who stood by her husband in good and bad times. She never roamed around with Ravana [the black demon-god threatening to destroy Ram's just rule].

Such representations of Sita and the subsequent expectations placed on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are "indicative of the patriarchal threads within Indian society…" (Naicker, 2017: 21). These representations and expectations have existed amongst SAI since the time of indenture. Desai and Vahed (2010) explain that during this time, Sita was portrayed as a steadfastly loyal and docile wife, the model for how wives should behave for indentured men. Evidently, as can be heard through the actual voice of Amichand Rajbansi, such models and standards are still prevalent in SAI communities. Thus, while Meer's statement may be dated, its continuing relevance within SAI culture can be seen in references to Sita in SAIT. Furthermore Meer's statement is also reinforced by Shukla's research which looks into the significance of the *Ramayana* for 3rd and 4th generation South African Hindis (2013).

The traditional, patriarchal view of Sita has been challenged by many artists, including playwrights, dancers and filmmakers (Farber, 2011; Moodley, 2008; Ratnam, 2018) who portray Sita as brave, defiant and strong. They have reimagined Sita through a feminist, rather than a traditionally patriarchal, lens. Rashmi Luthra discusses the feminist appropriations of Sita, in the form of folk songs, dance and short stories, and states that they do connect and tap into popular perceptions people have about the injustice Sita suffers (2014). For example, in the *agni pariksha* or fire ordeal episode of the *Ramayana*, Sita, after being rescued from King Ravana by her husband, must prove her sexual purity by walking through a blazing fire (Hess, 1999). This controversial part of the Epic has been defended, deliberately ignored or, conversely, challenged in debates, analyses and reinterpretations of the *Ramayana* for thousands of years. However, non-conformist perceptions and representations have not resulted in any substantial cultural change towards the *Ramayana* and the demeaning acts that are demanded of Sita. Hence, the prevailing status quo largely remains. Rama is so revered that a professor from the University of Mysore in Karnataka,

India was jailed for allegedly insulting Rama when he stated at a conference that Rama was unfair to Sita (Anand, 2016).

In *Devi* (2019), I challenged the perception of Hindu goddesses as obedient beings who only have a voice through their male counterparts, since such deportment engenders an expectation that Hindu women must model this behaviour. The cast portray goddesses of Hinduism including Durga, Draupadi and Sita. In this scene, they boldly articulate how they really feel about the indignities they and their fellow women have suffered. Draupadi says she has no desire to be reunited with any of her husbands while Sita laments how her body has been used and objectified. They tell the character Devi, who is deceased, that she now has "a freedom like no other" (Moodley, 2019: 13). A freedom that cannot be had during one's life. The goddess Draupadi explains why feminine power is threatening to the patriarchal status quo, even though Hinduism believes that women should be worshipped. She says, "But when women have immense power, they are also feared. We hold creative strength and power, *shakti*, and we cannot be contained" (Moodley, 2019:14).

Sadly, this feminine power cannot be found in the theatre of the indentured. In researching the role and voices of Indian women in theatrical work created during this time, there is little evidence of their representation, possibly indicating that from their arrival in South Africa, this was yet another way in which women were marginalised. While it is unclear if Indian women were permitted to perform the female parts, cross-dressing whereby males would play female characters was a common practice. There was also a steep gender ratio inequality among the indentured; thus, there may not have been enough women for performances (Naicker, 2017). As Kivithra Naicker states, what is clear about the arts of the indentured community is that "there is a distinct absence of female voice and physical presence" (2017: 16). Furthermore, patriarchal and conservative expectations of women can be seen in some songs performed by the indentured. Desai and Vahed cite a popular *natchania* record, a form of song which provides social commentary on daily life (2010). The "Riverside song" (Desai & Vahed, 2010: 309) talks about how Indian wives must dress and behave. Significantly, it explicitly relates this to family values and the expectation that women must uphold these traditions:

> From an old lady, you've become young
> Why, O wife?

You've painted your lips red
And made your hair curly
Why, O wife?
You go out walking down the roads
You dab powder on your face
And wear your sari back-to-front
You've abandoned family traditions

It is therefore evident that from the first arrival of Indians in South Africa, Indian women were expected to perform a clear role: the central and demanding responsibility of building and maintaining their families. These expectations were reinforced by religiously centred theatre during indenture whereby goddesses like Sita were portrayed as passive, dutiful wives. Indian women, like Shanti in Joseph's novel on indenture in South Africa (2021), seemingly left one oppressive environment for another, with ISAs that were patriarchally structured to reinscribe cultural mores. Crucially, the reverberations of such "age-old gender practices" have impacted the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID today (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 46), experiences that, I argue, are explored and represented in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID .

6.4: Vernacular Languages and Theatre

Theatre made by Indians in South Africa, from their arrival as indentured labourers, was staged and performed in their mother tongues, in vernacular languages such as Hindi and Tamil. This continued until the 1950s with plays still mainly drawing from religious and mythological narratives (Hansen, 2000). The influence of vernacular languages on theatre is important to discuss because these dialects and art impacted SAI culture and SAIT. Muthal, born in 1935, states that her earliest memory of theatre is of plays in Tamil. She explains that such art "reflected Indian mythology and history and included plays about great heroes…and dramatizations from the great all-Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (Naidoo, 1997: 31). Interesting to note here is that the last play Muthal wrote and staged was a feminist revision of the *Mahabharata* titled *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990).[22]

[22] As established, *Flight From The Mahabharath* is one of the selected plays included in my analysis of Muthal's body of work in chapter seven.

Muthal also indicates that while the casts of these performances were all male, "by the late 1940s and early 1950s women were performing in Tamil plays" (1997:32). She discusses her acting in vernacular schools, performing in plays in Telegu, explaining that such vernacular theatre was concerned with preserving Indian languages and cultural values, with events such as eisteddfods where there would be competitions in drama, music and dance (1997). These schools, while not nearly as prominent as during Muthal's childhood, do continue to exist, though only sparsely. In the 1990s and early 2000s, I went to the Gujarati school in Reservoir Hills.[23] Like Muthal, I also took part in eisteddfods. I performed in Gujarati plays, sang *bhajans* (devotional songs) in Gujarati and Sanskrit, participated in group dances and also individually orally narrated *vartalap* (short stories). Despite the time and effort required, I enjoyed my years at Gujarati school and only wish now that I could speak it fluently. While I can fully read Gujarati, I understand not enough of it to engage conversationally. Perhaps this is because in our house, which was also half-Tamil, we spoke the language common to all of us: English.

The point of my brief autoethnographic reflections here is to highlight the loss of, and issues with vernacular languages in both SAI culture and subsequently SAIT. The influence of western education and lifestyles, while allowing SAI to prosper in their learning and careers locally and globally, has also resulted in virtually the complete loss of vernacular languages amongst my peers, and certainly younger generations. Such dialects face the threat of becoming extinct in South Africa. Maharaj states that while in 1951 only six percent of SAI spoke English in their homes; by 1996, "94.4 percent of Asians declared English as their home language" (2013: 99). It has always been a regret of mine that I never learned how to speak Tamil or properly mastered Gujarati.

Ultimately, the dominance of English continues, with SAI losing the key languages of their families, ancestors and cultures. It is for these reasons that I value the experiences I had at Gujarati school. Learning and performing in this language brought me closer to parts of my culture. The vernacular is thus "still an important marker of identification even though it may not be spoken anymore…it has become the name of a community, not the name of a language

[23] Reservoir Hills is a suburb located in Durban, KZN that post-apartheid remains a predominantly Indian area, as it was designated for Indians under the Group Areas Act during apartheid. My mother's family moved from the Durban CBD (Central Business District), or simply 'Town' as they referred to it, to Reservoir Hills in the early 1970s.

as such" (Maharaj, 2013: 99). I hold my Gujarati and Tamil heritage as sacred and am proud to be mixed, in defiance of those who have referred to people like me as half-breeds (Govender, 2013). For this reason, I made the sisters in *Devi* (2019) also have a mixed Indian ethnicity.

I must also point out issues with vernacular theatre itself, namely the insularity of SAI culture that was reinforced by such performances. Therefore, even with the pride I have in my diverse heritage, I also note Hansen's (2000: 266) point regarding the "ethnic closure" that early Indian theatre engendered and which, despite the vast majority of performances now being in English, continues to be a feature of post-apartheid SAIT. Maharaj attributes the initial survival of vernacular languages to apartheid policies "which created a certain isolation of the 'Indian race'" (2013: 99). Muthal (1997: 33), in fact, argues that vernacular theatre was problematic because in striving to keep our culture and languages alive, SAI artists also ended up bolstering the apartheid state's policy of separate development:

> The vernacular drama, in my opinion, was easy prey for assimilation into an apartheid culture. The local determination to preserve Indian traditions and culture tended, unwittingly or not, to support the apartheid ideology of distinct, unchanging and timeless cultures. As a result, other forms and cultural practices that expressed the complexity of South African social, economic, and political reality were for a long time regarded as inauthentic.

I agree with Muthal's point here and recognise the problematic stance of seeing the actual lives SAI lead as inauthentic, when in fact, our daily realities as specifically SAI are a far truer representation of ourselves and our culture. I strongly assert this point in my thesis, as do Bose (2009), Govinden (2008), Pillay (2017), Rajab (2011) and Rastogi (2008) in their work. The Indian culture that has been created and sustained in South Africa is absolutely determined by our everyday reality as South Africans. Being South African and being Indian are thus not disparate but rather exist mutually and indispensably together in the construction of our lives, experiences and identities as SAI. From the beginning of the apartheid regime, SAIT started to reflect these troubling times, exploring the particular socio-political and cultural lives of SAI, matters Muthal contends vernacular SAIT overlooked (1997). Nonetheless, the political upheavals in South Africa in the 1940s, most especially the

implementation of the apartheid system by the Nationalist Party[24], "brought forth a new assertiveness among Indians" (Hansen, 2000: 258).

6.5: Types of SAIT

In her analysis, Muthal points out that until the 1960s, prior to the development of indigenous drama, three trends were prevalent in SAIT, namely "vernacular theatre, Indian plays translated into English, Western plays translated into the vernacular, and performances of the works of European playwrights" (Naidoo, 1997: 34). SAI began engaging with European play texts through tertiary education where they became fluent in the English language and its theatre traditions (Hansen, 2000). However, this "left little room for South African Indians or other non-whites to reflect on themselves and their own predicaments" (Hansen, 2000: 259). Thus, from the l960s, playwrights began to create original, indigenous theatre in South Africa that reflected the social, political and cultural environments of SAI. This included plays that were inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement.[25] Such works "by Strini Moodley, Saths Cooper and others working with the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON)…sought to 'conscientize' the non-white student population in South Africa" (Hansen, 2000: 259 – 260). Strini Moodley's *Prison Walls* drew from his experiences on Robben Island, exploring how this place, in spite of the regime's determination to squash the fighting spirit of inmates, actually served to strengthen interracial solidarity and understanding between African, Indian and Coloured prisoners (Hansen, 2000).

Ronnie Govender, South Africa's most prolific playwright of Indian descent, was a leading figure in the development of SAIT. His plays were both political and comedic, with a focus on the local and domestic situations of SAI communities and families (Hansen, 2000). The formative Shah Theatre Academy, formed by Ronnie Govender in 1964, was central to the development of an indigenous SAIT. The Academy, in which Muthal was one of the only women members, produced original plays in English, reflecting current South African politics and culture (Hansen, 2000). Such theatrical work "combined social criticism, political

[24] The Nationalist Party (NP), an ethnic Afrikaner and white supremacist organisation, as the governing party of South Africa in 1948 implemented its racial segregation laws, policies and systems known as apartheid. In 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) defeated the NP in South Africa's first democratic, multiracial elections.
[25] The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa was notably led by anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko. Formed in the 1960s, the BCM fought for the liberation of black people in South Africa, both through political and psychological transformation.

satire and the use of local idioms and expressions arising from the experiences and history of Indians in Durban and Natal" (Hansen, 2000: 259).

6.6: Comedy and Community

In the 1980s, however, SAIT shifted "turning away from political problematics of race and struggle towards comedy, almost exclusively focusing on issues internal to the community" (Hansen, 2000: 260). Considering that this was a time in which the fight against apartheid was intensifying, this move is perplexing but can be understood in light of the rising middle class lifestyles of many SAI. As such, cultural conservatism and the preservation of the Indian family became a primary concern. Thus, while plays with a focus on political satire in SAIT continued, there was a rise in the popularity of comedic and farcical plays that challenged and reflected SAI communities' cultural and familial lives (Hansen, 2000).

I would argue that both these kinds of SAIT – the overtly political in opposing apartheid and also that which satirised the local and familial everyday lives of SAI – are still both types of theatre that are politically and socially positioned. Playwrights were critical of firstly. the racism within SAI communities towards black South Africans, and secondly, of the tacit assimilation with apartheid structures in exchange for middle class lifestyles and better education. Such playwrights' political critique and response to this was through satire and comedy in both plays that specifically focused on politics in South Africa, and in works that were located in familial or communal contexts. In support of this idea, Hansen (2000) cites Kessie Govender's play *On the Fence* (1981) as critiquing the opportunism and snobbery of Indian middle class families; Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (1978) which explores an Indian family's objection to their daughter, fittingly named Sita, who has a relationship with a Coloured man that she intends on marrying; and Muthal's *Of No Account* (1981) which tells the story of two Indian book-keepers who while contending with their white boss are "both oblivious to the invisible African worker, the real hero and voice of sanity" (2000: 260). These plays are as political as any form of protest theatre; they simply use a personal, familial and communal lens in staging their work, reaching audiences and communicating their socio-political and cultural positions through these realistic and specific stories. Additionally, I believe that the socio-political and cultural focus in SAIT continues to

exist today. All the SAI and/or SAOID playwrights and plays I have discussed, including my own work, invoke the notion of the personal circumstances of our lives having been impacted by our wider political and cultural contexts. In *Race Trouble* (2013), the characters Divya and Menzi's lives are entirely constrained by the racial politics of South Africa while in *Devi* (2019), the sisters' lives are greatly influenced by the larger SAI and Hindu community in which they live.

The last point to note about the history of SAIT is that it has always been community-centred, whether focusing on religious mythology, promoting vernacular languages, locally adapting classic European plays, or exploring the political, social and cultural realities of our people. Due to apartheid segregation laws, no racially mixed casts nor audiences were allowed until the 1980s. As such, there were no formal theatre venues for SAI. Despite this, schools, community halls and cinemas were used for theatrical performances (Naidoo, 1997). In the current climate of struggling to attract theatre audiences (Meersman, 2012; Pinto & Mann, 2016), the tradition of taking artistic work directly into communities, even without the resources formal theatre venues provide, offers a potential solution to the problem of drawing in audiences. However, this also contributes to the tendency towards "ethnic closure" that exists amongst SAI (Hansen, 2000: 266), and to an exclusion of SAIT from the concept and development of South African theatre as a whole. Indeed, Naicker states that, "theatre in the Indian community has remained separate from other racial groups in a post-apartheid South Africa in keeping with the apartheid segregation laws which informed this seclusion" (2017: 21).

6.7: The Intersection of Nationality, Identity and Theatre

Theatre and society share an intersectional relationship, each informing and reflecting the other. How SAI and/or SAOID writers, namely playwrights in this thesis, articulate their subject positions and stories, in relation to their socio-political and cultural environments, must therefore be analysed. Rastogi examines the work and identities of SAI poets, novelists and playwrights (2008). She posits that SAI writers do not want to be chiefly seen as part of the Indian diaspora, as they have fought to have their nationality as South Africans to be accepted as the primary signifier of their cultural identity (Rastogi, 2008). Muthal, for example, emphatically stated to me that she does not identify as an SAIW (P1). Meer argues

that identifying as a diasporic Indian centres the Indian facet of our South African identity and thus inhibits our struggle for recognition in our own country (Rastogi, 2008). There is, therefore, an avowal in SAI writing that SAI desire "citizenship in the fullest sense of the word" (Rastogi, 2008: 1). However, this is an ongoing battle for us as we continue to contend with foreign, diasporic perceptions of our identities and cultures which are actually, as Bose (2009), Pillay (2017) and Rajab (2011) argue, specifically and acutely grounded in South African identity and culture.

Moreover, SAI have to fight for recognition in their own country due to "their erasure in both the apartheid and postapartheid consciousness" (Rastogi, 2008: 1). This is certainly a sentiment I share, as race relations in South Africa are often framed as a binary between black and white. Indian and Coloured people were designated as separate communities under apartheid and thus cultures and identities have formed as a result of this. When it comes to addressing the social, political, economic and educational consequences of apartheid, Indian and Coloured South Africans are caught in the middle, viewed as too black to have the privileges white South Africans had, while post-apartheid, these groups are seen as too white to qualify for policies aimed at addressing historical and institutional black disadvantage (Durrheim et al., 2011). Therefore, during and after apartheid, "The conflicted status of Indian and coloured communities – sometimes aligned with white interests, sometimes with black interests – persists" (Durrheim et al., 2011: 31-32).

I expressed the personal effect of this conflict in my play *Race Trouble* (2013). My Masters research is also autoethnographic in that it reflected my own racial prejudices and sought to challenge the racism, particularly towards black South Africans, that I had seen in my own family and community. Rastogi (2008: 8) explains that relations between Indian and black South Africans is a significant topic in SAI writers' works:

> The Indian relationship with blacks-in all its energy, joy, frustration, and mutual distrust-dominates…South African Indian fiction is…concerned with describing Indian relationships with black Africans, tracing racial solidarity in the apartheid period, and mourning its rupture in the postapartheid period.

Race Trouble (2013) is about an SAIW who seeks trauma counselling from a black South African man. My play unpacks and tackles the racial prejudices of both characters that largely affect the interactions between these two race groups. Ashwin Singh's play *To House* (2006), which I saw performed in a new staging of the work in Durban in 2017, tells the story of a couple Sibusiso and Kajol, a young black man and Indian woman, who become entangled in racial and class conflict within their communities, family and housing complex because of their interracial relationship. Just as race relations and tensions were explored by playwrights like Muthal, as well as Ronnie Govender and Kessie Govender during apartheid (Hansen, 2000), in post-apartheid South Africa, evidently such topics continue to inform SAI and/or SAOID playwrights and their plays.

The uncovering of state capture and corruption in the country, involving the infamous Gupta family from India, has served to further reinforce negative perceptions of SAI.[26] Kamini in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013: 71) comments on these perceptions, using comedy to critique and subvert stereotypes:

> But I don't know who decided to bring Indians here as labourers. Because we don't do physical labour, we run businesses. Like a Boss (eh heh eh heh) I'm sure when the Guptas were landing at our military base, they were like "you knaw vhat's funny? They brought us here as slaves"

Here, Kamini is playing on the stereotype that Indians are shrewd businessmen by joking that if this is true, then we should not have been brought to South Africa as indentured labourers. She also differentiates between the Guptas and SAI by putting on an Indian accent when speaking as the Guptas. She refers to South Africa's military base as 'our' thus asserting her South African identity. Kamini is therefore clarifying that SAI should not be seen as having any relation to the Gupta family, who are from India. Yet, in our country's current political climate, a remark (Pillay, 2017: 85) often thrown at SAI is that we should "go home" to India. Our home is South Africa, where we were born, raised and live.

[26] Since 2016, there have been allegations of a corrupt relationship between former South African President Jacob Zuma and the affluent Indian-born Gupta family, resulting in state capture in South Africa whereby private business interests have detrimentally impacted the state of South Africa's economy, politics and, in turn, our nation as a whole. The judicial commission established to investigate these allegations of state capture, known as the Zondo Commission of Inquiry, published its final report in June 2022.

The vast majority of SAI have never even visited India (Rastogi, 2008). When I visited the 'motherland', I was immediately struck by my "South Africanness" (Rastogi, 2008: 165). The only roots I found in India were with extended family members, in the places my maternal grandparents came from and about which they spoke. My first and only trip to India was eleven years ago for the purpose of shopping for my sister's upcoming wedding. My mother's family lived in Surat, in the state of Gujarat. Spending time with them was the most at home I felt in India. My *Ba* and *Pappa* were born and lived in a village ninety minutes from Surat called Valod, which my mother, sister and I were memorably able to visit.

The point of sharing these memories is that these are the connections I found in India. It was not with the place beyond the delicious food and vibrant culture, which are largely superficial ties or popular notions that have taken on their own distinctive meanings in South Africa (Naidoo, 1997; Rajab, 2011). The connections I found in India were with family and tracing the steps of my *Ba* and *Pappa*. When we arrived in Valod, I have a vivid memory of being self-conscious as we were stared at by the locals. Clearly we were foreigners to them, which is accurate. My maternal grandparents and my paternal ancestors came to South Africa and built a life for my family here, a life that is distinctly South African. My sentiments are shared by SAI writers, and can be seen in the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, such as Kamini and Muthal. Ultimately, while our identities are shaped by our diasporic roots, we are far more influenced and formed by our experiences as SAI. Therefore, SAI writers, like myself, strongly assert our desire to be seen as South African (Rastogi, 2008). Unfortunately, this is not how we are always perceived by our fellow citizens (Pillay, 2017). Thus, in the absence of our acceptance into South African culture, some SAI have perhaps turned to their diasporic roots for connection. This can be seen in the responses of some of my aunts that I interviewed (P3; P4: P5) with regards to how they identify, as well as my reflections on my *Ba* and *Ma's* experiences largely living in a South African society where they felt isolated and unwelcome.

6.8: The Intersection of Race, Nationality, Identity and Theatre

In terms of racial identity in South Africa, it is also important to note that one of the reasons for the "conflicted status" (Durrheim et al., 2011: 31) and, in turn, the subsequent

marginalisation of SAI from South African culture, was actually in the service of defeating the oppressive apartheid regime. Considering the importance of intersectionality that has been discussed in chapter two, 'black' is certainly not a homogenous type of identity; yet, "Coloured, Indian and *Bantu* (original emphasis) identities were all defined 'black' within the simplistic categorisation of the complex, problematic apartheid system that perceived individuals as either 'black' or 'white'" (Malimba, 2012: 5). In turn, the anti-apartheid movement "sought to incorporate all nonwhite people under a singular 'black' identity forged by the commonality of white oppression" (Rastogi, 2008: 4). As a result, the term 'black' South Africans can refer to all people of colour in South Africa, and has been denoted as such in South African socio-political and cultural discourse. Noxolo Malimba analyses the work of South African *Bantu* (original emphasis), Indian and Coloured women playwrights, seeing each respectively as a category of "black/ness" (2012: 5). She italicises and uses the term *Bantu* (original emphasis) in her research, "as a way to distinguish between the three categories of black/ness under exploration…and…as a reclaiming of black South African identity from its historical derisive connotations" (Malimba, 2012: 5).

Muthal goes further, rejecting the construction of race entirely as a false concept, arguing that the perpetuation of racial categories such as 'Indian' in South Africa sows division (P1). She asserts that, "race is based on acquired differences in physical features and cultural practices that arise from adaptation to differing environments" (P1). In other words, race is a construct that in apartheid South Africa was determined by one's birth and skin colour. Policies, particularly segregation based on these racial constructs, have subsequently influenced and shaped various cultures, subcultures, classes and subclasses in South Africa. While South Africans can now live wherever they choose, the economic and divisive effects of racial segregation have been far-reaching. As such, there are still areas in Durban that are predominantly Indian, for example Chatsworth and Reservoir Hills.[27] Therefore, Muthal

[27] The factor of class in SAI communities and culture can be seen in the spatial segregation engendered by the Group Areas Act which uprooted working class Indians "to sterile and monolithic public housing estates" in areas such as Merebank, Chatsworth and Phoenix (Khan, 2012: 140). Khan (2012: 140) adds that, "In contrast, affluent Indians of different ethnic and religious backgrounds established palatial homes within close proximity of white suburbs." I contend that Reservoir Hills is such an area, which my mother's family moved to from the Durban CBD in the 1970s. Post-apartheid, both formerly designated areas that catered to working class and middle to upper class Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID are no longer prosperous areas to reside in, with "the rapid mushrooming of informal settlements in and around apartheid created affluent Indian suburbs and public housing areas resulting in a phenomenal drop in property markets, drop in service delivery standards and escalating levels of violent crimes in the neighborhood" (Khan, 2012: 144-145). As such, in KZN, those Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID who can afford to move from these neighbourhoods are relocating to, for example, "the formerly white areas....while more affluent Indians are moving to…Umhlanga in KZN"

argues that writers do not create work to be seen as 'Indian' because of their race and culture, rather it is simply reflective of their environment (P1). This echoes Ronnie Govender's assertion that his writing is simply about his life and world rather than "something on Indians" (Govinden, 2008: 112). Ultimately, the form, content and structures of SAIT are consequently the result of our nation's very particular social, economic and cultural conditions, generated first by colonialism and indenture, and secondly by apartheid and segregation. Pillay (2017: 83) discusses the "Anti-'Indian' sentiment" that resonates due to the policies of these political eras, and the effect (2017: 85) this has on SAI lives and identities:

> South Africans of Indian descent who possess all the civil and political rights and privileges of citizens…are nevertheless *seen* (original emphasis) as undeserving in various contexts and moments – hence the reiterated calls for them to 'go home'. Citizenship in contemporary South Africa, therefore, for some does not assume inclusivity or regard all people as equal and deserving.

SAI evidently face challenges in terms of the construction and acceptance of their identities in South Africa. I argue that similarly, such issues can be found in the struggles playwrights have within SAIT. Plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, like Muthal and even our male counterparts such as Ronnie Govender, want their work to be recognised as part of South African theatre and culture as a whole rather than as niche plays only about and relevant to SAI. However, it would seem that South African theatre is one of the contexts, as Pillay terms (2017), in which SAI and/or SAOID playwrights are seen as underserving of such recognition. I find that Pillay concurs with Muthal as she also argues that the continued practice of classification "perpetuates 'race' thinking", impeding cohesiveness in South African society and creating "versions of the 'other' that are fixed" (2017: 83). While I agree with both Muthal and Ronnie Govender's point that indigenous plays by SAOID should not be seen as just or only 'Indian', I assert in this thesis that SAI environments are integrally a part of South African society and therefore should not be viewed as disparate or foreign to

(Vahed & Desai, 2010: 6). Therefore, any discussion around "Indianness" in SAI communities must consider "intraracial inequality" as class and living conditions are critical intersectional factors that historically and presently shape the lives, experiences and identities of Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID (Vahed & Desai: 6).

our national sense of community. My argument, as I posited in chapter five, theorises 'South African Indian', not as unrelated concepts, but rather as one inclusive term.

6.9: The Intersection of Politics, Race, Nationality, Identity and Theatre

What is clear is that "there is a direct and determinate relationship between politics and identity in South African Indian writing" (2008: 9). Ronnie Govender wonderfully articulates why this relationship is necessary to writing, echoing feminist principles (Rastogi, 2008: 223), as he describes how the personal is implicitly political as well:

> I think politics governs our entire lives…So if you don't have a kind of political consciousness, the characters and people in your work are in limbo…[F]or them to be three dimensional…the backdrop, the landscape, the life that they live, and they grew up in, is political.

In Rastogi's study on SAI novelists, poets and playwrights, I have discussed her assertion that such writers affirm a South African identity in their work (2008). I, as an SAIW playwright, wholly agree with this affirmation. There is scarcely a desire, physically or spiritually, to return to the 'motherland' India, which is only an empty symbol (Rastogi, 2008). I saw my first trip to India as a holiday, looking forward to returning to South Africa, my home. The Indian identity we speak of in South Africa, while bearing some connections to the land of our ancestors, is a concept that only exists precisely because it is, at its core, South African. Such a "political consciousness", as Ronnie Govender terms (Rastogi, 2008: 223), is reflected in plays by SAI and/or SAOID since playwrights like he and Muthal began writing and staging indigenous plays in apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights such as Krijay, Kamini and myself have continued with this focus in our post-apartheid plays.

Additionally, researchers have considered the paradoxical fluidity involved with defining what it means to be a SAI. Frenkel firstly asks, "What makes someone a South African Indian writer? What quantity of 'Indianness' is required? Can this label be applied on the basis of subject matter? Of parentage? Of ancestry?" (2010: 5). My own identity as an SAIW encompasses all three of these categories, and is reflected in my plays. However, SAI

culture is diverse and thus Frenkel's work also "aims to problematize the idea of race on which the notion of Indianness rests" (2010: 1). Of course, "Indian-ness", as Spivak terms and points out, "is not a thing that exists" (1990: 39). Govinden, in her book *Sister Outsiders* (2008), exploring the marginalisation of SAIW's writings, also states that in this field, "I simultaneously engage in a critical discussion of issues of identity and difference in relation to these writings and interrogate the very notion of 'South African Indian women'" (2008: 3). Frenkel (2010) and Govinden's (2008) work reflect a poststructural understanding of identity: social, cultural, religious and racial categories are themselves arbitrary, however, these factors matter deeply, shaping our identities and influencing our daily lives in the constructed communities we have created (Hall, 1997). In studying the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, specifically their representation in plays written by such women, it is therefore necessary to contend with the complexities of SAI identity and, as I established in chapter two, feminist poststructural and intersectional notions of identity and identity politics.

There are neither definitive nor factual ways to categorise "Indianness" resulting in "a multifarious designation of the Indian self. Consequently, what it means to be South African is also problematized" (Rastogi, 2008: 10). Ultimately, while I concur with Spivak (1990: 39) that any notions of "Indian-ness" are constructs, such conceptualisations still profoundly impact my own, my family, my community, and my compatriots' identities and lives. In addition, notions of "Indianness" in South Africa are specifically and evidently culturally South African, as so-called "Indianness is not only influenced but also determined by the everyday reality of South African life" (Rastogi, 2008: 167).

The continued usage of apartheid racial categories is regretful, Chetty argues, however, the relevance of such classifications to South African writing is that, "the different life experiences created for the various ethnic groups in the pre-1994 racist society are likely to have resulted in different forms of writings and literature" (2020: 392). Firstly, as I have discussed, SAI are caught between the influence of their heritage and the culture of their ancestors, versus the deep socio-political, cultural and nationalist connections with their homes and lives in South Africa. Because of this, there are two main approaches within SAI communities, involving both asserting Indian identity and culture while also cutting across racial and ethnic boundaries to unite with other population groups (Naidoo, 1997). The latter approach can be seen especially during apartheid, when people of colour came together

against this oppressive regime. SAI writing reflects both on the solidarity of these relationships during apartheid and the sad fracturing of them post-apartheid (Rastogi, 2008). As I have discussed, many SAI and/or SAOID playwrights have focused on race relations and tensions in their plays, during and post-apartheid (Govender, 1978; Govender, 1981; Govender, 2013; Moodley, 2013; Naidoo, 1981; Singh, 2006).

One of Rastogi's other important points in terms of SAI identity, and its construction and representation in writings by SAI and/or SAOID, is that while such work is influenced by our material and political conditions, the interpretation of these conditions does bear some distance from the actual reality of our lives (Rastogi, 2008). This is where there is perhaps a splinter in the intersection between politics, race, nationality, and theatre. In surmising the issues that are central in SAI writing, such as the minutiae of our identities, our affiliations and tensions with black South Africans, and the rejection of India as a fantasy – in contrast with our actual daily realities in South Africa – Rastogi found that these issues "did not seem important to many of the Indians with whom I interacted" (2008: 161). Thus, she (Rastogi, 2008: 161) poses the following pertinent question:

> Is South African Indian fiction really that removed from the world in which it is produced? Or is fiction aware of the problematic ideologies underpinning the lived experience and merely offering a vision of an alternate *better* (original emphasis) universe?

I would argue that SAI and/or SAOID novelists, poets and playwrights are attempting to do the latter by firstly, challenging the problematic issues in our communities and secondly, by placing these controversial subject matters within fully realised characters, stories and plays. As Rastogi astutely states, "In its commitment to remember, literature corrects a collective amnesia on the part of the Indian community…" (2008: 166). This amnesia is apparent, for example, in the lack of any substantial opposition to traditional representations of Sita. Furthermore, from the audience response to my plays, generally speaking, they do positively react and agree to the issues my work explores. Yet, when I reflect on my familial experiences, it seems as if my family walks out of the theatre and sees no need to interrogate these issues within themselves and their real life environments. I still hear racist comments from family members, which I challenged in *Race Trouble* (2013), and I still witness the passive acceptance of the patriarchal gender norms I confronted in *Devi*

(2019). I do not think I will ever stop being asked about when I will be getting married. I am not asking for everyone to simply agree with all my positions and understand that real systemic change, on an individual and institutional level, is historically and presently highly difficult to reach (Morley, 2019). However, as Rastogi (2008) interrogates in her respective research, I must question, in this thesis, the division between the characterisation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by such women, versus their construction and representation in the wider ISA of SAI culture.

My observational opinion of such inaction and indifference is that SAI do not want, to use the colloquial expression, air their dirty laundry. We do not want to address what is problematic about ourselves and our society, which in my view, is the racism, sexism and homophobia that exists in some of our homes and communities. However, this is precisely what is explored in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, for instance Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999), Muthal's *Flight From the Mahabharath* (1990) or my own plays *Race Trouble* (2013) and *Devi* (2019). Unlike the Brahmin priest who objected to the mere questioning of Sita's treatment (Hess, 1999), ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights deliberately address the unspoken things in our communities. I argue that as playwrights, we have used the platform of the stage, refusing to be in a state of denial and tacit acceptance which we are made to believe is, by the hegemonic powers that be, for the well-being of ourselves and our families (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1982).

Amongst SAI, the ISA most arguably used for such purposes would be the family. As Kuper points out: "It is regarded by all as the main social unit of Indian life, the centre in which the individual receives his foundation in social values and behaviours" (1956: 15). By unquestioningly conforming, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are told they are content. However, such inducement serves to appease the status quo that in reality, engenders many difficulties for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Playwrights such as Krijay, Muthal and I have thus used domestic situations, like arranged marriage and/or stereotypes around being divorced, single and/or pregnant out of wedlock, in our plays to challenge and highlight the patriarchal norms that are woven into the everyday fabric of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives. SAIT is therefore a vital, countering form of expression for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights in the ISA of SAI culture which evidently denies its women their voices in their larger communities and families (Carrim, 2016; Govender, 1999, 2001; Jagganath, 2008; Seedat-Khan, 2012).

In considering the critical intersections of nationality, race, politics, gender and theatre that I have discussed, Rastogi ultimately finds that there are two differing political views regarding what she terms "Afrindian" identity: There are SAI who believe that after years of oppression under Eurocentrism, they are now victims of Afrocentrism and "resent their elimination from a race-based national identity…" (Rastogi, 2008: 162). These SAI reflect the approach of avowing their Indian cultural identity foremost (Naidoo, 1997), a perspective that Rajab states new generations of SAIW and/or SAWOID find concerning and interfering "with their true place as fully fledged citizens of the country" (2011: 173). On the other hand, there are SAI, such as the writers, academics and activists discussed in Rastogi's study, who are self-critical, confronting the racism of SAI that is widespread (2008). I fall into this latter group and *Race Trouble* (2013) was an attempt to address these topics that remain unspoken in our communities. As I have discussed in regards to my plays, while there may have been some discomfort from audience members, I mostly had a positive response to confronting the issues that I addressed about SAI communities and culture. Krijay also found that audiences responded well to the bold, usually unexpressed, themes that she explores in *Women in Brown* (1999; P2). However, notably there seems to be an apathy towards making any kind of change or progress, with regards to these matters, in our lives (Rastogi, 2008).

6.10: Comedy – Crutch or Subversion

SAIT produces plays that represent differing ideological views: work that caters to the popular status quo versus work that seeks, both subtly and emphatically, to challenge and transcend the problematic norms of our society. The former view can be seen in Hansen's analysis of 1980s SAIT turning culturally inwards with the rising popularity of comedic plays about Indian families and communities (2000). As I have argued, however, even in such plays about the domestic situations of SAI families, there are still politically resonant themes. They are simply reflected though the characters' journeys, echoing the feminist notion that the personal is indeed political (Heddon, 2006). The play *Your Own Dog Won't Bite You* (1992) by Ronnie Govender is one example. I performed in a production of this work as a student in 2009. The play centres around a SAI mother who is devastated when her son brings home a white girlfriend. It also delves into the socio-political and cultural issue of interracial relationships in an emerging post-apartheid South Africa. In a community where insularity has been a key feature, dealing with such relationships in South African plays is

clearly reflective of the kind of political consciousness that Ronnie Govender asserts is imperative for a writer (Rastogi, 2008).

The play is filled with much comedy including playing on the stereotype of an over bearing and overly dramatic Indian mother. When we performed the play, this was thoroughly enjoyed by audiences. Such work is not to be looked down upon, for theatre is about both entertainment and engagement. Furthermore, stereotypes do not come out of a vacuum and are thus representative of actual people in our lives. However, comedy and satire have often been used as a crutch in SAIT, a "comfort zone" which Naicker argues perpetuates a cycle of oppression with stereotypes being rehashed rather than interrogated (2017: 7). Indeed, when I performed in *Your Own Dog Won't Bite You* (1992), playing the doctor character who tries to placate the nagging wife and mother character Madhu, I found that I did not see my own mother reflected in Madhu but rather in my grandmother, my *Ma*. My parents upon watching the show felt the same and, as doctors themselves, related most to the exasperation of my character. ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, as mothers and wives, had changed. Thus, the fact that the play, performed seventeen years since it was written, was simply enjoyed but unquestioned by largely SAI audiences is a concern.

Naicker states that "comedy remains a dominant genre in Indian theatre in KwaZulu-Natal, with a larger South African Indian audience following" (2017: 21). I find this to be concurrent with preserving a conservative "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373). Rastogi finds that many SAI "are attempting to create a pure version of 'Indian' identity" (2008: 165). This is propagated by an obsession with the fantasy of India, as seen through an idealised Bollywood lens (Rastogi, 2008). Muthal contends there is a strong influence of both Indian mythology and cinema in SAIT (1997). My argument is that what this perpetuates in populist SAIT is a lack of confronting our faults: We deliberately ignore our communities' racist, patriarchal and homophobic attitudes. As a result, stereotypes that are harmful and/or dated, especially with regards to ISAW, SAIW, and/or SAWOID focused on in this thesis, are not subverted nor transcended.

The popularity of comedy in SAIT has, alternatively, also been used to subvert stereotypes and challenge the regressive and damaging thinking prevalent in SAI culture and communities. In *Women in Brown* (1999), for instance, Krijay highlights the hypocrisy of SAI men in a scene where they are watching pornography featuring a white woman but when

an Indian woman appears on screen, they immediately turn the television off, seeing the Indian woman's act as shameful. The added humour and subversion in this scene are that the male characters are played by women. Muthal's *The Divorcee* (1977) comically derides the actions of a married man, Dan, who along with his two friends, fight to woo a divorced Indian woman, Mrs Singh. While they expect the woman to fawn over their affections, she does not and they end up making fools of themselves. When Dan tells Mrs Singh that she "must miss having a man around", she simply responds "Not really" (Naidoo, 2008: 178). Kamini in her one woman play satirises herself, unafraid to make jokes about her own life, even about experiences that have been harmful to her (2013). An example of this can be seen in her take on the derision she constantly faced from her Hindi family members because she was also half-Tamil. SAI colloquially refer to Hindis as *bread ou(s)* and Tamils as *porridge ou(s)*.[28] Thus, Kamini jokes in her play saying that, "See, I was half bread and half porridge, which meant I was a complex carbohydrate. Pardon if that was dry – but it's coz I'm a low GI" (2013: 4).

In *Devi* (2019), I also sought to use comedy to address some of the themes in the play as humour is a way to draw audiences into and enjoy one's work. Furthermore, being overly didactic often results in a preachy tone eliciting an adverse response from audiences. For example, the Bride tries to explain to the older Aunties that she has her own career, drives her own car and lived with her husband before they were married. The Aunties cannot believe this and exclaim with shock, saying "*Arre…*" (Moodley, 2019: 8). While the comic stereotype of an Indian auntie is used here, it is done so in the service of expressing how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have made progress. Naicker states that with her performance art she attempted "to subvert 'Indian comedy' trends by attempting to break the stereotypes from within" (2017: 25). I sought to do the same with *Devi* (2019) and found it to be very effective, both in terms of the flow of the play and the positive audience response. Perhaps this is because "the theatrical genre of comedy permits performers to speak in a direct approach, to articulate the personal and the political – a vocal means of direct theatrical expression" (Naicker, 2017: 21-22).

[28] "*Ou*" or "*Ous*" (plural) is an Afrikaans slang word, the translation of which means "Guys", "Fellows", "Chaps" and/or "Dudes". The full meaning of *bread ou(s)* and/or *porridge ou(s)* can be found in the Glossary. However, what must be noted here is the fusion of Afrikaans and SAI culture, evidenced in this SAI colloquial language. What this reflects is that firstly, SAI culture and identity is entrenched in South Africa and secondly, that SAI culture is not foreign to, but rather an inclusive part of, the multiculturality of South Africa.

ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights have strived to challenge, in our plays, what is not publicly questioned, and kept private expressly for the purposes of maintaining the status quo. We defy the private domain which is constructed to naturalise and confine women in the service of cultural preservation (Govender, 2001). Theatre thus provides a public space for SAIW, like myself, to express ourselves, delve into our experiences and challenge, for instance, the patriarchal gender norms that still persist in our culture, religion and communities. The stage gives us room we may not have in our homes, to explore our identities and represent ourselves. We, along with the SAI writers that Rastogi studies, are therefore showing readers and audiences a world in which our dirty laundry must be aired: candid representation grounded in reality. The use and popularity of comedy in SAIT can be seen, thus, as both an escape for audiences while also countering the prevailing and controlling ideologies that underpin our everyday lives (Rastogi, 2008). Rastogi's answer (2008: 167) to her question regarding the "reality" found within SAI writing echoes this sentiment, and is hence apt to consider here:

> If literature doesn't merely reflect reality but also creates and conditions our perceptions of reality, then the gap between South African literary composition and "reality" can be explained as not a disconnect of literature from reality as much as a *corrective* (original emphasis). Indian fiction projects an alternate universe that rectifies the communities problematic ideologies.

6.11: Recognition – Double Erasure

The stark reality is that there is a lack of recognition of SAI theatrical work in South African theatre. In discussing the issues associated with the term 'Indian', Schauffer declares that he will neither justify nor apologise for using this term any further, as "in our search for the formulation and development of a new cultural order, we have much to learn from the theatrical contribution of Indian South Africans" (1992: 85). Regrettably, such learning has arguably not been taken up, either in research on South African theatre, or in the theatre practice itself. The marginalisation of SAI socio-politically has a domino effect on SAI literature, including plays, which as Frenkel explains have been neglected: "As a body of literature, writing by South Africans of Indian descent has largely been excluded from the canon in post-apartheid South Africa" (2010: 6). The Indian population in South Africa is one

of the smallest minorities in the country. According to Statistics South Africa, in 2019, SAI amounted to only 2,6% of the country's population, just over one and a half million people (Department: Statistics South Africa, 2019). Perhaps this has played a part in literature from this community going unrecognised. However, such exclusion, "suggests that South Africans of Indian descent are marginal to culture to the extent that they almost did not exist during the time period examined" (Frenkel, 2010: 24). Rastogi also questions the lack of scholarship on SAI writing, arguing that it is reflective of a South African bipartite racial model that has, "no room for shades of gray, both in its oppressive and oppositional modes" (2008: 3). Hence, as Durrheim et al. (2011) assert, Indian and Coloured South Africans are caught in the middle of our country's socio-political relations. As a result, shades of brown remain largely ignored in the polarized binary "of race on which apartheid was predicated and which postapartheid South Africa has maintained" (Rastogi, 2008: 8).

Govinden discusses the creative writing of SAIW including novels, short stories, poetry and plays. Frenkel, in referring to Govinden's research explains that, "when inclusion occurs, it is usually a token few male writers who are acknowledged" (2010: 23). Thus, the disregard of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's literary work is not only a racial or cultural exclusion but also a gender based marginalisation. Govinden firstly clarifies that, "the exclusion of Indian women's writings in South Africa must be seen as a dimension of the larger exclusion of women's writings, white and black, from South African literature in general" (2008: 4). However, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are further side-lined as due to the history of apartheid and the separation of racial groups, as well as the dominance of male writers, work by such women has been glossed over by anthologists, publishers and researchers. Consequently, "the literary achievements of Indian women have not been widely known by local Western audiences" (Govinden, 2008: 4).

Govinden ultimately argues that SAIW have been marginalised in the field of South African literature because we are viewed as a minority within a minority (Govinden, 2008). We are considered subgroups of the categories of non-white writers, secondary to, for example, black male and female writers, and within the category of SAI writers, we are seen as secondary to Indian male writers. Therefore, one must be crucially aware of, "the way in which a literary hierarchy tends to be patterned on the social hierarchy" (Govinden, 2008: 4-5). My understanding here is that during apartheid, white writers, institutionally speaking, were at the top of the literary hierarchy. Chetty explains that the exclusion of local black

writings (referring here to the work of African, Coloured and Indian people) "was the principal mode by which power was exercised within the white dominated academe" (2002: 9). After apartheid, efforts to redress inequalities results in black writers being at the top. In both cases, SAI writers, especially Indian women, have been stuck in the middle resulting in what Govinden calls a "cycle of neglect" (2008: 4). This double erasure "has been detrimental, among other things, to the development of a more vigorous culture of writing and publishing, and to a fuller appreciation of the works that have already been produced" (Govinden, 2008: 4). For this reason, academics like Govinden (2008), Rastogi (2008) and Chetty (2002; 2020) have studied SAI writings in order to move the "excluded 'other' to the centre" (Chetty, 2002: 10).

The literary work of Muthal is an example of such exclusion and double erasure. Muthal is a prolific writer yet before reading Govinden's book in 2012, as part of my Masters research, I had never known about her.[29] She has been involved in theatre since the 1950s. Along with SAI male playwrights such as Ronnie Govender, Muthal was a part of developing indigenous theatre in South Africa by and about SAI and/or SAOID. By working experimentally using protest theatre, Muthal was, "the only woman writer in this progressive group" (Govinden, 2008: 111). Muthal, along with several of her fellow playwrights felt and saw, "themselves in the main as South African writers rather than as 'Indian' writers. If their writing is about Indians, they contend, it is still about 'South African' life" (Govinden, 2008: 112).

This inclusionary view is one I agree with as the experiences I write about in my plays reflect my life in South Africa, as a South African. What I am further asserting in this thesis is that SAI experiences are distinctive to this country and thus cannot be disconnected from South African culture. While we may have certain connections with Indians in India and diaspora in, for example, Britain or Australia, these ties are simply popular notions of culture such as "Bollywood films, music and, more recently cricketers…Saris, pots and pans and *objects d'art* (original emphasis) are sought after" (Rajab, 2011: 173). Our identities and

[29] A study of reception into theatre history, particularly in regards to SAIT and renowned playwrights like Muthal, it must be noted, falls outside the scope of my study, which is focused on the construction and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and about us. There is indeed a lack of research on this topic and source material is limited. Hansen (2000), as an example, largely only anecdotally discusses his observations and analysis of the demographics and responses of SAIT audiences. Therefore, how SAIT plays have been received and interpreted in South African theatre and society more broadly is certainly a topic to consider for further research.

experiences are constructed by our everyday South African lives. For instance, only South Africans know what the popular meal *bunny chow* is or the how to play the card game *thunee*. This is because these things were created by and are unique to SAI communities. Therefore, while I agree with Muthal (P1) and Meer (Rastogi, 2008) in terms of identifying and being seen as South African, for me being Indian is undisputedly a part of this as well. Thus, just as Zulu or Afrikaans cultures are seen as a part of South African culture so too must Indian culture in our country. It is not exotic or foreign, rather it is a significant part of the multicultural South Africa in which we all live (Bose, 2009; Pillay, 2017). For these reasons, I see the words 'South African Indian' as one term. SAI emphasises the intertwining of nationality and culture that are integral to my life. Rajab (2011: 173) expounds on this "constructed identity", one that she asserts fourth and fifth generation SAIW also share: "Identity and allegiance are proudly linked to South Africa. There appears to be a very clear definition of a South African Indian."

In the same way that SAI have fought for recognition in their country, the same struggle can be found in the landscape of South African theatre. This chapter focuses on theatrical developments and work by SAI because it is and should be seen as a substantial part of South African theatre as a whole. Like the SAI and/or SAOID playwrights that I have discussed, I want my plays to be accepted in this context. As racial categories continue to pervade South African society, theatre in this country is viewed through the same lens. Thus, theatrical work by SAI is seen as only relevant to SAI people, one of the smallest minority groups in the country. This boxes and places such work on the periphery of South African theatre, and consequently non-recognition and under-representation of SAI and/or SAOID theatre makers results. Ronnie Govender (Govinden, 2008: 112), who is South Africa's most popular SAI playwright, discusses this issue, pointing out that even in post-apartheid South Africa, his work is still seen through the apartheid lens in which individuals and groups are viewed in terms of race and ethnicity:

> I didn't write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world…I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians.

I wholeheartedly agree with Ronnie Govender here. The plays I have written were borne out of my life, my own unique experiences. These experiences, as Ronnie Govender argues, can be universally relatable (Govinden, 2008). Therefore, while plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID may be of particular relevance to their fellow brown women, this does not mean that others of a different race or culture may not find resonance in such work. Indeed, whenever I have presented chapters of this thesis at conferences, for example, I have engaged with a diverse group of South African women who have shared that they can also relate to the issues that I discuss. At the same time, I have also been met with appreciation by my fellow ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who value the representation of our experiences. In staging *Devi* (2019), our audiences were largely SAI, particularly women. They contacted me to book tickets, and I was pleasantly surprised by the response. I view this as a hungry desire for representation, not just in South African theatre but in our country's media and entertainment industries. We want to be seen as a part of South Africa, for our lives to be equally recognised in the places in which we exist. These places include the theatre, a space that, as my thesis argues, offers ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID freedom and empowerment.

6.12: Proliferation and Production

Regarding the post-apartheid context, Govinden states that writings by SAIW in the 1990s are diverse with publications in different genres (2008). Rastogi states that she is filling a critical gap with her research as, "There is very little literary scholarship available on Indians in South Africa…the works of South African Indian writers remain neglected" (2008: 3-5). Still, Rastogi (2008:3) cautions that the publication of literature does not correlate to the spread of that literature:

> South African Indians have been narrating their stories since the time they were transported from India as indentured labor in the middle of the nineteenth century, yet their voices are only being heard now.

When it comes to plays, the voices of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are limited and even where such work exists, it is marginalised. This is both ironic and disheartening because theatre and playwriting was actually SAIW's first "form of artistic expression…in English" (Chetty, 2020: 393). In my experience, as a theatre studies student at both the University of

KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and at the University of the Witwatersrand, the only play by an ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwright that I have studied is Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999). I saw the popularity of this play amongst my peers at university when in our first year, we were assigned the practical task of performing a monologue. Many of my fellow female students of all races, including myself, chose to perform one of the three monologues from *Women in Brown* (1999). The play is revelatory in boldly tackling issues usually kept private in SAI communities. Many plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID do the same and thus, the stage becomes that rare space, as Krijay argues, for us openly to reflect on and challenge the societal norms that greatly affect our lives (1999).

Other SAIW playwrights and plays are referenced in Govinden's work (2008), such as Devi Sarinjeive's *Acts of God* (1997), Rekha Nathoo's *Slices of the Curry Pie* (1997) and Candice Thaker (1997) who, in her work, revised Sarinjeive's script. In her Masters research, Krijay also analyses Sarinjeive's work, her own play *Women in Brown* (1999), and playwright Nadine Naidoo's play *Nadia* (1999). Significantly, as Govinden (2008) discusses, Nathoo and Thaker's plays were produced as part of their studies as Honours students in the University of Natal's Pietermaritzburg drama department. Similarly, *Women in Brown* (1999) was also first produced as part of Krijay's research at UKZN. The first play I performed in that was written and directed by an SAIW was Shirdika Pillai's *U & I* (2008). This was also a production, at a university and for Pillai's Honours studies, that I partook in as a student.

Pillai first wrote and directed *U & I* (2008), thereafter renaming it *Hum Tum* (2010) and staging it professionally at Suncoast[30] in Durban two years later. All three of the plays I have written, *Breathing* (2010), *Race Trouble* (2013) and *Devi* (2019) were all a part of my research and creative work as a student. I did stage *Race Trouble* (2013) at the Musho Theatre Festival[31] in 2013 and the Grahamstown National Arts Festival[32] in 2016, thus the work was able to reach a wider audience. I will also strive to present *Devi* (2019) again in Durban and at various festivals. Krijay wrote *Women in Brown* (1999) as part of her studies, but this play was also performed at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. It has thus received exposure in South African theatre. Kamini wrote *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013)

[30] Suncoast is a large hotel, casino and entertainment complex located at Durban's North beachfront. It is popularly patroned by Durban residents and tourists.
[31] The Musho Theatre festival is an annual festival in Durban of one and/or two hander plays.
[32] The National Arts Festival is the biggest annual performing arts festival in South Africa that takes place in Grahamstown (now Makhanda) in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

as part of her Masters research but she too performed the play at the National Arts Festival and professionally staged it at the Catalina Theatre[33] in Durban in 2014. There are two points to take from all these examples: firstly, often ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who have written plays have done so as part of their university studies. This is arguably due to the fact that in these spaces, we are given the chance to create such work, with university support, fellow students as performers and crew, and minimal costs. Secondly, not all of these plays get to be professionally staged. The reasons for this are complex and relate to many issues; one of these, however, is economic – the costs involved, with the chance of making a profit unlikely in the theatre, as well as a lack of opportunity to produce plays professionally. In my interview with Krijay, she attributed the dearth of plays by SAIW, that are published and/or in professional theatre spaces, to a dwindling theatre culture and as a result, diminishing hope that such work can be viable in this current climate (P2).

6.13: Publishing

When it comes to the publication of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, the situation here is, frankly speaking, dire. There is very little, if any, opportunity and resources to get our work published, while SAI male playwrights such as Ronnie Govender (1996; 2006, 2009), Kessie Govender (2009), Kriben Pillay (2009) and Ashwin Singh (2013; 2017; 2023), have had their work printed. Sarinjeive's play *Acts of God* (1997) will, according to Govinden, be published in a collection entitled *Siyabola – Nine plays by South African Women Playwrights*, edited by Hazel Barnes and Lynn Chemaly (Govinden, 2008). Twelve years later, I have yet to find this collection or any record of it thus, I assume it was not published. Therefore, Sarinjeive, an English professor at Vista University in Sebokeng, an academic, has not been able to have her plays appropriately recognised and published. Such exclusion, however, is to be expected when Muthal, considered by Govinden to be one of the most significant women playwrights in South Africa, has plays that have not been widely circulated nor published and thus, "have suffered from the absence of serious critical consideration" (2008: 116). In fact, Muthal has self-published all her work (plays, memoirs, short stories and poetry), on her own website which I was able to access at no charge.[34] When I asked Muthal why she chose to make her body of work freely accessible, she responded that

[33] The Catalina Theatre was a professional theatre venue located by Durban's harbour.
[34] All Muthal's writings are freely accessible and can be found on her website www.muthalnaidoo.co.za.

she did so in order to share ideas and not for any commercial purposes (P1). At university, we were only able to access *Women in Brown* (1999) because it was freely published in our course manual. This is very rare as largely all the other plays we studied had to be sourced from the library. My understanding here is that Krijay gave permission for this, and so this was the only way we were exposed to her work.

Krijay asserts that the system does not allow marginalised people to write (P2). Yes, we can each write plays of our own accord, but the public performance spaces, exposure and publication of such works is evidently limited for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (P2; P3; Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden, 2008). Kamini adds that there is no support from institutions to publish and as a result, a lot of artistic work remains unknown (P3). She is correct, and the consequences of such marginalisation is that plays about and by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can be lost, if not documented properly. An example of this can be seen in Nathoo's *Slices of the Curry Pie* (1997), a play that I noticed was mentioned in Govinden's book (2008). I managed to speak to Nathoo telephonically, however, when I asked about her play, she sadly no longer had a copy and consequently any record of it had been lost. I only had access to Pillai's play (2008) because I had kept my own copy and she was also able to send me a digital version of the script. Currently, thus, plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID seem to be predominantly available only through various forms of university research. While these are significant records that vitally represent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, this is precisely the reason why such plays should be more publicly accessible in South African theatre and society.

6.14: Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, it is firstly abundantly clear that there is a rich history of SAIT, which has represented SAI experiences, from the time of indenture to the present. This theatre is absolutely entwined in the politics and history of SAI identity and culture. For this reason, much of this chapter has engaged an analysis and discussion of the complexities around SAI identity, including my own position on this matter which I have established. Much creative writing by SAI and/or SAOID has grappled with such themes in their work, especially playwrights like Muthal and Ronnie Govender, two ground-breaking playwrights of both SAIT and South African theatre as a whole.

Evidently both during and after apartheid, “South African writers of Indian extraction seem to have been marginalised in the Black-White dichotomy that pervades the South African literary landscape” (Govinden, 2008: 112). Much artistic and literary work that represents SAI lives, and is created by such writers and artists faces a dual erasure: in both South African arts and literature discourses and within these very communities themselves. It is clear that SAI and/or SAOID writers, through their work, ardently centre their identity and stories as South African and wish to be recognised as such in their own country (Rastogi, 2008). However, generally this concern is seemingly not as important to their fellow brown citizens (Rastogi, 2008). Rastogi therefore finds that there seems to be “no interest among the Indian community or the administration to preserve the Indian past” (2008: 166). SAI novels, plays and poetry, therefore, serve a vital “communal and archival function by recording stories that are often forgotten or dismissed as unimportant” (Rastogi, 2008: 166).

Finally, as a SAIW playwright, I write, like Muthal, to feel liberated and whether my work will always concentrate specifically on SAI or not, it will always focus, “resolutely on South Africa” (Govinden, 2008: 116). The history of the marginalisation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights demonstrates that opportunities, resources, exposure and recognition are clearly very difficult to come by in the South African theatre industry. Despite such obstacles, the stage offers ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID a vital, potential space to harness our creative strength and power, the *shakti* that the goddess Durga declares we have. We are not typically given such space in our families and communities, where, as Krijay articulates, we are confined to the domestic, private sphere (2001). Thus, as a contribution from this thesis, I aim to publish an anthology of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. I strongly believe that this is critical, not just for the preservation and recognition of such work in South African theatre, but also because of the empowering cultural and representative value this has for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Lastly, having established a comprehensive understanding of SAIT, in the next chapter I will present my data analysis of the selected plays and playwright interviews, specifically looking at the representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in these texts.

"representation
is vital
otherwise the butterfly
surrounded by a group of moths
unable to see itself
will keep trying to become the moth"

representation by Rupi Kaur
(2017: 239)

CHAPTER 7: ISAW, SAIW AND/OR SAWOID PLAYWRIGHTS AND THEIR PLAYS

7.1: Introduction

The creation of any artistic work is grounded in our experience. Whether we tell our stories through realism or more avant-garde genres, or through the modes of theatre, music, television, film or visual art, these are just mediums and metaphors. I believe that one of our deepest desires and needs to create emanates from our identities and experiences. This is distinctively evident in plays written by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, including myself. This chapter, through a reflexive thematic analysis of my playwrights' interviews, and a textual analysis of their selected plays, specifically sets out to analyse the significant connections between our plays and our identities, experiences, environments and histories.

When undertaking autoethnographic studies, one's work must be highly reflexive and infused with one's subjectivity, personal experiences, and appropriate academic research, to connect and support one's socio-cultural arguments and findings (Blanchard, 2018). Therefore, in this chapter, I have engaged with the answers given by my playwright interviewees, responding to their ideas and reflecting on my own experiences. As a playwright myself, I must also consider the very same questions I have asked these artists. Accordingly, I have explored my response to the topics under discussion as well, which, in

turn, allows the interviewee, the reader of this thesis and myself to understand, more fully and deeply, the phenomenon under discussion in my research (Blanchard, 2018).

I established in chapter three the purposive criteria I employed in choosing playwrights Muthal, Krijay and Kamini (see Figure 3), and their respective selected plays, as the sample I needed to interview and analyse for my research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this chapter, I comparatively examine the data I collected and reflexively thematically analysed from my interviews with the playwrights, in conjunction with the data I collected and textually analysed from their plays. From my analysis of the playwright interviews, I have established five themes around which this chapter is structured. I will analyse the selected plays in relation to these interrelated themes which are:

- Constructing Identities
- Intersectionality of Religion, Tradition, Ethnicity, Culture
- Representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID
- Voices, Identities and Empowerment through Creative Practice: Playwriting and Theatre Making
- Space and Limits: South African Theatre

These themes or data sets, emerged from my analysis of the interviews and a textual analysis of the selected plays. Such sets are created by identifying similar thematic areas of interest in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Braun and Clarke (2016: 740) explain, I "actively crafted" my themes, choosing, defining and applying them to the data. For instance, any point made about the influence of personal life on writing falls under the topic of playwriting and theatre making; alternatively, any responses engaging identity falls under the first thematic area about constructing identities.

7.2: Constructing Identities

The first question I posed to each playwright is what I questioned about myself upon beginning this thesis: "How do we each identify ourselves?" While I instinctively felt, in my whole being, that I identified as an SAIW, Muthal emphatically stated that, "*my identity does not include the word 'Indian…I am a woman born and raised in South Africa*" (P1).

Muthal's statement here is concomitant with her fellow SAOID and/or SAI writers who have also ardently asserted their nationality, as South Africans, as the foremost part of their identities (Rastogi, 2008).

I find Muthal's argument that race is a false construct (P1) to be reflective, consciously or not, of a poststructural position, which views categories, like race, as constructs (Barker, 2010). Crucially, however, while these categories may not necessarily be natural or eternal to society, they do have potent and actual impact on our lives and identities (Hall, 1997). Muthal, in fact, writes that there is a "pressure to acknowledge if not assert an ethnic affiliation because race is still a major factor in our thinking in South Africa" (1997: 39). Although Muthal's statement was written 25 years ago, I contend that it still rings true in South Africa today, where the consequences of colonialism and apartheid have resulted in continued tension within racial relations (Durrheim et al., 2011). Our social, political and cultural histories mean that the key categories of race, gender and class intersect and cannot simply be disregarded. Therefore, each individual either actively identifies, dis-identifies or counter- identifies (Weedon, 2004). Hence identity categories, while arbitrary, affect how we are perceived by others and how we identify ourselves (Hall, 1997; Morley, 2019).

I concur with Muthal's point: race is indeed a construct that only has as much meaning as we give it. Nevertheless, upon reflection of my own "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373), and in considering the history of indentureship for SAI, I recognise that SAI identity is inextricably linked with the complexities of colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Seedat-Khan, 2012). This is captured in *Devi* (2019) in the scene where the Indentured Woman faces abuse from the British Colonial Officer and, due to her inferior position, is forced to accept a marriage proposition from the Indentured Man (Moodley, 2019: 28-30). Race is so steeped into our societies, our lives, our skins and bones that it is, arguably, never not going to be a part of who we are. The concept of intersectionality acknowledges and embraces this, while also recognising that identity categories such as race and gender must not be understood in an essentialist way. These categories are an embodied part of our histories and everyday lives, and thus, these multiple positionalities are integral to exploring and constructing our identities (Lutz et al., 2011). Muthal's standpoint is not contrary to intersectionality because she does not deny the construct of race; rather, she defies it by actively dis-identifying (Weedon, 2004).

Ironically, for someone so assured of their identity as an SAIW, I often have to answer questions and puzzling looks about who and what I am. I have very fair skin, and because of this, I am often seen to be of a different race (such as white), or part of a different religion (such as Islam), or of an entirely different nationality. I have had people tell me that they thought I was Egyptian, Spanish, Greek or Middle Eastern several times. This speaks to the multiplicity and arbitrariness of identity categories, such as race, which should not be seen as fixed or inherent (Hall, 1997). My ambivalent appearance on my life has become a bit of a running joke, with my siblings always telling me that my parents must have brought the wrong baby home from the hospital. While I do laugh along, whenever I am questioned about my identity, I find myself wanting to assert my culture, race and nationality as an SAI even more. It is not a pressure for me, as Muthal contends, to acknowledge my ethnicity (1997). I am proud of it. Additionally, while I understand Muthal's stance regarding the term 'Indian' (P1; 1997), I disagree. An SAI is not a foreigner in South Africa (Pillay, 2017; Rastogi, 2008). I thus contend that the term and conceptualisation 'South African Indian' should be seen as one composite identifier, emphasising the intersecting of nationality and culture that are integral to, as I argue, SAI lives.

Due to the forced segregation that South Africans had to abide by during apartheid, Muthal argues that one's culture also becomes the culture of apartheid (P1). Part of such a culture results in the development of segregated, insular communities, an aim of the apartheid regime. In turn, the development and fortification of SAI culture and SAIT is due to apartheid-based segregation (Naidoo, 1997). I find that the insularity of SAI communities engendered by apartheid is arguably why SAI culture and SAIT is perceived as separate and/or "other" (Pillay, 2017: 82). Perpetuating such frames of reference is another reason why Muthal rejects racial classifications.[35] The continued use of such words and categories, Muthal avows, "*keeps us in mental group areas. As long as we feel the need to use these terms, so long will we continue to remain in apartheid*" (P1).

Muthal (P1) also points to the influence of English, western and colonial culture that has spread all over the world, including South Africa, which influenced her upbringing and identity in South Africa:

[35] African, Coloured, Indian and White were distinct and legislated constructed racial categories of the apartheid regime. These categories continue to be used in South African society post-apartheid (Pillay, 2017).

> *And as these systems were determined by the dominant group and are based on their culture, we have all come under the same cultural influence and have adapted to it…But I do not feel a lack in my identity as South African because I read Shakespeare not Tagore. As Ronnie Govender has pointed out we are products of the environments in which we were born.*

I definitely relate to Muthal's points here. I too have grown up in a western education system and am well versed in Shakespeare. I feel, like Muthal, that it is a part of who I am as a South African, and the spaces in which I have been raised, environments that are a consequence of the socio-political and cultural impacts of colonialism and apartheid. SAI have been strongly influenced by Western culture which has "historically dominated education and leisure in South African cities, where most of the community lives…" (Naidoo, 1997: 30). Thus, Muthal asserts that, "In ourselves we represent a fusion of cultures – Western-African-Indian" (2017: 42). The British Empire was indeed extensive and Muthal also astutely points out that there is no such thing as being purely Indian, and that even people in India cannot claim this as "*they too have come under the influence of Western ideologies, culture and technology*" (P1). Spivak, too, discusses the complexities of her identity in this regard, reflecting on her postcolonial education, her relationship to both the languages she speaks and writes in, Bengali and English, and her connection to her home country 'India' (1990). Spivak argues that she does not write much about 'India' because for people like her it "has always been an artificial construct…" (1990: 39). I agree with both Muthal and Spivak's points here regarding refuting any notions of pure "Indian-ness" and that any sense of identity, whether provenance - or race based - are constructs (P1; 1990: 39). However, just because "Indian-ness" (Spivak, 1990: 39) or "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373) is a construct that has multiple meanings, it still has cultural value. It informs our identities and lived experiences (Hall, 1997). I therefore purport that "Indian-ness", because it is a construct, can be a myriad of things and need not be traditionally rigid: it can be, as Spivak says we all are, "absolutely plural" (1990: 38).

Krijay's notions regarding identity also follow this thinking. She states that, "*I've never consciously seen myself as any one thing*" (P2). When I asked her how she would identify herself, her response was that she would say she is a "*South African female of Indian descent*" (P2). Kamini gave a similar, though less definitive answer than Krijay. While explaining that she identifies as a South African woman, she also mentions that she identifies

as Indian as well (P3). Neither Krijay nor Kamini objected to being referred to as 'Indian'. Krijay said "*I'm aware that others see my race and gender first*" (P2). Many researchers have studied Krijay's work, both in the theatre and her stand-up comedy, and all have referred to her as an SAIW (Govender, 2014; Naicker; 2017; Malimba, 2012). Even Krijay in her own Master's research, reflects on her play *Women in Brown* (1999) in relation to her identity, as an SAIW (Govender, 1999). However, Krijay intentionally italicises the word '*Indian*' (original emphasis) in her thesis in order to contest the notion of Indian identity as fixed, and the implication that SAI communities and culture(s) are homogenous (1999). As with Muthal (1997) and Spivak (1990), Krijay's ideas, I argue, also reflects a poststructural position as she asserts that SAI culture is imagined, socially constructed and "a product of its history" (1999: 9).

Kamini's (P3) expounded answer reflects the complexities involved in being a part of an ethnicity that is connected to a nation, race, culture and a global diaspora:

> *I feel like India, to use the term "Indian" puts me in a place that I'm not geographically in, or have any connection to in any way, shape or form besides historically. Also, maybe I do consider…Because when I fill out my application forms I have to tick Indian, so I do identify as Indian. But I'd say if I travelled internationally, and someone asked me "Where are you from?" I'd say I'm South African, I wouldn't say I'm South African Indian, I suppose because they'd see. So I think…It's actually a difficult question.*

In her Masters research, Kamini looks at how South African women have explored their identities and contexts through stand-up comedy. Throughout her research, Kamini refers to herself as an SAIW. Of course, her thesis and play were written eight years ago and, understandably, her thinking regarding how she identifies herself, and how she reflects on this, has changed. Krijay (P2) too admits that even though her artistic work, most notably her stand-up comedy performances, are bound up in her identity, she chooses to not pay too much attention to that:

> *It's perhaps subconscious. Consciously I try not to think or entertain my identity that much. Odd, I know as a lot of my material is based on it but it's a strange relationship. Identity frees and limits one at the same time.*

Grappling with our identities and the politics involved in such relations are indeed paradoxically both restricting and liberating (Hall, 1997). For me, however, this is not a dilemma; my feminist poststructural theoretical framework (see Figure 2) provides the lens with which to explore such complexities. All the playwrights I interviewed also indicated to me – consciously or not – a poststructural understanding of identity: Muthal discussed notions of race as a false construct while recognising the need or pressure, as she argues, to nevertheless assert ethnic affiliation (Barker, 2010; Hall, 1997); Krijay discussed the plurality, freedoms and limits of identity (Kristeva, 1981); and Kamini, along with articulating how complex identity is for each individual and thus how it is a difficult question to answer simply, added that discovering one's identity is also a journey (P3). She is correct; 'finding oneself' as is popularly said, is a continual navigation of our identities and one of the ways in which we explore this is through art forms, such as theatre. In plays, for example, playwrights such as Muthal, Krijay and Kamini have dealt with many subject matters in their work including motherhood, marriage, divorce, religion, ethnicity, politics and freedom. The overarching theme at the root of such artistic work is identity: the fight, challenge and lifelong journey to find who we are in relation to the world, country, communities, cultures and families that deeply shape us. Exploring each playwright's respective identity was therefore the most crucial thematic area of data analysis to first establish, as it significantly impacts every theme I crafted from my study of the playwrights' interviews.

7.3: Intersectionality of Religion, Tradition, Ethnicity, Culture

Religion, tradition, ethnicity and culture are interrelated sub-themes. As such, the data analysis of the playwrights responses' on these sub-themes is discussed throughout this data set where it is most relevant to my analysis and argument. I must note here, for example, that I will discuss Muthal's spiritual views under the sub-theme of religion, while examining Krijay and Kamini's religious beliefs respectively under the sub-themes of tradition and ethnicity.

7.3.1: Religion

ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have varied backgrounds, coming from different religions, cultures and ethnicities. This is plainly evident in just the responses regarding religion from the three playwrights I interviewed, each one holding entirely different religious beliefs from the other. Muthal says that although she is a Hindu by birth, she has

been an atheist all her life. She asserts that atheism "is my understanding of existence…as my faith is in the human condition, it is not a reflection of hope and fear; it is based in reality" (Naidoo, 2017: 52). Muthal explains that faith, religious rituals and mysteries always baffled her thus she was not a believer, but rather an outsider who could not develop any devotion or deference for rituals (Naidoo, 2017). She believes that instead of ritual and tradition, the dignity and progress of a community lies in the concept of *ubuntu* (Naidoo, 2017). This is a Southern African philosophy, which is, at heart, about mutual respect, by recognising the humanity within and through each other: "a person is a person through other persons" (Naidoo, 2017: 51).

I relate to much of what Muthal is saying here. My *Ma* was a woman obsessed with ritual. When we went to the temple, she would repeatedly tell my brother, sister and I that we must walk around the temple three times, we must hold our hands a certain way and that when doing any kind of offering we must use our right hand. This always infuriated my brother, who would refuse because he is ambidextrous. To this day, when we celebrate *Raksha Bandhan*, which celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters, we tie my brother's *rakhi* on his left hand. Normally, it is done on the right. Historically, there has always been prejudice and discrimination towards those who are left-handed, as is evident in Hindu religious practices where we are always told to do anything with our right hands only (Srinivasan, 2011).

Ultimately, I grew up simply accepting many of the cultural and religious norms I saw and partook in, never questioning or delving into the meanings of these ISAs until university, until, as I established in chapter one, the death of my *Ba*. For the first time, I became aware that perhaps some of the customs and practices I was seeing taking place in my culture and family were problematic and needed to be questioned. Because of my research and creative endeavours, I actually had to read *Hinduism For Dummies* (Srinivasan, 2011) to understand my own religion. While I do feel a bit of shame in admitting this, I think it is important to acknowledge, not just for myself but also for my peers. Due to the loss of vernacular languages amongst young SAI (Maharaj, 2013), I believe that we often do not fully understand all of the prayers we are reciting. Muthal writes that, from her childhood, "the rituals of the religion meant nothing to me. As I did not understand them, I could not develop reverence for them" (Naidoo, 2017: 8). The above reflections echo Saussure's point that we are ignorant about the languages we use (2011), and that the words we speak and pray in are

actually part of an interdependent system that affects our everyday lives, cultures and representation (Barker, 2010; Hall, 1997; Harcourt, 2007).

Crucially, progress has taken place, as many Hindus in South Africa, particularly the youth, are less interested in the blind faith and ritual of religion our grandmothers so ardently abided, and are rather seeking a more philosophical and reflective orientated Hinduism (Maharaj, 2013). Maharaj wisely states that in South Africa, "there is a need to turn Hinduism into a vibrant religion which reverberates on all aspects of life, logically and rationally" (2013: 96). While there are democratic Hindu religious organisations that consider and are rooted in South African contexts, there are some religious organisations in which poorly trained priests whose focus "almost exclusively on rituals…are…responsible for the malaise in the Hindu community" (Maharaj, 2013: 95). The obsession with doggedly sticking to ceremony, anecdotally seen in my brother's reaction to our *Ma*, was largely negative. For Muthal, *ubuntu* is where real faith is experienced and all other "religious rituals, like social traditions, requiring strict conformity, are a means of maintaining community" (2017: 51).

7.3.2: Tradition

Muthal's argument suggests that religion and rituals are rigidly used to uphold conservatism. For instance, as a young girl, Muthal was obligated to clean "the little Tamil temple" by the officiating priest, who was their neighbour, precisely because "that was woman's work and as he had sons and no daughters, the job was given to me" (Naidoo, 2017: 8). Such customs or acts engender unequal communities which maintain the status quo, under the guise of preserving tradition and family. Thus, the key patriarchal structures of housework, culture and sexuality that Walby (1990) delineates have historically, and even presently, significantly affected the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. As I argue in this thesis, we are marginalised in such patriarchal societies and have been expected, for centuries, to look after our families above all else (Carrim, 2016; Desai & Vahed, 2010; Ginwala, 1985; Jagganath, 2008; Kuper, 1956; Meer 1972; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012).

When I asked Muthal (P1) if she felt strict conformity has continued to restrict SAIW under the pretext of maintaining customs, traditions and communities, she poignantly responded:

> *Every individual is both a conformist and a non-conformist. There are those who are strictly conformist and do not question; there are those who challenge and bring about change and there are those who challenge for greater understanding. It is a destiny that we each choose.*

There is much to unpack in Muthal's statement here. Firstly, once again, her take on each of us both conforming and not conforming, is indicative – consciously or not – of a poststructural understanding of identity politics, identity construction, and how much impact the communities around us have on how we each identify ourselves (Hall, 1997; Morley, 2019). ISAs like religion, culture and family, indeed influence our sense of selves and how we conform, yet crucially these institutions function through such concealment and symbolism that we typically fail to realise we are being subjugated (Althusser, 1971, 2006). Secondly, in the three kinds of people Muthal describes here, I found myself, my *Ma*, and my mother. My *Ma* always conformed and never questioned; my mother in all her religious and spiritual pursuits has never looked for definitive answers or solutions to problems, but rather for guidance to understand. However, she instilled in me that questions can and should always be asked. I want to push further, to inquire and challenge for without questioning, there is no awareness, and without awareness, there is no change. This is, as Muthal describes, the destiny I have chosen (2017).

The strict conformity of religion and culture and its effects on women is challenged in Muthal's *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990). This play looks at the ancient Sanskrit myth from the viewpoint of the women characters in the Epic and "becomes a metaphor for the patriarchal society in which women function mainly as adjuncts" (Naidoo, 2008: 215). Heroines such as Draupadi in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990) have escaped the confinement of the Epic to seek freedom on the stage, which they want to make their new home (Naidoo, 2008). Textual analysis examines how a text, in this instance a play, has been constructed (Given, 2008). By making the setting in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990) the stage itself, Muthal is directly constructing the theatre as a space of freedom. When I asked her to affirm if this was indeed the case, she asserted that, "*the stage in my play is a space for free exploration of women's capabilities. It is a symbol of freedom from the conventions and traditions that bind women in the Mahabharata*" (P1).

Draupadi struggles with whom she is expected to be saying, “We are women. We were born to be wives and mothers” (Naidoo, 2008: 236). Muthal gives her characters the space – the stage – to form a new reality, one that “escapes the social conditioning that denies them their identities…” (Naidoo, 2008: 215). Such social conditioning is entrenched and perpetuated through ISAs (Althusser, 1971, 2006) which are upheld by repressive and productive power relations (Barker, 2010; Foucault, 1982). Thus, in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990), Muthal shows that it is impossible for the women characters to exist authentically in the Epic as their agency and identities are restricted in such a society. The stage, by contrast, offers a space of liberation for the women. This, however, does not come easily to them and Muthal shows us the strong pull that tradition and customs hold over us. The character Gandhari wears a blindfold to show obedience and faithfulness to her husband Dhritarashtra, who is blind. Initially, Gandhari only leaves the Epic to follow her beloved sister-in-law Kunthi and refuses to take her blindfold off when the others demand that she no longer needs to do such things. In fact, Gandhari is never able physically to enter the fictional ‘stage’ space the women have made. Draupadi says, “She couldn’t get in because she is still trapped in Epic traditions. She can’t cut herself free” (Naidoo, 2008: 218). When Kunthi urges Gandhari to make some changes, her response is, “Are you mad? Do you expect me to interfere with tradition?” (Naidoo, 2008: 217). The answer to this from the women characters in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990) would be a resounding yes!

For religion and culture to thrive, it must be allowed to be questioned and to adapt. As a child, my *Ma* would take my brother and I to the Divine Life Society in Reservoir Hills for religious services. Such reformist Hindu movements focus on deeply studying scripture, communal religious services (*satsang*) and inner spirituality (Gopal et al., 2014). While researching for my thesis, I came across the following passage, written by the founder of the Divine Life Society Sri Swami Sivananda (no date: 28) in a small book I found at home, titled *Glory of Hinduism*:

> The laws and rules, which are based entirely on our social position, time and clime, must change with the changes in society and the changing conditions of different ages and different parts of the world. Then only can the progress of Hindu society be fully assured.

The irony is that this book most likely belonged to my *Ma*, the most rigid religious and cultural conformist in my family; however, I need only look at my own relationship with Hinduism to find resonance and assurance in the above passage. I only began to appreciate and actually learn about my own religion and culture when I started to question it. Additionally, as Muthal astutely points out, Hinduism is about the journey towards enlightenment and as such, I must "find that which gives real meaning to my existence…I cannot simply accept that I have no choice" (Naidoo, 2017: 41). Thus, through firstly asking questions, and then writing and staging *Devi* (2019), as well as intensively researching and writing this thesis, I have found a deeper understanding of "my Hinduism", and in turn, my identity.

Krijay, conversely, is Christian and says that recently she has come to consider this to be a part of her identity (P2). Since the time of indenture in South Africa, there have been Indian Christians; missionary efforts to convert Hindus and Muslims[36], who were regarded as heathens, was a part of the agenda of colonialism (Gopal et al., 2014). While critics rightly point to the spread of Christianity as a form of justification for colonialism manipulatively used by settlers, to say that such Indians today are merely converts of an oppressive system would be unfair. Gopal et al. (2014: 33) state that, "in the past two decades, there has been an increasing trend towards conversion to Christianity, particularly among Hindus of South Indian origin." Such SAI Christians have converted due not just to a change in religious beliefs but also because of factors including social problems, poverty, illness and caste prejudice (Ojong, 2012). As Ojong (2012: 442) explains, SAI Christians face stigma in their communities for their religious choices:

[36] Discussing, in expansive detail Indian South African, SAI and/or SAOID Muslim, Christian and/or atheist history is outside of the scope of my study. However, what must be noted is that religion has always been a significant factor that has informed the lives of Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID. As Gopal et al. (2014: 31) explain, "Despite…the rigours of indentured labour, organised religion began to take form from the beginning." Furthermore, while Hindus and Muslims largely resisted Christian missionaries' attempts to convert them, in recent decades the number of Christians has grown (Gopal et al., 2014). Therefore, the development of religion(s) for Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID is formed from complex migratory, diasporic, colonial and apartheid connections in a pre-democratic South Africa to a free, multicultural post-apartheid country in which all religions and marriages are recognised (Khan, 2012). The ISA of religion is thus distinctive in South Africa: whether one is Hindu, Muslim, Christian and/or atheist, our lived experiences, identities and "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373) as Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID are collectively shaped by religion(s) in our country. Hence, in SAI communities, religion(s) and culture(s) are paradoxically both distinct and similar. As such, while this thesis focuses chiefly on Hindu ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, such research still resonates, at varying levels, with ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who hold differing religious beliefs.

> The inability of practicing Hindus in South Africa to understand why some of their fellow co-religionists convert has led to a simplistic explanation that converts were people who had failed to understand the true nature of Hinduism and, being ignorant of their culture, did not merit a place in the "Indian" community.

It is these views that are, in fact, ignorant. Desai and Vahed explain that during the time of indenture, Indians were excited about festivals of all religions including Christian worship (2010). They recount the story of a priest who marvelled that the indentured came out to celebrate midnight mass for Christmas in 1862 singing hymns, beating drums and bringing a crib decorated with angels (Desai & Vahed, 2010). My Hindu family, like many others, have always put up a Christmas tree in our home and exchanged presents, celebrating the festive season every year. The true nature of Hinduism is, actually, to respect all religions with the belief in tolerance as a core value. As Srinivasan explains, "With this same spirit, modern Hindus accept all religions to be true and self-contained" (2011: 11). Indeed, Gopal et al. (2014: 37) assert that in their interviews with South African Hindus for their study, selected through snowball sampling, one of the special aspects of Hinduism that respondents valued about their Hindu beliefs was its "tolerance towards other faiths." This is one of the tenets of my religion as a Hindu that I value most, that our varying beliefs and practices are merely different paths to God.

The prejudice around SAI Christianity reflects close minded traditional thinking, deeming what should or should not be a part of SAI communities (Gopal et al., 2014). Integration in SAI communities, albeit to different extents, does take place, reflecting diverse religions and cultures. For example, at a SAI Christian wedding, the bride may not wear a white western dress but a traditional Indian outfit. People from both religious communities, for example, celebrate Diwali. Prejudice and discrimination, on the basis of culture and/or religion, however, remains an issue in SAI communities. My argument here is that feminist poststructural thinking (see Figure 2) is thus imperative to understanding that notions of "Indian-ness" are artificial (Spivak, 1990: 39). There is no pure or authentic 'Indian' way to be (P1). We construct "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373) and therefore, SAI Christian and/or SAI Islamic cultural practices, for instance, are and should be considered as much a part of SAI culture and communities as any SAI Hindu rituals.

7.3.3: Ethnicity

Kamini is, like myself, Hindu and she is also of mixed ethnicity, being half-Tamil and half-Hindi. However, our experiences of being culturally mixed have been vastly different. Even though Indians have been in this country for over 160 years, the issue of caste prejudice that Gopal et al. (2014: 33) discuss "has always been a feature of Hindu society in South Africa." Indenture meant that in a new environment, the usual rules associated with caste could not be observed fully. However, caste-based ideologies and prejudices persisted in South Africa, especially in terms of north/south divisions[37] (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Such divisive thinking continues in SAI communities. Generally, Hindi or Gujarati originate from the north of India and typically have fairer skin, while Tamil or Telegu people originate from the south of India and typically have a darker complexion. There has always been tension between those of North versus those of South Indian descent in South Africa. This can be seen in complaints from South Indians who argue that the SAI radio station *Lotus FM* does not play enough Tamil and Telugu music, focusing primarily on popular Bollywood music which is mostly in Hindi (Lutchman, 2019). There are also often arguments over which date should be officially decided, on the South African calendar, for Diwali each year as traditionally, it is celebrated over two days in South Africa with South Indians observing on the first day and North Indians on the second (Devan, 2017).

A significant difference between North and South Indians is related to caste and ethnicity. Caste has been a highly contentious matter in SAI communities. In the past, the mixing of castes and ethnicities, especially through marriage, was often forbidden or taboo. Of course, outdated notions like sub-caste (*jathi*) identities such as *Brahmin* (a member of the highest Hindu caste)[38], have become largely insignificant in terms of marriage today. However, caste mindfulness is still dominant in SAI communities. Thus, although there is far more mixing of different castes and ethnicities, "caste consciousness [of a superior status] is more significant than actual caste maintenance in real society" (Gopal et al., 2014: 33). Effectively, this means that while the integration of diverse SAI cultural groups is often accepted and even celebrated today, there is still an affiliation with caste identification, and

[37] Culturally and historically, "although India is one country, there are striking differences between the north and south" with its "own regional languages, cuisine, attire, customs, and artistic expression" (Sodha, 2021: np). These differences have influenced, and continue to influence SAI culture, communities and identities.
[38] Within various cultural and linguistic ethnicities, such as Gujarati, there are sub-castes within these communities that are socially stratified and hierarchical.

the notion of superiority associated with this. Such thinking has no factual basis, in the same way that apartheid racial hierarchies had no validity.

While I take great pride in and enjoy both my Tamil and Gujarati cultures, I hold no regard for any sub-caste Indian system. Comments and exclusions my siblings and I have experienced because of caste prejudices, has especially been directed towards our Tamil heritage. My mother's Gujarati family is of the *Brahmin* caste but as I am half-Tamil, I remember jokingly being told that this negated my *Brahmin* lineage. I have also once been told that because I was half-Tamil, I was a half-breed. Kamini also recalls this term in her play saying that she grew "up as a half-breed" (2013: 4). Male *Brahmin* children partake in a *Janoi* ceremony, a rite of passage for Gujarati boys wherein they tie a thread of three strands around their torso, each symbolising their duty to God, their parents and their spiritual teachings. This thread is worn for the rest of one's life (Desai, 2017). I attended the *Janoi* ceremonies of my Gujarati male cousins. My brother, however, never underwent this ritual as he was half-Tamil.

Kamini, once again, uses comedy to tackle and highlight the hypocrisy with such thinking in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013). She points to the colourism[39] entrenched in the Indian caste system with lower caste, darker skinned Indians being seen as inferior to higher caste, fair skinned Indians. Kamini (2013: 4) ironically derides a Hinduism that should serve all its devotees yet exists in a culture that is hierarchical:

> Brahmin always sounded to me like Mr Min's brother – Bra Min. But according to the caste system – you can all stand by the fire and say swaha[40]; just know that God

[39] Colourism is prejudice or discrimination against people on the basis of their skin tone, where mainly light skin is seen as more desirable than dark skin (Jagarnath, 2016). In India, Jagarnath (2016: np) notes that the preference for light skin cannot "be divorced from the caste system, the country's North-South divide, the impact of colonialism and the manner in which capitalism has exploited these prejudices via the beauty industry." The effects of this for Indian South Africans, SAI and/or SAOID are complex, as Jagarnath (2016: np) explains that, "While there are some overlaps with the Indian experience in terms of the desirability of light skin tones…", most SAI "have very little direct connection to India." Indeed, "in South Africa, the matter of skin colour is often classed and shot through with very localised understandings of differences between North and South Indians" (Jagarnath, 2016: np). What is significant to note about Jagarnath's analysis of colourism amongst SAI communities is that she speaks to our specific socio-political and cultural contexts (2016). She explains that for many, including herself, because of her family's beliefs, and the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), "colourism was not always a significant presence in our families" (Jagarnath, 2016: np). Nonetheless, she does point out that there are SAI families "in which colourism is intensely felt. In some cases it can even result in discrimination within the intimate space of the family and, as a result, significant personal trauma." (Jagarnath, 2016: np).

[40] See Glossary for meaning of *swaha*.

> will take Bra Min's swahas first and if you were a lower caste consider your swahas invalid – God just wants you by the fire so He can burn you. "Not that it would make much difference – you look like burnt wood anyway."

The obsession with fair skin in Indian communities globally continues to be a problematic issue, a consequence no doubt from our caste structures, which was further exacerbated under colonialism, a system wherein whiteness was valued, above all else (Waheed, 2020). Bollywood, India's Hindi language film industry, is highly biased in its casting of fair-skinned actors (Waheed, 2020). The impact of representation in Bollywood is immense, not just in India but worldwide. Bose (2009) and Rastogi (2008) have pointed out the superficial, yet still impactful, notions of Bollywood fantasy that influence SAI culture. Indeed, South African academic and filmmaker Subeshini Moodley explains that, "in the Indian diaspora, films from India are considered to be crucial textual links…used to inform the maintenance of culture outside of the homeland" (2008:117). Hence, in SAI culture, Bollywood films are not just entertainment, they clearly inform the experiences and identities of SAI.

For example, the cultural obsession with fair skin I have seen first-hand in my SAI friends, mostly women, who avoid the sun and will even cover their arms when driving so that their skin does not darken. They say I do not understand their experience and the stigma they grew up with as young girls, namely that fair skin equalled beauty. They are correct; I never experience such discrimination. Conversely, I have always been aware of my fair skin and how it has separated me from my father and my Tamil culture. My father has much darker skin than me and thus, while we have some similar facial features, we do not look alike. My surname, Moodley, is a very common South African Tamil surname. When people hear that I am a Moodley, they are surprised until I say I am half-Gujarati, saying that this must be why I have fair skin. Whenever I went to Shree Ranganathar Temple with my *Ma* in Greenwood Park[41], I would often feel people staring at me, as if I was out of place in this Tamil temple because of my skin colour. I find, ultimately, that because externally I appear to look more Gujarati, I am bothered by this perceived separation between myself and my Tamil family and heritage.

[41] While most of my father's family has now moved out of the Greenwood Park area, the local Tamil temple, Shree Ranganathar Temple, is where my family goes for religious and cultural purposes. My *Ma* dearly loved this place and was a devotee for many years at the temple.

My own, as well as Kamini's experiences and observations show that caste and ethnicity are evidently still significant to SAI lives and identities. Notably, it is the perceptions or "caste consciousness", as Gopal et al. (2014: 33) term – effectively what each group should stereotypically represent – that continues to pervade our communities. Indeed, Singh and Harisunker (2010: 48) found in their study that even when conservative SAI families wish for their children to marry within not only their own religion, but also their own ethnolinguistic group, these children ironically "neither spoke the languages which they claimed to be theirs, nor was religion a major factor in their daily lives." Thus, the outward signification of caste still holds weight in SAI communities. How one is perceived remains relevant and those whose choices and identities differ from cultural norms and expectations do face pressure to conform to perceived standards determined by ISAs such as SAI religions, ethnicities and families (Weedon, 2004). Ultimately, our identities are influenced by conformist representations which are created and perpetuated through a constructionist system of common languages, cultural signs, symbols and practices (Barker, 2010; Hall, 1997, 2005; Weedon, 2004). Such dominant perceptions and representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and culture are countered and challenged in the plays written by Muthal, Krijay and Kamini.

7.3.4: Culture

The prejudices my siblings and I faced largely came from outside of our family and lay more in community and cultural customs. Herein lies the difference between myself and Kamini's experiences of being mixed. While my parents were unsure if their Gujarati and Tamil parents would give them their blessing to get married in 1980, they fortunately did receive this and were able to happily build their marriage and family. For Kamini's parents, this was not the case as her Hindi mother and Tamil father were not allowed to be together, to the point that her mother was kicked out of her home. Moreover, as a teacher, Kamini's mother had to face a school inspector who came to monitor her behaviour as she was an unmarried woman living with a man (P3). Kamini's parents did register their marriage but later divorced. Kamini (P3) felt that she was picked on by her mother's Hindi family which made her rebel and reject her Tamil culture:

> *So my Tamil side never picked on me ever, it was always my mum's side. And there were always comments about porridge and bread. So sometimes they'd have those prayers, and then everyone has to bow. And if I'd bow in the wrong way, it's like,*

> *"She has no direction because she's porridge" type of thing. Those comments were always thrown around…And then I'd start to act out, and then I'd want to reject everything that's Tamil to try and fit in.*

As I explained in chapter six, SAI colloquially refer to Hindis as *bread ous* and Tamils as *porridge ous*. In our interview, Kamini further discussed, that she not only rejected her Tamil culture but her whole Indian culture and assimilated very hard to western culture, because she attended a Catholic school with predominantly white students (P3). It was only in her later years of high school that Kamini says she found her way back "*and saw the beauty of it, because I do find a lot of elements that are very beautiful about the culture*" (P3). I can relate to what Kamini is saying here, as the aftermath of my *Ba's* death and funeral rituals made me distance myself from my religion and culture. Thirteen years later – learning more about Hinduism, SAI culture, its gendered politics and history, and most especially by researching and writing *Devi* (2019), and this thesis – I too have been able to journey back and locate my identity in my SAI Hindu culture.

Kamini reflected on the hurtful comments that affected her in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) as well as the taboo of her parents' relationship. Her work is autoethnographic and this is evident in the following excerpt from the play where Kamini (Govender, 2013: 4) connects her personal and familial circumstances to the larger cultural and political environments in which she and her family have lived:

> So because my father had dark skin, and was from a lower caste than my mother – to put it in survivor terms – they were both voted off and sent to exile island. As my great grandmother put it: **picks up piece of paper from the floor*does survivor imitation** I want to send her away because she went and found one Tamil boy. She can match her clothes and shoes so nicely – why she can' find one partner to match.
>
> The simple difference of skin colour and language, because one says "oyoh sami" and the other says "arre baab" – they had to be separated. They did separate eventually, in 1988 at the height of the apartheid struggle. When they were divided by apartheid racial laws, they were divided by cultural caste systems, they were divided by family politics and they were divided by their own actions. Indian people

> are so good at maths, BODMAS could be my uncle, but they never figured out that division causes division.

The profound last line here is a clear critique Kamini is making of SAI communities who through prejudicial racial, caste, and ethnic beliefs sow divisions amongst themselves. In looking at our divergent experiences of being culturally mixed, I greatly cherish what both my Tamil and Gujarati grandparents did by accepting my parents' relationship and in turn, allowing my siblings and I to be raised in an environment of love. The opposite, evidently, is damaging not just at an individual level but also at a familial and societal level.

There are, of course, stereotypes and jokes that Tamil, Gujarati and Hindi people make about each other. These are a part of our culture(s), and the banter between us. The satire and comedy that is popular in SAIT is indicative of a collective sense of humour in SAI communities (Hansen, 2000). I find that generally, SAI do not have a problem with laughing at themselves and their own idiosyncrasies. However, when such humour goes further, involving deeper questions and asking us to confront that which is problematic in our families and communities, our dirty laundry so to speak, this is where I find pushback and avoidance. It is here that the value of autoethnographic research can be seen because this kind of artistic and scholarly work does not look away. Kamini uses her comedy: clever pop culture and SAI jokes, as well as colloquial language, to draw the audience in and entertain. She is also, however, asking them to bear witness to her experiences, as painful as they were, so that collectively greater understanding and resonance can be found.

7.4: Representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID

As one of my primary research objectives is to examine representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by such women, I had to discuss with each playwright their thoughts on our histories and shared social, cultural and political experiences. It is important to understand a writer's worldviews as they are inextricably linked to, inform and inspire their artistic work. Rosalind Brackenbury (1987: 56) perceptively articulates the significance of our connection as artists to our lived experiences:

> Nobody writes in a vacuum, away from the political and social structures in which we live. We breathe the air of today's thought, we digest it in everything we read and consider; also, we create it. This is largely the role of women today: to create, present, and consider a new world.

This is certainly what Muthal, Krijay and Kamini have done in their plays, all of which are bold, tackling issues that often remain unspoken in SAI communities. When reading Muthal's trilogy of one act comedy plays *Three For Tea* (1977, 1983), I was emboldened by the courage she revealed in the topics she dealt with in these works, because I found that she was writing in the 1970s and 1980s about issues that are still considered objectionable in SAI communities in 2023. In each of Muthal's one act comedies, there is a woman character who is trying to break the shackles of the expectations of her culture, family and community, so that she may carve out her own path for her life. In *Have Tea and Go* (1977), Radha's family is intent on her getting married so her cousin Rajan has arranged for her to meet his friend Anand, who likes her. When Radha objects to such an arrangement, stating that she can meet someone on her own, her mother (Naidoo, 2008: 168) straightforwardly replies:

> Well, maybe you can't. I don't see any nice fullas coming here and you're twenty-four already. When you gonna get married? I'm telling you, the next time you get a proposal, you better accept.

For Radha, the possibility of marriage is not what she objects to but rather the terms under which she is expected to find a partner and wed. If I found myself in Radha's situation, having to meet my prospective fiancé and his uncles together for the very first time, I too would be completely mortified and would not accept any kind of proposal. Muthal gives her heroine choice and agency when she refuses to agree to marry. It is not that Radha dislikes Anand, she is open to the possibility of a relationship with him. However, crucially, such a decision must be her choice, not any elderly men in her or Anand's families. Indeed, the next day when Radha meets Anand in a more casual manner, with no domineering parents or uncles, one sees the beginnings of a romance between them. While there is merit in arranged marriages or set-ups by families (I have seen this in my own family in my grandparents' and *mamas*' marriages), love marriages as they are colloquially called, which are a result of organic long term relationships chosen by couples, are far more common in SAI communities

today (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). What remains the same is the question Radha's mother asks, "When you gonna get married?" (Naidoo, 2008: 186). While ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID today are marrying at a later stage in their lives than Radha, the expectation and pressure to get married is still prevalent (Jagganath, 2008). As Muthal avows (Naidoo, 2017: 4), a woman faces tremendous pressure to "accept her reproductive function as the primary reason for her existence." She goes on to assert that it is through familial and community expectations that marriage and motherhood are presented as the ideal of womanhood (Naidoo, 2017). These expectations are effectively entrenched and permeated through the ISAs of religion, culture and family which form a core part of our daily lives and experiences (Althusser, 1971, 2006).

Muthal has no children of her own (Naidoo, 2017). When I asked her what implications such familial roles hold for SAIW, she (P1) pointed to the greater freedoms women have won as society has evolved and that we should explore our full potential just as men always have:

> *A woman has a brain as well as a body, so she has more than just the capacity for bearing and raising children. A man follows a career and marries. So does the modern woman. And just as there are bachelors, there are also women who do not require marriage for fulfilment. There will always be mothers, daughters, sisters and wives but these are functions concerned with the survival of the species; the modern woman is one who is also looking to the enhancement of the species.*

While Muthal is indeed right in her ideas here, there is idealism in the above statement. Because will there ever be a time where a woman is seen as a woman first rather than a mother, daughter, sister and wife? Muthal is aware of this struggle, as is evident in her plays. In *Have Tea and Go* (1977), the male characters refer to the female characters, Radha and her mother Ambigay as "the wife" and "your daughter". In *The Divorcee* (1977), the character Mrs Singh cannot escape being seen as a divorced woman, it effects every action she tries to take in her life, even simply wanting to go out dancing. In *It's Mine* (1983), the character Desmond cannot fathom why his girlfriend Sunitha does not pine after him, or is bothered that he went out with another woman, or that when she is pregnant, sees no need for him to be a husband and father. Even in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990), the sad truth is that the women escape the Epic to find freedom on the stage but this is not a viable solution, it is a

fantasy. The actual Epic text, a tool of the ISA of Hinduism, has a far more potent and tangible effect on Indian people's lives. Mythologies such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are as fictional as plays; however, these stories are "certainly a kind of *ur*-text (or meta-narrative) constitutive of Indian society" (Singh, 2009: 168). Therefore, such imagined tales are treated as factual and entrenched in Hinduism (Singh, 2009). Thus, while theatre makers might treat the stage with hallowed reverence, we are a very small minority as compared to the world's oldest and third largest religion.

Theatre, Muthal explains, treads a delicate balancing act: plays are neither exact representations of life nor are they solely about escapism. Audiences "are looking for something beyond themselves, something that enlightens" (Naidoo, 2017: 46). Therefore, in her work, while Muthal's plays are grounded in real life situations, she gives her ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID characters' choice and agency that arguably the women who watched her shows did not have, especially in the time period in which they were performed. Muthal's plays were, and remain, revolutionary in their representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. I particularly found *It's Mine* (1983) to be ground breaking, a play in which a woman chooses to have a child on her own, from the very beginning and not because the child's biological father chooses not to be involved. Sunitha ignores her parents' wishes that she marry to legitimise the birth of her baby, and defiantly says to Desmond that, "It's my child. You fathered it, but I was the who decided I wanted a child…it's mine now. One day, it will belong to itself" (Naidoo, 2008: 199). From the outset of *It's Mine* (1983), through the character of Sunitha, we can see a dis-identification with the hegemonic identity norm of motherhood as a role within a marriage and with a man, to a counter-identification of single motherhood as a foremost choice in parenthood (Weedon, 2004).

A friend of mine, an SAIW, had a baby three years ago on her own. It was a choice she made, knowing that the biological father would not actively be involved. Single mothers, whether divorced or widowed, in SAI communities experience family and cultural pressures including attitudes of stigmatisation and ostracism. Jagganath's study shows that this is due to the "value and identity placed upon women…based on their marital status, and conformity to what was considered socially 'appropriate' in terms of gender and generational attributes" (2008: 155). My friend, in her mid-thirties like myself, decided that at this point in her life she wanted to become a mother, on her own terms irrespective of having a husband. Her decision was not met with outright support from all in her family but she, like Sunitha in *It's*

Mine (1983), stuck by her choices and I have seen how rewarded she has been with her beautiful son. To write the single motherhood experience, as Muthal did in *It's Mine* (1983), is still today a conservative-shattering take in SAI society and, in fact, SAIT. Muthal's response with regards to what she wants to communicate through her plays, is that she does not want to dictate to audiences but rather that when she presents unorthodox views, "*it is simply to challenge people to think about and question taken-for-granted notions*" (P1).

Significantly, these notions about gender norms, social order, power relations, and stereotypical identities and representations – that are insidiously purported to be simply inherently our way of life – are precisely what poststructuralism seeks to critically contest (Harcourt, 2007). Muthal argues that, "We have the greatest need to free ourselves from the attitudes and values into which we have been socialised" (2017: 47). Her statement here is indicative of the aims of feminist poststructuralism and I argue that by engaging with the work of playwrights like Muthal, I can work towards what she terms our "greatest need" (Naidoo, 2017: 47). When I read her plays, I laugh and find resonance in her work that she wrote over forty years ago. Muthal further contends that as plays are performed through living beings in human situations, theatre is a medium that is more intimately connected with the living experience than other abstract art forms (Naidoo, 2017). Thus, Muthal's body of work, that of the most prolific SAWOID whose plays were largely staged and written during apartheid, are an important historical and cultural archive. In such texts, as my thesis has found, there is a great deal that can be learnt about the identities and representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

While Krijay has only written one play, *Women in Brown* (1999), she has and continues to work as an actress, stand-up comedian and director onstage and on screen. She has also developed and written research on SAIW's identity and playwriting (Govender, 1999, 2001). More importantly, *Women in Brown* (1999) is a seminal text in post-apartheid SAIT, widely known and researched (Govender, 1999; Govender, 2014; Malimba, 2012; Naicker, 2017). The influence of *Women in Brown* (1999) is evident, especially on young ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID dramatic arts students, myself included. As Naicker states, "this text is pertinent to my trajectory in terms of it being the first and only play by a South African Indian female writer that I engaged with during my studies…" (2017: 20). I recall being awed by *Women in Brown* (1999) the first time I read the play, seeing on the page vivid SAIW characters boldly talking about their desires and fears, what angers them and what

hurts them. The reason that I found this so refreshing was that such thoughts and feelings are often not openly discussed in SAI families. In *Women in Brown* (1999), the character Mona smokes and hates the ways in which she is judged and labelled for this because it is seen as unbecoming for an Indian woman to smoke. My father often comments, in a somewhat objecting tone, on the increasing number of young Indian women he sees smoking. Krijay cleverly connects Mona's anger not just with the perceived judgement of her community but more so with her adulterous father and continuously forgiving mother. One of the points I believe Krijay (Govender, 1999: 8) is making here is that perhaps it is Mona's father whose behaviour should be questioned, and not Mona for her chosen vice:

> The way he would pull her close, drag the life out of her, and when he was done, he would just flick her aside and walk all over her. (*She does these actions with her cigarette*)…People! Who the hell are they to judge me? I know I'm not traditional, cultural…I never was! I'm different. I'm a strong woman and that intimidates them. Well tough! I'm not going to change – they must deal with it!

Mona, even in constructing a non-confirmative or counter-identification for herself, still cannot escape the conservative expectations of her religion and culture. Non-identification is not possible as her community and family are an integral part of her life, and thus to have power and agency, she must contend with these dominant expectations (Weedon, 2004).

Kammy, in *Women in Brown* (1999), is not as strong as Mona. She tragically feels so trapped by her parents' determination that she marries the man they have chosen for her, Rajesh, that at the end of the play, Kammy commits suicide. Pritha, the third main character in the play is a housewife, who is controlled by her husband Des. He ensures she is home at all times by not letting her do errands like shopping and gets upset when Pritha is not at the front door to greet him every day when he returns home from work (Govender, 1999). Such control is thinly veiled abuse, and as we learn later in the play, Pritha is also being physically abused by her husband. These issues of suicide and abuse are boldly and sensitively explored by Krijay in her playwriting. Research on suicidal behaviour in SAIW, done in the late 1990s, around the time Krijay wrote and staged *Women in Brown* (1999), found that the high rate of suicide amongst young Indian women could be attributed to these women's changing cultural values in a traditional, patriarchal Indian culture that rigidly refutes such change (Wassenaar, van der Veen & Pillay, 1998). Citing, among other marital and cultural difficulties, the

pressures of arranged marriage and abusive behaviour, both problems that Kammy and Pritha respectively face, Wassenaar's et al. (1998: 85) research shows that SAIW have felt so trapped that "they develop a sense of hopelessness about their future, with the result that suicidal behaviour may be increasingly seen as an option that is culturally normative, particularly for women."

The fact that in the late 1990s, in an emerging post-apartheid South Africa, it was more culturally acceptable for an SAIW to consider suicide than to refuse an arranged marriage, or report her abusive husband, or seek to empower herself through earning her own income, is telling (Wassenaar et al, 1998). I would likely be labelled as over dramatic here but I am reminded of the centuries old, and at least virtually extinct, practices of *sati* and *jauhar* in India whereby Indian women were expected to sacrifice themselves when their husbands died by self-immolation. Wassenaar's et al. (1998) study, as well as Krijay's play, shows that SAIW, while not literally burning, have been suffering in communities and families that seek to confine them. They are burning from within. Frankly, it speaks to the intensely powerful hold culture and tradition have in SAI families. Althusser was indeed correct in his claim that ISAs function by repression, albeit in concealed ways (1971, 2006). One of these concealed ways is through the insidious manufacturing of consent, as Gramsci (2006) argues, in which hegemonic beliefs and values persist. Such consent is questioned or broken when hegemonic norms are challenged. However, this is an ongoing and difficult struggle for marginalised groups. As Pritha says with longing sadness in *Women in Brown* (1999: 6), "I too got dreams, but that's all they can be – dreams."

We become socially regulated human beings through repressive and productive power relations (Barker, 2010; Foucault, 1982), and hegemonic discourses that insidiously manufacture our consent (Kellner & Durham, 2006; Gramsci, 2006). In her research, Krijay strongly makes the point that in the SAI community, due to fixed notions of culture, SAIW are confined to the private domain for the purpose of cultural preservation (Govender, 2001). SAIW entered the public realm usually reserved for their male counterparts due to the desire and opportunity for education, career advancement, independence and the need for two income households (Govender, 2001; Meer, 1972). Thus, when I asked Krijay (P2), broadly speaking, what pressures she thinks SAIW experience today, she stated that while it is true that we have progressed in the public domain, the expectations of the private domain persist:

> *The roles within marriages have shifted because of education, careers and the capacity to earn money. Wives are no longer confined to the home space…Nonetheless the ability to earn money has empowered women to such an extent that it has shifted the very definition of motherhood and sisterhood…the ability to earn money allows a woman into what was previously known as a male-dominated sphere, however roles and duties in the private sphere is not necessarily shared by her male counterparts, but rather by other women who are employed. Ironically, it is a case of women employing other women.*

Krijay's sentiments here were echoed by my women family members that I interviewed. My Sister particularly noted the pressure she feels as a wife and mother to have a perfect, clean household with home cooked food for her family (F2). She does employ other women to assist her, namely a nanny and domestic worker. We are falsely conscientised into believing that our subjugation is merely a part of our social precepts and systems (Lewis, 2002) and, in turn, our consent to abide by the ISAs that structure our lives is induced (Kellner & Durham, 2006). Thus, while my father and brother in-law, for example, are men who clean their homes and assist in their upkeep, the crucial difference here is that there is no weight on their shoulders, no expectation nor a sense of failure if there is no dinner on the table every evening. For us, however, as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, the grip of the private domain remains ever strong and hard to shake off. This hold on the lives and identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID is upheld through consenting to the practices and expectations of the ISAs of SAI cultures, communities and families (Althusser, 1971, 2006; Gramsci, 2006).

For some, the only way to escape has been through suicide. Wassenaar et al. (1998) explain that the primary suicide methods for SAIW are hanging and poisoning (1998). In *Women in Brown* (1999), Kammy commits suicide by hanging herself with a *sari*. In the last scene, we see Pritha folding a *sari* just as she did in the beginning of the play thus reflecting her continuing the cycle of her current life despite her unhappiness; Mona is slowly ripping her *sari*, still angry and rebelling; while Kammy dresses herself and, "The final, chilling image is that of the end bit of the sari held up high above her head" (Govender, 1999: 14). One of the ways in which gender is performed is through external signifiers such as garments (Malimba, 2012). A *sari* represents the most traditional attire of an Indian woman and it is expected that one must wear them, particularly when one is older and/or married (Singh & Harisunker, 2010). My mother often says that she has to wear *saris* and cannot, like me, wear

punjabis or fancy outfits consisting of a full length skirt, blouse and shawl of sorts. My *Ba* wore a *sari* every day of her life which I would find very cumbersome. Krijay goes further than mere physical discomfort in *Women in Brown* (1999): Kammy's final act with the *sari*, the ultimate garment of conservative Indian womanhood, becomes a metaphor for the suffocation of rigid tradition and culture that abounds in SAI communities.

In *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990) as well, once Draupadi enters the stage space, she takes off her wig saying, "This is not who I am. I wore it in the Mahabharath" (Naidoo, 2008: 216). The other women follow Draupadi's lead and take off their traditional attire which shackled them to their previous existences in the Epic (Naidoo, 2008). The interconnection between acceptable attire, such as a *sari*, and its coding as the sacred morality of Indian women is clear with Singh and Harisunker noting that "the character of the leading women such as Sita in the *Ramayana* and Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* are often reference points for younger women to emulate in terms of values and dress" (2010: 42). Therefore, while *saris* are beautiful garments that celebrate Indian culture, in both Krijay and Muthal's plays what is shown is that the *sari*, by being the archetypal external signifier of "Indian female/ness" (Malimba, 2012: 95), also becomes confining and oppressive. The ultimate sadness of the fates and lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, who are like Kammy, Mona or Pritha, is that their thoughts and feelings, their desires and hopes, their cultural values and how they behave are entirely valid. Notions of gender and culture are just that: notions that are wholly constructed and as such, are open to change and multiplicity. Poststructuralism theorises this, that our identities are fluid and constructed, socio-historically specific and influenced (see Figure 1). Hence, "the point of a feminist post-structuralist analysis is not to expose the hidden truth of sex/gender in all its simplicity, but to *trouble that which is taken as stable / unquestionable truth* (original emphasis)" (Davies & Gannon, 2005: 320). Such seemingly fixed 'truths' that leave no room for interpretation lead to fixed representations of SAI culture and, in turn, the stifling of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identities and lives.

This can be seen in the struggles Mona, Kammy and Pritha face in *Women in Brown* (1999) to voice their 'truths' and live their lives with the freedom to make their own choices. Mona defiantly states that she is different precisely because she is forthright, strong and a smoker, characteristics and actions that are not what is culturally expected of an SAIW. Kammy cannot be open about her relationships or her sexual desires, as SAIW are expected to behave in a chaste manner (Radhakrishnan, 2005). She says, "I am their eternal virgin

(*spreads legs open. Then, mischievous smile*) If only they knew!" (Govender, 1999: 5). For Pritha, while she is dealing with the pressure of struggling to get pregnant from her husband and in-laws, she is too scared to even say that she does not want to have children in the first place because, "You know what these people are like – if you can't have children, they think something wrong with you and your marriage" (Govender, 1999: 6). Thus, our identities are made up of many factors, but as Krijay astutely points out, culture is an overriding factor in the lives of SAIW (Govender, 1999).

Krijay attributes this dominance of culture to the ways "gender roles have been stereotyped through certain cultural and religious practices" (Govender, 1999: 17). These practices are entrenched in the ISAs of Hinduism and SAI communities and families. Radha in *Have Tea and Go* (1977), Mrs Singh in *The Divorcee* (1977) and Sunitha in *It's Mine* (1983) all contend with cultural and community rules or expectations about their roles as women, specifically in connection to their marital status and their mothering. Radha must find a husband, Sunitha must marry the father of her baby, and Mrs Singh cannot go out on her own as a divorced woman. Even if they choose not to follow these paths, they will always be defined in relation to them (Weedon, 2004). For some, like Kammy in *Women in Brown* (1999), dis-identification or counter-identification proves futile, and thus suicide is seen as the only way to be free.

A further, significant point that Krijay makes in her research is that issues of the private domain, that is the issues women face, are devalued and given little attention in a patriarchal system (1999). However, the second wave feminist slogan "the personal is political" challenges this marginalisation, showing "that an act in the private sphere becomes as political as an act in the public" (Govender, 1999: 15). Such acknowledgement is crucial in the progression of women's rights, bringing to the forefront that the ways in which women are marginalised and confined in their homes is indeed political and discriminatory. Krijay shows us in *Woman in Brown* (1999) that, "South African Indian female/ness therefore carries no prescriptive elements or an inscribed essence that cannot be challenged" (Malimba, 2012: 96). In Pritha, Mona and Kammy we see possibility, even if they do not see it in themselves yet.

As Butler asserts, gender is not fixed but repeatedly performed (1999). Mona, Kammy and Pritha's actions in *Women in Brown* (1999) are therefore all performative acts that either

abide or defy the gender and cultural norms of SAI society. At the end of the play, we see three women each taking a different path. Pritha has folded her *sari* and is staying with her husband. She is unable to leave Des but her action of spitting into the cake she is making for him is a small act of defiance. Mona, having been dumped by her boyfriend Neil, continues to smoke and rips her *sari*. Mona's rebellion is contradictory in that as much as she asserts her difference from tradition, she yearns for it as well, as can be seen in her desire to marry Neil and have children one day (Govender, 1999). In constructing our gendered identities, like Mona we simultaneously both embrace and reject society's normative gender roles. This speaks to the complexities of our identities and the strong influence of the communities in which we live. Kammy, by hanging herself with the *sari*, takes the path of no return because she sees no way of escaping what is expected of her (Govender, 1999).

Just as in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990), in *Women in Brown* (1999) the presence of the theatre is clearly presented with the Director Figure character who speaks to the women characters on the stage, thus breaking the fourth wall and exploring the metaphor of the stage as a space of freedom for SAIW. Indeed, Mona, Pritha and Kammy all speak directly to the audience and the Director Figure, openly sharing all their thoughts and feelings, which they cannot do in their own homes and lives. This, Krijay asserts, can be interpreted as the play presenting "a platform for the marginalised South African *Indian* (original emphasis) woman to represent herself…" (Govender, 1999: 8). Theatre and performance offer a limitless space, "an arena in which the brown female body may begin to redefine, re-represent and speak" (Naicker, 2017: 21). We can start to loosen the bounds we have been constricted by in our families and communities by acknowledging and embracing the fluidity of culture and identity. This is what feminist poststructural thinking posits (Weedon, 1997). Vitally, the stage can give ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID the opportunity to, as Naicker (2017: 21) terms, "re-represent" ourselves. Krijay (Govender, 1998: 18) articulates how deeply meaningful this can be for SAIW:

> The idea that identity and culture are unfixed notions becomes revolutionary in both the psychological and practical experience of South African *Indian* (original emphasis) women. It gives South African *Indian* women an opportunity to question, challenge and shift their identity away from a cultural one. Playwriting and theatre can thus offer South African *Indian* women, a way in which to challenge her identity, which has been culturally constructed. Through such articulations South

> African *Indian* women challenge not only the notions of private space, but the role which she plays within such a space.

By exploring her own identity in her play, Kamini reflects on the ways in which she has abided by or defied gender and cultural norms in her lived experiences. She echoes Krijay's argument that culture is largely viewed as fixed and thus, "*A lot of people feel like if you move away from it, you're moving away from tradition, instead of letting tradition unfold…letting it transform*" (P3). Kamini too engages Butler's notions of gender as performative (1999) and argues, in her research, that performance forms such as stand-up comedy allow for the construction and expression of multiple identities (Govender, 2014). Kamini states that, "There are certain behavioural constructions around gender that cannot be separated from a person; however, these behavioural constructions can be subverted in performance" (Govender, 2014: 25). The subversion of normative gendered behaviour is exactly what Kamini performs in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013). She talks about her constant lateness, joking that this is the reason why, when praying, she would put offerings into the fire late and not on the chanting of each *swaha* as one should (Govender, 2013). Kamini too refers to the traditional attire expected of SAIW, noting that SAI men do not have to face the same strict dress codes. She describes, in her play, that, "There we would all be, standing in our traditional outfits, well the women in Punjabis and sarees[42], the men were allowed to stand by the holy fire in their Man United t-shirt and jeans" (Govender, 2013: 3).

Kamini also talks about body image, commenting on her long nose and body hair that does not fit the typical beauty standards of Indian women recalling that, "the first boy I ever dated, told me I looked like Pinnocchio…" (Govender, 2013: 14). Being hairy is a body issue that greatly affects Indian women. My sister, cousins and I all regularly go for waxing and/or threading to remove body hair as it is perceived as unfeminine and unattractive. Here is an example of how consent is manufactured and induced (Gramsci, 2006). While we may feel more comfortable, cleaner or prettier when removing our body hair, such thinking is not simply personal, it is a result of systemic gendered representations of SAIW, specifically SAI cultural beauty standards which we, as SAIW, perpetuate in our communities. Therefore, in the same way that I enjoy cooking as an SAIW, my bodily choice to wax is indicative of my identity as paradoxically influenced by both personal choice and social regulation.

[42] See Glossary for meanings of *punjabi(s)* and *saree(s)*.

Conventional beauty standards, it can be argued, result in stereotypical, circumscribed and potentially harmful representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Kamini, through her performance, therefore subverts such prevailing constructions of gender, challenging the behavioural and repeated performative acts that are expected of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Butler, 1999; Govender, 2014). Moreover like Kammy in *Women in Brown* (1999), Kamini also openly talks about her relationships and sexual desires with the audience. She tells us that she wants to make her ex-lovers jealous, refers to her masturbating, and cheekily says, "I swear I would give up on it all, the idea of love dating etc if it weren't for the hope of one thing – a multiple orgasm" (Govender, 2013: 14).

In *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013), Kamini expresses all the authentic, deeply personal, varied and constructed parts of herself, which crucially are all a part of her identity as a SAWOID. Kamini uses comedy and self-deprecation, articulating in her research that while this could be seen as demeaning oneself, through self-mockery and making oneself vulnerable onstage as comediennes do, one takes on an authoritative stance (Govender, 2014). Thus, by joking about her perceived traditional failings, physical flaws, and speaking aloud her impure thoughts, Kamini is actually empowering herself and, perhaps other women, myself included, that are watching and reading her work. By bravely sharing herself with the audience, we get to see that as women, we do not have to adhere to the gender constructions that are perpetuated in society (Butler, 1999). An ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can, like Kamini, reconstruct her identity. Kamini does this through the performance space which as Naicker (2017) rightly asserts, gives SAIW room to redefine themselves.

In my interview with Kamini, she observed how for her a lot of SAIW are forced into the roles of wife and mother, for example, and are not seen as individuals. Furthermore, she feels that, "*there's more responsibility given to Indian women to fulfil those roles, than Indian men to fulfil their roles as husband, father*" (P3). We discussed the ways in which SAIW are referred to and defined in terms of their marital or motherhood status, with Kamini pointing to the typical conversations at cultural functions where "*you'll hear things like…if someone chose not to have children, they'll be that whistler like, 'Oh, she didn't have children*'" (P3). I pointedly portray this in *Devi* (2019: 31-34) with Posh Mother 1 and 2: the actors in playing these characters break the fourth wall by indicating members of the audience, as if their daughters in the community are single, divorced, married outside of their

race and/or religion, or are homosexual. Thus, what is evident from Kamini's responses and my analysis here, as well as my play *Devi* (2019), is that for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, the pressures from ISAs, especially that of family, to become wives and mothers, and to fulfil these duties to perfection, remains prevalent.

In *Devi* (2019) the beauty and importance of motherhood and sisterhood, the precious relationships between daughters and mothers, as well as sisters is portrayed. Kamini too recognises this, reflecting on her close relationship with her own mother, noting that "*there's a lot of maternal support from Indian mothers…always that connection and that bond that is maybe unique to the culture*" (P3). As chapter five of this thesis illustrated, the generational bonds between mothers, daughters and sisters amongst ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are very strong and dearly held. I strived to highlight and honour this in *Devi* (2019). Kamini (2013: 6) too notes the maternal and familial kindness of SAIW in *She put the 'I' in Punchline*:

> Even if they have nothing, these aunties will make a plan and give you something. It's their generosity that has often allowed others, their children, their children's, their children's neighbours and cousins – to progress.

These humble yet striking lines remind me of my *Ma*, who like many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID before her, made sacrifices, taking charge of households and families so that others could thrive and prosper. Without my *Ma*, I would not be in the advanced educational position I am in today. Through her care, my mother was able to have a career as my *Ma* helped us get ready for school and was home with lunch when we returned. I have gone from naively seeing such tasks as just the way things are to viewing them through a feminist poststructural lens, one in which the gendered and patriarchal dynamics constructed in SAI culture and their effects on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can clearly be seen, since the first arrival of Indian indentured women in South Africa.

Another important topic that Kamini discussed in our interview was the issue of body shaming. She talked about the stigma around skin colour and how this made her conscious when swimming as a child as her skin is dark (P3). Kamini expanded, referring to body size describing that, "*It's also you can't eat the sweet things that are always there, because someone will say something about your weight*" (P3). A critical point Kamini made in our

interviews is that all these expectations and judgements around marriage, motherhood, skin colour and body image that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID experience are, in fact, perpetuated by us (P3). This highlights the issue that the system of patriarchy is promulgated by the very women who are oppressed by it (Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1990). Generation after generation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID continue to preserve patriarchal SAI cultural practices, with grandmothers and mothers inducing their daughters to consent to these norms (Kellner & Durham, 2006). SAI men have a vested interest in maintaining this status quo. Yet the bitter irony is that they have insidiously and largely used their female counterparts, us, to maintain the very structures, the ISAs, that continue to box us "into age-old gender practices" (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 46). Kamini (P3) expands further on this issue:

> *So you'll find a lot of Indian aunties will ask you when you're getting married, even though they themselves may have been abused in their marriage…So it's a very weird thing that happens within the roles you mentioned of mother, daughter, sister, of absorbing, and re-giving that patriarchal thought.*

I can certainly relate to Kamini's points on body shaming as I have battled with judgements over my weight all my life. I have never been the ideal slim, SAI girl body type. I have always been chubby to the point that one of my nicknames as a child in my family was 'fatso'. Such remarks have been quite damaging to me and I have dieted, exercised and lost weight, which I also acknowledge I needed to do for my health. Concern for my wellbeing, however, was not wholly the reason that my family gave me this nickname. Although they may have seen it as a harmless joke, my identity and experiences as an SAIW are shaped by popular beauty standards, as well as my family and culture's preference of these standards. Therefore, while I have realised that I will never be the ideal body type, and even as I strive to dis-identify and accept myself, I still look in the mirror at times and yearn for a body that has thin thighs, less flabby arms and a flatter stomach and bottom. We are thus bound up in the cultural expectations of our communities, and the representations of slender beautiful women in popular culture, who are ideologically constructed and normalised in our media (Morley, 2019). They loom over our actions, identities and lives. However, the work of poststructural cultural theorists, such as Hall, have lifted the veil on the limits, and crucially, the artificiality of societal norms so that we have and continue to learn to understand identity and representation as fluid, multiple and changeable (1997, 2005; Morley, 2019). Plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, particularly those studied in my thesis, are indicative of this

conceptualisation of identity and representation. These texts are filled with ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID characters who are forging paths for themselves that are contrasting, in varying ways, to what is culturally and traditionally expected of them.

7.5: Voices, Identities and Empowerment through Creative Practice – Playwriting and Theatre Making

Broadly speaking, there are several artistic mediums that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have used to express themselves, taking up spaces and forms in which they have voice and agency. Indeed, Muthal and Krijay, for instance, have not only worked as playwrights. However, the first artistic foray for the playwrights I interviewed in this thesis was through the medium of theatre. I too have primarily worked in the field of theatre making and it is indeed my first artistic love. I therefore questioned each playwright about their love of the stage, what first interested them about it and what possibilities they think theatre has for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in relation to artistic opportunities, as well as personal and collective empowerment. Furthermore, a primary research objective of my thesis is to ascertain how ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights' identities respectively influences our playwriting. I thus also questioned Muthal, Krijay and Kamini about how they feel their identity has impacted the theatrical work they have created.

In her personal essay *A Medley: Women, Writing, Freedom* (2017: 30), Muthal states that writers' works are not entirely autobiographical but rather, "Like a baby in the womb, the story, which takes its nourishment from the author, will inevitably reflect her characteristic view of life." She goes further (Naidoo, 2017: 29 – 30), eloquently explaining that as artists we use ourselves as a resource:

> Writers get ideas for stories from newspaper reports, from casual remarks, from things observed, experienced, dreamt and so on. What they do is then grow these ideas inside themselves, inside their own understandings and perspectives on life…to find the contexts, the feelings and the thoughts of their characters…writers supplement from their own experiences to give their work its fullness. But the writing is not autobiographical. The stories that they tell…reflect their understanding of life.

Much of what Muthal says here resonates with me. My plays incorporate not just my experiences and memories, but also what I have observed and researched, what I have both consciously and subconsciously thought. Significantly, the biggest and most important resource for my work and research is, as Muthal points out, myself. Similarly, my plays reflect my understanding and characteristic view of life (Naidoo, 2017). It presents to the audience and/or reader my beliefs, my stance on socio-political and cultural issues, and my understanding of the world we live in, all of which inform, in effect, my identity. This is why the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR, specifically the method of narrative autoethnography, is ideally suited for my thesis. Such approaches centre both the researcher and artist, and crucially their identity, allowing these historically disparate fields to work together as both a process and product of my research (Leavy, 2009).

Muthal was one of the first SAWOID to work in theatre and write plays. She explains that her interest in theatre was twofold, starting firstly with Hollywood movies which she watched as child with her siblings, as their father managed "*the cafes at the Empire and Royal Bioscopes in the Asiatic Bazaar in Marabastad in Pretoria*" (P1).[43] This shifted to theatre once she began studying speech and drama at the University of Natal: "*I also met Ronnie Govender and Kessie Govender…we formed a theatre group and began putting on performances*" (P1). Muthal's work was noticed and she received a scholarship to study theatre and drama in the United States of America in the 1960s where in the time of Black Consciousness, she "*became involved in Black Theatre*" (P1). When she returned to South Africa in 1976, Muthal became involved in the anti-apartheid movement. She asserts that her playwriting reflects "*the injustices of apartheid and the attempts of its victims to defy the system and to assert their own power and dignity*" (P1). She has written several politically focused plays. I have discussed *Of No Account* (1981). *Ikhayalethu (Coming Home)* (1982) is Muthal's critical response to living in a racially divided society. S'hlobo, a black stranger, arrives at the home of David and Sally Kane, a progressive white couple whose safe space and liberal views are challenged by a black man who lays bare their racial bigotry (Govinden, 2008). *Outside-In* (1983) explores the complexities of interracial relationships in a time when it was taboo in South Africa, between a white woman, Kate, and an Indian Muslim man, Kassim (Naidoo, 2008). In *We Three Kings* (1982), Muthal satirised the South African Indian

[43] Pretoria is located in the province of Gauteng in South Africa and is one of the country's three capital cities. The Asiatic Bazaar or Marabastad is a business area found near the city centre of Pretoria.

Council (SAIC) elections: “The play derided Indian ‘sell-outs’ subservient to the white man and accepting the apartheid order” (Hansen, 2000: 261).

What is important to note about the above mentioned plays by Muthal is that although these works may not have any central ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID characters, they are still reflective of the political, cultural and social environments in which we have lived. As I have articulated earlier in this chapter, Muthal argues that living under apartheid meant that this also became one’s cultural environment (P1). Moreover, for Muthal (Naidoo, 2017: 33), culture involves the customs and institutions into which we are socialised and thus, as South Africans, we all share a common culture:

> It is true that when we first met, we were all different. There was an African way of life, a European way of life and an Indian way of life. Each group still maintains its own tribal customs but these are simply vestiges of past cultures. We also have a common culture in South Arica, a common, overriding culture.

This common culture Muthal speaks of echoes Hall’s point that we are inextricably connected to the socio-political factors of our environments which, in turn, affect our daily lived realities and identities (1997). The issues in Muthal’s more politically focused plays explore the interpersonal and real life effects of apartheid rule on relationships between people in their domestic and work spaces, on their romantic lives and on their political choices. Significantly, these are issues in plays that, although may not directly centre ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID characters, are still a reflection of the political, social and cultural conditions of our histories and lives.

More importantly, given that she is a SAWOID, Muthal’s plays reflect her experiences living in South Africa and her identity as a playwright. She points out that writers engage with their surroundings in their work because they “*know most about the environment in which they live and that is where they place their stories*” (P1). Muthal fought against apartheid and struggled to hold onto teaching positions due to government opposition to her theatre work (P1). She writes that “We were outside the system and our plays were condemnations of the system. And all our efforts invited strict police surveillance and harassment” (Naidoo, 2017: 10). Meer too asserts that SAIW have “participated fully in the general struggle for Indian and Black liberation” (1972: 47). Therefore, Muthal’s plays that

focus on the politics of apartheid through fully realised South African characters and plots, are indeed influenced by her identity and experiences as a SAWOID.

My plays are arguably more directly personally influenced than Muthal's plays, but she has also clearly infused her work with her own experiences, observations, opinions and beliefs. In *My Search For Meaning* (2017), Muthal writes about how she has always felt like an outsider in the environments she grew up in, because she did not speak the right language or was not of the right class or race. She adds that this made her a "participant-observer" of her circumstances and she thus rebelled and defied traditions (Naidoo, 2017: 7). Muthal then developed her revolutionary beliefs and fought for democracy, as can be seen in her work as an anti-apartheid playwright and activist in both the companies she co-founded, the Durban Academy of Theatre Arts (DATA) and the Shah Theatre Academy, as well as her own theatre company which she formed in the 1980s, the Work in Progress Theatre Company (WIP) (Naidoo, 1997). Ultimately, whether they are about the pressures of arranged marriage as seen in *Have Tea and Go* (1977) or of interracial marriages as seen in *Outside-In* (1983), or about heroines trying to escape a patriarchally steeped Epic as seen in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990), or about the political and social upheavals of an unjust apartheid system as seen in *Ikhayalethu (Coming Home)* (1982) and *Of No Account* (1981), the narratives in Muthal's work are borne out of her life and identity. The plots and characters in Muthal's plays centre stories and experiences that strike at the core of her, and many fellow women's, experiences as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Indeed Muthal has, like her characters Radha, Sunitha and Draupadi, rebelled, defied convention and sought transformation.

Krijay (P2), feels that her identity and experiences, including her observations, have had an influence on her playwriting (P2):

> *I suppose parts of my personal life is there. More from observation. I've had a very unconventional childhood with many liberties despite living in a conservative community. My characters are largely based on many people or ideas not anyone specifically.*

When I asked Krijay what made her want to work in South African theatre and write plays, her response was that she went into the arts because, "*I always have a lot to say*" (P2). She

added that this type of entertainment is a great way to challenge notions and norms while also entertaining a focused audience (P2). I certainly can relate to Krijay's views here. Firstly, I too grew up in a fairly liberal family while living in a traditional community. Muthal seems to have had a similarly liberal upbringing with uncles who were involved in anti-apartheid struggles and with whom she began engaging in political activities (Naidoo, 2017). She recounts that her mother would dress her and her sister in shorts, which in the 1940s, was shocking. She writes that her mother "was 'modern,' not strictly conventional" (Naidoo, 2017: 8). Kamini's mother with whom she has a very close relationship, was also a woman who defied conservative expectations in terms of her marriage. Eventually she raised her daughter independently as a single mother (P3). My mother has always been open minded, raising my sister and I to have agency, an education and choice, to be women who should never fear asking questions or taking a stand. In reflecting on my own, and my fellow playwrights' backgrounds here, I believe that perhaps we felt emboldened to make theatre because we grew up in homes and families where speaking out was not squashed but encouraged. This is significant because the potential theatre has as a medium for entertainment and empowerment, which Krijay highlights (P2), is vital for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID lives and representation.

Furthermore, all of us pursued drama and performance studies at university; thus, we actually had the opportunity to firstly study what is not generally seen as an advantageous degree in SAI communities and secondly, we were able to develop our skills as playwrights and theatre makers in the university space. As posited in chapter six, tertiary education is crucially a place where many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights have initially and primarily been able to write and stage their plays. Before writing the script for *Women in Brown* (1999), Krijay firstly worked with her cast, workshopping and improvising ideas around identity (Govender, 1999). She encouraged her cast share to their experiences, as well as the experiences of women in their families. Through this, Krijay and her cast became aware of how cultural and religious practices have constructed roles for SAIW (Govender, 1999). These roles, as Krijay argues in her research, and which her cast realised in their rehearsal process, "have been naturalised through fixed notions of culture (and through culture practices such as theatre)" (Govender, 1999: 5). Krijay further asserts in her thesis that the representation of SAIW affirming these seemingly 'naturalised' roles are reinforced in plays by SAI male playwrights. Thus for Krijay, it is imperative that SAIW challenge these 'naturalised' constructions and represent themselves onstage (Govender, 1999). This is the

research and journey Krijay (Govender, 1999: 5) delved into when beginning to conceive *Women in Brown* (1999), which was vital for her in writing the seminal text we know today:

> It was only after this process of identifying (as a cast) the stereotypical ways in which South African *Indian* (original emphasis) men and society at large constructed South African *Indian* women, and only after an intense workshop experience that I began formally scripting the play.

My writing and rehearsal process was slightly different to Krijay's process. I had already written a completed script for *Devi* (2019) before I started rehearsals. However, the script certainly changed and became richer in detail with the added input of my cast. Furthermore, just as Krijay encouraged her cast to share their experiences, I did the same and found that often in rehearsals, I would have many conversations with my cast about their lives, identities and families. We connected and bonded with each other in our shared experiences as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.[44]

Kamini's creative process of writing and staging *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) was largely an individual and personal undertaking. Describing what sparked her interest in theatre, Kamini says that her mother sent her to drama school as a child because she was shy and this is where her love for the stage began: "*It just felt so joyful. And I used to have so much fun, that I didn't want to stop that feeling, so I pursued it until after school as well*" (P3). Kamini has studied drama and performance up to a Masters level and, like Krijay and myself, has produced academic research in conjunction with her artistic work. In fact, Kamini explains that were it not for her Masters research, "*I don't think I would have picked up the pen and done this*" (P3). Out of all the plays my thesis studies, including my own, *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) is the most personally influenced work. Kamini states that the play is based on her personal life and experiences, so much so that she did not cast another actor but rather performed the theatrical solo stand-up style show herself (P3). When I asked Kamini (P3) to explain the meaning behind the title of her play, she expressed that it is about making herself the punchline and the joke:

[44] I will further discuss my rehearsal process with my cast in chapter eight.

> *It's like putting my identity into the joke almost…making myself the joke, but also some of how society makes a joke out of you in the way your things are constructed maybe.*

Firstly, Kamini's elucidation here, consciously or not, reflects a poststructural understanding of identity, that it is simultaneously both individually constructed and socially impacted (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). In her play, she bravely and vulnerably deconstructs her identity and life, grappling with how it has been constructed both by herself and her choices, as well as the influence of her family, culture and country. Kamini states in her thesis that her play "emerged out of my subjective experiences and opinions, it was informed through research, engaging and responding to notions of gender and identity in the South African context…" (Govender, 2014: 41). I relate to Kamini's statement here as my process in researching and writing both *Devi* (2019) and *Race Trouble* (2013) were similar to her writing process. My analysis of my interview with Kamini, her research, and her play is that *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) is a deep exploration of her identity and life that seeks to challenge gender and cultural norms, offering what Naicker would term a "re-representation" of brown women (2017: 39).

In her research, Kamini discusses how the use of comedy and self-deprecation is actually empowering for the writer and performer as, onstage, one is able to have a command and ownership of their own experiences and identity (Govender, 2014). Additionally, comedy can connect the performer with their audience, which was an aim of Kamini's work. This is particularly effective in SAIT as comedy is highly popular (Naicker, 2017). In using a conventional form to challenge stereotypes, Naicker argues that one is "attempting to drive the subversion and re-representation of brown female identity; continuing to dismantle and shatter illusions and stereotypes from within" (2017: 39). Hence Kamini writes that although *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) is largely informed by a subjective and personal narrative, her hope was that the people would relate to what she was representing "on stage – and laugh. If others could identify with my perspective (and laugh) this would prove that there is an 'I' in 'collective'" (Govender, 2014: 42).

This notion of an 'I" in 'collective' is significant to both myself and Kamini's research as we both have used the methodological approach of autoethnography in our respective theses and plays. Kamini finds great value in autoethnography, particularly as it is

relative to performance because, as she asserts, "*whenever a South African body is on stage, we're representing our self and our culture*" (P3). I have discussed in this chapter the many social, cultural and political themes Kamini addresses in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013), from caste prejudice, to body image and representation, to South African politics and stereotypes of SAIW. Vitally, all of the themes Kamini tackles in her play come from her own body, her own experiences, her own identity. There are two points to understand here: firstly, just as with my creative work, the central and most important resource for Kamini, as an artist, is herself. Narrative autoethnography is thus a useful research and creative method (Leavy, 2009). Secondly, *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) does indeed exemplify that "the personal is political" (Heddon, 2006: 132), as can be seen in the themes Kamini boldly tackles in her work through the prism of her own body, experiences and identity.

A final point to discuss with regards to the topic of playwriting and theatre making is Muthal, Krijay and Kamini's thoughts on if and how they think the stage is an empowering space for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Many writers' argue that SAIW have been seen as "invisible" (Rajab, 2011: np), that they have largely been confined to the private, domestic sphere of life (Govender, 2001), and that their fictional work has been seriously neglected (Govinden, 2008). Therefore, a research objective of my thesis is to ascertain how plays and theatre by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID defy these socio-cultural limitations. As aspiring writers, there is always a nervousness that comes with publicly sharing one's work. We become concerned with whether or not we have the authority or necessary skills to tell our stories and speak our 'truths'. This feeling is exacerbated in marginalised groups, such as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, who historically and culturally have been required in our communities to remain silent and not speak out, in first of all our private homes let alone the public domain.

I certainly always feel trepidation in sharing my work, from its inception on the page right until opening night. This stems from doubt in my abilities as a playwright and in the stories I want to tell, with the personal connection in my plays adding to my anxiety. Such thoughts are not uncommon, particularly when taking on narrative autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2000). I find assurance in writing my voice, once again, in Muthal's words. She crucially says that in considering empowerment, the only person who can make the writer believe in their authority is themselves: "the moment you set pen to paper, you write with personal authority" (Naidoo, 2017: 25). Muthal thus asserts, in an interview with Nancye

Edwards, that one of the reasons she self-publishes is because even though she did first submit her work for consideration, she was not going to wait for recognition or worthiness from a publisher (2017). Muthal makes a vital point here, one that we should all heed, that our worth and authority as writers, as artists comes from within us. This, in itself, is empowering for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights who have long been overlooked in South African fiction and theatre (Frenkel, 2010; Govender, 1999; Govinden, 2008).

Kamini too agrees that playwriting and theatre is an empowering form of expression for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Nonetheless, she does point out that sharing oneself and one's life with an audience, as she unflinchingly did in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013), puts one in a very difficult and vulnerable space. She says that, "*Looking back it was brave, but at the time it was very hard…That week before jitters, and nerves, it really was a lot harder for this show*" (P3). Ellis (2004) contends that those who think autoethnography is simply writing about one's life have no idea about how truly difficult it is, that it requires honesty and the vulnerability of revealing oneself, and that it may cause one doubt, fear, humiliation and emotional pain. I can attest to this as what I have shared in this thesis, and what I have also expressed in my plays, are indeed my innermost thoughts and feelings, which I have never revealed before, anywhere or with anyone. Much of what I have written, I had never even admitted to myself before undertaking autoethnographic research.

On the other hand, there is reward to be found in putting oneself in such a vulnerable space and it is twofold. Firstly, delving into autoethnography, and using it in both research and creative work, is a fulfilling experience as it allows one to understand oneself far more deeply. Bochner and Ellis (2000) avow that we should feel no shame if our work has therapeutic value. Such thinking reflects "a narrow definition of social enquiry, one that eschews social science with a moral center and a heart" (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 746). Kamini does affirm that despite the vulnerabilities involved in portraying her life and literally putting her body onstage, it was a freeing experience. She says that, "*I wouldn't talk about these things over lunch or dinner with someone…But somehow when I went on the stage it's an ability to be open*" (P3). Thus Kamini, like Muthal, views the stage as a space for free expression, one that is not always found for women in our communities (P1; P3). Secondly, while our lives are particular, "they are also typical and generalizable, since we all participate in a number of cultures and institutions" (Bochner, and Ellis, 2000: 751). Hence in understanding ourselves, we in turn understand others more, leading to meaningful

communication in autoethnographic work and performance, between researcher and reader, and between playwright and audience. Kamini (P3) indicates the power of the personal, of expressing it onstage and boldly sharing oneself with audiences, in her account of the connection people had with *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013):

> *The more personal your story is, somehow it echoes….somehow people seem to be more open to it, or relate to it. There were so many people who said afterwards that they went through similar things in childhood. So I wouldn't use the word universal, but I'd say the more personal, the more audiences come…*

The stage space is therefore uniquely suited to intimate and authentic expression and connection. Muthal asserts that, "*When you think of a stage it is simply an open space that calls for imagination and invention – it provides opportunity*" (P1). She further explains that because in plays time is contracted showing only that which is relevant, from the characters' lifetimes, to the plot; this "makes it possible to create plays of great impact. People involved in the theatre, therefore, have at their disposal a very powerful means of communication" (Naidoo, 2017: 46). Muthal has said that particularly, for her, *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990) and its stage setting symbolises freedom for women from the conventions that bind them, with the space to freely explore their capabilities (P1). Krijay has long argued that SAIW have had their voices, stories and truths quashed in their own homes and communities. She thus advocates for the theatre as a space where SAIW can express their own subject positions and construct their own identities (Govender, 2001).

When I asked Krijay if she still thinks SAI male playwrights, in their work, reinforce stereotypical representations of SAIW, her response was that it is difficult to answer this question due the scarcity of plays being produced. However, she does feel that this generation of SAI men have been exposed to very strong Indian women, in media and corporate fields, and that "*global awareness around gender issues and gender equality has definitely impacted the way in which comedy is constructed and stories are told*" (P2). I contend that the work of SAI male playwrights, on both a local and global scale, is far more recognised and published (K Govender, 2009; R Govender, 1996, 2006, 2009; Pillay, 2009; Singh, 2013; 2017; 2023), than the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights (Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden, 2008). Therefore, arguably the predominant misrepresentation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in such plays by SAI men, due to unquestioned and stereotypical

perceptions, remain prevalent in SAIT. In light of this, Krijay's proclamation that self-representation is not just a necessity but also the responsibility "of South African *Indian* (original emphasis) women to challenge such image constructions and represent themselves" is still critically needed in SAIT and SAI culture today (Govender, 1999: 5).

Kamini feels that in SAIT and stand-up comedy, there continues to be the perpetuation of stereotypes, such as wife and mother-in-law bashing jokes, that lack nuance and complexity (P3). I agree, and find that the use of stereotypes in comedy and satire that comfortably get laughter from audiences prevails. When such stereotypes are simply repeated rather than interrogated, the cycle of oppression is continued (Naicker, 2017). One must seek with one's artistic work, as Naicker attests, to break "stereotypes from within" (2017: 25). Krijay achieves this in her play. She argues that *Women in Brown* (1999) does not construct SAI men as objects of ridicule. Rather, having women play the male characters, for example – which both Kamini (Govender, 2013) and I (Moodley, 2019) have also done in our plays – challenges the audience to really think about how power operates in relationships between SAI men and women (Govender, 1999). Such power relations, as Foucault notes, control, categorise and make individuals subjects (1982). Since SAI men (typically) hold more power than ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in our patriarchal society, portraying and questioning their stereotypical behaviour does not mean that we are demeaning them; rather, we are resisting the power relations under which we are directly and immediately subjected (Foucault, 1982). Krijay (Govender, 1999: 8) expands further on this performance style:

> The actors did not put on any "voices" or costumes to signify that they were playing men. This was a deliberate choice so that audience were aware that the actors were offering a critique to the way in which the men behaved in the various scenes…Thus the humour presented is not an oppressive one but an oppositional one, since the South African *Indian* (original emphasis) woman (the joker) is below the existing social hierarchy.

With the male character scenes in *Women in Brown* (1999), Krijay depicts the double standards at play between SAI men and women which, in turn, challenges the audience to question the cultural norms in our community and the objectification and silencing of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Krijay points to the distressing scene where the character Siva beats his wife because she did not serve food to him and his friends timeously (Govender, 1999).

This scene is staged in a blackout. Krijay explains that the use of a blackout here is to reflect the unseen and unspoken acts that are committed in homes, the private domain. Furthermore, this illustrates that although the "woman is constructed within the private domain, she does not have any power over that domain. Patriarchy is the dominating force, which controls the space" (Govender, 1999: 7). The beating comes straight after a scene in which the male characters joke about women's liberation, their progress in the workspace and that these days, women think they are too smart and speak too much. Siva jokes that "lib" in women's liberations stands for "Lonely in Bed!" (Govender, 1999: 10). This juxtaposition is an example of how comedy can challenge and break "stereotypes from within" (Naicker, 2017: 25).

In *Devi* (2019), I also had my female cast play male characters several times, such as Uncle Jeevan, the Indentured Man and the British Colonial Officer. In my play, after Uncle Jeevan objects to Vidya performing her mother's funeral rites as she is a woman, I transitioned to the farcical Bride and Aunties scene where the older women laugh at the young woman's naivety about her freedom (Moodley, 2019: 6 – 9). In the indentured scene, which portrayed the immensely harsh circumstances for indentured women, the Curator first remarks that this is what one needs to know about celebrating the arrival of Indians in South Africa (Moodley, 2019). This is a satirical comment on the recreation of indentured history in the media that celebrates ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as selfless matriarchs without acknowledging the very real and harrowing conditions of their lives that left them with no choices or freedom to do anything else in the first place (Desai & Vahed, 2010).

Kamini, through comedy, subverts stereotypes in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013), challenging her audience on their inner cultural and ethnic prejudices. Muthal in her trilogy of one-act comedy plays *Three for Tea* (1977, 1983) places her stories in the domestic spaces of SAI, and in using physical comedy, farce and pointed satire, she highlights the issues of arranged marriage, divorce and single motherhood in our communities. Consequently, I would argue that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, in using the various facets of the comedic genre which is highly popular in SAIT, certainly develop more nuanced work with regards to our experiences and identities. Thus, it is imperative, as Krijay asserts, that we use the medium of theatre to represent ourselves and our subject positions (Govender, 2001).

Lastly, Krijay adds that theatre will always remain a powerful tool as "*to have an audience is to have power*" (P2). Therefore, she not only sees the stage as empowering for SAIW theatre makers but also for the women who watch their work. Muthal (Edwards, 2017: np) echoes this sentiment as well, explaining the impact theatre can have for audiences:

> If the author's view is understood, it may change a spectator's understanding of reality. But I think artists simply offer other perspectives, which they share with audiences. They simply make spectators aware that they have choices.

Vitally, this is what plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have done: they have not only represented our experiences, they have boldly tackled what is often unquestioned and unspoken in our communities. By doing this, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can relate to characters onstage and see that there is power in voicing our issues and experiences. Muthal says that, "a woman should understand that traditional roles are options, and she is not obliged to choose them" (Edwards, 2017: np). As an SAIW, I can say that one of the first spaces in which I became aware that I even had such choices was in the theatre and by reading plays like *Woman in Brown* (1999), *It's Mine* (1983) and *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990). My autoethnographic reflection here is a testament to the empowering impact that theatre and plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can have, both for playwrights and their audiences.

7.6: Spaces and Limits – South African Theatre

The final data set or thematic area to discuss are Muthal, Krijay and Kamini's respective thoughts on the current state of South African theatre and the opportunities for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to prosper in this industry professionally. Unfortunately, the consensus from the these playwrights is that it is extremely difficult to be a financially successful theatre maker in South Africa. Muthal retired from working in theatre in 1998 and returned to Pretoria, where she continues to write and has self-published all her plays, novels, poetry and memoirs (P1). By self-publishing, Muthal is not generating an income. Although she has stated that writing is not a commercial venture for her, but rather to share ideas, it is unfair and a sad indictment on the state of South African theatre, literature and publishing that Muthal has not received financial compensation and recognition for her vast anthology of

creative work. Muthal, after all, in 2012 was awarded the highest honour by the Presidency for her achievements in arts, culture and literature, the National Order of Ikhamanga (Sewchurran, 2012). In an interview about the award, Muthal expressed that getting published is the biggest challenge for South African writers; this means, she says, that "my soul is rich, but I live in abject poverty because as anyone in this business knows – it's not cheap" (Sewchurran, 2012: np).

Regarding the dire situation of the production and publication of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, Krijay (P2) thinks the reasons are for this deficit are multiple and systemic:

> *The fault is many. The system doesn't encourage marginalised people to write…who themselves give up hope when conventional opportunity doesn't invite. We also have a dwindling theatre culture. I would have loved to be a full time theatre practitioner and performer but there is very little money to be made...*

Kamini too agrees that it is difficult to get funding to make theatre, to find spaces to perform, and to travel and stage one's work across South Africa. In addition, the lack of publication of work by SAI playwrights means that we are not exposed to the work that is being created (P3). Kamini attributes this problem to the lack of institutional support from universities towards publishing. She explains that because there have been SAI student performers who perhaps did not know where or how to publish their work, the impact of such plays is that "*it almost exists in the academic bubble it was performed in*" (P3). Kamini also mentions the National Arts Festival as a great platform but notes the immense effort and expense it takes to get there, and stage plays in a festival that is inundated with much new work each year (P3). Krijay, Kamini and I have all undertaken the task of staging our plays at the National Arts Festival. When taking one's work to the biggest theatre festival in South Africa, every theatre maker knows that one is doing this because of the exposure one hopes to get rather than any revenue one will make, which considering the expenses of travelling and staging plays in Grahamstown, will most likely mean that one will not be making any profit at all. As Gabriella Pinto and Dave Mann write, "The artists will continue, if the harsh economic reality hasn't dissuaded them already…after receiving a congratulatory pat on the back and a small cash prize" (2016: np). This is the sad reality of the state of South African theatre.

I questioned the selected playwrights regarding if they feel there is a dearth of plays being made by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Muthal explained that while she is retired from working in theatre, her understanding is that the producing of plays "*may be small as theatre in the community has always been a struggle. Indigenous theatre requires a good deal of support and that has been lacking*" (P1). Muthal is critical of mainstream South African theatre which she argues treats indigenous, original theatre as exotic and inferior while continuing to be preoccupied with western theatre (Naidoo, 2017). She has a point as, for example, western musical theatre continues to be popular and draw large audiences in South Africa. In fact, before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictions effectively halted live entertainment (Govinden, 2020), KickstArt Theatre Productions, one of the biggest companies in Durban, produced American and European musicals, such as *Chicago* (2017), *Into the Woods* (2016) and *Sweeney Todd* (2014), almost every year. Pieter Toerien Productions in Johannesburg and Cape Town have also produced massive scale productions of *The Phantom of the Opera* (2015), *Matilda the Musical* (2018) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2015), to name a few. These productions are successful with largely sold out audiences. I acknowledge that I am a fan of such musical theatre and enjoy seeing South African actors take on these iconic roles. However, I fully agree with Muthal's point that there needs to be far more support for the creation of original plays and theatrical shows in South African theatre.

Krijay contends that this support needs to come from not just the South African theatre sector, but also from our communities, our potential audiences. She says that as much as a "*play is a tool or expression of freedom, it is pointless if it isn't watched by audiences beyond the elitist South African theatre-going audience*" (P2). I believe that there is a desire within SAI communities to watch plays and theatrical work that reflect our cultures and stories. Anecdotally, I interpreted this from the response audiences had to *Devi* (2019). Particularly, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who watched the show resonated with the play and appreciated seeing such representations onstage. Krijay expressed that the reaction she got from SAI when she staged *Women in Brown* (1999) was positive which she was surprised by, considering the taboo topics the play openly explores (P2). Ultimately, while there is a hunger for the representation of SAI and their experiences in South African theatre, there is also an apathy in our communities when it comes to actually going to the theatre to watch

such productions.[45] This results in a narrow audience base for new South African theatre work, usually consisting of what Krijay refers to as an elitist audience (P2). As Brent Meersman asserts, "Without audiences there is no theatre. And in the South African context that means an audience that is not only wrinkled, balding, wealthy and white-skinned" (2012: np). Meersman (2012) and Krijay's (P2) point is that theatre must reach its audiences, of all races, genders and classes. This lack of reach is an issue with South African audiences in general, where it has become increasingly difficult to get people to commit to a night out at the theatre (Pinto & Mann, 2016). In fact, one of the marketing lessons I learned from staging *Devi* (2019) is that audiences were far more receptive to a matinee performance on a weekend than an evening show. My opening Friday night performance for *Devi* (2019) was largely full, but the Saturday night performance only had about ten audience members while my Sunday afternoon show was completely sold out. There is a running joke that SAI do not like to go out at night especially if it is raining, particularly elders like my *Ma*. Well, I learnt from staging *Devi* (2019) that there is indeed some truth to this.

On the other hand, while there is a need for SAI and/or SAOID theatre makers to have the support of their communities, there is the problem of "ethnic closure" when it comes to SAIT (Hansen, 2000: 266). Hansen explains that while the battle for the recognition of black theatre and Indian theatre "has been won in many respects…the audiences for many plays are still completely racially segmented" (2000: 266). Hansen notes that even *Women in Brown* (1999) with its fresh and contemporary tone did not "break out of the Indian segment of the public sphere" (2000: 266). It has been over twenty years since Hansen's research and sadly still, much theatre made by SAI is limited by the issue of "ethnic closure" (2000: 266). Indeed, the vast majority of audience members for *Devi* (2019) were SAI. The notion thus continues to exist that plays which focus on a particular ethnicity can only be relevant to that cultural group. This systemic thinking can be attributed to South Africa's history of racial segregation which has resulted in a post-apartheid society that is ideologically informed by differences of race and culture (Pillay, 2017). As such, theatre made by SAI continues to be

[45] As stated previously, reception theory or an examination of reception in regards to SAIT is outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, primary source material on this topic is limited, with, for example, Hansen's observations and analysis of the SAIT plays and audiences he watched and studied, being one of the few sources that discusses SAIT audiences (2000). Nonetheless, the resistant feminist theatre I contend ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have staged, and are staging, is indeed impacted not just by the educational opportunities and economic status of those who make it. The intersections of gender, class and race certainly impact the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are exposed to and get to experience such theatre. Thus, in endeavouring to reach beyond elitist audiences, SAIT and especially its women playwrights must keep in mind that empowerment and accessibility go hand in hand.

marketed and viewed along insular racial and cultural lines. This is engendered by SAI and/or SAOID playwrights themselves, seeking to target audiences in SAI communities, which have long been inward-looking (Rastogi, 2008).

I asked each playwright about their thoughts on this issue and if they agreed with Ronnie Govender's statement that his work is simply about his life, his unique experience of the universal and his assertion that this "is not ethnic, that is how art is made…but here we are invariably dubbed as 'Indians'" (Govinden, 2008: 112). Muthal, whose standpoint on identifying as Indian I have clearly established, avows that, "*Until we learn to see ourselves as South Africans, theatre will remain segregated and support for theatre will be sectional*" (P1). Krijay wholly agreed with Ronnie Govender's sentiments and affirmed that "*South Africans have not shifted from their race lenses*" (P2). Krijay also echoes my earlier point that what compounds this framing is the marketing and sales strategies in all sectors, including entertainment, arguing that "*their ideologies are unquestioned and often based on stereotypical and archaic notions of identity and audiences*" (P2). Thus, plays written by and about SAI are usually specifically marketed to SAI communities. This is done through, for example, "ethnic newspapers" (Vahed & Desai, 2010: 7), such as the well-known SAI focused *The Post, The Tribune Herald* and the *Sunday Times Extra*. When I worked as an intern for the *Sunday Tribune* in 2011, I was specifically made to write articles for *The Tribune Herald* section of the newspaper. I was given this task as I am an SAI and this section of the newspaper is targeted explicitly towards SAI in Durban. As theatre practitioners, we are also guilty of perpetuating this trend as we seek to target those most likely to attend our shows. Such people will most likely be our fellow SAI precisely because we are representing our respective cultures and experiences onstage.

Kamini discusses the complexities involved here, and points out both the pitfalls and upsides of categorising SAIT. She recalls that as a child her mother would take her to see Ronnie Govender's plays where there would mainly be SAI in the audience. She says such insularity in South African theatre is still the case, which is disappointing because "*it is just a story about someone's life. If you or I had to put something onstage, it would be about our lives, but it would always be labelled Indian*" (P3). Conversely, Kamini does note that because there is a general resistance to go to the theatre, SAI do venture to watch work that would be of interest to them as "*they're seeing someone of their culture there, so they might want to support, which is also nice and positive*" (P3). We are thus caught in a dilemma when

it comes to the issue of "ethnic closure," as Hansen (2000: 266) terms, in SAIT. While there is a need to represent and reflect specific South African cultures onstage for these respective communities, this should not be marketed to the exclusion of other groups, but should rather seek to be inclusive of as many diverse people as possible.

As Muthal notes, as South Africans we all share an overriding common culture (Naidoo, 2017). Therefore, as South African playwrights, we must strive not to perpetuate the prevailing trend of racially segmented theatre audiences. Muthal argues that if we truly are theatre makers, we should not be hypocrites as our medium is one of unity, where all art forms are blended. Various artists, from backstage to onstage, all have to work together towards the common goal of getting the production ready for the audience, with whom we also join in experiencing the final production (Naidoo, 2017). Muthal accordingly asserts (Naidoo, 2017: 47-48) that in the theatre, there should be no place for segregation:

> In the theatre world, we believe ourselves to be free of prejudice yet our practices fall in line with the dictates of our culture…we write plays that we limit to our own groups in the mistaken belief that other people are different and our plays cannot have any meaning for them. As theatre people, we should be the last people to fall victim to the idea of difference and separateness because the field in which we work, presents in every facet the idea of wholeness, of harmonious co-operation…of reaching out beyond ourselves.

Once more, while I agree with Muthal, I also acknowledge the idealism in her statement. South Africa's segregated history means that the prevalence of racial categories in all aspects of South African society, including the arts, is inevitable (Durrheim et al., 2011). However, with such groupings, we need to learn, as Muthal profoundly observes, to see beyond ourselves and to recognise that in the multicultural South African society in which we live, there is indeed much resonance we can find in each other's stories (2017).

Harnessing our identities and experiences, and infusing them into our artistic work vitally represents our respective cultures, communities and ourselves. This is what ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights have done with their work, in spite of the financial and spatial hurdles in the South African theatre industry. Hence, there needs to be a lot more support for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, in terms of the staging, marketing

and publishing of our plays. Yet even in the face of such marginalisation (Chetty, 2020; Govinden, 2008; Frenkel, 2010), I do not believe that our voices will be completely lost. When stifled, the hunger to write and perform only becomes stronger. ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in South African theatre may only be few and far between, but we have continued to write and stage our plays. It is my hope that future ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights will come across the plays and research of perhaps Muthal, Krijay, Kamini and myself and that, despite the immense challenges to make theatre, they will write their plays.

7.7: Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has extensively analysed my interviews with the playwrights Muthal, Krijay and Kamini, as well as their respectively chosen plays. Through a reflexive thematic and textual analysis – and in breaking down this study into the data sets or thematic areas of Constructing Identities; Intersectionality of Religion, Tradition, Ethnicity, Culture; Representations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID; Voices, Identities and Empowerment through Creative Practice: Playwriting and Theatre Making; Space and Limits: South African Theatre – I have discussed in detail the playwrights' respective thoughts on how they identify themselves, and how their playwriting is impacted by their lived experiences. I have also ascertained, by engaging in discussions with the playwrights and by analysing their selected plays, their views on the influence of culture and religion in SAI communities and families, as well as their thoughts on the constructed roles of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID within these ISAs. I also reflected on my discussions with the playwrights around the struggles ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID face in South African theatre.

Within each thematic area or data set discussed in this chapter, my analysis is infused with my response to the questions I asked of the playwrights, and my experiences of the many social, political, cultural and artistic topics that arose in our interviews. All this serves to highlight the phenomenon under discussion, and the primary research objectives of my thesis which are firstly to interrogate the construction and representational significance of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity in plays written by such women; secondly to explore how such playwrights' identities and experiences influences their playwriting; thirdly to examine the intersectional impact of traditional social, religious and cultural customs

(ISAs), specifically analysing how this is dramatised, challenged and represented in plays written by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID; and fourthly to discuss the empowering potential of theatre for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. In the next chapter, I discuss the feminist writing and theatre making process of *Devi* (2019), delving further into how I have used the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR to write and direct my plays.

"can you hear the women who came before me
five hundred thousand voices
ringing through my neck as if this were all a stage built for them…"
Rupi Kaur
(2020: 157).

CHAPTER 8: FEMINIST WRITING AND THEATRE PRACTICE – THE MAKING OF *DEVI* (2019)

8.1: Introduction

I discussed at the beginning of my thesis, the impetus for this research was my *Ba's* death. Indeed, her passing inspired the first play I ever wrote, *Breathing* (2010), which explored the effects of terminal and debilitating illness on family, for both the sickly and their caregivers. The toll such illnesses take on a family, and the pain thereof, which I observed in my own *Ba*, *Pappa* and their children, inspired *Breathing* (2010). The point to note here is that playwriting, for me, has always been influenced by my personal experiences and memories. Furthermore, *Breathing* (2010) was written as part of my Honours degree and *Race Trouble* (2013) was written as the creative project for my Masters thesis. *Devi* (2019) is also a process and product of my doctoral studies. Thus, as I have established, like many ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, I began playwriting as a university student because this space provided me with the opportunity to develop my skills as a theatre maker, and to write and stage my plays.

Race Trouble (2013) too was based on my own encounters of racial tensions between Indian and black South Africans. Therefore, my playwriting has always been infused with research and grounded in my experiences, exploring the broader cultures and communities in which I live. My writing is therefore autoethnographic and as a whole, the theatre I have created has always been personal, familial, autoethnographic, and research-based. Significantly, my playwriting and directing of *Devi* (2019) is grounded in feminist writing and feminist theatre practices, which is the focus of this chapter.

8.2: Feminist Performance Theory and Criticism

Feminist performance theory and criticism[46] is the "lens through which scholars understand theatre and performance practices that take gender difference, and gendered experience, as their primary social and political focus" (Solga, 2016: 1). *Devi* (2019) is a play centred around the different and gendered experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, as is evidenced in its plot, characters and themes. Gender is a social construct, and this is "reinforced in performance, for better and for worse…" (Solga, 2016: 1). What feminist performance theory and criticism does is enable scholars and theatre makers to have "productive discussions about women's (and others') experiences of gender, sexuality, political power and human rights, both on and off the stage" (Solga, 2016: 2). Therefore, this chapter analyses my writing and directing of *Devi* (2019) within and through the context of feminist performance theory and criticism.

8.2.1: The Spectator's Gaze

Solga (2016) argues that there are three central frameworks that feminist theatre makers and scholars use to deconstruct and analyse the ways in which gendered experiences are created in performances and represented onstage. The first framework is concerned with the gendered nature of the spectator's gaze and Solga (2016) points to two canonical essays on this, namely Peggy Phelan's *Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism and Performance* (1988) and Elin Diamond's *Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism* (1988), as seminal writing on feminist theatrical viewing. Firstly, Diamond explains that "gender refers to the words, gestures, appearances, ideas and behaviour that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity" (1988: 84). Thus, when spectators watch theatre performances, they see reproductions of "the cultural signs of gender, and by implication, the gender ideology of a culture" (Diamond, 1988: 84). Hence, although gender is a social construct, it is "a perfect illustration of ideology at work since 'feminine' or 'masculine' behaviour usually appears to be a 'natural' – and thus fixed and unalterable – extension of biological sex" (Diamond, 1988: 84). Feminist theatre practice sets out to challenge these ideologies by exposing, mocking and portraying counter representations of gender stereotypes. Theatre, with its direct, visceral and intimate

[46] This chapter is not a review of feminist theory literature. Rather, the specific central frameworks of feminist performance theory and criticism that Solga (2016) delineates have been employed to frame my discussion and analysis around the making of *Devi* (2019).

connection with spectators, is an effective space for exposing the ideology of gender "as a system of beliefs and behaviour mapped across the bodies of females and males, which reinforces a social status quo" (Diamond, 1988: 85). The gendered gaze of the spectator is one of the ways in which Foucault's (1982) concept of repressive power relations functions in society because through socially entrenched constructs, such as gender and sex, "human beings police their shared cultural mores in public and maintain the dominant culture's status quo…" (Solga, 2016: 19). To combat this, feminist theatre aims to throw open spectators' minds, asking them to question their own understandings of gender and their identities (Diamond 1988).

This is what I set out to do with *Devi* (2019). My play challenges the gender ideology of SAI culture in which ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are constructed as dutiful, care-taking, subordinate women raised for the primary purpose of maintaining their families as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters (Carrim, 2016; Desai & Vahed, 2010; Gopal et al., 2014; Jagganath, 2008; Kuper, 1956; Meer, 1972; Naidu, 2011; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Seedat-Khan, 2012; Singh & Harisunker, 2010). For example, in *Devi* (2019: 30-31), the moving tableaux depicting typical representations of SAI families since the time of indenture, and how this changed in subsequent decades, show that while ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives have advanced in terms of their educational pursuits and financial security, they are still the primary caregivers of their kin upon whom the moral reputation and integration of the family unit is dependent. The Curator in *Devi* (2019) guides the audience through the tableaux, pointing out these expectations that have been placed on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Moodley, 2019: 30-31). This is what feminist theatre practice can do: by foregrounding gender and enabling the spectator to see the gender signs of a culture, such as the structures of SAI households and families, these signs are shown plainly as "illusionistic trappings" that can "be put on or shed at will" (Diamond, 1988: 85).

Diamond's (1988: 85) categorisation of the gender signs of a culture as "illusionistic trappings" highlights a feminist poststructuralist position that words, objects, signs and their meanings have no natural connection to each other; rather, they are constructed and represented in our cultures and communities through and within language (Harcourt, 2007; Saussure, 2011). This is what Solga refers to as cultural materialism which she defines as "the social, political and economic conditions that shape the choices made by individuals in specific real-world contexts, as well as by characters on stage" (2016: 18). Theoretically, we

can embrace or reject the gender norms that are prevalent in our communities and families precisely because these norms are not natural or fixed, they are cultural constructs (Butler, 1999; Chang, 2016; Diamond, 1988; Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). However, it is difficult to "put on or shed at will" (Diamond, 1988: 85) gender signs because these gestures, appearances and behaviours are so entrenched in our societies that even when one chooses to dis-identify with the perceived gender standards determined by patriarchal ideologies, one cannot escape being defined by others in relation to these expectations (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017; Weedon, 2004). Thus inevitably, the social construct of gender is a part of the construction of identity.

There is a great need to challenge, as Phelan states, the central absence of women that is "integral to the representation of women in patriarchy", which creates a focus on male desire that "infects and informs all forms of representation" (1988: 125)? How can feminist performance practices counter such dominant narratives of gender? Phelan does acknowledge that "redesigning the relationship between self and other, subject and object, sound and image, man and woman, spectator and performer, is enormously difficult" (1988: 125). However, this does not mean we must not work within the systems of language and representation as this only perpetuates the silencing of women (Cixous, 1976; Phelan, 1988). As Derrida argues, "Deconstruction is something…which happens inside" (1997: 9). Hence, Phelan asserts that we must create work in which the positions of theatrical exchange, between performer and spectator, are easily identifiable with a coherent point of view so that our plays, for instance, can address the female spectator and "raise the specter of the absent women" (1988: 124).

In *Devi* (2019), I have strived to create a play that directly addresses ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, with a laser focus on this cultural group's issues and experiences. Ultimately, we must embrace the spectator's gendered gaze and channel it to question their long-held assumptions and beliefs on gender. Theatre is effective in exploring feminist poststructural notions of identity, language and signs precisely because of its understanding of the gendered nature of the spectator's gaze, as Solga (2016: 18 – 19) explains:

> This "gaze" does not simply refer to one's individual act of looking at (or on) the stage; the gaze may be focused through individual viewers' eyes, but it derives from those viewers' unconscious commitment to shared social and cultural expectations

about how men and women *should* (original emphasis) each appear, act and speak, both on stage and in the world in a given place and time.

8.2.2: Non-realism

Examining how feminist theatre makers critically engage the spectator's gendered gaze points to the second central framework that is of importance to feminist performance theorists: the politics of realism in feminist theatre (Solga, 2016). Elaine Aston explains that in order for feminist critical theory and feminist performance "to develop counter-cultural practices, feminists needed to be able to understand the formal properties and ideological content/s of dominant cultural forms" (1999: 6). The dominant cultural form in theatre is realism, particularly the traditional realist drama of the well-made play (Solga, 2016). The feminist resistance to stage realism was due to firstly, this theatrical style's focus on men's issues "at the expense of complex women characters" and secondly, because the well-made play "all too often features a challenging female character…whose resistance to the feminine property dictated by her society makes her troublesome…Ibsen's Hedda…William's Laura or Blanche" (Solga, 2016: 39). The notion of the portrayal of women as difficult or problematic in classic realist plays reflects a critical feminist "understanding of the ways in which the conventions of the dominant tradition of domestic realism could be seen to uphold an 'active/male and passive/female' structuring of narrative and agency" (Aston, 1999: 6-7).

Of course, this is not a blanket statement that can be applied to every realist play nor does it mean that feminist theatre makers do not work with the conventions of realism. As Solga states, "feminist critiques of realist plays by both men and women have rarely extended to a wholesale rejection of the form" (2016: 40). Rather, as Aston (1999: 7) explains, realism has been adapted for feminist theatre practices:

> Feminist playwrights and practitioners who felt alienated by the realist structures of 'women-belonging-to-men' wanted to explore other theatrical forms and acting styles to represent their experiences, themes or subjects. It was not so much a question of finding *new* forms, but of *re-working* (original emphasis) old or established forms and styles, in the interests of feminist dramatic and stage practice/s.

Realism has always been my first love in theatre. I enjoy reading, performing and watching realist plays. I relish the in-depth characters and detail of this form, as seen for instance in my favourite realist play, Athol Fugard's seminal *Hello and Goodbye* (1965). Both *Breathing* (2010) and *Race Trouble* (2013) were plays I wrote and staged in a realist style. While this worked fairly well for *Breathing* (2010), I did feel, upon reflection after the production, that *Race Trouble* (2013) could have been more compelling and enjoyable if I had written and staged this play using non-realist playwriting and stage techniques. Therefore, when it came to writing and directing *Devi* (2019), I knew I wanted to, as Aston (1999) says, explore other theatrical forms to represent my experiences and my play's themes.

I still used realist conventions in writing *Devi* (2019), alternating between realistic and non-realistic scenes. The realistic scenes are between the sisters Vidya, Nitara, Kavya and Neha linearly following their journey from the inciting incident of the play, their mother's death. The non-realistic scenes are placed between these realistic scenes in which the cast play multiple characters (signified through props and costume pieces) in multiple settings. The set is thus non-realistic, with the ottomans and benches representing many different objects and settings from a funeral area and coffin to a lounge. The reason for these non-realistic scenes is because I felt, just as Aston notes other women theatre makers did, that everything I "needed to say, show, communicate could simply not be contained 'in a naturalistic setting or with a narrative that just went beginning, middle, end, or a one-act play'" (1999: 7). Furthermore, I wanted to jolt and engage my audience with contrasting scenes, a mixture of drama and comedy[47], as well as a range of characters and experiences representative of SAI culture. The use of both realist and non-realist conventions was the most effective way to achieve this. In having contrasting scenes, I therefore used "slicing techniques, ways of suspending disbelief, to get the imagination and the emotions operating on many different levels" (Aston, 1999: 8).

The use of the Curator in every non-realistic scene establishes the notion that the audience is viewing these scenes through the concept of the "Museum of the South African Indian Woman" (Moodley, 2019: 6). This allows for a variety of alternate settings and realties to be portrayed onstage from Devi speaking to goddesses Sita and Draupadi in the afterlife to a ship bringing indentured Indian men and women to South Africa. Another

[47] My use of this genre, and its complexities in SAIT, I discussed in chapters six and seven.

"slicing" technique, as Aston (1999: 8) terms, apart from the multi-functional sets and props, is the use of music. Specific songs are utilised during the scene changes, which is precisely noted in the stage directions of the script. I deliberately chose certain songs in order to contrast with the scenes onstage. For instance, in the scene between the Aunties and the Bride who receives a reality check about marriage, Beyonce's lovestruck song *Crazy in Love* (2003) plays (Moodley, 2019: 6). In the scene where the Daughter learns about the strict customs and unease of menstruation, the upbeat song *Walking on Sunshine* (1983) by Katrina and the Waves plays (Moodley, 2019: 20) to highlight the contradictions between fictional representations of menstruating women in adverts and the actual reality of our menstrual and cultural experiences.

Such theatrical choices are reflective of the type of "strategies that feminist scholars have used to redirect and critique the patriarchal gaze…" (Solga, 2016: 33). A renowned theatre practitioner who developed these kinds of strategies to conscientise and evoke change in his audience was Bertolt Brecht (Solga, 2016). While not a feminist theorist, Brecht's ideas had a major influence on feminist theatre makers. Namely, his Epic theatre and its non-realist techniques – such as distancing the audience through the defamiliarizing of words, ideas, gestures and the actor demonstrating rather than becoming a character – aim "to produce a spectator/reader who is not interpolated into ideology but is passionately and pleasurably engaged in observation and analysis" (Diamond, 1988: 83). Brecht, like poststructural thinkers Derrida (1997), Foucault (1982), Butler (1988, 1999), and Saussure (2011), recognised the difficulty of radically changing language systems, as well as power relations and dynamics in societies noting that, "it seems impossible to alter what has long not been altered" (1964: 192). Thus, in order to move away from a state of general passive acceptance, Brecht (1964: 192) advocates that both the performer and the audience must develop a detached eye when in the theatre:

> Here is the outlook, disconcerting but fruitful, which the theatre must provoke with its representations of human social life. It must amaze its public, and this can be achieved by a technique of alienating the familiar.

Butler is also a philosopher whose work has influenced feminist performance theory (Solga, 2016). Her concept of gender as not innate but rather as a constant reproduction of gender codes that we subconsciously think of as "normal" (Solga, 2016: 35) is relevant to

feminist performance because, as Butler states, "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" (1988: 521). Butler, like Brecht (1964; Diamond, 1988), is also critical of realist mainstream drama as she sees it as a "tool by which gender identities are normalized and rendered binary…" (Solga, 2016: 38). She further contends that the theatre space does not have the same real-life consequences for those who subvert gender norms in their daily lives (Solga, 2016). As such, "gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions" (Butler, 1988: 527). While I acknowledge Butler's points regarding realism, and the comparative safety of the medium of theatre, this form and space can still be, as my thesis argues, empowering for marginalised groups such as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. The stage presents a space where we can explore our gender and identities with relative freedom.

While many SAI realist plays are androcentric, Krijay argues, including those written by women, the realist approach has also been used by some ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights to challenge the historical and culturally constructed private spaces of such women (1999). Citing Devi Sarinjeive's *Acts of God* (1997), which is set in the kitchens of its characters Kanna and Baby, Krijay explains that through the content of the play, Sarinjeive shows how such private spaces have been "unseen" and misrepresented (1999: 78). Therefore, the "play becomes groundbreaking in that it is one of the first plays that uses the realist approach in the presentation of the feminist argument" (1999: 78).

Krijay makes use of both realist and non-realist conventions in her theatre work. She employs many Brechtian, non-realist as well as traditional realist devices in her writing and staging of *Women in Brown* (1999). For instance, the main characters break the fourth wall and speak directly to the Director Figure in the audience, while some scenes are written in a realist form, such as the all the interactions between the male characters (Govender, 1999). In terms of directing choices, Krijay (Govender, 1999: 7) explains that having women actors play multiple roles, including the male ones, is a useful Brechtian tool that challenges the audience to think:

> The device allows the actor to play the roles of the abusive husband, the pervert, the gangster and so on which is interesting in terms of the way in which power operates in relationships explored on stage.

Krijay's mixture of both realist and non-realist devices in her playwriting and directing are reflective of the same approach I undertook when making *Devi* (2019). The writing of my play, like much of the scenes and monologues in *Women in Brown* (1999), is written in a realist form but the linear narrative of the sisters' shared grief and journey is paired with non-realist scenes in "a compare-and-contrast, episodic approach…" (Solga, 2016: 38). The purpose of non-realist theatrical practices is to challenge and play with cultural assumptions around gender (Solga, 2016). Thus, in *Devi* (2019), the Mannequins represent the ways in which ISAs such as Hinduism, culture and family, and especially elder women themselves in the family unit (such as grandmothers, aunties, mothers and mothers in-law), attempt to control the lives of the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID around them. This can particularly and symbolically be seen when Posh Mother 1 and 2 physically manhandle the Mannequins depicting what they feel their daughters, and by extension, younger generations of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have, freedoms and privileges (Moodley, 2019: 32-33). As Posh Mother 1 avows, "At the end of the day, we've given them everything they could possibly want. Far more than we ever had" (Moodley, 2019: 33).

Furthermore, the portrayal of Uncle Jeevan, the British Colonial Officer and the Indentured Man by women actors is intended to highlight their treatment of the women around them. Having the audience see the male role played by a woman produces a heightened consciousness (Forte, 1996) of gender roles and their effects on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Like in Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999), these representations redirect the patriarchal gaze, critiquing the behaviour of the men in these scenes. Such behaviour in the private domain of our daily lives is largely ignored and treated as 'natural' and 'acceptable' (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Hall, 1997; Solga, 2016; Walby, 1990). Jeanie Forte explains that this kind of theatre making, which combines realistic and episodic elements, allows scenes to "free-float in a cultural condition, making visible the oppressive society…" (1996: 23). She identifies such feminist writing practice as consciousness-raising, producing plays that implicate and motivate the audience to think about their own culture, sexuality and identity (Forte, 1996).

Ultimately, feminist theatre and performance theory – in particular Butler's philosophies as well as feminist theatre makers' reinterpretation and utilisation of Brecht's ideas in new ways (Diamond, 1988; Solga, 2016) – are useful in contesting and reimagining gender and sex onstage. However, one does not have to employ exclusively or explicitly

these concepts (Forte, 1996; Solga, 2016). For instance, Brecht's (1964; Diamond, 1988) notion of demonstrating rather than becoming a character is not a technique that I utilised in *Devi* (2019) in which I required my cast to fully embody their characters, particularly the roles of Vidya, Nitara, Kavya and Neha. As Solga states, "any dramatic genre, matched to an appropriately critical form of acting and directorial practice, might accomplish…politically activist resistance to ingrained sex and gender norms" (2016: 38). With *Devi* (2019) I stepped out of wholly working within the realist form, which had up until this point been a comfort zone for me, to explore a range of non-realist techniques. I found the mixture of the two forms, and an engagement with feminist theatre and writing practices, to be both effective and rewarding in my theatrical work. It is definitely a working method that I intend to take forward in the next plays that I write and direct.

8.2.3: Feminist Playwriting in the Present – The Personal is Plural and Political

The third central framework pertaining to feminist performance theory and criticism is concerned with "the present, and to the question of where feminist scholars and artists interested in theatre are focusing their attention right now" (Solga, 2016: 54). As discussed in chapter five, there are a great deal of negative stereotypes and perceptions around feminism. Added to this is the emergence of neoliberal thinking that perpetuates an illusion of gender equity that has resulted in, I would argue, a false belief that we are now living in a historical post-feminist moment (Solga, 2016). I thus agree with Aston and Geraldine Harris's stance (2006: 3) on not embracing the term post-feminism as it is defeatist in a time where, evidently, "even the most privileged do not yet as inhabit a world in which violence, injustices and inequalities are no longer carried out in the name of identity categories."

Furthermore, as I also discussed in chapter five, while some women are reluctant to self-identify as feminist, notably in South Africa (Steyn, 2008), it is clear from their actions that they hold feminist principles and practice these values in their daily lives (Solga, 2016). The same can be said of women playwrights, such as Sarah Kane, who while refuting a feminist identity, have written plays which reflect that for them, "feminism lies in primarily doing rather than being, and for whom that doing is both politically urgent but also marked by a profound loss of col-lective[48] feeling" (Solga, 2016: 64 – 65).

[48] Solga (2016) in discussing the loss of feminism as a uniting political force spells the word collective as "col-lective". She does not explain this choice. My interpretation is that Solga (2016) is highlighting the "col" in "col-lective" in order to emphasise the group aspect of the word, as found in similar words like 'col-laborate'.

There are thus contradictory beliefs around feminism, which Solga breaks down as "political *feelings* (original emphasis), especially…of hope (for a better, more gender-equal world), as well as…loss (for the currency of feminism itself, and its political force)" (2016: 15). Regarding this "hope and loss" (Solga, 2016: 54) within feminism, there are two significant points to note: firstly feminism, and its "col-lective feeling" (Solga, 2016: 65), cannot just be attributed to the negative stereotypes associated with this movement or the neoliberal belief that such a movement is redundant. There is also a long-held and arguably justifiable point that (Western) (Liberal) feminism[49] does not serve all women, especially those who are further marginalised by their race, class and sexuality. Therefore, any unity between women without addressing these imbalances and power relations is superficial and harmful (Aston & Harris, 2006; Davis, 2011; Reinelt, 2006).

Second wave feminism while striving to embrace an inclusive and collective "we", also violently excluded and "generated a 'we' that failed to take account of how it might be simultaneously inscribed through discourses of class (middle), sexuality (hetero) and above all 'race' (white)" (Aston & Harris, 2006: 6). For this reason, the concept of intersectionality, as argued and established in chapter two, is a useful lens to interrogate feminist identities and issues. This concept is suited to exploring feminist performance since, as Aston (1999: 17) asserts, while there is "no one way of making feminist theatre", the objective of feminist theatre practice is to disturb. Moreover, "representational systems (of gender, sexuality, class, race, etc.) are the subject (and are subjected to) this 'disturbance'" (Aston, 1999: 18). By the same token, May (2015) astutely explains that intersectionality, like feminist theatre, is open-ended. Yet, within this flexibility, the purpose of intersectional practice, like feminist theatre practice, is to contest societal and cultural norms. As May avows, intersectionality "is not about add and stir inclusion or assimilation into status quo…socialities, embodiments, epistemes, affects, and structures, but about interrupting, unsettling, reworking and transforming them" (2015: 251).

This is what I aimed to do in *Devi* (2019). Through presenting the cultural dynamics at play in our family homes, temples, at funerals, or in our communities, *Devi* (2019) firstly unsettles the systemic patriarchal hierarchies prevalent in these ISAs (Althusser, 2006) and

[49] There are many feminisms and some do specifically serve women of colour, such as African feminisms / decolonial feminism, and those marginalised by class, such as Marxist / Socialist feminism. However, engagement in these many feminisms is beyond the scope of this thesis.

secondly, seeks to transform the lives and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID onstage. For instance, Vidya insists that she will perform the funeral rites for her mother, a cultural practice usually performed by men. Further examples are that the versions of Sita and Draupadi in *Devi* (2019) break away from the unyielding loyalty they show their husbands in the traditional Epic texts of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* respectively. The Daughter rejects her Ma's rigid menstrual customs; Nitara confesses that her marriage, despite appearing on the surface to be successful, is actually failing; and Vidya admits that she has frozen her eggs, acknowledging considering this unorthodox way to become a mother. Ultimately, the actions of all these characters challenge and seek to change the status quo that remains prevalent in the ISA of SAI culture, thus reflecting my play's feminist and intersectional intentions.

While I purposely set out to make a feminist play when writing and directing *Devi* (2019), this is not necessarily the case for all women playwrights (Aston & Harris, 2006; Reinelt, 2006; Solga, 2016). Nevertheless, Reinelt argues that although playwrights may not self-identify as feminists, their work can still be interpreted through a feminist lens (2006). She does note the ethics of affiliating playwrights with labels that they perhaps disparage (Reinelt, 2006). However, I would argue that within feminist poststructural studies such as my thesis, it is acceptable to view and interpret plays through a feminist gaze because the representations in such texts are constructed through the shared medium of language. Plays are thus open to multiple interpretations by both the playwrights and theatre makers, audiences and readers, who engage with these texts (Hall, 1997; Weedon, 2004). Therefore, while there are current debates on feminism and its relevance, namely the varying "hope and loss" (Solga, 2016: 54) of this movement, feminist performance scholarship and practice continue to "provide spaces where women of all ages and backgrounds can come together to dream of a better, fairer world for all" (Solga, 2016: 77).

I endeavoured with *Devi* (2019) to create such a space for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, one of empowerment and emancipation that we are rarely able to experience in both the private and public domains of our lives (Govender, 1999, 2001). This is a process that began with firstly, my research for and writing of the play using the methodological approaches of PaR and autoethnography; secondly, working with my cast of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to stage the play; and thirdly, producing the play for audiences. The use of narrative autoethnography in the writing and staging of feminist plays is productive as both

autoethnography and feminism similarly intend to explore the personal in order to engage with wider socio-cultural and political issues. As Heddon explains, consciousness-raising informs "feminist art-practice" and therefore, "Given that the most visible 'origins' of women's use of personal material in performance lies in the feminist movement…the link between the personal and political seems self-evident from the start" (2006: 134).

Solga (2016: 14) definitively explains why it is crucial to study feminist theatre practices:

> Post-feminism is a seductive idea in theory, but it is not (at least, not yet) a reality in practice…And because many more women are "doing" feminism than merely identifying with it, we need to pay attention to feminist *practice* (original emphasis) as well as feminist ideology in order to account for their labour and their successes. Feminist performance theory and criticism developed in the later twentieth century in order to do just that.

One seminal text I utilised in writing and staging of *Devi* (2019) is Aston's book *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (1999). She provides playwrights, directors and actors with exercises and practical suggestions on feminist theatre practices (1999). Firstly, Aston (1999: 18) defines feminist theatre practice, noting that it is not just one type of theatre:

> It is…a practice that 'steals' or draws on whatever is necessary, from wherever it is needed, to oppose categorisation; to disturb the processes that en-gender meaning and representation; to activate a sphere of doing for the purpose of 'undoing'.

In preparing to write *Devi* (2019), as per Aston's (1999) advise, I drew from whatever I needed for my feminist theatre practice and for me, this lay in the field of autoethnography. I therefore largely engaged with autoethnographic exercises suggested by Carolyn Ellis in her book *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (2004). The exercises I did include writing about an event that greatly affected my life, my *Ba's* death; reflecting on a conversation I had with my mother about Sita and writing this out as a dialogue; writing about the emotions I feel when asked the question, "When are you getting married?"; writing my thoughts on my thesis as an internal monologue; and writing about my

vivid memories of what happened to me in my early years of menstruating (Ellis, 2004). Substantial information can be found through doing autoethnography, what Chang refers to as either personal memory data, self-observational data and/or self-reflective data (2016). However, autoethnographers must sift and sort all this data in relation to the objectives of their research. The purpose of Ellis's writing exercises were to take my vast personal memory data and specifically locate, reflect and interpret the experiences and memories that are of relevance to my research, along with developing my artistic and autoethnographic voice (Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004).

The methodological approach of autoethnography thus infused my writing of *Devi* (2019). My experiences and identity informed all aspects of the play, from the plot and characters down to the props used, most of which were of familial and cultural value to my family (see Appendix C). In fact, the many props used in the *Devi* (2019) can be viewed as cultural artifacts because they are objects "that explicitly or implicitly manifest societal norms and values" (Chang, 2016: 80). For example, all the kitchen utensils used in the play by the women characters, from potato peelers to pots and spoons, reflect the importance of "kitchen culture" in SAI homes since the time of indentureship (Daniel, 2020: np) and how this continues to characterise and represent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as the primary domestic figures in their families. My play wrestles with the effects of "kitchen culture" (Daniel, 2020: np), as we see the sisters begin to make their mother's biryani for her funeral ceremony. Here, the Curator challenges the audience to consider the gender inequity in our communities when she says that, "Passing down these special recipes goes from the *manja (Nitara and Vidya here press manja onto Kavya's face as if at her nelungu)* stained hands of mothers to daughters. Fortunately, some sons learn these days too, but never with the same expectations that their sisters face" (Moodley, 2019: 24).

In working with my cast, I engaged with Aston's practical suggestions for feminist theatre practice such as relaxing, as well as freeing vocal and physical exercises as, "Women especially need to free up their bodies and voices from the social and cultural conditioning that has driven them away from themselves, has silenced their voices and has constrained their bodies" (1999: 43; Cixous, 1976). Exercises Aston suggests for women to "help them 'undo' their gender conditioning" that I utilised in rehearsal with my cast include movement and warm-up techniques that focus on filling the space such as stretching all parts of the body on multiple levels; freely moving in the rehearsal room; changing directions and creating

different patterns because as women we "are often conditioned into making small, feminine movements and gestures…" (1999: 49 - 50). A vocal exercise I engaged with was asking my cast to vocalise whatever sound they felt as a response to being in the rehearsal space, in order to bring out their voices from "inside" their bodies (Aston, 1999: 51). Women are often discouraged and taught not to speak out and express their anger, as it is seen as unbecoming or unfeminine (Aston, 1999). I thus strived to create a rehearsal space that was the antithesis of the constrained environments found in SAI culture, for both myself and my cast.

I found, ultimately, that the most effective way to engender such a space was in having in depth conversations with my cast about the socio-cultural issues *Devi* (2019) tackles. While such conversations happened effortlessly and spontaneously as rehearsals progressed, Aston's practical exercises on "performing your selves" (1999: 171) assisted in jumpstarting dialogues and bonds between all the ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who worked on staging *Devi* (2019). Aston's exercises focus on women using themselves and their stories as the subject of feminist performance and theatre practice (1999). While I had already written *Devi* (2019) using my own identity and life in this way, I employed Aston's exercises in order for my cast and I firstly, to bond over our shared autobiographies, and secondly, for us to understand the wider political and cultural context of these experiences (1999). Some of the exercises Aston suggests that I utilised in rehearsals included each of us bringing photographs from our childhood and of our families to share with each other. Such images offer a great way to start conversations and develop personal connections as "photographs are an invaluable source for generating personal narratives" (Aston, 1999: 176). I shared with my cast photographs of the Tamil ceremonial prayer I underwent after beginning menstruating, revealing to them my unease with this cultural act which can clearly be seen in the images. I had not looked at these photographs in years; however, the autoethnographic approach of my research and the feminist theatre practices used in making *Devi* (2019) allowed me to revisit this emotional time in my life, which, in turn, led to expressing this cultural issue performatively in the play and analysing it in this thesis.

I also asked each of my cast members to bring to rehearsal a personal object that they associate with their mothers because in *Devi* (2019) the connection between mothers and daughters is a profoundly significant theme. As I express in the programme for the production (see Appendix B), *Devi* (2019) is a play that at its heart is rooted in and dedicated to my own mother. My cast thus shared the relationships they have with their mothers

through the starting point of the personal objects they brought. One cast member presented her mother's gold bangle while I brought my mother's white pearls because she always tells me that when she dies, I must make sure she is wearing them for her funeral. The purpose of the "personal object I associate with my mother" exercise is that it "was a significant way of bringing the 'mother' into the space to begin work" (Aston, 1999: 181 – 182). We also played word association games using key words such as "mother", "daughter", "sister" and "wife", while I also tasked my cast with creating tableaux comparing how they actually see their families versus how they would like to see them (Aston, 1999). As rehearsals progressed, we created tableaux for scene seven in the play that reflected the journey of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in the family unit since the time of indenture (Moodley, 2019: 30-31).

Aston notes that a safe space must be fostered for women in feminist theatre practice (1999). While the exercises I utilised may seem simple, they can be emotionally charged and thus, "A supportive atmosphere is essential for women to make public private representations of themselves, their family, their friends, and so on" (Aston, 1999: 176). I set out to create such a space with *Devi* (2019) and believe that my cast and I were able to bond, freely expressing ourselves and sharing our stories with each other. The more we rehearsed together and conversed on the issues *Devi* (2019) raised, the more I came to understand and appreciate that the personal is indeed both political and plural because women together "creating their own self-representations", "drawing on personal experience…forging and practicing new forms of performance", "revealing previously hidden or silenced experiences", "transforming (and thereby controlling and changing) their lived experiences into creative products", as well as engendering community and aiming to raise the consciousness of audiences through theatre, are all political acts (Heddon, 2006: 134-135). *Devi* (2019) is a play grounded in the autoethnographic and feminist theatre practices that Aston (1999, 2006), Chang (2016), Diamond (1988), Ellis (2004), Harris (2006), Heddon (2006), Phelan (1988) and Solga (2016) discuss and purport. As a playwright, I therefore wholeheartedly agree with Heddon's argument that the "performance of the personal is implicitly political and always necessary" (2006: 136). I state this in the programme for *Devi* (2019) (see Appendix B), expressing that while my play may have been inspired by my own experiences, it is not solely about or for me at all, and this is where its political and cultural value lies:

> *Devi* (which means Goddess in Sanskrit) is both deeply personal and familial to me. But it is also equally an expression of my research into the lives of South African

> Indian women. Thus my hope tonight, if you are a South African Indian woman watching *Devi*, is that you simply feel seen. For we must represent and honour ourselves, our mothers and our sisters. Nobody else will ever do it as well as us.

8.3: Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the feminist writing and theatre practices that informed my playwriting and directing of *Devi* (2019). This discussion was shaped around the three central frameworks or concerns of feminist performance theory and criticism, namely the gendered nature of the spectator's gaze, the politics of realism, and current debates around the political feelings of "hope and loss" within the feminist movement (Solga, 2016). I analysed my writing and directing of *Devi* (2019) noting how it was influenced by gender, specifically the impact of this social construct on the creation and viewing of my feminist play. Secondly I examined my use of non-realist techniques in *Devi* (2019), discussing the resistance of feminist theatre to classic realism and the influence of the philosophies of Brecht (1964) and Butler (1988, 1999) on my theatrical work and vision. Lastly, I noted the current debates around feminism today, and explored how intersectional feminism, autoethnography and feminist theatre practices have worked together in both my practice and research, particularly in rehearsals with my cast where the connections between the personal and the political were strongly developed.

Chapters two to eight have extensively and in detail interrogated ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity through a study of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and their plays, including my own work, specifically *Devi* (2019). The writing and directing of my play has been discussed throughout my thesis but was especially focused on in this chapter. The following final chapter concludes my comprehensive research and summarises my thesis' findings.

"…there are hundreds of firsts i am thankful for.
that my mother and her mother and her mother did not
have the privilege of feeling. what an honour. to be the
first woman in the family who gets to taste her desires.
no wonder i am starving to fill up on this life. i have
generations of bellies to eat for. the grandmothers must
be howling with laughter…how wild it must be for them
to see one of their own living so boldly."

Rupi Kaur (2017: 211)

CHAPTER 9: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1: Introduction

In this final chapter, I summarise the findings and conclusions of my thesis which has interrogated ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity, through a study of their plays, including my own theatrical work. I present my findings in relation to the key research questions outlined in chapter one. Ackerly and True explain that, "Analyzing your data involves converting all your data, regardless of type, into findings" (2010: 177). My data, consisting of interviews, my autoethnographic reflections and/or use of secondary sources, was reflexively and thematically analysed. My primary sources, the selected plays, were textually analysed. All this data contributes to the findings and conclusions of my study.

9.2: Findings

For each key research question, I will offer the associated summary, findings, and conclusions.

9.2.1: Key Research Question 1

What plays have been, and are being, written by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID?

Firstly, historically and presently, there continues to be a negligible number of plays written and/or published by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Ansuyah Singh's *Cobwebs in*

the Garden was the first play published by a SAIW in English in the 1960s (Chetty, 2020). While Singh's plays and novels were set in India, Muthal was one of the first SAWOID to write and stage her own indigenous plays beginning in the 1970s, creating "works that draw on local apartheid realities" (Govinden, 2008: 111). She remains the most prolific and renowned SAWOID playwright. Since her pioneering work, there have been several other notable playwrights, such as Krijay, whose play *Women in Brown* (1999) is arguably the most well-known post-apartheid play by and about SAIW and/or SAWOID. In present post-apartheid South Africa, unfortunately even when such work is created, by for instance playwrights like myself and Kamini in the 2010s, the writing and producing of plays, as verified by my interviewees, is still negligible.

ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who write plays often first create and produce their work through dramatic arts departments in tertiary institutions. This is one of the few spaces in which we have been able to develop our skills as theatre makers. Moreover, the performances of plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID sometimes only have exposure through student productions, for two reasons: opportunity and resources. After initially staging our work as students, playwrights such as Krijay, Kamini and myself, have produced our plays professionally in theatre venues across South Africa and at local and national theatre festivals. However, this is an increasingly difficult undertaking due to the lack of opportunities, resources and especially funding to produce our plays in the South African theatre landscape (P2; P3). For instance, I intended to produce *Devi* (2019) at local theatre festivals. However, the pandemic and lockdown restrictions interrupted such plans. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already vulnerable state of South African theatre and its efforts to attract audiences. Additionally, funding and support for live performance artists from the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture has largely not materialised (Govinden, 2020). Ultimately, while from 2022 Covid-limitations have progressively been lifted, the lack of opportunities, resources and a financially constraining environment persists. Thus, the risk of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID remaining confined within the university locale, thereby limiting engagement and exposure, both nationally and internationally, is a reality.

In addition to the clear difficulties involved in producing plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, a further reality is that the publication of these works is largely non-existent. Discussing the "dramatic literature and performative acts" of SAI, Bose notes that

though there has been a focus on SAI novels, short stories and memoirs, "Theatre…has been remarkably under-theorised…even though its power in Indian South African communities and within South African history and culture has been amply documented and analysed" (2015: 235). Such documentation, however, does not include the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights. Our male counterparts, however, have fared better, with their work being published nationally and internationally (K Govender, 2009; R Govender, 1996, 2006, 2009; Pillay, 2009; Singh, 2013, 2017, 2023). As I discussed with my playwright interviewees, the situation is dire as there are few, if any, opportunities, resources and institutional support to get our work printed and distributed. The consequences of such an unconducive environment is that plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID remain unknown and existing work can and has been lost (Nathoo, 1997), if not documented properly. At the very least, plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID produced through university research have been recorded in some way, often as appendices to our theses (Govender, 1999; Moodley, 2023). Without this, or self-publishing, which Muthal generously does, plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID faces erasure from the fields of South African literature and South African theatre. Furthermore, as theatre audiences continue to dwindle (Meersman, 2012; Pinto & Mann, 2016), the history and importance of SAIT, and the continued potential of the stage for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, is becoming more and more removed from our communities' consciousness.

In my final analysis, I therefore argue that the writing, producing and/or publishing of plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID can indeed be seen as a continuing "cycle of neglect" (Govinden, 2008: 4). This term still applies as the situation remains non-conducive for such women to become producing and publishing playwrights. The marginalisation, and at times virtual exclusion altogether, of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's fictional work, evidences a perpetual side-lining in such fields on the basis of gender and race because we are viewed as a minority within a minority (Chetty, 2020; Govinden, 2008). Thus, we are so far down South African society's pecking order that we are largely overlooked. The concept of intersectionality is useful in understanding such marginalisation because it acknowledges and interrogates the ways in which identity categories, such as race, gender, class and nationality, intersect and affect the identities and lived experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including how we are perceived and subjugated by others (May, 2015). Ultimately, the literary hierarchy is shaped by the social hierarchy and therefore the marginalisation of SAI in post-apartheid culture continues to be upheld by the racial

categories constructed under apartheid (Chetty, 2020). This results in a dichotomous and binary racial model of black and white in which SAI are caught in the middle and discounted (Durrheim et al., 2011; Rastogi, 2008). What is therefore needed, as Chetty asserts, is "a shift of South African Indian women's writings to the centre…to strengthen and enrich the country's literary historiography and…for the creation of a culturally rich and just society" (2020: 400). I wholeheartedly affirm this point, as can be seen in my thesis which endeavours to recognise plays that are written by and that represent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

9.2.2: Key Research Question 2

How do the selected plays represent ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and what can be understood about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity from these works?

What is evident is that despite the decade or the prevailing political system, broadly I found the following common interrelated themes in plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID: marital status, marriage, motherhood, family, culture and religion. Regarding the ISA of religion, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID do have diverse religious beliefs and practices. Thus, arguably, specific customs and/or internal debates within Hinduism discussed in my thesis may not be relevant to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who are Muslim, Christian and/or atheist. However, SAI religion(s) are a mélange, defined not by hard lines but by mixed marriages, families and a patriarchal culture that has used religion(s) as a justification to subjugate ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (Meer, 1972; Seedat-Khan, 2012). Furthermore, our collectively constructed "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373) is shaped by religion(s) established in specific South African indentured, colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid contexts, and especially by the ISA of family which, as established, resonates across SAI communities (Gopal et al., 2014; Khan, 2012; Kuper, 1956; Naidoo, 2017; Vahed & Desai, 2010). Hence in both affirming and constraining ways, these ISAs, particularly family, deeply impact ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's lives and the construction of our identities, themes which ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights explore in our work. These themes echo the data sets that I found in my analysis of the interviews with the women members of my family. Therefore, there is a distinct interconnection between the shared cultural, religious and familial experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, and the focus on these themes in plays written by and about us.

To highlight examples of these interrelated themes, I will briefly summarise and discuss the characters and narratives found in the selected plays: In Muthal's *Have Tea and Go* (1977), Radha challenges her family's expectations of marriage by seeking to forge her own romantic path; in *The Divorcee* (1977) Mrs Singh attempts to handle the SAI men around her who cannot abide her desire to freely live as a newly single woman; in *It's Mine* (1983), Sunitha boldly chooses single motherhood despite her parents' and boyfriend's wishes; and in *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1990), goddesses such as Draupadi leave the traditional Epic to enter the freedom of the stage space that will not suffocate them (Naidoo, 2008). In Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999) we see three women, Pritha, Mona and Kammy contend with a range of familial issues that stem from the expectations of what an SAIW 'should be' in a culture and community that is hypocritical and turns a blind eye to the struggles of those who do not conform: Pritha is expected to bear her in-laws a child yet she does not desire to become a mother and is being controlled and abused by her husband; Kammy is in love with her boyfriend but her parents expect her to accept an arranged marriage; and Mona is seen as objectionable because of her choice to smoke yet her father's infidelity is deliberately ignored by all, including his own wife, Mona's mother (Govender, 1999). The women in Krijay's play use the stage space as an outlet to express their voices and stories because in the private domain of their lives, they are confined and silenced for the purpose of cultural and patriarchal preservation (Govender, 2001). In Kamini's *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013), through the bold and vulnerable prism of her own identity, experiences and body, Kamini comedically challenges SAI cultural and gender norms, from politics and caste to body image and sexuality. Finally, in my play *Devi* (2019), by demonstrating the deep and complex relationships between SAI mothers, daughters and sisters, I explore the lived experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID (based on my interviews and extensive autoethnographic and academic research). I probe the issues of death, marital status, marriage, divorce, motherhood, menstruation, family, religion, history and culture, and their effects on the lives and identities of my characters Vidya, Nitara, Kavya and Neha (Moodley, 2019).

The representational significance of such plays is that our cultures, to which our identities are inextricably linked, are defined through cultural practices including theatre (Govender, 1999). Comedy and satire are theatrical genres that can be interpreted as a "comfort zone" in SAIT, maintaining rather than interrogating stereotypes (Naicker, 2017: 7).

I thus contend that generally SAIT does not critically interrogate its communities' cultural and gender norms. Yet, it is clear that these patriarchally structured institutions have a wide-ranging and deep impact on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. I therefore argue and reaffirm that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, through comedy and satire, particularly challenge the stereotypical structures and representations of both our cultural and performing arts communities.

In constructing our identities, and defining who we are within these social systems, we grapple with the influence of our culture, religion, community and family (Hall, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1988; Morley, 2019; Walby, 1990; Weedon, 2004). This is the journey the characters in all the selected plays take. Some characters counter-identify, as Weedon (2004) suggests, while others find that they cannot be who they truly are in their culture and community. Sunitha in *It's Mine* (1983), for instance, fearlessly chooses to raise her child by herself despite society's objectionable views of single motherhood. However, Kammy has limited choices and thus commits suicide, while Pritha continues to stay in her abusive marriage, unable to live out her "dreams" in *Women in Brown* (Govender, 1999: 6). Vidya and Nitara fight in *Devi* (2019) because each sister is contending with their marital status, and the negative connotations of respectively being single and becoming a divorcee within SAI communities. Lastly, Kamini, in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013) expresses her memories, opinions, flaws, desires, realities, effectively her identity onstage. She shows us that what we have in common is not our conformity but rather our inner struggles to embrace our true and multiple selves in a culture that boxes us into pre-determined roles (Seedat-Khan, 2012). Evidently then, while there has certainly been change and progress in the public and private lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, the constrains of the private domain for the purposes of cultural and patriarchal preservation, which Krijay asserted in her research over twenty years ago, remains entrenched (Govender, 1999; Maharaj; 2013). The cultural practice of theatre is therefore vital because in challenging the constructed roles that induce us to continue to hold onto the patriarchal conventions of the private space, plays are "a weapon through which some form of liberation can be achieved" (Govender, 1999: 65).

9.2.3: Key Research Question 3

How do women who are seen as, and/or who themselves may identify as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights, including myself, construct our identities and how does this impact our work?

Hall (1997) is indeed correct in his assertion that identity construction is always fluid and in process, as can be seen in the range of responses from my selected playwrights on how they identify themselves. Both Kamini and Krijay noted the complexities of identity, particularly with the racial and cultural category of being 'Indian.' Neither objected to being seen or referred to as 'Indian' recognising that this forms part of who they are, their artistic work and how they are perceived by others (P2; P3). In fact, both these playwrights in their respective Masters research (Govender, 1999; Govender, 2014), refer to themselves as SAIW. However, from my analysis of our interviews, I found that since the time they respectively wrote their academic research, both Krijay and Kamini identify themselves more as SAWOID (P2; P3). Muthal, on the other hand, was far more certain, identifying as a South African woman, and emphatically refuting the word 'Indian' as part of her identity because she sees race as a false concept and views the continued use of apartheid racial categories as a perpetuation of apartheid mentalities (P1; Naidoo, 1997, 2017). She has thus always been referred to in my thesis as a SAWOID.

I identify as an SAIW and have strongly felt this way from the moment I began this study. One of the findings that I have established from my research is that the terms 'South African' and 'Indian' should not continue to be seen as disparate concepts, but rather as one connected and definitive term (Rajab, 2011). Separating these identity categories rather than acknowledging and understanding their significant intersection (Bose, 2009) only serves to further marginalise and "other" SAI people, culture and communities in their own home and country (Pillay, 2017: 82). This was reflected in the interviews with the women in my family, many of whom asserted their nationality as South Africans but seemingly separated this from their Indian culture (F5; F6; F8; F9). I argue that such dissociative thinking is due to South Africa only recognising SAI as citizens from 1961, along with the issues of ethnic pride and exclusion that have long been prevalent in our communities (Pillay, 2017; Rastogi, 2008). Thus, there has clearly been both a culture of insularity as well as a history of othering SAI, thereby erasing our specificity from the fabric of our nation's cultural identity. To counter this, SAI and/or SAOID playwrights have deliberately created indigenous plays that are about or contextualise South African politics and culture (Hansen, 2000; Naidoo, 2012). Therefore, when I state that I am an SAI, not an Indian South African, the distinction is important. Like all the playwrights studied in this thesis, we emphasise our nationality as the foremost part of our identities (P1; P2; P3). This echoes Rastogi's research which clearly establishes that SAI,

especially fiction writers such as novelists and playwrights, wish to firstly assert their identity as South Africans above all else (2008).

The influence of family on my playwright interviewees' lives is significant. In analysing their responses and my own autoethnographic reflections, I found that we all grew up in liberal homes where voicing our thoughts and sharing our experiences was encouraged rather than silenced. Hence, I contend that because of this kind of environment, we felt emboldened to make theatre and were captivated by the creativity and freedom of expression that such a medium offers (P1; P2; P3). This has not always been the case for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID who have been silenced in their homes and communities where patriarchal structures remain entrenched in the ISA of the SAI family (Althusser, 1971, 2006; Benstead, 2021; Carrim, 2016; Jagganath, 2008; Kandiyoti, 1988; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012). The influence of family is thus central to one's life experiences and the construction of one's identity (Pillay, 2015). This is particularly significant in autoethnographic studies where the connection between the researcher and their family is strongly made as our families, and broadly speaking the ISA of family, has an indelible impact on each person's life, experiences and identity (Adams & Manning, 2015; Althusser, 2006).

All the playwrights I interviewed expressed, consciously or not, what I analysed and found to be a poststructural understanding of identity. As I posit in Figure 2, identity is, as Muthal (P1; 1997, 2017) expresses, influenced by social, cultural and political factors; it is, as Krijay (P2) discusses, not wholly autonomous or freely chosen; and it is, as Kamini (P3) notes, ever changing and fluid. I argue that my finding here is significant because it highlights how a feminist poststructural worldview can potentially impact cultural products, such as plays. All the selected plays analysed, therefore, can arguably be interpreted as tackling identity politics through a feminist poststructural lens, countering the fixed and innate conception of our communities' socio-political, cultural and gender norms.

With regards to how our identities influence our playwriting, it is abundantly clear that my identity and experiences have directly influenced all the plays I have written and directed. Autoethnography has been a crucial methodological approach to both my research and my playwriting. This can also be seen in Kamini's Masters research (Govender, 2014) and her play *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013). In studying how South African women

explore and use their identities and experiences in their stand-up comedy, Kamini delved deeply into her own life using autoethnographic methods, as well as both the practices of stand-up comedy and playwriting, to create her one-woman play. Ultimately, just as the second wave feminist slogan attests, the personal is indeed political, as is evident in the work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights who draw connections between their personal experiences and the broader social, cultural and political ISAs that shape our lives.

The influence of personal identity on Muthal and Krijay's playwriting is more indirect, a reflection and exploration of the environments, communities and people they have lived in and observed (P1; P2). For Muthal, this involved the socio-political environment of apartheid, a regime against which she actively protested, both through her political activism and her plays that highlighted and challenged the realities and politics of living in such an oppressive system (P1; Naidoo, 2008). Such work includes Muthal's plays on SAI domestic situations, which often focus on women's experiences and issues (Naidoo, 2008). She asserts that playwrights situate their plays in the communities they know, environments which were engendered by apartheid's segregation policies (P1). Such communities continue to exist post-apartheid; hence, for Krijay, while her playwriting does include parts of her personal life, it is more influenced by what she has observed in the generally conservative SAI community, with her characters based on many people and notions, rather than on anything or anyone specific (P2). Considering the clear and common themes that are evident in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, notably marriage, marital status, motherhood, family, culture and religion, one of the findings from my thesis is that undoubtedly all our plays are indirectly influenced by our experiences and observations.

9.2.4: Key Research Question 4

In what ways do religion, culture, community and family influence the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID and, in turn, their representation in plays?

The ISAs of religion, culture, community and family deeply impact the lives and identities of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. My research demonstrates that in SAI communities and families there are clear roles and expectations of women, namely that we must be dutiful and moral daughters and sisters who must then fulfil our ultimate purpose of becoming wives and mothers who care for our families and homes. As Krijay posits, such roles are perpetuated through cultural, religious and familial practices that are "naturalised

through fixed notions of culture" (Govender, 1999: 5). Feminist poststructuralism seeks to dismantle such naturalised notions and systems in order to show that the societies, languages and identities we inhabit are entirely historically specific constructs, and therefore are not fixed but rather open to multiplicity and transformation (Barker, 2010; Davies & Gannon, 2005; Harcourt, 2007; Weedon, 1997, 2004).

There has, of course, been advancement and progression in the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, in terms of educational and career opportunities, as well as financial and personal independence. Notably, one's class absolutely affects one's access and opportunities in SAI communities, which are characterised by "extreme class differentiation" (Khan, 2012: 148). This can be seen in subclasses within SAI communities where both during and post-apartheid, class impacted one's respective living conditions and neighbourhoods, political support and electoral choices, as well as one's educational resources, limited university opportunities and career advancement (Khan, 2012; Vahed & Desai, 2010). Even SAIT is influenced by class in SAI communities, as seen in the significant 1980s trend towards SAIT theatre focused on farcical and comedic familial and domestic plays, due to rising inward SAI middle class lifestyles and cultural conservatism (Hansen, 2000). The intersectional factors of class, and in turn education, are therefore significant to the lived experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, including the opportunities and accessibility for such women to study, create and view theatre in South Africa (P2; P3; Chetty, 2020; Govinden, 2008).

What I do contend, however, is that across class, religion and/or ethnic differences within SAI communities and families, and largely within popular SAIT as well, the patriarchal stronghold of the private familial and cultural space remains, expressly in reference to our roles as daughters, sisters, mothers and wives (Carrim, 2016; Govender, 1999, 2001; Jagganath, 2008; Maharaj, 2013; Naicker, 2017; Rajab, 2011; Seedat-Khan, 2012). The responsibility of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to be the nurturers, as well as the moral and steadfast bearers of family values and connection, was firmly established during indenture (Desai & Vahed, 2010). I assert that the construction of these roles were engrained to such an extent that they have persisted for centuries in SAI families. This is evident in my research which finds that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, both young and old, view family and the expectations that come with this institution to be absolutely central to our lives. Crucially, such roles or expectations are not only upheld by patriarchal ISAs such as Hinduism, SAI culture (engendered by practices including SAIT theatre), communities,

and/or the SAI family unit. We consent to participating in these institutions, and thus fundamental cultural and ironically patriarchal traits are transmitted through generations by ISAW, SAIW and SAWOID themselves (Naidu, 2011). Therefore we continue, as Seedat-Khan argues, to box ourselves "into age-old gender practices" (2012: 46).

Through ISAs, our consent to abide and live within our patriarchal cultures, communities and families is manufactured and induced (Kellner & Durham, 2006; Gramsci, 2006). In the same vein of feminist poststructuralism's intentions (Davies & Gannon, 2005), ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's plays challenge the patriarchal status quo by portraying our issues openly, and expressing how we have been subconsciously manipulated to accept rules, customs, expectations and/or traits that are problematic. While not directly referring to her plays, Muthal describes what I argue can be seen as feminist poststructuralism's purpose in the foreword to her collection of short stories *Jail Birds and Others* (2004). I further contend that the following excerpt (Naidoo, 2017: 14) fittingly illustrates and summates the work of plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that have been analysed in this thesis:

> The characters in my stories are women for whom life within the social contract has become a jail sentence. Some break through the regulations and find the freedom to be themselves, others, fearful of breaking rules remain trapped in the prison of social conditioning and never find themselves.

Pritha rebels but is still trapped in her abusive marriage while Kammy's only release is death in Krijay's *Women in Brown* (1999). In Muthal's *Have Tea and Go* (1977), Radha takes action and begins a relationship on her own terms while in *It's Mine* (1983) set almost forty years ago, Sunitha is perhaps the most audacious, breaking all the rules of a very conservative community. Kamini figuratively strips herself bare in *She put the 'I' in Punchline* (2013), *un-censoring* (my emphasis) her body (Cixous, 1976), by confronting and comically deriding the social conditioning she has faced. And in *Devi* (2019), the titular character comes to understand, albeit in the afterlife, that some of her expectations were, in fact, socio-culturally imprisoning her daughters.

In reflecting on the impact of and connections between ISAs, and the dramatisation and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays, it is evident that firstly, during the time of indenture, religiously centred theatre and performance was a common practice.

However, the voice and presence of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID was largely absent along with patriarchal representations in such art, therefore reinforcing conservative expectations of women and their roles as devoted wives, mothers and bearers of family values (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Naicker, 2017). This continued in the popular vernacular theatre of the early 20th century, in which Hindi and Tamil plays dramatised mythological narratives such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (Hansen, 2000; Naidoo, 1997). Women began performing in these plays only by the late 1940s (Naidoo, 1997). The onset of apartheid brought about a change in focus to local social, political, and cultural issues. From the 1960s, SAOID playwrights such as Muthal, who was significantly one of the first woman, began making original, indigenous and protest theatre that reflected the socio-political environments of SAI and/or SAOID (Govinden, 2008; Hansen, 2000; Naidoo, 1997).

In order to challenge the seemingly 'naturalised' roles of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that are perpetuated through cultural and religious practices, theatre presents a medium for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights to counter stereotypical depictions and mis-representations. This is vital because, as Krijay argues, in plays by SAI men, conventionally constructed roles of SAIW are often unquestioned and therefore reinforced (Govender, 1999). Thus, it is imperative that "South African *Indian* (original emphasis) women…articulate their own" subject positions and represent themselves onstage (Govender, 2001: 33).

ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights have indeed taken up the task of challenging dominant representations through our playwriting. In such plays, whether written by Muthal in the 1970s or by myself in the 2010s, the central themes of marriage, motherhood, family, culture, and religion are explored through ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID characters who are constructing their identities in communities and families that have fixed notions about who they 'should be' and how they should behave. The impact of traditional religious and cultural customs on the lives of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID is therefore wide-ranging. Moreover, as is evident from the selected plays analysed in my thesis, such customs distinctly have and continue to be explored, contended, dramatised and represented in plays by and about ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

9.2.5: Key Research Question 5

Considering many writers' belief that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have been seen as "invisible" (Rajab, 2011: np), confined to the private, domestic sphere of life (Govender, 2001), and whose fictional work has been neglected (Govinden, 2008), how do plays and theatre by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID challenge these perceptions?

All the playwrights interviewed in my study expressed their belief that the medium of theatre can certainly be an emancipating and empowering form of creative and artistic expression (P1; P2; P3). Muthal firstly avows that the simple act of writing itself demonstrates authority thus writers should never feel disempowered (Naidoo, 2017). For ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights who are overlooked in South African literature and theatre, this is vital to remember: our voices and art do matter. While sharing our lives requires much vulnerability, Kamini still says the stage provided her with the "*ability to be open*" about what she would not address normally in her daily life (P3). Muthal asserts that the stage is a space that "*provides opportunity*" (P1) where "plays of great impact" can be made (Naidoo, 2017: 46). As established, one of the first points Krijay emphasises in her research is that the theatre is a public domain for "South African *Indian* (original emphasis) women" (Govender, 1999: 1) to tell their stories, and that such self-representation in South African theatre is imperative and our responsibility.

The methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR that I undertook in conducting my study demonstrate that the use of these two approaches together can create work and research that is of significant and therapeutic value, not just to the researcher but also potentially to the audiences and readers of the art one creates (Bochner & Ellis, 2000). The making of *Devi* (2019) was a deeply liberating experience for me, both as a researcher and a theatre maker, but most especially as an SAIW. Kamini, who also worked with the methodological approach of autoethnography in her research, along with the practice of writing and staging her play, stated that audiences connected with her work precisely because of its specific and personal nature (P3). Sylvia Grills (2021) asserts that academic knowledge can have social and political power when it is made accessible to the public through arts-based methods and practices, such as playwriting. She explains that when a play, or other artistic method, is "combined with an interest in conversing with the public…we can refer to it as public sociology" (Grills, 2021: 3). Arts practices and research work well together to both disrupt disciplinary conventions and impact society, as Grills (2021: 4) expounds:

> Art enables critique and empathy by making the views and experiences of others more accessible. Public sociology…and arts-based methods of knowledge mobilization are complementary to one another, and they help us gain a more critical understanding of the social world…

Krijay can be seen as concurring with the above statement as she says that having an audience means having power (P2). Furthermore, as *Women in Brown* (1999) is a popular play that came out of Krijay's Masters thesis at university, it is thus the most accessible form of her research. Muthal too finds that the theatre can have an indelible impact on audiences because it shows spectators that they have choices and can even change their understanding of reality (Edwards, 2017). Muthal's points here are distinctly feminist and poststructural because through her work, she is seeking to express to her audiences, especially women, that their identities and lives are not fixed or decided by tradition or culture, and that the roles we think we are expected to follow are simply options (Edwards, 2017). Such enlightenment can be found in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as they challenge the gendered nature of the spectator's gaze (Diamond, 1988; Solga, 2016). Incontrovertibly, it is through reading and watching the work of my fellow playwrights, as well as eventually writing and directing my own plays that I have not only felt empowered as a theatre maker, but also absolutely as an SAIW.

Comedy is the most popular genre in SAIT (Hansen, 2000; Naicker, 2017). However, the stereotypes used to generate laughs from the audience are problematic if comedy remains a crutch that perpetuates stereotypes without attempting to subvert or transcend these representations. As I have discussed in this thesis, I find that SAI do not like to interrogate the issues in our culture(s) and families. As a community, broadly speaking, we prefer to not air our dirty laundry and would rather continue to promote pure 'Indian' images and stories of mythology, Bollywood fairy tales, and comedic plays with the roles of men and women in such work either dated and/or harmful, preserving a conservative "Indianness" (Bose, 2009: 373; Naicker, 2017; Naidoo, 1997; Rastogi, 2008). There are, fortunately, SAI fiction writers, novelists and playwrights, who defy such traditionalism and wrestle with our socio-political and cultural realities in their work (Rastogi, 2008). Of course, stereotypes do occur in our communities and have some basis in our realities. As such, the form of staging comedic plays framed within a personal, familial and communal lens (Hansen, 2000), that developed and became popular from the 1980s in SAIT, continues to be popular post-apartheid. However,

playwrights must take their comedy further to transcend and "break stereotypes from within" (Naicker, 2017: 25). As I have argued, this can particularly be seen in plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID where oppositional instead of oppressive humour is presented (Govender, 1999) to point out double standards, subvert stereotypes and challenge audiences on their inner prejudices.

In writing and staging *Devi* (2019), I found the use of both realism and non-realism techniques to be an effective way to comedically present the themes of my play. This is not uncommon with feminist writing and theatre practice(s) in which artists often re-work the dominant style of realism with other contrasting styles to represent their experiences, themes and subjects (Aston, 1999). Such feminist dramatic and stage practice(s) can be seen in both Kamini and Krijay's plays (Govender, 1999; Govender, 2013) as well as my play *Devi* (2019). Ultimately, I assert that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights have taken the popular form of comedy, and through the use of feminist theatre practices such as challenging the spectator's gendered gaze by engaging with various realistic and non-realistic theatrical styles (Solga, 2016), have created nuanced plays that confront the prevailing stereotypes of our communities. Critically such work offers, as Naicker terms, a "re-representation" of brown women (2017: 39).

Lastly, South African theatre needs more audiences, beyond those that are white and wealthy (Meersman, 2012). Krijay contends that as much as the medium of theatre can be empowering, our communities need to show their support so that our work is not only watched by elitist South African audiences (P2). Considering the audience response to *Devi* (2019), I argue that there is a desire from SAI to watch local theatre that reflects and represents our experiences. However, there is also an apathy in our communities when it comes to actually spending one's evening at the theatre, an issue that similarly affects South African live entertainment as a whole (Pinto & Mann, 2016). Additionally, the racial, "ethnic closure" and insularity that early 20th century Indian vernacular theatre in South Africa engendered, further driven by apartheid's segregation and separate development policies, continues to be a problematic feature of SAIT post-apartheid (Hansen, 2000: 266; Naicker, 2017; Naidoo, 1997, 2017). As playwrights we face a dilemma of wanting our respective communities to resonate with our plays. However, this should not be at the expense or exclusion of other socio-cultural groups. As Muthal states, all South Africans, while having different respective heritages, share an overriding common culture and thus, "The way of life,

the culture of the 'Indian' in this society, is the way of life of all South Africans" (2017: 37). Hence, my contention in this thesis that the terms 'South African' and 'Indian' should not be viewed as disparate notions or categories. As Rajab (2011: 173) asserts, "South African Indian" as a definition is "very clear." Racially segmented theatre audiences which continue to be a prevalent trend of SAIT must thus be rooted out as plays by any South African can have meaning for all South Africans (Naidoo, 2017).

9.3: Conclusions

In Joseph's *Children of Sugarcane* (2021: 121), the character Shanti, an Indian woman who braves the arduous journey by ship to South Africa with the hope of a better life, describes her feelings upon arriving in her new home:

> Many embraced each other in that moment, relived that the *kala pani*, the black waters had not swallowed us. India felt as distant in that moment as if I had only glimpsed it in a photograph. I was elated at what lay ahead, glad I had found the courage to turn my back on a marriage I did not want. We had changed along that journey. So many beliefs we had held dear in India about caste, religion, the roles of women, had simply fallen away. I wondered whether, when we landed, people would fight to restore them. But I had a feeling that there would be more freedom to choose in Port Natal.

Sadly, Shanti's hopes are shattered in Joseph's well researched novel. She suffers under indentureship, within patriarchally constructed colonial, religious and cultural systems that never allow her to have the freedom she craves (2021). *Children of Sugarcane* (2021) recently received the 2022 Adult Fiction and Overall Winner at the SA Book Awards, which are "based on the bestselling books…as added up by Nielson BookData, and then voted upon by the booksellers, who pick which titles they 'most enjoyed selling'" (de Waal, 2022: np). Joseph's achievement here is a notable and positive step towards the reading and recognition of the creative work of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, particularly as her novel explores the experiences of the first Indian women who came to South Africa. Shanti's question about the restoration and preservation of customs regarding caste, religion and the roles of women has been answered in my research. As discussed and established in my study, these beliefs were

indeed reinstituted and although they have evolved, for centuries such views have been and are still perpetuated in SAI culture and communities. The interrogation of such acute tradition and expectation for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID has been explored by the playwrights, whose plays and identity, including my own, have been extensively examined in this thesis. In chapter one, I discussed what brought me to the point of beginning my study. In dramaturgical terms, my *Ba's* death was the inciting incident that led to researching and writing my thesis and *Devi* (2019). Now I must look back as Shanti does at the end of *Children of Sugarcane* (2021), and in writing the denouement of my research, I will discuss how my work and this journey has changed me.

To begin with, my understanding of identity has been deeply informed by my research, growing and emboldening my worldview. I discussed, at the very beginning of this thesis, the significance of my BA studies, specifically the discipline of drama and performance on my life, and how this influenced the ways in which I processed my family's grief and actions around my *Ba's* death. As Merriam and Tisdell explain (2016: 85), such connections are important to consider in any study:

> Each of us has been socialized into a discipline…with its own vocabulary, concepts, and theories. This disciplinary orientation is the lens through which you view the world. It determines what you are curious about, what puzzles you, and hence, what questions you ask that, in turn, begin to give form to your investigation.

My theoretical framework, that is usefully summarised in Figure 2, is in effect not just the backbone of my thesis. It is also a reflection of my worldview, in particular my understanding of identity politics and identity construction. In reading and studying the work of theorists and philosophers such as Althusser (1971, 2006), Butler (1999; 1988), Cixous (1976), de Saussure (2011), Derrida (1997), Foucault (1982, 1998), Hall (1997, 2005), Irigaray (1985), Kandiyoti (1988), Kristeva (1981), Spivak (1987, 1990, 1991, 1993), Walby (1990), Weedon (1997, 2004), and many others, I learnt about the concepts and theories of patriarchy, ISAs, deconstruction, power, identity politics, gender, performance, intersectionality and feminist poststructuralism. Most importantly, I came to understand that our communities, cultures, families, as well as our individual lives and identities, are not simply part of the natural way of the world which we are induced to believe (Gramsci, 2006). Rather, we live within ideological and/or repressive systems that are all constructed, not

innate. We also construct our identities with these RSAs and ISAs having a considerable influence over our lives and experiences.

Grasping that all our linguistic, social and cultural practices operate through constructed and especially rigid ideological and repressive institutions, crucially opens the door to the possibility of change (Foucault, 1982; Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997). By deconstructing how identity and power relations operate in societies, the purpose of feminist poststructuralism (Davies & Gannon, 2005), our eyes are opened to the fluidity and multiplicity within ourselves and our communities. Thus, we can seek to dismantle the oppressive patriarchal systems that as my thesis has illustrated, strike at the core of our identities and everyday lives as ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Ultimately, the clarity of this realisation for me, which came after considerable reading and research on my PhD journey, has been deeply profound, echoing my "view of the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 89). I therefore argue that the theoretical framework of my thesis, encapsulated in Figure 2, contributes to feminist poststructural studies. Specifically, in relation to ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, my thesis interrogates our identity through a feminist poststructural lens that I assert is uniquely suited to examining us as we are a group that has been marginalised, with our critical and creative work being overlooked in our own country, South Africa (Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden, 2008; Rajab, 2011).

To my knowledge, other than Krijay's Masters thesis written over twenty years ago which analyses three plays, including her own work, by "South African *Indian* (original emphasis) women" (Govender, 1999: 1) in post-apartheid KZN, there is no body of research that singularly examines plays written by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. My thesis considers playwriting by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in both the post-apartheid and apartheid period, the latter of which has especially been studied through an analysis of Muthal's plays. Most importantly, my research has particularly explored identity construction through semi-structured interviews with my selected playwrights that capture fresh data on their work and identities. There has thus been a gap, in recent decades, of comprehensive research on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights and their plays. My study contributes to filling this gap. Along with my own autoethnographic introspection (data which was reflexively thematically analysed within a feminist poststructural framework), as well as a textual analysis of the selected plays, including my own work *Devi* (2019), I have drawn further connections between, and established findings on ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's

identity, experiences, and representation within the broader social, political, religious and cultural contexts in which we partake and live.

The limitations, arguably, of my study is that my sample of playwrights is perhaps small, considering that I endeavoured to recognise work made by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID playwrights. However, this study required detailed, in depth analysis of the selected playwrights and plays in order to answer the key research questions of my study regarding the identities and representation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in plays written by and about such women. Another possible limitation of my research, as critics of autoethnography may contest, is that one of its primary focuses is the researcher, myself. However, I refute this as my identity and experiences are not the sole focus of my study. It is the central pivot around which my entire research has revolved and thus, autoethnography has been fundamental to my work. I could not have approached nor undertaken this project in any other way as it would not have only been impossible, but also disingenuous.

By deconstructing my own identity, life experiences, deepest feelings and unspoken thoughts, the autoethnographic process for me was both emotionally painful and enlightening. To put it simply, I have changed and grown through my autoethnographic research. I have contended with both my roles as a daughter and sister, as well as my dis-identification with the expected roles of wife and mother in my SAI culture and family. Identity is never fixed; nonetheless, upon the completion of my thesis, I am more assured than ever before about who I am in the community and family in which I live. Such a transformative experience is not uncommon in autoethnographic studies. My wish is that readers of my research and/or viewers of my narrative autoethnographic work, *Devi* (2019), may also have similar experiences. Bochner and Ellis (2000: 742) expand on this phenomena:

> Readers, too, take a more active role, as they are invited into the author's world, evoked to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference.

As ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, we are barely recognised, as either writers, artists or even characters, in South African theatre and literature (Chetty, 2020; Frenkel, 2010; Govinden,

2008). Furthermore, our characterisation in plays by our male counterparts is often unquestioned and thus we are stereotypically misrepresented (Govender, 1999). There is little critique of gender relations in SAI families and culture, and/or consideration of the particularly gendered nature of SAI spectators' gazes (Solga, 2016). In the programme note for *Devi* (2019) (see Appendix B), I write that one of the intentions of my play is for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID to "simply feel seen." I believe that I have achieved my goal of writing creatively and meaningfully about themes and people that matter. Through the methodological approaches of autoethnography and PaR, the representation of socio-cultural groups and identities like ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID that are often disregarded, are challenged through the writing of counternarratives, "stories that deviate from or transgress the canonical ones" (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 744).

In looking at actual experiences and thoughts of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID as I did in chapter five, one of the findings established from the interviews with the women in my family is the importance of sisterhood in all our lives, and the deep bonds we all share with each other as brown women. I emphasised this in my programme note, simply writing that "we cannot live without it" (Appendix B). I argue that one of the reasons for these valued relationships is because of the nature of the private domain for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. There is a distinction between the public and private domains for us, and the roles we are expected to perform in these respective spaces (Butler, 1999; Govender, 1999, 2001). While the private domain has been shaken by younger generations of SAI, both women and men who are seeking to change and/or adapt some of the customs in our communities (Maharaj, 2013), the patriarchal stronghold that is the ISA of the SAI family continues to stand firm. And yet, in this culturally constrained cycle, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, even as agents of patriarchy themselves, find our closest connections with each other because our experiences and identities are shaped by the ISAs that ideologically and repressively structure our lives. I therefore argue that in countering the silencing of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's voices, plays written by such women serve as vital representation, confronting and connecting us to each other through our shared experiences and struggles in a public, vocal space that seeks to challenge the status quo by questioning "perceptions within individuals and societies" (Bose, 2009: 374).

In her book, *The Moment of lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World* (2019: 105), Melinda Gates writes that, "when the life of a girl is planned out, the plan serves

everyone but the girl." As a young upper class SAIW in post-apartheid South Africa, I have grown up with ample opportunities, resources and relative freedom. I have not lived like my *Ma* or *Ba,* or even my mother, all of whom lived under oppressive apartheid rule and far stricter cultural traditions. However, for my whole life I have been raised, like many other ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID, under a weight of customary rules, traditions and expectations. Whether cooking, cleaning, dressing presentably, or behaving morally, it is as if each generation of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are being prepared for what is seen as their ultimate purpose: to become wives and mothers. This is the plan, and as Gates (2019) perceptively notes, such systems do not serve the women. Of course, as I have established in my thesis, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are by no means a homogenous group, nor are marriage and/or motherhood wrong desires. Nevertheless, still in 2023 in our culture, being single, divorced, or unmarried with children is not wholly embraced by our families and communities. Marital status is therefore a significant factor which all ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have to contend with in their lives. So even when one dis-identifies or counter-identifies with traditional marriage and motherhood, whether by conditional choosing or due to circumstances beyond one's control (Weedon, 2004), one is still identified in relation to these notions. One is forever seen as lacking and incomplete without being a Mrs and/or a mother, while at the same time, single status positions one as being available to care for any and all family members; above all and at one's own expense, ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID must be nurturers of the family unit (Carrim, 2016; Lau, 2010).

So has there been, as Shanti hopes in *Children of Sugarcane* (2021: 121), more "freedom to choose" for ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID? In concluding my thesis, I assert that our lives are still, albeit to a lesser extent, constrained by cultural, religious as well as familial customs, which we are expected to exemplify in our performative roles as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. My answer to Seedat-Khan's question is that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have indeed, since the time of indenture over 160 years ago, boxed ourselves "into age-old gender practices" (2012: 46). Muthal (2017: 41) eloquently writes about the introspection and journey we must all take in order to understand the meaning of our lives, rather than uncritically following what I would refer to as the ISA constructed, hegemonic routes and pre-determined roles that seek to silence our voices and constrain our lives:

> I am a Hindu by birth and the religion tells me that my entire life must be a journey towards enlightenment. That means that I cannot simply accept the routine into which my life has fallen. I must understand why that routine is necessary and if I find that the routine is simply a performance of perfunctory actions which merely stimulate living, then I must abandon it and find that which gives real meaning to my existence. If I cannot make an immediate change, I must be alive to opportunities for change. I cannot simply accept that I have no choice. I must be a person who makes choices and decides my own future. In other words, I must take control of my destiny.

The aim of this thesis is to interrogate constructions of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID's identity through a study of plays written by and about such women, including myself. The reason, ultimately, that I was drawn to exploring our identity and representation through this lens is not just because I am a playwright and lover of theatre. I avow that the stage has been one of the few spaces that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID have been able truly to be free, to raise our voices, express our desires, to effectively undertake the journey, as Muthal attests, towards understanding the meaning of our lives (Naidoo, 2017). It is not coincidental to me that for SAIW, their first forms of artistic expression and writings in English were playwriting and theatre in the 1960s (Chetty, 2020). Our preceding generations found resonance with the stage and we should take heed of the power they saw in this medium. When reading Muthal's plays, as well as reading and watching performances of Krijay and Kamini's plays, I have felt 'seen' in my identity as an SAIW. In writing and staging my own plays, I have strived, as my fellow playwrights have inspired me, to draw from my own life, observations and research to create plays that embody my 'truth' and broadly speaking, the experiences of ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID.

Such representation is necessary, because plays by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are an act of resistance, challenging the repressive ways our religions, cultures and families constrain us through patriarchally gendered and entrenched power relations. Thus, it is firstly crushing that there is a lack of plays being written by ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID. Secondly, of the works that have been written and staged, it is unacceptable that the professional producing and publishing of these plays in South African theatre is virtually non-existent. Therefore, one of my ardent hopes is that ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID in reading my thesis and *Devi* (2019) will be invigorated, as our elders were, by all that the

theatre provides. We must make use of such liberating spaces to write our own plays where our voices, often stifled and ignored for the patriarchal preservation of SAI culture, will not be silenced onstage. We are beckoning brown girls. We must keep reaching for that mandala magic.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SCRIPT OF *DEVI* (2019)

Written by: Devaksha Moodley

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Characters:

The cast wears white knee-length *kurti* tops with red tights and play multiple characters, signified by various props and accessories.

Vidya, 35, (oldest daughter; her name means wisdom; knowledge)
Nitara, 33, (second daughter; her name means to be deeply rooted)
Kavya, 30, (third daughter; her name means poetry in motion)
Neha, 27, (youngest daughter; her name means loving)

Uncle Jeevan	Woman
Curator	Daughter
Bride	Ma
Auntie 1	Mother
Auntie 2	British Colonial Officer
Auntie 3	Indentured Woman
Sita	Indentured Man
Devi	Posh Mother 1
Durga	Posh Mother 2
Draupadi	Mannequins

Setting:

The thrust stage is bare expect for four red ottomans and several white benches. Strings of flowers, in various colours, hang against the back wall and around the four poles near the

audience. A few strings of flowers also centrally hang in front of the back upstage space, where most of the props are kept, delineating the performance space from the props area.

Scene 1:

The four sisters are each sitting on a red ottoman, placed apart in a square formation. All of them have their heads bowed, and each look up when they first speak.

Vidya: She is dead.

Nitara: Mummy.

Kavya: Passed away.

Neha: This morning.

Vidya: In her sleep.

Nitara: Mummy.

Kavya: We were here.

Neha: By her side.

All: As she left us.

Pause. Then suddenly movement and much activity. Sounds of a telephone continually ringing. The women reposition the ottomans (now representing a coffee table) and benches into a lounge setting. Neha can be heard offstage, in the kitchen, preparing tea and snacks.

Vidya: *(on her cellphone) Namaste,* yes the priest is confirmed and the crematorium time.

Nitara: *(also on her cellphone)* Thank you for coming auntie. Thank you for the vade and kachoris.

The telephone keeps ringing

Kavya: Neha, put the kettle on, we need more tea.

Neha: Okay, can someone answer the phone?!

Kavya: Sorry, who uses a landline these days anyway?

She heads offstage to answer the telephone but it stops ringing before she gets there.

Neha: Mummy used the phone a little. But she was getting better with her cell.

Vidya: I'm sending the funeral details on WhatsApp, it's faster.

Kavya: Good because I'm tempted to disconnect the home line.

Neha: Just put it off the hook for now. Uncle Jeevan is here to talk about more funeral preparations. I'm going to lie down, I have a headache.

Neha leaves

Nitara: Wonder what he wants us to do?

Kavya: We need him. I don't know what needs to be done.

Vidya: You and Neha were too young to remember when Daddy died. We've been through this.

Neha (as Uncle Jeevan with a suit jacket over her Punjabi) enters

Uncle Jeevan: *Meree Sakhiyaan* (my girls), I am so sorry.

He hugs and kisses Nitara and Kavya, then goes to sit down. They all stand. But when Uncle Jeevan realises he has not greeted Vidya, he goes to hug and kiss her. Vidya cringes at this.

Vidya: Uncle Jeevan, thank you for coming.

Uncle Jeevan: Do not thank me, my dear. My sister in-law was a wonderful woman. Even after my brother passed, she kept our families together. Sad to see her go but she was suffering in the end.

Vidya: Yes. Uncle, I have made the funeral arrangements.

Uncle Jeevan: Yes, I got the WhatsApp.

Vidya: Right, so the body will come here tomorrow morning. This was mummy's home. She would want to go from here.

Uncle Jeevan: Of course, of course.

Vidya: I will be doing the prayers.

Uncle Jeevan: Forgive me darling but…

Nitara: Vidya? That's not what usually…

Vidya: I was her oldest child. I will do it.

Uncle Jeevan: No, only males perform the last rites. I did it for your father.

Vidya: I was too young to handle it when Daddy died. I can do it now.

Uncle Jeevan: My dears, that is just not how we do things. You can be there until the last rites but we'll get Kavi to preside over the prayers with the priest.
Vidya: Kavi, our cousin. Please, I, we, her daughters knew her best…

Redout. The song 'Crazy in Love' by Beyonce starts to play. The women line up the four ottomans in a row, a space between each one. While this takes place, Neha is the Curator speaking to the audience. She wears glasses, a brown silk shawl and holds a brown leather folder. Nitara, with an orange and red silk shawl over her head, as a bride would wear, stands on the first ottoman. The other women stand on the sides, as Aunties with shawls on their shoulders. Vidya is Auntie 1; Kavya is Auntie 2; Neha is Auntie 3 after she speaks as the Curator; Nitara is the Bride.

Curator: Good evening Ladies and Gentleman. And welcome to the Museum of the South African Indian Woman. Rare as it is to find anything solely focused on our gender and race, we hope you learn from this exhibition where we seek to make the invisible visible. Throughout this evening, we will look at snippets of the lives of South African Indian Women, starting, of course with the most important thing an Indian woman can do: Get married!

Neha now becomes Auntie 3. The other Aunties are fawning over the bride.

Bride *(radiant)*: The day has finally come.

Auntie 1: Yes girly. And as you take your first steps as a bride, you must remember this…

Bride steps onto the second ottoman

Auntie 2: Look at you in a love marriage, all your own choice. Planning your own wedding, choosing what food and flowers you want.

Auntie 3: And at 30 years old! What I would have given to have a marriage free 20s…

Auntie 1: One thing, you are so lucky, we did not have these choices when we were young. Mummy girl, tell me, for true you got your own career?

Bride: Yes.

Auntie 2: And you drive your own car?

Bride: Yes.

Bride steps onto the third ottoman

Auntie: 3: And you lived with your husband before you got married?

Bride: Yes.

Auntie 1: Without your mother in-law?

Bride: Yes.

Aunties: *Arre! Ayyo sami kadabale!*

Bride: I guess I really am lucky.

Bride steps onto the last ottoman

Auntie 1: Hmm, it's not all sunshine and roses. I was so sad to leave my mother and father when I got married.

Auntie 2: That's why you got to have at least one boy. Our daughters, they leave us, but our sons, they keep us.

Bride: That's not true!

Auntie 3: Don't worry *beti*, you must be good with your new family. Show them all what your mummy taught you.

Auntie 1: More family, more love, more obligations.

Bride: Our families didn't marry each other, we did.

Aunties look at each other and laugh.

Auntie 1: These modern girls get so carried away these days Just you wait. I could not even be there for my parents' funerals because I was so far away.

Bride: My parents live fifteen minutes away from me.

Auntie 2: Well they won't let you do much for the funeral anyway. You can't do certain prayers or pay for certain things. Only sons and their wives can. You'll sit on the side at the funeral, not behind the coffin like the men of the family.

Bride: People don't sit like that anymore.

Auntie 3: You belong to another family now.

Bride: I belong to myself.

The Aunties look at each other and break out into even more laughter. They take the Bride off the ottoman and leave.

Scene 2:

Redout. The funeral song 'Muthineri Arayatha' plays. The women push the ottomans together, removing the space between them and then place a bench on the two centre ottomans, representing a coffin. The women sit on the other two benches, now behind the coffin. They can be seen accepting condolences from mourners throughout the scene. The music fades.

Nitara: Thank you. *Namaste. Vanakam.*

Kavya: I don't know half of the people here.

Neha: Yes you do, you just can't remember.

Kavya: The queue is building. Wow, a lot of people knew Mummy.

Vidya: She was a teacher for thirty-five years. She was part of the temple women's committee. The whole community knew mummy and daddy.

Neha: Vidi, you made mummy look so beautiful. Now I know why they always say, "you must see the face, you must see the face" at funerals.

Nitara: *(giggling)* Shush Neha, don't make me laugh.

Vidya: We should have done the prayers.

Kavya: Oh Vidi, don't dwell on that now. What's done is done, it all went smoothly.

Nitara: We've got about fifty people coming for lunch and then bhajans for the next eleven days. We don't have time to think of anything else.

Kavya: Look at those people in the middle of the line over there.

Neha: Who?

Kavya: There, the two ladies and a man. They leaving the queue. They've come to the wrong funeral!

Nitara: What nonsense Kavya.

Neha: It's possible. There are so many funerals and cremations here all day.

Kavya: *(laughing)* Look how they trying to duck out! Well, I much rather they do that than offer us condolences.

Nitara: Don't laugh Kavya, this is a funeral!

But all the sisters are now stifling their laughter.

Vidya: Don 't worry, mummy would be laughing too.

Neha: Vidi, go, they calling you to speak.

Vidya stands and moves between the benches, as if standing behind a podium.

Vidya: To the presiding priest, dear family and friends. *Namaste. Vanakam.* Thank you all for coming to pay your last respects to our beloved mother, Devi Naidoo. She lived for 60 years and in that time, she lived every day to its fullest. She saw resting time as wasted time. Sadly, in these last six months, she became very ill. While sixty is too young an age to die, my mother, as such an active and vibrant person, would not have wanted to live a life confined to a bed. It was a blessing that her suffering did not continue and that she passed away peacefully with my sisters and I beside her. Now she is with our father and we know they must be happy to finally be with each other again. Our father, Praven Naidoo, who many of you knew, died tragically 20 years ago. Our mother had to pick up the pieces, she did not have time to grieve. She had four daughters to raise and she did this job with the greatest dedication and love. The loss of our mother has left a void my sisters and I are yet to process. Our mother Devi, as her name tells you, was a Goddess, our Goddess. We must now find a path without her. Mummy, we miss you and we love you. You did your job, you must rest easy now. Thank you.

Deva Premal's instrumental music 'Om Namo Bhagavate' starts to play. The sisters each place a white rose on the coffin. They all stand for a moment around the coffin, to say goodbye to their mother for the last time.

Scene 3:

Redout. Belinda Carlisle's song 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' plays. Neha resumes her role as the Curator. The other women reassemble the stage while she speaks. The benches are moved to the sides of the stage. A large blanket is placed on the stage, with the ottomans back in the square formation, as done in the beginning of the play.

Curator: 'Death is certain to the one that is born and birth is certain to the one who dies.' I got that gem from a little scripture called *The Bhagavad Gita*. For Indian women, nothing is certain in this world except death, taxes and that you will perfect how to roll a roti. These days, you can just buy them at *Food Lovers Market*. But still, you must know how make that dough while also making this dough *(uses hand to gesture money)*. Even after death, in your next life, you will be asked to do this. Unless you are reincarnated as a man…But ugh, what karma would you have to make you live that life, girl?

Neha now sits on an ottoman, just as Nitara and Kavya are while Vidya is lying down on the blanket. Each sister has a garland around their necks. Each sister in this scene is a Goddess with the exception of Vidya who is playing her mother Devi. The Goddesses hold certain props that distinguish them. Kavya is Sita with a crown-like headpiece. Nitara is Durga with a trident weapon and crown. Neha is Draupadi with a mangal sutra-like chain and crown.

Sita: Devi, wake up, Devi.

Devi sits up on the blanket.

Durga: Devi welcome.

Devi: Where am I? You are?

Durga: Yes, I am Durga, the most powerful Goddess. You are with us now.

Devi: My daughters…

Sita: They miss you but they will be okay. *(Devi gestures at Sita as if to say 'Are You?)* Yes, I am Sita.

Draupadi: And I am Draupadi. This is where you want to be Devi.

Durga: A freedom like no other. You have fulfilled your *dharma*.

Devi: I had more to teach them, to say. I need more time.

Sita: That was not in your destiny. I only gave birth to my children, I never got to spend any time with them.

Devi: My husband?

Draupadi: You will see him soon. How fortunate that you want to be together again. I have no desire to be reunited with any of my husbands.

Sita: They would have no answers for us now, just as they had no answers back then.

Draupadi: Serve me, feed me, care for me, pleasure me. Then strip me and shame me for all to see.

Sita: Using our bodies to wage war. Demanding that I walk through fire to prove my 'purity'.

Devi: I am so sorry. We don't think about these things when we tell your stories.

Durga: '*yatra naryastu pujyante ramante tatra devataha*'. 'Gods are pleased when women are worshipped'. The Feminine Divine should be venerated, not in their support of male deities, but on their own. They are our consorts as much as we are theirs. I was fortunate to be created independently, birthed by light. I was made to conquer evil, to restore *dharma*. But when women have immense power, they are also feared. We hold creative strength and power, *Shakti*, and we cannot be contained.

Draupadi: We see progress in you Devi, in your daughters. You do not live like your mothers before you. You never remarried, for instance.

Devi: I didn't want to and nobody wanted to marry a woman with four daughters.

Draupadi: Ah do not internalise that shame.

Devi: Sometimes at *nalangus*, I felt I could not even bless the bride as I was a widow. But I did it for my daughters' weddings, I didn't care.

Sita: As you should. A ridiculous custom.

Devi: My mother and grandmother made me think all these things. I fear I may have done the same to my daughters.

Durga: Tradition seeps into our bones, some are worthy of maintaining, others must be abandoned. But they are hard to shake off. You did your duty to your daughters. You will see this. Now do what most of our sisters rarely get to do on earth. Rest freely.

The Goddesses gesture to Devi, get up and exit. Deva Premal's instrumental music 'Aad Guray Nameh' starts to play. Devi stays and sits on the blanket, as if meditating.

Scene 4:

The music fades. Vidya, still on the blanket, sits. Kavya, Neha and Nitara enter, chatting. They go to the blanket and start to lift it.

Neha: *(yawning)* I am so tired.

Kavya: I know, its been so busy.

Nitara: Vidya get up.

Vidya struggles to get up.

Vidya: Sorry, these *punjabi* pants are killing me. They almost tearing every time I sit.

Vidya stands up and helps them fold the blanket. While speaking, the sisters move the ottomans and benches back into a lounge setting.

Kavya: Those pants are not made for women with…legs.

Neha: Better than a *sari*. I just cannot move in one, no matter how easy people say it is. And no thigh gap in a *sari*! Got to put my Spanx on beneath my underskirt.

Nitara: Stop whining. It's only a few more days. I'm tired, and not being with the kids is tough.

Vidya: And Vikash?

Nitara: Ya…

Neha: When are you going back to Joburg?

Nitara: The weekend after the ceremony.

Vidya: I have a wedding in the Midlands to shoot by then too.

Neha: Oh.

Kavya: You must come stay with us Neha. Your niece would love to have her favourite *mousi* around.

Neha: No it's okay. I need to face being here alone.

Vidya: You don't have to. I'm always in and out of my place. If you don't think my spinsterhood is contagious, you can move in with me.

Kavya: Vidi don't say that! And Neha is dating Mark anyway.

Neha: Poor guy, I think he's found this all overwhelming.

Vidya: Sorry but if I hear 'when are you getting married?' or 'let me introduce you to this boy' one more time, I don't think I can politely laugh it off again.

Nitara: Just tell them. 'No auntie, but you know, the way I'm having sex just to make sure I find the right one. Where's your grandson?' That will shut her up.

They laugh.

Vidya: In all seriousness, we have to talk about selling the house eventually. It's too big and not safe for you to stay here alone.

Neha: I know but I can't imagine anyone else living here. So what boiled food are we eating tonight?

Nitara: Masala-less but flavourful beans curry coming right up.

Neha: Ugh, I don't know how much longer I can eat like this.

Vidya: It's not so bad. Mummy was Hindi, she used to do it and so we must do it for her. Or you can be like Kavya and sneakily scoff the food her husband brings her.

Kavya: How do you know?

Vidya: Like mummy, I know all.

Neha: Why didn't you share?

Vidya: I woke up in the middle of the night and saw you. What were you doing up at that time anyway?

Kavya: I forgot what it's like sleeping next to you. I needed to pee.

Nitara: And this morning you were vomiting. Kavya are you?

Neha: Pregnant? Not again!

Kavya: Hey, I only have one child!

Neha: Which you birthed like yesterday.

Vidya: Congratulations Kavya.

They come together and embrace.

Nitara: Ooh I am so happy.

Neha: Me too. Another baby to happily play with and give back when I am tired.

Kavya: I didn't want to say anything now, at a time like this.

Nitara: Why, we could do with good news. My boys will be happy to get another cousin.

Kavya: I just wanted Arya to have a sibling, a sister hopefully. Like us.

Vidya: I froze my eggs.

Neha: Woah you did what?

Nitara: Why didn't you tell us Vidi?

Vidya: I wanted to. I told mummy…like Kavya said, it's been a difficult few months. Let's have supper. Neha, did you light the lamp?

Neha: Uh no, I can't.

Kavya: Not that again.

Neha: Sorry, I just can't do it when…you remember what *Aya* was like.

Nitara: I also struggle with it. I imagine her bearing down on us "You can't go in there!" Mummy never really made us follow it though.

Vidya: Hmm she didn't exactly stop *Aya* though? Come on, I'll do it.

They all get up to leave, heading offstage to the kitchen and temple. Neha remains and is now the Curator again.

Scene 5:

Redout. The benches are moved to the sides of the stage while the ottomans remain as they are. Music typical of introducing a news broadcast plays.

Curator: News from the Motherland: "India's Supreme Court has lifted a centuries-old ban on women who could potentially be on their periods from entering a popular Hindu pilgrimage site. The temple has refused to abide by this ruling so two women visited the temple in Kerala in the middle of the night. Attempts by other women to visit the temple have been blocked by thousands of devotees, both male

and female. Conservative Hindu groups say they believe women of menstruating age would defile the temple's inner shrine. The ban was imposed on all females between the ages of 10 and 50. News channels reported the chief priest briefly shut the temple for "purification" rituals after the women visited. In 2015, the head of the board that manages the temple said that only when a machine is invented that will scan if a woman is menstruating or not, will the temple discuss letting women inside."

While the Curator is speaking, a white string is placed downstage by Vidya and Nitara. By the end of the Curator's speech, the song 'Walking on Sunshine' by Katrina & the Waves begins to play. The three women stand by the Curator with scanners, attempting to see if she and they are menstruating. They even try this on a few audience members before abandoning the scanners. The women then move into their respective positions.

Vidya, as the Ma, is downstage right, in front of the white string, sitting legs crossed, in prayer. She has a lamp in front of her and is wearing a beige shawl. Nitara, as the Mother is downstage left, holding a pot and stirring it with a spoon. Neha, as the Daughter, is behind the white string, centre stage. She is clearly uncomfortable, looking around while tying a jersey around her waist. Kavya, as the Woman enters, skipping merrily towards the Daughter, twirling a red shawl. She is a stereotypical representation of the women in sanitary product adverts.

Woman: That time of the month. You know what I'm talking about. I can see it's just starting for you darling.

Daughter: Yes, can you help me Miss?

Woman: Of course, I have just what you need. *Stigma Free*.

Daughter: *Stigma* what?

Woman: *Stigma Free*. All day protection. Head to work, go for a run, swim in the ocean. You won't need to cover yourself anymore with *Stigma Free* sanitary pads and tampons.

The Woman guides the Daughter to step over the white line. But they are stopped by Aya.

Ma: You can't come in here.

Woman: Sorry auntie?

Ma: Go have a bath girly. And give me your clothes, you can't use them anymore.

Daughter: It's my school uniform *Ma*.

Ma: You have more than one. These must be given away.

Daughter: Mummy?

Mother: (*in a robotic manner throughout the scene*) Do it sweetheart. I can't believe this day has come. You are a woman.

Daughter: Why can't I come in here?

Ma: You can't enter a temple when you're having your monthlies.

Daughter: But you tell me to pray there every day *Ma*?

Mother: That's just how it is sweetie. We're going to have a special prayer and function for you. The family will come.

Daughter: Family? Function? Everyone will know I have started my periods???

Woman: Oh yes, now I remember. Must have blocked it from my mind. On the upside though, you get presents. Jewellery usually.

Daughter: I don't want jewellery. This is too much to deal with…I feel sick…

Woman: At least you're not being advertised for your new wifely and reproductive value. Now you can study, have a career and then get married and have children. You see, *Stigma Free*, You Can Do It All!

Mother: Come have some food, you'll feel better.

Ma: Take it to her. She can't come in the kitchen either.

Woman: Why? With *Stigma Free* you're covered while you cook and clean. You Can Do It All!

Ma: She needs to rest.

Woman: *(her advert persona begins to fade)* You can't be serious auntie! I suppose you think if she touches pickles, they will go bad or if her shadow falls over a basil plant, it will die. You don't want her to cook or touch anything. She's impure to you, she'll spoil the food. That's what you think right?

Ma: This is how we do things, how we always have and how we always will.

Daughter: Mummy?

Mother: (*hesitantly*) *Ma* is right. Come.

Mother takes the daughter and begins to exit.

Daughter: (to Woman) Miss, can I have some *Stigma Free* pads?

Woman sighs, shakes her head and kicks the white line away. Ma sits down and begins her prayers again. She puts the white line back in its place while the Woman speaks. Mother and Daughter begin to leave. Woman stops them.

Woman: Real truth. *Stigma Free* is bullshit. You want to know what happens when you're on your period? You have pain, you get headaches, you feel bloated. They'll be smells. That's right, it's not easy to go to work or exercise when you're bleeding from your vagina! Let me sell you the real deal: *Stigma Full*, covering you completely to be able to meet all your obligations because with *Stigma Full*, you won't have to worry about any leakages. You'll still have to live with the deep-seated shame your elders have passed onto you. But, you won't have to worry that when you cough, sneeze, stand up after sitting or lying down, that the flood you feel coming out of you is going to stain your clothes! So here's my advice: God forbid if they ever invent those scanners. No one's really going to know that you're on your period. So go wherever the hell you want! Walk into the temple, head held high. And hey, if you ever feel like not going, just use their ideas against them. "Sorry, it's my time of the month. I can't come to pray." Your mother knows I'm right. We just haven't had the guts to challenge it, carrying on customs that never should have been accepted in the first place. Girl, do us all a favour: Stop the Bullshit! Bleed Freely! Now that's a slogan…

The song 'Walking on Sunshine' resumes. The Daughter defiantly picks the white string on the floor, places it in the pot and leaves these things with the Ma. Redout.

Scene 6:

The ottomans are now also moved to the sides of the stage. Neha is The Curator once again.

The Curator: Is there a greater cuisine on this planet than Indian food? People who can't fathom being vegetarian have never learnt how to cook Indian food. For is there a better meal than vegetable biryani, *dhal*, and carrot *raithu*? Followed by *soji*, on the same plate, of course. Or *bunny-chow*, a Durban favourite, said to have been created as a take-away lunch for Indian indentured labourers by their wives. Passing down these special recipes goes from the *manja (Nitara and Vidya here press manja onto Kavya's face as if at her nelungu)* stained hands of mothers to daughters. Fortunately, some sons learn these days too, but never with the same expectations that their sisters face.

Vidya, Nitara & Kavya: My son is so good, like one professional chef!

Neha now heads to join her sisters on the floor. There are two big plastic bowls filled with some potatoes and water. The sisters are peeling and cutting the potatoes.

Neha: How many people are coming to the ceremony?

Vidya: Seventy.

Neha: So how many potatoes do we have to cut?

Nitara: Lots. Kavya, you're going too slowly.

Kavya: Sorry, I can't do it as fast as mummy could.

Vidya: None of us can. But we still got the green beans and carrots to go.

Neha: You know, we could have catered this whole thing.

Nitara: Don't be lazy.

Neha: I'm not! Do we even know how to make mummy's biryani?

Kavya: I've only ever made it with her next to me, telling me what to do.

Nitara: I wrote it down.

Vidya: Wrote what down? She barely used measurements. 'Just put, just put' she would say.

Nitara: I got the just. We'll manage. She only ever liked her food you know, she was particular that way.

Neha: We were so spoiled by her cooking. Since she died, I keep thinking there is so much I don't know. Like even all these prayers and ceremonies. I don't have the faintest clue about what to do or why we doing it.

Vidya: We are praying for mummy's *atma* to go peacefully. That's why we have kept the lamp lit since she passed. After the ceremony, mummy does not need to stay here, we can let her go.

Neha: I need her.

Nitara: I know but we have to go on. Mummy did it after Daddy died. We can do it now. Kavya is having a baby. Birth. Death. It's the cycle of life.

Neha: Speaking of babies, so Vidi, where are those frozen eggs of yours?

Vidya: Uh…they're in a lab.

Neha: And what are you going to do with them?

Kavya: I want to know too, if you don't mind. Are you waiting for Mr Right or a Mr Right Now?

Vidya: As if there is such a thing.

Nitara: Don't pry.

Vidya: Yes let's not. Or tell us Nitara, is your hubby Mr Right?

Neha: What are you talking about?

Vidya: I've heard you on the phone Nitara. Why isn't he here?

Nitara: The kids have school and Vikash has work. They're coming tomorrow.

Nitara starts to take the bowls and cut potatoes back to the props area.

Kavya: Are you having problems? You can tell us.

Neha: Really? What problems? Vikash is my favourite brother in-law.

Kavya: Hey, what about Niren?

Neha: He's okay, a bit boring. But he loves you so much, shame.

Vidya: She's had problems since before she got married. But she got hitched anyway.

Nitara; Why are you bringing this up now? Why are you attacking me? Just because you've never been married…

Vidya: That's my choice.

Nitara: As if! To answer your question, she is waiting in vain hope for Mr Right to have babies with! It's what mummy wanted anyway.

Vidya: Shut up! You don't know anything.

Kavya: Calm down guys.

Nitara: That's why she was okay with you being with a white guy Neha. At least you would have a husband.

Neha: Hey! She told me she loved him, he always liked her samoosas!

Vidya: Because getting divorced is so much better right? That's where you're headed. But hey, at least you tied the knot. Like a noose around your neck!

Nitara and Vidya continue to escalate their argument.

Kavya: Stop it! Both of you, before you say anything more that you can't take back! We're all just emotional right now. Let's go out Vidi, do those errands that need to be done at the mall. We can cook later. Come on. And maybe we'll get Neha some copies of *Indian Delights* and *Hinduism For Dummies* while we're there.

Kavya and Neha leave.

Scene 7:

Redout. The song 'Bad Girls' by M.I.A plays. Neha is the Curator once again. Two ottomans are placed together in a row, upstage centre.

Curator: We write from the past in the present about the future we want. In looking forward, we must thus look back. The journey of Indian women in South Africa begins in 1860. You know a couple of years ago when there were all these commemorations about the 150 year arrival of Indians in South Africa. This is what they were talking about.

Nitara, as the Indentured Woman, enters and stands on an ottoman. She is uncomfortable and scared, tightly holding a shawl over her body. Vidya, as the British Colonial Officer, wearing a jacket, enters and stands on the other ottoman next to the Indentured Woman, with a rifle in his hand. Kavya, as the Indentured Man, wearing a turban, stands nearby.

British Colonial Officer: You must not be very respectable to be on this ship.

Indentured Woman: No sahib.

British Colonial Officer: You're one of the only ladies on this ship. Why have you come? Are you a *randee*?

Indentured Woman: No *sahib*.

British Colonial Officer: *(looking at the Indentured woman up and down and poking her with his rifle)* I'll come back for you later…

The British Colonial Officer steps off the ottoman and continues patrolling. The Indentured Man now steps onto the ottoman.

Indentured Man: *Vanakam*

Indentured Woman: *Vanakam*

Indentured Man: Is your husband on this ship?

Indentured Woman: My husband died.

Indentured Man: I can help you. You hoping for a better life than being a widow?

The indentured woman nods.

Indentured Man: We'll get married.

Indentured Woman: What?

Indentured Man: You don't want to be a rice cooker, selling your body for food there. I can protect you.

The British Colonial Officer comes back.

British Colonial Officer: We've docked. Let's go *coolies*.

The Indentured Woman, between the Indentured Man and British Colonial Officer, hesitates, looking between the two men.

British Colonial Officer: Now!

They leave with the Indentured Woman taking the Indentured Man's hands.

Throughout the curator's next monologues, the women silently create moving tableaux, reflecting the curator's descriptions of a typical South African Indian family and the transition of South African Indian women into educational and working sectors.

Curator: And so began the lives of South African Indian women. Vulnerable and made, for decades, to depend on Indian men for their survival. During indenture, it was very difficult for women to get a divorce. But India's Supreme Court is on a roll, having also recently abolished another colonial-era law, over 150 years later: The adultery law which allowed a husband to prosecute any man who engages in sexual relations with his wife. In addition, this law prevented a wife from doing the same if her husband had an affair.

Curator: From the time of indenture, the most important institution of South African Indians, the family, was developed and nurtured by women. It was solely the responsibility of South African Indian women to maintain their families. To quote the great Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi: "Men and women are equal in status but are not identical, man is supreme in the outward activities of a married couple, and home life is entirely the sphere of the woman. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy."

Curator: So how did we step out of this blissful domesticity? World War 2 brought about a demand for labour as hawkers, domestic workers and cooks. From the 1940s, we started to go to school beyond puberty, heading to university. Now we could get skilled work as office clerks, lawyers, nurses, doctors and teachers. But still, above all, no matter what, we had to be 'decent' and we had to keep our families together. For a good Indian family must have 'moral' women.

The song 'Dear Future Husband' by Meghan Trainor plays while the moving tableaux conclude. Two ottomans are now placed in front of the already placed upstage centre ottomans, at a diagonal angle. The Curator now removes her shawl, becoming a Mannequin with Nitara. Kavya is now Posh Mother 1. Vidya is Posh Mother 2. Posh Mother 1 and 2 point to both people in the audience and the Mannequins. The Posh Mothers wear shawls and sunglasses. The Mannequins stand on the upstage centre ottomans and remain still, their heads bowed until the Posh Mothers handle them.

Posh Mother 1: So nice to see you. You well?

Posh Mother 2: Oh yes. And you? How are your children?

Posh Mother 1: My daughter is doing well. Working so hard, too hard. And then she must care for the kids. I help her. I keep telling her, you can't neglect your household. They must never forget that. My boy you know, still up to his mischief. But what can you do eh?

Posh Mother 2: True. Boys will be boys. Your daughter is married to that accountant from *Deloitte*, what's his name James?

Posh Mother 1: Yes. You know, at first we thought it would be difficult, her marrying a white man, but it's been all right.

Posh Mother 2: Christian?

Posh Mother 1: Lapsed.

Posh Mother 2: Better that way. (*Pointing to audience)* Saras Govender's daughter got a job with the United Nations.

Posh Mother 1: Amazing, so accomplished. She never married eh?

Posh Mother 2: Yes shame, maybe she'll find a husband in America.

Posh Mother 1: *(Pointing to audience)* Sanjay's daughter is getting divorced. They've only been married for three years. One child.

Posh Mother 2: So quick to give up these days. And what a wedding they had. *(Pointing to audience)* Well, Radha's daughter married a Muslim man. *(whispers)* A black Muslim man.

Posh Mother 1: *Arre Rama! (whispers, pointing to audience)* The Patel girl is living with another woman. As a couple.

Posh Mother 2: What? We must be grateful ours have not strayed so far. Some of these girls think they can do whatever they please.

Posh Mother 1: We let them live on their own. The hell my mother in-law gave me. That's why I don't live with my son and his wife. I didn't want to be like that, breathing down their necks.

Posh Mother 2: Who wants to live with them anyway? We have our own lives, you know.

Posh Mother 1: True. At the end of the day, we've given them everything they could possibly want. Far more than we ever had.

The Posh Mothers come to the Mannequins and start to handle them. They each stand on the ottomans just in front of the Mannequins, at a diagonal angle.

Posh Mother 2: Education.

Posh Mother 1: Travel.

Posh Mother 2: Tattoos.

Posh Mother 1: Piercings.

Posh Mother 2: White Husbands.

Posh Mother 1: Work.

Posh Mother 2: Living on their own.

Posh Mother 1: Independence.

Posh Mother 2: Choice.

The Mannequins now come to life. They remove the shawls and sunglasses off the Posh Mothers. The next verse is shared by all the cast, with certain lines being spoken individually, in duos and as a group.

All: Conditional choices you mean. When you wished for more, you were stopped. Why stop us now? When you didn't like being told what to do, why do you tell us what to do now? When you were forced to follow customs you knew weren't right, why do you push them on us now? When you see the changes you have made, why do you stop our progress now? We will cook your food, wear your clothes, say your prayers, expand on your teachings and nurture our homes because you showed us how, because they are ours now. We thank you for this. But we will not stop to question, not stop to wonder what is beyond. You have already shown us the way. We walk in your light.

They step off the ottomans. Redout.

Scene 8:

The song 'Sit Still, Look Pretty' by Daya plays. The ottomans remain in the same place, now reflecting a bedroom. This can be seen by Nitara packing her suitcase. Vidya comes out with a box. Kavya and Neha follow.

Vidya: Hi.

Nitara: Hi.

Vidya: You leaving tonight.

Nitara: Yes I need a day at home before work on Monday.

Vidya: I found this box of mummy's things.

Nitara: Oh.

Vidya: Look, it's full of pictures. Of her and daddy, of her childhood home.

Neha: She got married so young.

Kavya: *Aya* got married even earlier, at 17.

Nitara: I could never.

Vidya: Life was hard for them. They got set in their ways because they had no other choice.

Nitara: I know. Vidi, I'm sorry.

Vidya: Me too. I was upset because I told mummy about my eggs. At first she was fine with it but then when I said I may go with a sperm donor one day, she wasn't really okay with that. She said a child must know who they are.

Nitara: After daddy died, all we knew was her. We are who we are because of her and no one else. I told her I was considering divorce.

Vidya: Oh I didn't mean anything by that.

Nitara: No you were right. It's not working. Mummy understood but she wasn't happy.

Neha: She wasn't happy not because she didn't support you. She was worried about how it would affect your lives, she didn't want you to become a single mom like her. She also thought about how people would see you. She shouldn't care but like you said, sometimes she got set in her ways.

Kavya: *(touching her stomach)* Got to make sure I don't fall into that trap.

Vidya: You won't, we won't. I've felt so lost since Mummy passed. I don't know what path I am going to take. But I know you'll be with me. Remember what she used to say about the meaning of our names.

Nitara: Nitara. To have deep roots.

Kavya: Kavya. To be poetry in motion.

Vidya: Vidya. To have wisdom, knowledge.

Neha: And Neha. To be loving.

Vidya: What more do you need eh?

The sisters embrace. They continue to chat and look through the pictures. The song 'Gilehriyaan' by Jonita Gandhi starts to play. Lights fade.

The End.

APPENDIX B: PROGRAMME FOR *DEVI* (2019)

UKZN DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES PRESENTS

Devi

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY DEVAKSHA MOODLEY

FRIDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 7PM
SATURDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER 7PM
SUNDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER 3PM

SQUARE SPACE THEATRE (Howard College, UKZN)
ENTRANCE IS FREE
FOR BOOKINGS CONTACT:
devaksha26@gmail.com / 083 658 0707

Cast:

Vidya - Sivani Chinappan

Nitara - Kamini Govender

Kavya - Irinka Sante Nelson

Neha - Kiarah Ghirdari

"we all move forward when we recognize how resilient and striking the women around us are"
Rupi Kaur, ***Milk and Honey***

Written and Directed By: Devaksha Moodley

Set Design: Devaksha Moodley and Verne Rowin Munsamy

Set Construction: Rogers Ganesan, Crew and Cast

Costume Design: Devaksha Moodley and Verne Rowin Munsamy

Lighting Design: Verne Rowin Munsamy

Sound Design: Devaksha Moodley

Photography and Video: Vivek Mehta

Front of House: Jason Barber and Ndabenhle Christopher Tobo

This play is dedicated to all the South African Indian Women in my life who have raised me and inspire me every day – My Ba, Ma, Sister, Masis, Mamis, Aunties, Cousins, Friends and, most of all my Goddess, my Mother

Playwright and Director's Note:

We grow up, very much, under the guidance of our mothers. They feed, bathe and clothe us. They teach us, protect us and nurture us. But as daughters, naturally, we argue and fight with our mothers. We feel that our mothers do not understand us. Yet no one knows us better. And we are far more alike than we may care to admit.

As I get older, I have realised that I am connected to no one more deeply than my mother. I have been raised by an exceptional father and am most definitely a daddy's girl. But as I have related more and more with my mummy, I know that all I have learnt and all that I am is because of her.

My life is filled with an abundance of love and joy from my mother, sister, girl cousins and many aunts. This bond of motherhood and sisterhood that we share is profoundly significant in all our lives. In fact, we cannot live without it. My PhD research has led me to truly appreciate this and has blossomed into the play you see tonight, *Devi*.

No woman can claim to fully speak for another. As South African Indian women, we are vibrant and varied. But we are also connected, brought together and defined by the religions and cultures we practice, and the communities we are a part of. There are few spaces where we can talk honestly and openly about the issues we face, the challenges of stepping out of the boxes we are confined in and the experiences of our lives. The theatre, I believe, is a sacred space, a space where dissent is not squashed and where South African Indian women can move forward and flourish.

Devi (which means Goddess in Sanskrit) is both deeply personal and familial to me. But it is also equally an expression of my research into the lives of South African Indian women. Thus my hope tonight, if you are a South African Indian woman watching *Devi*, is that you simply feel seen. For we must represent and honour ourselves, our mothers and our sisters. Nobody else will ever do it as well as us.

Acknowledgements

- UKZN Drama and Performance Studies Department for your nurturing and continued impact on my education and life.
- The National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences in association with the South African Humanities Deans Association (NIHSS-SAHUDA) for their support through my doctoral scholarship.
- To my supervisor Dr Miranda Young-Jahangeer for your sage guidance always.
- To my co-supervisor and "drama mother" Tamar Meskin, thank you for your invaluable advice and support, especially on my script.
- Uncle Rogers, thank you for all your help. From the very start, you have assisted me, I really appreciate it.
- Uncle George, thank you for fixing my trident prop.
- Jason Barber and Ndabenhle Christopher Tobo, thank you for assisting me with front of house duties.
- My cousin, Vivek, thank you for doing my photography and filming. You are the best!
- Rowin, thank you for designing my lights. Thank you for always being there whenever I need it, with your expert advice and calming presence.
- To my cast, a group of amazing women: Sivani, Kamini, Irinka and Kiarah. It has truly been a beautiful experience working together. You brought this play to life and elevated it with your immense passion and talent. I will forever be grateful. Thank You.
- To my drama peeps, near and far, for all the love and support.
- To my large and wonderful family, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. Special thanks to all the women in my family who shared their lives with me for my research.
- To my two biggest joys in life, my nephews Vihaan and Bhavik. Masi loves you.
- To my biggest supporters, my brother Nishaan, my sister Niriksha and their partners Christine and Viresh. You are my pillars of strength. Thank You.
- To my parents, Mummy and Dad: Thank you, most of all, for your wisdom, your unwavering belief in me and your help whenever I call. All that you see on this stage is because of you. My deepest thanks.
- To you, the audience, for coming and sharing in my work. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX C: *DEVI* (2019) PRODUCTION PHOTOS

Playwright and Director Devaksha Moodley

Preset

Props, many from my own home and family

Prop used in scene 8 as Devi's *box of memories. This is actually my Ma's box filled with family photos she collected, which we found after her passing.*

Curator

Scene 1: Uncle Jeevan sympathising with Vidya

Scene 1: Aunties and Bride

Scene 3: Sita

Scene 4: Neha, Vidya, Kavya and Nitara (sisters bonding)

Scene 5: Woman, Daughter and Mother discussing "Stigma Free sanitary pads and tampons"

Scene 6: Neha, Nitara, Kavya and Vidya cooking

Manja tray used in scene 6

Scene 6: "Passing down these special recipes goes from the *manja (Nitara and Vidya here press manja onto Kavya's face as if at her nelungu)* stained hands of mothers to daughters" (Moodley, 2019: 24).

Scene 7: British Colonial Officer and Indentured Woman

Scene 7: Posh Mothers and Mannequins

Scene 8: Vidya, Kavya, Neha and Nitara (Sisterhood)

APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

20 June 2018

Ms Devaksha Moodley (207510477)
School of Arts
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Moodley,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0371/018D
Project Title: Mother, daughter, sister, wife? Interrogating constructions of South African Indian women's identity – A study of South African Indian women playwrights and their plays

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 01 March 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

.....
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Miranda Young-Jahangeer and Ms Tamar Meskin
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Nicola Jones
Cc School Administrator: Mr Christopher Eeley

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 **260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** simbas@ukzn.ac.za / snxmanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

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Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

APPENDIX E: CHANGE OF TITLE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF ARTS

Motivation for Change of Dissertation/ Thesis Title

NAME OF STUDENT: DEVAKSHA MOODLEY

STUDENT NUMBER: 207510477

CAMPUS: Howard [X] Pietermaritzburg [ ]

DEGREE (e.g. M-ART/PhD(Drama/Media etc): PhD (DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES)

SCHOOL: SCHOOL OF ARTS

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: DR TAMAR MESKIN

NAME OF CO-SUPERVISOR: DR MIRANDA YOUNG-JAHANGEER

CURRENT TITLE: MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTER, WIFE ? INTERROGATING CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S IDENTITY - A STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THEIR PLAYS

NEW TITLE: MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTER, WIFE ? INTERROGATING CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S IDENTITY - A STUDY O SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND OUR PLAYS

MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE/ALTERATION OF DISSERTATION/THESIS TITLE:

My research is autoethnographic and practice-based. These are my primary methodological approaches. (Continue reading motivation on next page).

As I near the completion of my thesis, with the knowledge of all I have written, I feel it is thus necessary to change the word "their" to "our" in order to reflect the significance of autoethnography and Practice-based research to my study.

(If the motivation exceeds the space allowed, please attached the written motivation to this form)

DATE: 30/04/2022 STUDENT SIGNATURE: [redacted]

DATE: 30 April 2022 SUPERVISOR: [redacted]

DATE: CO-SUPERVISOR:

The application for change of title was submitted to the School of Arts Research and Higher Degrees Committee (RHDC) and was approved at its meeting on 22nd September 2022. This was confirmed by the postgraduate officer, Mr Christopher Eley on Monday 26th September 2022, and noted on the minutes of the meeting.

[redacted]

Tamar Meskin (Supervisor)
1 December 2022

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS

A) Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research (For South African Indian Women Playwrights)

Date: _____

To: _____ (respective playwright)

My name is Devaksha Moodley and I am a full-time PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, South Africa in the Drama and Performance Studies Department. My thesis is titled *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife? Interrogating Constructions of South African Indian Women's Identity - A Study of South African Indian Women Playwrights and their Plays*. I can be contacted on [redacted] / 031 262 7600 or via email at [redacted].

As you are a South African Indian woman[50] playwright, you are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research through semi-structured interviews. The aim and purpose of this research is to examine how South African Indian women playwrights' work, including my own, reflects our identities and experiences as South African Indian women. Specifically, I am exploring how the way in which our identities have been constructed impacts on our work in the theatre, and on the kinds of representative or countering characters and/or narratives that are present in our plays. The objective of the semi-structured interviews is to find out how, if at all, your life, experiences and identity have influenced your plays and characters. I am also interested in asking your informed opinions about the representation and presence of South African Indian women in South African theatre.

The study is expected to include several South African Indian women playwrights, based throughout South Africa. The duration of your participation if you agree to enrol and remain in the study is expected to consist of one interview, in person, at a place that is suitable for you. The interview should take, at most, a few hours to complete. The interview will be semi-structured and will consist of several open-ended questions. I have attached to this letter the general questions that will be asked. Particular questions will be asked about your own play(s). The nature of the interview is conversational with the hope of engaging in a critical dialogue about the lives and representation of South African Indian women. This study is funded by the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) in association with the South African Humanities Deans Association (SAHUDA).

It is hoped that the study will benefit you, as a playwright, by recognising your work and its contribution to the representation of South African Indian woman in South African theatre. On this note, as your plays are already in the public domain, your name will appear and not be anonymous in the thesis.

[50] Please note that the categorisations ISAW, SAIW and/or SAWOID are not reflected in Appendices F - G as these terms were only established after I conducted my data analysis and was further along in the writing up of my thesis. Thus, the samples are reflective of the original information and consent sheets, as well as the original interview questions, that were sent to my interviewee participants.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number _____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Miranda Young-Jahangeer on 031 260 1144 or via email at youngm1@ukzn.ac.za , and my co-supervisor, Tamar Meskin on 031 260 1139 or via email at meskint@ukzn.ac.za

If you would prefer to contact UKZN directly, the contact details are as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Please also note that:

- The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- A few photographs will also be taken, and permission to use them will be obtained. However, participation as an interviewee is not contingent on this and should you not wish to be photographed, there will be no pressure to do so.
- The data (audio and print material) will be stored in a secure location for 5 years and thereafter be incinerated and shredded, unless they are still of use, in which case, new permission will be obtained.
- You may choose to answer or not answer any of the questions posed to you.
- You will be allowed access to the thesis material and you will have the opportunity to correct or respond to any commentary that includes your name, prior to the final submission of the thesis.
- You can choose, at any time, to withdraw from participating and being interviewed for this research.
- Your involvement is for academic purposes only and there are no financial benefits involved.

Should you agree to participate in the study, please fill out and sign the consent below.

Kind Regards
Devaksha Moodley

……..

CONSENT

I _____ (full name of participant) have been informed about the study entitled *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife? Interrogating Constructions of South African Indian Women's Identity - A Study of South African Indian Women Playwrights and their Plays* by Devaksha Moodley.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on [redacted] / 031 262 7600 or via email at [redacted].

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record and transcribe my interview	YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES / NO

_____ _____

Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____

Signature of Witness **Date**

B) <u>Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research (For South African Indian Women in my Family)</u>

Date: _____

To: _____ (respective family member)

My name is Devaksha Moodley and I am a full-time PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, South Africa in the Drama and Performance Studies Department. My thesis is titled *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife? Interrogating Constructions of South African Indian Women's Identity - A Study of South African Indian Women Playwrights and their Plays*. I can be contacted on [redacted] / 031 262 7600 or via email at [redacted].

As you are a member of my family and play a significant part in my life, you are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research through semi-structured interviews. The aim and purpose of this research is to examine how South African Indian women playwrights' work, including my own, reflects our identities and experiences as South African Indian women. The impetus and basis of my research is my identity and life. Autoethnography, which is a research practice that reflects on the researcher's personal experiences and connects these lived stories to broader social, political and cultural issues, will be used in my study. Thus the objective of these semi-structured interviews is to explore firstly, my own subjectivity and experience, and secondly, your insights around identity in relation to yourself, and me, as South African Indian women. In searching to understand my identity, engaging with women, such as yourself, who have directly influenced and shaped my experiences and life is very useful.

The study is expected to include several South African Indian women in our family. The duration of your participation if you agree to enrol and remain in the study is expected to consist of one interview, in person, at a place that is suitable for you. The interview should take, at most, a few hours to complete. The interview will be semi-structured and will consist of several open-ended questions. I have attached to this letter the general questions that will be asked. Particular questions will be asked about your respective lives. The nature of the interview is conversational with the hope of engaging in a critical dialogue about our shared lives, opinions, agreements and disagreements around issues that are not often openly addressed in our family. Your thoughts and experiences, as my mother, sister, aunts or cousins, will contribute rich data and add much depth to my research. This study is funded by the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) in association with the South African Humanities Deans Association (SAHUDA).

The study may involve the following risk and/or discomfort: should you agree to participate, I will do my utmost to keep your input confidential. Pseudonyms can be used, if you wish to remain anonymous. However, as this research is centred around my identity, your relationship to me (e.g.: my mother, sister, aunt or cousin) cannot and will not be hidden in the research. The research will provide no direct benefits to you but it is hoped that this thesis will contribute to studies on the identities and representation of South African Indian women, such as yourself.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number _____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Miranda Young-Jahangeer on 031 260 1144 or via email at youngm1@ukzn.ac.za , and my co-supervisor, Tamar Meskin on 031 260 1139 or via email at meskint@ukzn.ac.za

If you would prefer to contact UKZN directly, the contact details are as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
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KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
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Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Please also note that:

- The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- A few photographs will also be taken, and permission to use them will be obtained. However, participation as an interviewee is not contingent on this and should you not wish to be photographed, there will be no pressure to do so.
- The data (audio and print material) will be stored in a secure location for 5 years and thereafter be incinerated and shredded, unless they are still of use, in which case, new permission will be obtained.
- You may choose to answer or not answer any of the questions posed to you.
- You will be allowed access to the thesis material and you will have the opportunity to correct or respond to any commentary that includes your name/pseudonym, prior to the final submission of the thesis.
- You can choose, at any time, to withdraw from participating and being interviewed for this research.
- Your involvement is for academic purposes only and there are no financial benefits involved.

Should you agree to participate in the study, please fill out and sign the consent below.

Kind Regards
Devaksha Moodley

……..

CONSENT

I _____ (full name of participant) have been informed about the study entitled *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife? Interrogating Constructions of South African Indian Women's Identity - A Study of South African Indian Women Playwrights and their Plays* by Devaksha Moodley.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on [redacted] / 031 262 7600 or via email at [redacted].

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
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Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby wish to remain anonymous in the study YES / NO

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record and transcribe my interview YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____
Signature of Witness **Date**

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A) Interview Questions For Muthal Naidoo (via email)

Note: I will explicitly state in my thesis that you identify as South African, not South African Indian and I will not refer to you in this way. I do ask some broad questions about South African Indian women in the following questions: when asking these questions I understand that the answers are your broad views of other women, not yourself.

1) I identify myself as a South African Indian woman. For instance, another woman may say that she is an Indian woman who lives in South Africa. These terms may seem synonymous but, in fact, they carry a great deal of meaning regarding how we identify ourselves. You have told me that your identity does not include the word Indian. Does it include the word woman? Do you identify as a South African woman? Is this how you have always seen yourself? What lead you this self-realisation?

2) In your paper *The Search for a Cultural Identity: A Personal View of South African "Indian" Theatre* (1997), you discuss how apartheid resulted in segregated communities and theatre development, as well as that identity and culture are not fixed but rather fluid and diverse. You thus write that, "In the 'Indian' community, therefore, the search for identity is an ongoing process and underlies all cultural, social, and political activities" (1997: 31). Today, 25 years post-apartheid, what are your general thoughts on the South African 'Indian community' and their search for identity? Are we still boxing ourselves racially and culturally because, as you say, there is a "pressure to acknowledge if not assert an ethnic affiliation because race is still a major factor in our thinking in South Africa" (Naidoo, 1997: 39)?

3) In your book *A Medley: Women, Writing, Freedom* (2017), you write that, "There is tremendous pressure on woman to accept her reproductive function as the primary reason for her existence. In addition to the pressure exerted through familial and community expectations there is also the presentation of marriage and childbearing as the ideal of womanhood…" (2017: 4). With this in mind, regarding the terms of "Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife": What do these familial roles mean to you, as a woman in South Africa, and what implications, in particular, do you think they hold for South African Indian women?

4) You are one of the first South African women (of Indian descent) to write plays and you primarily worked in theatre during apartheid. What made you want to work in South African theatre and write plays? Why did you stop writing plays or working in theatre in post-apartheid South Africa?

5) In *A Medley: Women, Writing, Freedom* (2017), you explain that writers' works are not entirely autobiographical but rather, "Like a baby in the womb, the story, which takes its nourishment from the author, will inevitably reflect her characteristic view of life" (2017: 30). Considering this, how would you say your

identity and life experiences have influenced your playwriting? In particular, the characters and narratives in your work?

6) Your trilogy of plays *Three For Tea* (1977, 1983), focuses on a lot of issues South African Indian women face in their lives through South African Indian women characters, specifically regarding marriage, divorce and motherhood. In *Have Tea And Go* (1977), men refer to women as 'the girl' and 'the wife' and the age of 24 is seen as already too old for a woman to still be unmarried. *The Divorcee* (1977) has a recurring theme of male ownership of women who supposedly need men but you show in the play that they are more a hassle than they are necessary. *It's Mine* (1983) is a radical take on motherhood, boldly seeing it as a singular experience, separate from traditional marriage and family. Considering these works, what have you wanted to communicate about South African Indian society, in particular South African Indian women, through your plays?

7) In your play *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1998), Draupadi says, "We are women. We were born to be wives and mothers" (2008: 236). In your play *Outside-In* (1983), the character Kate says, "Our choices are not really free. Our choices depend on our conditioning" (2002: 246). You state in *My Search For Meaning* (2017: 51-52) that you are an atheist and that, "religious rituals, like social traditions, requiring strict conformity, are a means of maintaining community". In your personal experiences as a South African and in your observations, have South African Indian women been able to escape the restricting customs of their families, cultures and religions? Can they ever really achieve this or are we, as Kate says, too conditioned to ever truly be free?

8) South African comedian, actress and playwright Krijay Govender states that theatre allows South African Indian women a chance to represent themselves (2003). How do you think South African Indian women are represented in plays by South African Indian men, as opposed to how they are represented in plays by South African Indian women?

9) In the past and presently, there have only been a few South African Indian women playwrights. To what extent do you agree with this statement? Do you think there has been a dearth of plays by South African Indian women?

10) Devarakshanam 'Betty' Govinden in her book *Sister Outsiders* (2008) focuses on literature by South African Indian women and argues that such poetry, plays and novels have been consistently neglected. You have self-published some of your own work. Considering this, do you feel that there is a lack of recognition and publication of plays by South African (Indian) women? What do you think are the reasons for this deficit? Why have you chosen to make all your work freely accessible on your website?

11) In your play *Flight From The Mahabharath* (1998), the characters' find freedom from the Epic on the stage where they can create a new reality for themselves. One can interpret this as a metaphor that the stage and theatre is a space of freedom. Was this your intention? Do you think playwriting and theatre can be an empowering form of expression for South African Indian women? In what ways do you think it is beneficial?

12) Ronnie Govender has said of his work: "I didn't write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world…I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians" (Govinden, 2008: 112). Do you agree with these sentiments? You write in *My Search For Meaning* (2017) that, "we work in separate areas, in separate groups, and we write plays that we limit to our own groups in the mistaken belief that other people are different and our plays cannot have any meaning for them" (2017: 47). Do you find that works viewed under the banner of South African 'Indian' theatre or plays by South African Indian people are seen as only relevant to South African Indian people? What do you think are the pitfalls of this categorisation? Do you find that this categorisation continues to persist in post-apartheid South African theatre?

B) Interview Questions For Krijay Govender (via email)

The following questions form the basis of my investigation into South African Indian women playwrights and their plays. Specifically I am exploring how the way in which your identity has been constructed impacts on your work in the theatre and on the kinds of representative or countering characters and/or narratives that are present in your plays. The nature of these semi-structured interviews is thorough with the hope of engaging in critical discussions about the representation of South African Indian women.

1) I identify myself as a South African Indian woman. For instance, another woman may say that she is an Indian woman who lives in South Africa. These terms may seem synonymous but, in fact, they carry a great deal of meaning regarding how we identify ourselves. How would you identify yourself?

2) Is this how you have always seen yourself? What lead you this self-realisation?

3) What made you want to work in South African theatre and write plays?

4) Are your plays based on your personal life and experiences? How would you say your identity has influenced your playwriting? In particular, the characters and narratives in your work?

5) In your MA thesis, you write that in some plays by South African Indian men, female characters are only referred to in terms of their relationship to the male characters (1999). Furthermore, a strong point you make in your academic work is that due to fixed notions of culture in the South African Indian community, South African Indian women are confined to the private sphere for the purpose of cultural preservation (2001). In *Women in Brown* (1997), this can be seen in the character Pritha whose husband Des likes her to be at home all the time, waiting and ready to greet and feed him when he comes home. In post-apartheid South Africa, South African Indian women have indeed made strides in the public sphere through, for example, their careers. However, as you state, "the so-called 'Indian culture' is further situated within the structure of patriarchy and thus carries gendered ideological constructions" (Govender, 1999: 1).

With this in mind, do you think that South African Indian women are still pressured with the expectations of becoming wives and mothers, above all other individual aspirations? Considering the terms "Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife": What do these familial roles mean to you and what implications do you think they hold for South African Indian women?

6) *Women in Brown* (1997) was first staged over twenty years ago. The character Kammy feels so trapped that by the end of the play, she commits suicide. Had you written *Women in Brown* (1997) today, do you think the characters in your play, Pritha, Mona and Kammy would still be struggling through the same problems (arranged marriages; the taboo of South African Indian women smoking; domestic violence; the pressure to become a mother) that they go through in the play? Would Kammy still feel that she has no other choice but to kill herself in order to be free?

7) In your MA thesis, you write that, "While South African *Indian* male playwrights and theatre practitioners were successful in creating a voice for themselves…they did so at the expense of the South African *Indian* woman. Their presentation of South African *Indian* women in their plays reinforce stereotypical ways of seeing South African *Indian* women" (Govender, 1999: 53). Do you still find this to be true in present plays, or even present stand-up comedy, written by South African Indian men?

8) *Women in Brown* (1997) boldly explores the experiences of South African Indian women that are, generally speaking, not openly discussed in the South African Indian community. For instance, Kammy's openness about her sex life and virginity; Mona's adulterous father, her subsequent smoking and her strength being seen as intimidating; Pritha's hidden wish to not become a mother and the domestic abuse she suffers through: When you staged this play, what kind of response did you get from South African Indians? Was there a difference in the responses you got from South African Indian men as opposed to South African Indian women? Were older generations of South African Indians less receptive to the play than younger generations of South African Indians?

9) In the past and presently, there have only been a few South African Indian women playwrights. To what extent do you agree with this statement? As a drama and performance studies student for many years, your play *Women in Brown* (1997) was the only play by a South African Indian woman that was prescribed in my coursework. Do you feel that there is a lack of recognition and publication of plays by South African Indian women? What do you think are the reasons for this deficit?

10) You state that theatre gives South African Indian women a chance to represent themselves and "articulate their own subject position" (Govender, 2001: 33). In *Women in Brown* (1997), through the character of the Director Figure, the South African Indian women characters are given the space of the stage to express themselves without restrictions. One can interpret this as a metaphor that the stage and theatre is a space of freedom. Was this your intention? Can playwriting and theatre be an empowering form of expression for South African Indian women? In what ways do you think it is beneficial?

11) You continue to works as a writer, actress, MC and comedian. However, is it accurate to state that you have not continued to write plays? If yes, why have you stopped being a playwright? Do you see your stand-up comedy as a continuation of your work onstage and a representation of South African Indian women that you produced in *Women in Brown* (1997)?

12) Ronnie Govender has said of his work: "I didn't write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world…I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians" (Govinden, 2008: 112). Muthal Naidoo writes in *My Search For Meaning* (2017) that, "we work in separate areas, in separate groups, and we write plays that we limit to our own groups in the mistaken belief that other people are different and our plays cannot have any meaning for them" (2017: 47).

    Do you agree with these sentiments? Generally, do you find that South African Indian theatre or plays by South African Indian people are seen as only relevant to South African Indian people? What do you think are the pitfalls or alternatively, the advantages of this categorisation? Do you find that this categorisation continues to persist in post-apartheid South African theatre?

C) <u>Interview Questions For Kamini Govender (in person)</u>

The following questions form the basis of my investigation into South African Indian women playwrights and their plays. Specifically I am exploring how the way in which our identities have been constructed impacts on our work in the theatre and on the kinds of representative or countering characters and/or narratives that are present in our plays. The following are general questions that will be asked of you. Particular questions will be posed to each playwright about their respective play(s). Additional questions may be posed based on the your responses. The nature of these semi-structured interviews is conversational with the hope of engaging in critical discussions about the representation of South African Indian women.

1) I identify myself as a South African Indian woman. For instance, another woman may say that she is an Indian woman who lives in South Africa. These terms may seem synonymous but, in fact, they carry a great deal of meaning regarding how we identify ourselves. How would you identify yourself?

2) Is this how you have always seen yourself? What lead you this self-realisation?

3) "Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife": What do these familial roles mean to you and what implications do you think they hold for South African Indian women?

4) What made you want to work in South African theatre and write your one play?

5) You wrote and performed a one woman show titled *She Put The 'I' In Punchline* (2013 – clarify dates etc.). How would you say your identity has influenced your playwriting? Is this play based on your personal life and experiences?

6) Can you explain the meaning behind the title of your play?

7) Can you expand on what your masters research was focused on? Did you look at South African Indian women and stand-up comedy? Etc.

8) In the past and presently, there have only been a few South African Indian women playwrights. To what extent do you agree with this statement? Do you think there has been a dearth of plays by South African Indian women? Do you feel that there is a lack of recognition and publication of plays by South African Indian women? What do you think are the reasons for this deficit?

9) Writing and performing *She Put The 'I' In Punchline* (2013) was a brave, personal and vulnerable thing to do. Was it an empowering experience for you? Can playwriting and theatre be an empowering form of expression for South African Indian women? In what ways do you think it is beneficial?

10) Ronnie Govender has said of his work: "I didn't write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world…I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians" (Govinden, 2008: 112). Do you agree with these sentiments? Generally, do you find that South African Indian theatre or plays by South African Indian people are seen as only relevant to South African Indian people? What do you think are the pitfalls or alternatively, the advantages of this categorisation?

D) <u>Interview Questions (General) For Women Family Members (in person)</u>

The following questions form the basis of my investigation into my own identity as a South African Indian woman. Interviews with women in my family, such as my mother, sister, aunts and cousins, will be undertaken to explore my own subjectivity and experience, as well as to gain their insights around identity in relation to themselves, and me, as South African Indian women. Particular questions will be asked of each woman in my family. For instance, whether they are married, divorced or single, they will be posed respective questions about this. Additional questions may be asked based on the participants' responses. Once again, the nature of these semi-structured interviews is conversational with the hope of engaging in meaningful discussions about our lives and sense of selves as South African Indian women.

1) I identify myself as a South African Indian woman. How would you identify yourself?

2) "Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife": Instinctively, what do these words mean to you?

3) Do you think that South African Indian women especially are expected to get married and have children? Did you / Do you feel pressure to do this?

4) Do you think there is a stigma attached to being divorced, single, married with no children or unmarried with children for us in our family, and generally in the larger South African Indian community we are a part of?

5) What pressures and expectations do you feel our family places on us, as women?

6) It has been said to me, by people in our family, that I must get married because "Someone must look after me…" What is your response to this?

7) Do you think South African Indian women today, and particularly women in our family, have more opportunities, choices and freedom than our mothers, grandmothers and ancestors had in the past?

8) I am seen as somewhat of a feminist by our family, which is not always viewed in a positive light but rather in a scathing or negative way. What does feminism mean to you? Do you see yourself as a feminist?

9) How important are traditions and customs to you?

10) For instance, the custom of Hindu women not being allowed to enter a temple when menstruating. How do you feel about this? Do you follow this custom?

11) Do you feel a connection of sisterhood and kinship with your mothers, aunts, sisters and/or cousins? What do these relationships mean to you?

12) What values, about being Indian and about being a woman, do you want to pass onto your (current / future) daughters and nieces?

APPENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT

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