

New spaces and old stories: the Luminance woman, black womanhood and the illusion of the “new” South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines ideas of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa. The opening of the Luminance boutique in 2013, previously owned by South African businesswoman and media mogul Khanyi Dhlomo in Johannesburg's ultra-exclusive Hyde Park Corner, has been articulated as representing a rupture in the public and private performance of black womanhood. Luminance has positioned itself as a provider of world-class style and beauty and has embraced a narrative of black women's empowerment in the process. The study is based on narrative semi-structured interviews conducted in Johannesburg with black women who have shopped at the boutique and women who believe themselves as having a meaningful connection to the store. The literature on black women, both internationally and in South Africa, acknowledges that black women experience multiple and intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender, among others. Located within black feminist theory, the study argues that the Luminance woman does represent some rupture in the historic understanding of black womanhood in South Africa. This woman is an elite player in both the corporate world and the world of luxury consumption, and is certainly entering spaces to which black women have historically been denied access. However, this study argues that there is a danger in reducing this woman to an oversimplified character, allowing responses to her to ignore the complexities of her reality in favour of the simplicity of her story, and ignore the structural socio-economic challenges that continue to shape the lives of all black women in post-apartheid South Africa. In this regard, the Luminance woman, while on the surface appearing to be an empowering new iteration of womanhood that should inspire other black women, contributes to the erasure of her particular marginal experiences, and the oppression of black women in general. The story of the Luminance woman contributes to a narrative of individual hard work and determination that frames her as a respectable example of what the "new" South Africa has delivered for its citizens. This woman is a model example of a South African who has succeeded because she took advantage of the opportunities supposedly afforded to all in the post-1994 era. It is therefore argued that praise of the Luminance woman serves a dual purpose: to reinforce the myth of equal opportunity in South Africa, and to lessen the legitimacy of marginalised groups' experiences of oppression, especially black women who continue to constitute the poor majority.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Luminance Woman

1.1 Introduction: The stories that started it all

As is often the case, this work was inspired by seemingly everyday events that proved fascinating under heavier scrutiny. Two events in particular, over the past three years, seemed to create space to ask new questions about black women, albeit in very different ways.

In July 2013, South African media mogul Khanyi Dhlomo opened the first branch of Luminance, a self-described “accessible luxury and contemporary fashion and lifestyle department store for consumers who covet world-class quality and beauty” (Luminance Online, 2013). The purpose of the boutique is to give consumers access to the luxury brands they would ordinarily have to travel outside of the African continent to source, and essentially bring those spaces into Africa. While Luminance was opened to much fanfare, it was obvious from the start that the store existed to fill a very small gap, one populated by only the most elite shoppers. The opening of the Luminance boutique would not have ordinarily piqued my personal interest, but the intense scrutiny of Dhlomo – a black women in a racially divided and sexist society – led me to look beyond my own presumptions and think more critically about what Luminance could actually mean.

The store is opulence itself: plush carpets, gently perfumed air, and glistening displays of the finest the world of Western fashion has to offer. On arrival, it is obvious it is a place that only welcomes the finest, in terms of both clientele and merchandise. The fact that the goods on offer are only accessible to the economic elite sometimes seems less important than the kind of person who the store welcomes: discerning, interested in fashion, and possessing the kind of fashion sense and knowledge of the industry that cannot be faked.

The story of Luminance goes beyond the actual store, and starts with its former owner, Khanyi Dhlomo. From a young age, Dhlomo has been one of the more visible

members of South Africa's black elite: after completing a degree in Journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand, she was the first black anchor-person on SABC; she was the editor of *True Love* magazine for eight years, building the magazine into one of the most successful in the country; and she launched her own magazine, *Destiny*, in 2007 (Pillay, 2013)

Destiny is a business and lifestyle magazine, which focuses on showcasing representations of black women accessing the business and lifestyle options which have historically been reserved for those with economic privilege – people who have been overwhelmingly white and male. The majority of its readership consists of black women and, while it certainly has an aspirational slant, it is also marketed to those black women who have attained wealth and are looking for inspiration on how and where to spend it (Jangara, 2011).

Dhlomo's relationship with money has always followed her; when she founded the Luminance boutique with funds from the National Empowerment Fund (NEF), her use of state funds created something of a scandal. Why would a woman who already came from such privilege need to access money supposedly set aside for incubating new business? This perception further strengthened what has always been one of the strongest criticisms of Luminance: it provides the rich with yet another stomping ground.

But Luminance was different, at least in the way it was presented. The narrative that surrounded it was one of black women's empowerment. From the ownership structure – which was spread between Dhlomo and other private investors, and to a lesser extent, the black women involved its day-to-day operations – to some of the goods on offer in the boutique itself – which were to be sourced from rural collectives in some of the country's least invested in areas – Luminance pronounced to the world that it aimed to bring black women into spaces that had previously been inaccessible (Pillay and Nandipha, 2013). And for some, that was a reason to praise the boutique – its aims were transformational, even if its merchandise was not.

Dhlomo eventually sold her shares in the venture to another powerful black woman in South Africa's economy, Dr Judy Dlamini. Dlamini made her start in the occupational health sector, but has since been a force in the pharmaceutical and corporate spaces. As one of the wealthiest women in South Africa, and as someone in the public eye, Dlamini certainly meets criteria needed to be both a woman on the cover of *Destiny* magazine, and a patron of the Luminance boutique. However, despite the sale, Dhlomo's name remains in some ways synonymous with the venture.

In February 2016, the film 'Happiness is a Four-letter Word' was released in South Africa, and selected cinemas around Africa. The film, based on the book of the same name, follows the lives of three black women living in Johannesburg as they navigate life, love and work. All three projected the image of the perfect life, successful in their careers, and with apparently fulfilling personal lives. However, the film's value lay in how it explored the dissatisfaction that each woman felt, despite having all the things that have become synonymous with happiness and success. Prestigious jobs, powerful connections, spa days, expensive shoes, romantic relationships – none of these brought the happiness that such things have come to symbolise in the lives of many young people.

It may seem that these two events – the opening of an exclusive luxury boutique and the release of a film – are largely unrelated. However, both the boutique and the film appeared to be speaking to the same group of black women, despite presenting different stories. The Luminance boutique, despite existing in the real world, projected a highly stylised idea of new forms of black womanhood in its owner, and its desired clientele. Conversely, "Happiness is a Four Letter Word" aimed to show the complexities that exist behind the scenes of the perfectly put together, successful and enviable black woman. The overlaps between these two projections of black womanhood are the focus of this thesis.

1.2 The story of the Luminance woman

The Luminance woman is a black woman who can both afford to shop at Luminance, and has the desire to do so. She only wants the best and most exclusive that life has to

offer, ranging from her experiences to the clothes she wears. She works hard to be able to afford her lifestyle, and as a result has no qualms about treating herself – after all, why work so hard if not to be able to enjoy the fruits of her labour? In many ways, her existence is an exhortation, directed outwards to other black women, to live life beautifully.

She is a powerful businesswoman who demands respect for the work she does. She is aware that she is aspirational figure for many, and feels that she has a responsibility to project a positive image to the outside world in order to inspire young black women to demand the best that life has to offer. While she is concerned with the empowerment of all women, and recognises how difficult it is for women to thrive in a ‘man’s world’, she is particularly committed to young black girls. Her position as a leader in her chosen field, and the corresponding notoriety that comes with that position, puts her in the position to be a desired mentor for young black women who want to realise similar success.

The Luminance woman does not necessarily come from a privileged background. In many cases, she has known economic hardship. A large part of her narrative is how hard she and her family worked to overcome that hardship, and how little was simply handed to her in life. Even if she did come from financial privilege, the Luminance woman’s success is, first and foremost, a result of her hard work; she may have had an advantage, but she is not one to simply sit back and enjoy what she has. There is always new ground to be broken, and the Luminance woman does not shy away from hard work.

The Luminance woman is far from the first challenge to dominant iterations of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa. Magazines, music, fashion, television icons – for those who have access, South African media has long provided representations of black women that international media has not. Women like Brenda Fassie and Lebo Mathosa are icons of the entertainment industry. Fictional characters from soap operas like Queen and Karabo Moroka on *Generations* were, in different ways, icons of style and class. After all, *Generations* premiered in 1994 on national

broadcaster SABC as signal of the brand new world for the black men and women of the new South Africa.

These women, for different reasons, are precursors to the Luminance woman and what she represents in the public imagination. The Brendas and Lebos claimed their sexuality and sexual freedom on a public platform, challenging the limitations that had historically been placed on black women with regards to the terms on which they are allowed to own their sexuality. The Queens and Karabos consumed style and fashion unapologetically, regardless of attempts to characterise them as shallow or vain, and despite the socio-economic conditions that prevent the majority of black women from affording similar sartorial choices.

Consuming soap operas, while certainly a form of leisure, has meaning that goes beyond the recreational. Television programmes such as *Generations* emerged at a time when South Africa was in the process of a social reformation. *Generations* thus created a space for South Africans, especially the black South Africans who were the target audience, to “constitute a sense of themselves” (Tager, 2010: 100). Popular culture is therefore a space that has multiple purposes; it is a space for escaping from reality, but also a canvas on which new and desired possibilities are projected.

Underlying the importance of figures in popular culture is the idea that, while what is popular is not always a guaranteed site of resistance, it should still be taken seriously when trying to understand how young black women create and embody new ways of being (Motsemme, 2003). The women mentioned above may not have represented the reality of the majority, but they certainly resonated with the aspirations of many, and provide insight into new forms of womanhood that have and are being created in post-apartheid South Africa.

Popular culture has always caused meaningful shifts in the experience of womanhood. As Motsemme (2011) points out in her doctoral work, scholars in the field of cultural studies “have conceived the ‘popular’ as a site of both struggle and negotiation over interests and meanings between dominant groups over a range of issues such as taste, pleasure, beauty, nation and gender” (p. 33). Those pieces of media produced for and

embraced by black people in post-apartheid South Africa are therefore sites in which blackness can be renegotiated and reimagined.

Popular television programme *Sex and the City* was a re-imagining of womanhood in the United States, presenting women whose lives were influenced by career, pleasure and sex. The exploits of main characters Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte as they tried to survive the demands of the modern world resonated with women through six seasons and two motion picture films between 1998 and 2010 (Stillion Southard, 2008).

Despite having a significant impact on popular culture, the *Sex and the City* woman was always a re-imagining for white women. Not only were all the main characters white, their stories seldom engaged black people. On the rare occasion that they did, black women were portrayed as stereotypically aggressive and angry or hypersexualised, while black men were mostly portrayed as desirable sexual conquests because of their stereotyped sexual proficiency (Brasfield, 2006; Nash & Grant, 2015)

For their own re-imaginings, black women had to look to programmes such as *Girlfriends*, an American television programme which followed a similar format to *Sex and the City*: four friends, each trying to balance the demands of life with her personal desires. However, *Girlfriends* differed from *Sex and the City* in two significant ways: it cast black women as the programme's lead characters, and it explicitly embraced the lived experiences of black women, and the various oppressions they face intermingled with their achievements. During its nine year run, *Girlfriends* demonstrated that black culture in the United States was far from monolith, and that black people's experiences were just as varied and nuanced as the white stories that dominated television nationwide (Harrison, 2010)

While mainstream popular culture in Africa also tends to over-represent white people and their experiences, there are examples of popular culture representations of blackness that have complicated the often-oversimplified stories told about black people. The recent web series *An African City*, dubbed the African *Sex and the City*,

follows the lives of five upper-middle class ‘returnees’ to Accra, and the various ways in which they navigate that space after spending much of their lives abroad. *An African City* is a notable example of black popular culture both because of its success both locally and globally, and because of its role as “a counter-narrative to popular depictions of African women as poor, unfashionable, unsuccessful and uneducated” (Adeniyi Ogunyankin, 2016: 37).

Popular post-apartheid television programme *Generations* also provided new representations of black women in South Africa. From the time of its inception to the present, the programme has had different intentions and interpretations, but one thing has remained constant: there has always been at least one black woman who is portrayed as embracing pleasure, success and independence. Whether it was Queen Moroka, the socialite who seemed to be motivated by fashion and shopping, Karabo Moroka, the former model whose inherited wealth in some ways paved her way into her own financial success, or Ntsiki Lukhele, the ‘villain’ who used her cunning to realise her ambitions – *Generations* popularised the glamorous, immaculately put together black woman who was unapologetic about getting what she wanted, no matter the cost (Tager, 2010).

The scarcity of offerings such as *An African City* and *Girlfriends*, and the response that popular culture focused on black women tends to elicit, are reminders that, while there certainly are representations of black women available to those who know where to find them, the multiplicity of black women’s stories are given only a fraction of the airtime that their white counterparts claim. It is therefore important to investigate the stories of black women that have found a place in the popular culture of post-apartheid South Africa.

1.3 The ‘new South African woman’ and the Luminance woman

The increasingly unapologetic and bold black woman has certainly found representation in post-apartheid South Africa. One of her manifestations, one that moves closer to the Luminance woman, is captured by Pumla Gqola. She identifies a

new iteration of black womanhood, or ‘script of femininity’ that has become increasingly relevant in post-apartheid South Africa.

“The “New South African woman” [NSAW] is a working, urban, upwardly mobile woman. She has a career, and she is ambitious and driven. She has smooth skin, straight, shiny hair and “tastefully” manicured nails, and an arched brow, all of which communicate through the body of a specific location within a global economy and a very controlled feminine aesthetic whose transgression is ridiculed... Her visual circulation across different media platforms and genres is notable: through television drama and soap operas, as the embodiment of the newsreaders and anchors of the SABC Channel 3, as the featured interviews and cover images on women’s magazines. There is clearly a high cost and physical pain involved in processing her body into the epitome of global glamour and sophistication.” (Gqola, 2016: 123)

This ‘script’ clearly has a lot in common with the Luminance woman, and in many ways she is the foundation upon which the Luminance woman is built. In the post-apartheid era, when re-creation was the watchword of the day, the NSAW was a re-creation of black womanhood that fit in with the social vision of a new and improved South Africa. She was not only a departure from the limitations placed on black women by apartheid, but also proof of South Africa’s entry into a new world, in which the NSAW’s very existence is proof of the successful construction of a new South Africa, one in which individual merit and hard work are enough to guarantee success (Gqola, 2016: 120). She exists in a world that measures success in terms of consumption, and is able to consume expensive beauty and leisure products, because South Africa has rearranged itself to enable this level of consumption.

The Luminance woman is even more of a rarity than the NSAW. She exists in an exclusive enclave, one that is desired by many but achievable only to a few. What is also notable is that the Luminance woman does not exist in a vacuum despite being so distinct from other black women; the absent referent is the ‘old’ black South African woman – old both in terms of the generation in which she was the norm, but also in terms of her not having the benefits of the new South Africa.

The NSAW is very clearly the precursor to the Luminance woman, especially in terms of the cost of her conforming to the embodiment of her particular brand of

black womanhood. By framing itself as a luxury brand, Luminance is out of financial reach for the vast majority of women, regardless of race. Additionally, the Luminance woman is constituted in a particular way, one that requires that she makes major investments – of finances, of time, of emotional energy – to be not just the NSAW, but to be the very pinnacle of ‘newness’ that black women can achieve.

This thesis will show that, as someone in the public eye (on the cover of magazines, on television), the Luminance woman is already a black woman who we see taking up public space in a way similar to popular culture icons. She is a form of living popular culture, like the women from television brought to life, and brought to life in new ways and in new spaces. Women like Khanyi Dhlomo and Judy Dlamini, despite being undoubtedly human and therefore imperfect, project a public image so strong that it is easy to assume that their magazine-cover appearance extends into their private life.

As shown by the television programmes discussed above, embracing the aesthetic and luxurious always looks different for black women, but there has been a lack of exploration of what there is to see, especially once one looks below the surface. For black women in South Africa especially, the Luminance woman is a re-imagining that puts possession of power directly into the hands of women, and frames them as the protagonists in their own lives.

More critically however, the Luminance woman is “evidence of women’s empowerment, but not necessarily feminism” (Gqola, 2016: 123). Despite being a public figure, and being so vocal about what she has achieved, more value is placed on her experience as an empowered woman than there is placed on the unavoidable oppressions which ensure that feminism is still relevant, new society or not. This study will argue that Luminance woman is therefore hesitant to explicitly embrace feminism, because doing so tarnishes her image as an empowered woman who needs nothing more than herself to succeed.

It appears that there is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Luminance woman. Her position gives her access to a variety of choice: economically,

aesthetically – in terms of choices that are predicated on financial wealth, the Luminance woman seems free to do as she pleases, making her the perfect poster child for the new South Africa. However, one non-monetary cost of her title is silence about those aspects of life that do not fit in her seemingly ideal life.

Silence has long been a companion of black women, as they are historically not given the space to express any hardship without it being misinterpreted due to the multiple oppressions they face. Hardship from a black woman is therefore read differently than it would be from a white woman, and is less likely to illicit sympathy or empathy. Silence manifests itself in stereotypes such as the ‘angry black woman’ or ‘mammy’ – stereotypes that severely limit black women’s available responses to the racist sexism they experience. In *Sister Citizen* (2011), an analysis of African-American women’s experiences in the United States, Melissa Harris-Perry notes that respectability politics create very limited options for the performance of black womanhood, which leaves very little space for the realities they face (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Similarly, women in South Africa have historically been silenced in various ways; Gqola makes reference to the ways in which black women’s experiences of intersectional oppression “limited women’s life choices and movement and undervalued them through institutional silencing, policing, and legal minorization” (2016: 120). The intersection of class oppression, patriarchy and institutionalised racism in apartheid South Africa meant that black women were not only excluded from spaces in which they could exercise freedom, but were also in a position where their grievances were seldom heard.

Post-apartheid South Africa has found new ways of silencing black women. Black women who had lost their partners to the violence of the apartheid regime, publically identified as widows, saw their private suffering being subsumed by their role as a social embodiment of pain, made more intense if her partner was someone notable during the struggle (Ramphela, 1996). Widows who did not conform to the moral expectations placed upon her behaviour were seen as transgressive, as rejecting the privilege of being a public representation of collective suffering. As a result, rejecting

this form of performed widowhood meant rejecting the opportunity to publicise her pain.

The Luminance woman is certainly transgressive in terms of what she has achieved and the spaces she has entered as a black woman in the context of a patriarchal, racist and economically unequal society. Silence enters her life in the sense that hardship is so at odds with the public's perception of her experience that it is never to be spoken of. The constant criticism of Khanyi Dhlomo for using public funds, gained legally, to start up Luminance serve as a prime example: there was nothing a woman like Khanyi Dhlomo could say to justify her seeking out state funds for her business venture, because she is imagined as someone perceived as already having everything.

This silencing is notable because of the one fundamental difference between the Luminance woman and characters on television who explored the lives of black women: she is real, not a character. The deafening silence around those of her life experiences that do not fit in with the idea of her 'perfect life' have a real impact on her, as a real person who is encouraged to embrace silence at her detriment. Expressing hardship is interpreted as airing one's dirty laundry, something that simply not acceptable behaviour from a Luminance woman.

It is important to note, however, that silence cannot always be read as a result of oppression. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) became a space in which words were the only way to engage the pain that the apartheid regime had inflicted. Despite this limitation, Motsemme (2004) notes that black women at the TRC used the language of silence to articulate their experiences of pain and grief. Silence can be an act of empowerment, but only if it is engaged on its own terms instead of misunderstood and misrepresented. The aim of this study is therefore to explore the silences around the Luminance woman, and create the space to begin to engage that silence on its own terms.

On the surface, the Luminance woman may seem an unlikely point of focus for a piece of feminist work. While her blackness in a fundamentally racist society is undeniable, she also occupies a world of privilege that is out of reach for many,

especially many other black women in South Africa. In fact, there were many times during the process of this research when even I doubted the relevance of the work.

The work of Pumla Gqola was invaluable to me, both theoretically and as a reminder of the relevance and potential of such work. In her book, *A Renegade Called Simphiwe*, she argues the following:

“Feminism also places emphasis on the interior world as important, where emotions and experiences are worthy sites of knowledge in and of themselves. This lies at the heart of many feminist strands’ insistence on theorising from women’s lived realities. Paying attention to interior worlds is an important part of how we change. It is not indulgence. The revolutionary feminist lesbian Audre Lorde reminded us that self-care is revolutionary work: ‘Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.’” (Gqola, 2013: 25-26)

1.4 Research objectives and questions

The main question that guides this study is: Has the Luminance boutique created a space for black women to live new ideas of lifestyle and beauty?

- How does the Luminance woman negotiate the costs, both financial and intangible, of achieving the ideals encapsulated in the Luminance boutique?
- How does the Luminance woman relate to the state, her community and other black women?

The objectives of the study are therefore to:

- To examine how the Luminance woman experiences her class privilege in relation to other South African women.
- To evaluate the extent to which this woman represents ruptures and continuity in the public and private performance of black womanhood.
- To evaluate how the economic and social privilege of the black Luminance woman reconfigures her political role as a citizen in South African public culture.

1.5 Thesis outline

Following the introduction to the idea of the Luminance woman some of her precursors described in this chapter, Chapter Two provides an overview of the theoretical literature that informs this study. The progression of feminist history and the fundamental principles of black feminist theory are outlined, followed by a discussion of some of the feminist theories that have emerged from Africa and South Africa in order to provide conceptual context for the examination of evolving forms of black womanhood. The concept of harmful stereotypes is explained, the particular limitations they place on black women in South Africa in their performance of citizenship. The chapter then provides an overview of the concept of post-racialism and its relevance in the context of the 'new' or post-apartheid South Africa. It is argued that post-racialism asserts that, in the new South Africa, race is no longer the main determiner of social position, and the Luminance woman is a signifier of the new South Africa. The chapter discusses the ways in which the end of apartheid, and the resulting increase in economic opportunities (for some black people) has led to a shift, both in terms of how black South Africans consume, and the ways in which ideas of performance and consumption are made manifest in the lives of black women

In Chapter Three, the methodological grounding of the research is explored. Qualitative methodologies are discussed, as well as the importance and difficulties of conducting feminist research. It is argued the value of feminist research lies in its transformational potential, as this type of research seeks both to create better understandings of women's experiences, and transform the empirical world to address the ways in which women are marginalised. The chapter then outlines the research design of the study, and includes discussions of sampling, chosen research methods, and the analytical tools used to make sense the data collected.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the interviews conducted with women who shopped at the Luminance boutique located in Johannesburg's Hyde Park. The purpose of this chapter is to present various perspectives from the participants about Luminance, their personal experiences with the boutique and how they conceptualised the Luminance woman.

Chapter Five provides space for analysis of the findings discussed in chapter four, and draws some conclusions about who the Luminance woman is, and how she is positioned in the context of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa. It is argued that the Luminance woman needs to be understood in terms of more than just the tangible costs of buying the lifestyle on offer at the boutique; the social costs of maintaining that position often involve silence and the projection of a composure that is unattainable in reality. The Luminance woman is in some ways, a new iteration of the strong black woman stereotype. However, her experiences also resonate with those of wealthy white women who struggle to 'have it all'. Because of her marginality, her simultaneous privilege, and the limitations placed on her by those limitations, the Luminance woman is something of a bridge between black and white womanhoods in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Six concludes the study by discussing the wider implications of the findings. By exploring the outcomes of the way the Luminance woman has been framed, it makes inferences about black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa, and some of the potential implications of the Luminance woman for black women in general.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Depictions of wealthy black women in South Africa are few and far between, due in large part to the multiple and intersecting oppressions black women have and continue to face. The Luminance woman provides an interesting new iteration of black womanhood, one that has in the past been largely limited to dramatizations in the media. The Luminance woman, however, is something of an imagined character brought to life, as she seems to have stepped out of a magazine or film in which new possibilities for black women are imagined. At the same time, she is someone who experiences the real world and its prejudices against black women. The contradictions that occur at the intersection of the Luminance woman's privilege and her marginal position are the focus of this research.

This study is located within feminist theory, which is concerned with challenging the various ways in which women are subordinated to men. However, mainstream feminism is often challenged for its tendency to universalise the experiences of white middle class women, and extrapolate from those experiences to generalise about all women. Black feminist theory therefore provides a useful and more context-specific framework to the study. This chapter discusses its origins and key tenets, and examines the theoretical insights it provides into the various ways in which black women have and continue to face marginalisation in post-apartheid South Africa.

This chapter then turns to a discussion of feminisms in African and South Africa, and the criticisms that have been levelled against all Western feminism, including black (American) feminist theory. At their core, these criticisms challenge any feminism that claims to be useful to prioritise the context and experiences of the women it claims to be working in favour of.

The chapter then discusses the concept of post-racialism. It is argued that post-racialism is a concept that has gained traction in the years since South Africa's transition to democracy, motivated by the desire to reject the violent logic of the apartheid state. It asserts that, in the new i.e. post-apartheid South Africa, race is no

longer the main determiner of social position. In this regard, the Luminance woman is understood as a signifier of the new South Africa as she represents the material and symbolic articulation of the desired “post-racial” citizen.

Lastly, the chapter offers a discussion of literature on black womanhood as public performance that is linked to consumption. The chapter discusses the ways in which the end of apartheid, and the resulting increase in economic opportunities (for some black people) has led to a shift in how black South Africans consume and the ways in which ideas of performance and consumption are made manifest in the lives of black women.

2.2 Feminist theory: claiming spaces throughout history

Feminist theory has developed in response to the structural and entrenched subordination of women to men. It evolved out of a larger movement to understand, critique and challenge subordination, and has continued to change to meet the needs of women inclusively, as critiques of subordination have become more nuanced. While women have been intellectualising about their oppression for centuries, feminism as it exists today can be understood as occurring in waves.

The first wave is often measured from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which called for the establishment of equal political rights and economic opportunities for women, mainly in Western Europe, although it inspired similar movements in North America. First wave feminism took a liberal approach to the oppression of women, in that it assumed that the marginalisation of women was a result of their denial of equal rights, and that guaranteeing these rights was the best path to gender equality (Elliot and Mandell, 1995: 6).

Second wave feminism went beyond the legal barriers to equality, and focused on fundamentally transforming society, rather than trying to ‘fix’ existing sexist structures and institutions. In many ways, the second wave was born out of dissatisfaction with society after the Second World War, and the realisation that the guarantee of rights for women had had little effect on the marginalisation of women. In addition to this, second wave feminism was critical of the fact that the legal changes prioritised by the liberal first wave movement did not require the fundamental change of societies’ institutions, and therefore did not have an equally positive impact on the lives of all women (Elliot and Mandell, 1995: 8).

Feminist movements have also spearheaded the distinction between sex and gender, a distinction made by several theorists, including Judith Butler. Making this distinction was an important step in challenging the widely held truth that women were biologically inferior to men as a result of their different sex organs. By making the distinction between sex as a biological truth and gender as a learned behaviour (Butler, 2006), feminists were able to challenge the assumption of women's inferiority, and highlight the ways in which patriarchal culture created distinctions between individuals based on biology. By attributing positivity to those traits deemed masculine, and negativity to those deemed feminine, feminists like Butler concluded that women were set at a disadvantage from birth.

French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir also played a significant role in dispelling many of the myths about women and femininity that prevailed in Europe and the United States. She challenged the continued strictures imposed on women by standards of womanhood and femininity, despite the move towards enfranchisement that was moving across Europe at the time (de Beauvoir, 2011). In her work, she challenged the conflation of women's *difference* to men with their *subordination* to men. Despite the limitations of her work, which assumed a white, middle class existence, de Beauvoir's contribution to feminist thought is still evident, especially in terms of how issues of privilege, gender construction, and gender myths are dealt with in contemporary arguments (Kruks, 2005; Vintges, 1999).

The third wave of feminism began in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s as a criticism of the exclusivity of the second wave, which tended to universalise the experiences of white, middle class women. While black feminists acknowledged that there were similarities between the experiences of women living in patriarchal societies, they argued that that differences amongst women had a significant impact on the specific ways they experienced oppression (Davis, 1982; Crenshaw, 1995; Hill Collins, 2009). Ultimately, third wave feminists proposed that there are different ways to be a woman, and that, accordingly, there need to be different ways to be feminist.

While the third wave of feminism was a move towards greater inclusivity, feminist theory has, to a large extent, been wed to a Eurocentric gender logic, something that has been challenged by feminists from the Global South. Nigerian feminist scholar Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (2003) challenged the biologic of Western feminism, namely its

reliance on heteronormative and rigid understandings of gender to limit conversations about gender inequality.

2.3 Black feminist theory: “all the men are black, all the women are white”

“Seldom do feminist theorists take into account the complexity of life – that women are of many races and ethnic backgrounds with different histories and cultures and that as a rule women belong to different classes that have different concerns” (Christian, 2000: 19)

“Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situations of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group” (Hill Collins, 2000: vii).

Black feminist theory was born out of the third wave of feminism in the United States. It is part of the feminist canon in that it continues to challenge the patriarchal nature of most societies. However, it differs in that it recognises that not all women can relate to the experiences of white, college-educated, middle and upper class married women. That particular brand of feminism, which was initially presented as universal, not only excluded black women, but also actively continued their oppression by ignoring and silencing their concerns.

Black feminist theory has criticised dominant feminist perspectives for promoting classist and racist biases which privilege the experiences and priorities of a small minority, and which diminish the possibility of a meaningful sisterhood between women (hooks, 1984). Early black feminist intellectuals such as Patricia Hill Collins highlighted multiple dimensions of black women’s oppression, including: the exploitation of labour upon which much of the progress of American capitalism depended; the political exclusion of black women from the rights and privileges afforded to white men; the ideological oppression of women by means of controlling images and stereotypes concerning black womanhood (Hill Collins, 2009: 4 – 5). By highlighting these dimensions, black women actively created a worldview that aligned with their experiences, instead of trying to trim their experiences to fit a worldview generated by others.

The goals of white feminism – the brand of feminism that caters to white, middle class, college educated women – has also been criticised for its commitment to limited

change that are reformist rather than revolutionary in nature. In *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks notes that:

“From its earliest inception [the] feminist movement was polarized. Reformist thinkers chose to emphasize gender equality. Revolutionary thinkers did not want simply to alter the existing system so that women would have more rights. We wanted to transform that system, to bring an end to patriarchy and sexism. Since patriarchal mass media was not interested in the more revolutionary vision, it never received attention in the mainstream press. The vision of “women’s liberation” which captured and still holds the public imagination was the one representing women as wanting what men had. And this was the vision that was easier to realise.” (hooks, 2000: 4).

The danger of the feminist movement that dominated at the time was that its gains, far from holding the universal value they claimed, benefitted a small minority. Furthermore, that benefit was measured in terms of how much certain sectors of society could be superficially transformed without fundamentally altering their structure. This measure of progress did not take into account the differences between women, or the impact that racial and class oppression would have on black women’s lives.

Black feminists have also been sceptical of the concept of sisterhood. While they see the value in women standing together to oppose patriarchy, they are hesitant to afford the relationship between all women the same assumptions given to the relationship between sisters. The concept of sisterhood relies on a concept of the nuclear family consisting of two parents (one male, one female) and a number of female siblings who draw strength from their relationship to challenge the oppressive father figure (Oyewùmí, 2003: 6). Furthermore, the relationship between sisters is often considered to be one in which the wrongdoings of one sister can be overlooked in favour of maintaining a loving and stable relationship. In the context of a movement that aims to change society, excluding some people from criticism under the guise of a simulated family is problematic.

Creating links between all women under the guise of sisterhood thus implies that all women are allies in the struggle against patriarchal power relations, and that they form supportive and inclusive support structures amongst themselves. However, black feminist theory has highlighted the ways in which mainstream white feminism reliance on the concept of sisterhood was in many ways a method of erasing the glaring differences highlighted by the multiple and intersecting oppressions faced by

black women, and the ways in which black women (and women with other marginal identities) have been actively silenced and excluded from the mainstream arena of feminist politics. As a result, black feminist theorists have been suspicious of claims of sisterhood extended by those in relatively privileged positions, and have rejected the idea that the commonality of biological sex somehow guarantees solidarity (De la Ray, 1997; Combahee River Collective, 1991: 17).

At its core, black feminist theory speaks to the idea of intersectionality: the recognition of the multiple and intersecting oppressions that marginalised groups face. Specifically, the term is often used to refer to the intersection of race, class and gender in black women's experiences of oppression. The central claim of black feminist theory is therefore that any attempts to address one type of oppression without recognising the effects of others preclude meaningful change (Hill Collins, 2009: 5; Crenshaw, 1995; Davis, 1982; Harris-Perry, 2011). Addressing the oppression of black women would require the understanding of the raced, classed and gendered stereotypes which they constantly face.

Given the history of the United States, it is unsurprising that intersectionality is such a crucial feature of black feminist theory; American slavery was built on the marginalisation of black people, and of black women in particular as they were exploited both as sources of unpaid labour and as sexual objects (Davis, 2000: 155-158). This phenomenon has continued into the present day, where the capitalist system of production promotes a sexual division of labour which privileges and rewards (in both monetary and non-financial) the work of men over that done by women (2000: 155-158).

More recently, in her 2011 work, *Sister Citizen*, Melissa Harris-Perry explores the ways in which race, class, and gender intersect to inform the experiences of African-American women. Her work, and that of other black feminist theorists, also acknowledges the fact that there exist multiple intersecting identities which impact on one's experiences, such as sexuality, physical ability, nationality etc. In the context of capitalist societies such as South Africa, which has been and continues to be distinctly raced, classed and gendered (Acker, 2006; Davis, 1982; hooks, 2000; Figart, Mutari

and Power, 2002), the recognition of these intersecting oppressions is crucial in analysing the position of black women.

2.3.1 Experience as theory

In order for black feminist theory to engage intersectionality and understand its practical workings, the privileging of experiential knowledge informs feminist work from its inception and throughout. Feminist thinkers have long been critical of the distinction made between ‘academic knowledge’ and experiential knowledge. The former tends to be produced by the male-dominated academy, which has historically privileged objectivity, while the latter has historically been associated with the private sphere, an arena that has long been associated with femininity (Letherby, 2003: 22).

Black feminist theory in particular asserts that privileging experience is crucial to the emancipation of black women because doing so creates an understanding of womanhood that resonates with black women, unlike the alienating figure of white, middle-class, college-educated womanhood which has historically been universalised to all women. As a result, real and common experiences became the starting point for the creation of collective conceptions of black womanhood. In this way, black women in the United States could begin to use their own experiences and those of black women around them to challenge some of the stereotypes that were mobilised to devalue them in American society (Hill Collins, 2009: 10-11).

While exclusion from the mainstream feminist movement certainly influenced the development of black feminist theory, the civil rights movement in the 1960s was another social movement that alienated black women while simultaneously expecting their full commitment. In both movements, black women were expected to put aside one aspect of their humanity in service of the greater good: in the feminist movement, a woman’s blackness was seen by some as a distraction from achieving gender equality, while black men in the civil rights movement often berated black women from expressing dissatisfaction with the patriarchy they experienced from black men.

This state of never being a full insider is one that is well known to black women. From the domestic workers who are never completely accepted as ‘part of the family’ to the women academics whose ideas are marginalised in dominant academic

discourse, black women have used their social location as “outsiders-within” to critically engage with their environments (Hill Collins, 2009: 12).

The need for an experiential knowledge that paints a multi-dimensional and empathetic picture of black women becomes even more important in the context of black women’s erasure from struggles as well the portrayals of black women that have been dominated in the past. In Harris-Perry’s exploration of the ideological oppression of black women in America, she highlights the dominant stereotypes that often cloud people’s perceptions of the everyday actions of black women. The ‘angry black woman’ is irrational and emasculating, the hypersexual black woman is promiscuous and predatory, and the stereotypical black domestic worker is ever loyal to her ‘white family’. The prevalence of these stereotypes means that the most innocuous actions of black women risk being misrecognised (Harris-Perry, 2011: 34; Hill Collins, 2009: 69; Davis, 1981; Motsemme, 2002: 650).

Misrecognition refers to the inherently dehumanising and devaluing failure to see black women as human beings in their own right (Harris-Perry, 2011: 29). Instead of seeing black women as political actors with complex experiences and desires, society frames them in stereotyping ways that to be negative and one-dimensional. Harris-Perry compares black women’s attempts to deal with racial and gender stereotypes to attempting to “stand up straight in a crooked room” (2011: 29) in reference to the ways in which women try to contort themselves in order to negotiate their place in society. Using this concept as a frame of reference shows that black women’s responses to structural oppression are far from unconsidered. Rather, it is necessary to understand how society is ‘crooked’ and reframe black women as political subjects. As noted by Harris-Perry, “inaccurate recognition is painful not only to the psyche but also to the political self, the citizen self” (2011: 38).

Black feminist theory’s concern with recognition also serves as a response to the ‘colour-blindness’ of those who claim not to see race, instead allegedly judging people on individual merit. This stance has been criticised for ignoring the reality experienced by black people for whom colour-blindness is a luxury they cannot afford as their race is *made* an important feature in their lives. Theorists who claim ‘colour-blindness’ (or who propose ignoring other marginal identities) also maintain inequalities by ignoring the ways in which retributive action is needed to account for

the ways in which oppression has taken place, and instead opt to treat people the same (Hill Collins, 2009: 24, 110). Colour-blindness as a form of misrecognition can have a similar effect as stereotypes, in that it allows the actions of black women to be evaluated in a way that is divorced from the reality of their context.

2.4 African and South African feminism

“We have had to fight for our own meaning to be kept alive, as the Western European and North American women have taken [feminism] up and filled it with their realities” (Amina Mama in Salo, 2001)

Black feminist theory is far from the only feminist discourse that speaks directly to the needs and experiences of black women. In Africa, as around the world, marginalised black women have developed their own ways to theorise their worlds and their responses to their particular contexts. While black feminist theory has done important work to carve out space for African-American women, it is far from universally applicable to all black women. African feminists have noted the danger in misrepresenting the African-American woman as universal, noting that it can lead to misrecognition of black women’s responses to their experiences. Black feminist theorists, therefore, need to be aware of the way different contexts being different oppressions, but also create different opportunities for black women to negotiate power.

African feminisms challenge the misconception that feminist thought itself is a Western invention, and note that African women’s collective and active resistance against their oppression dates back to pre-colonial times (Guy-Sheftall, 2003). While African feminists are not monolith, their feminism and struggle against gender oppression has been entangled with “liberation from other forms of oppression, namely slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, poverty, illiteracy and disease” (Steady, 1981 in Guy-Sheftall, 2003: 31)

African feminists who ground their theory in the writings of African-American feminists run the risk of falling into the trap of seeking legitimacy from experiences that do not necessarily relate to them. While global structures of race, class and gender oppression may create a number of similar experiences for black women, it does not follow that black feminist theory speaks to all. While many African feminists

draw on black feminist theory, and do not aim to reject it in the way that the white feminist canon is rejected, there is a demand for the recognition of African contexts in keeping with the logic of intersectionality that informs black feminist theory. This demand is applied to all feminists who intend to make claims about women in Africa; the projection of a Western social reality onto the social relations that exist in Africa reaffirms many of the problematic and simplified understandings of the experiences of African women (Amadiume, 1997; Mohanty, 1997).

African feminists have highlighted the need for create a body of thought that originates from the experiences of African women, rather than simply importing ideologies of Western women, despite the similarities in marginal experiences (Davies, 1986 in Guy-Sheftall, 2003: 32). The intersectional nature of oppression is a recurring theme in African feminism (Guy-Sheftall, 2003), as well as criticism of those traditional/cultural practices which reinscribe gender inequality such as the persistence of male conjugal rights, inheritance practices that unfairly privilege men (McFadden, 2001 in Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Munalula and Mwenda, 1995; Potash, 1995; Thiam, 1978), and the legal pluralism which has afforded problematic traditional practices legitimate legal status (Gasa, 2011; Toungara, 1997).

South African feminists, following the tradition of progressive African feminists, were concerned with all the above, in addition to the climate created by their particular context. The political climate in South Africa before 1994 meant that citizenship in the new South Africa was a concern for feminists. An inclusive Constitution, they argued, was meaningless unless it came with a corresponding recognition of existing oppressive structures, and a commitment to transformation (Salo, 2007).

The complexity of South African history means that any discussion of black women's present position in society is given meaning by an understanding of their past, and the particular ways in which colonialism and apartheid created oppressive structures. This need to understand the past goes beyond a mere historiography which records or analysis past events; memory plays a role both in experiences of the present and hopes/expectations for the future. African-American author Toni Morrison takes this concept of rememorying – “filling in, recasting, relooking, reformulating (both of

memory and history) outside historiography” (Gqola, 2010; 8) – seriously in her literary expressions of black female lives.

Representations of black women’s role in South Africa’s liberation struggle are an example of the limitations that an incomplete history places on black women. Feminist theories have typically failed to recognise the intersection of gender and nationalism when thinking about liberation struggles despite the fact that, as noted by McClintock, “no nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state” (1993: 61). In liberation histories the issue of gender difference, and the ways in which it is institutionalised, she continues, is often subsumed under the call for unity against an external oppressor. In light of this failure to fully acknowledge the social context, the opportunity is created for the actions of women to be misrecognised.

Therefore in South Africa, where black women actively participated in the liberation struggle, there were those who misrecognised this participation as their collusion with the patriarchy entrenched in the movement, rather than contextualising their actions in the context of the multiple oppressions faced by black women, and the particular power they did hold in the movement by leveraging their positions as wives and mothers (Magubane, 2010).

South African feminist scholars also take seriously the importance of memory in any analysis of the present, acknowledging that without the lens of memory, the present will always appear blurry. In her exploration of slave memory in post-apartheid South Africa, Pumla Dineo Gqola notes that “when slavery is ‘forgotten’ or unremembered, the connections between slavery and current expressions of gendered and raced identities are effaced” (2010: 10). Memory and history, therefore, are an integral part of South African feminism, because the effects of history continue to echo so clearly in the present.

Ideas of black femininity have evolved in post-1994 South Africa concurrently representations of black women. Black women have been represented as independent and politically conscious agents, as in Pumla Gqola’s book, *A Renegade Called Simphiwe* (2013). Gqola juxtaposes an independent and unapologetic black woman with what she considers the dominant archetype of the image-conscious, apolitical

and ambitious career woman (2013: 57-58). Other representations of black women have emerged; Mark Hunter's *Love in the Time of AIDS* (2010) paints a picture of women whose sense of self is constantly challenged by the presence of HIV/AIDS in their lives, while others have focused on the impact of gender-based violence on black women in South Africa (Bhana and Mthethwa-Sommers, 2010; Posel, 2005).

There has also been an increased focus on black 'political' women i.e. those who were active (and often sidelined) during the apartheid struggle. The collection of works edited by Nomboniso Gasa, *Women in South African History*, weaves a rich tapestry of black women's stories, including those active during the apartheid struggle (see also: Britton, 2005; Goetz and Hassim, 2003; Hassim, 2006; Hassim, 2004; Ngcobo, 2012), and those who have made a space for themselves within post-1994 South African politics by forming part of the post-apartheid government (see also: Britton, 2005).

However, constructions of black womanhood, similarly to those in the United States, misrecognise black women by constructing them in one-dimensional and negative ways. Black women have and continue to be portrayed as hypersexual. While the sexualisation of black women has been documented historically, Deborah Posel notes in *Sex, Death and the Fate of the Nation* (2005: 148), that black women continue to be sexualised by society at large, and by the state in particular (see also: Lewis, 1993: 537).

The power of these and other popular stereotypes lies in their justification of the oppression (both initial and sustained) of black women. The hypersexual 'Jezebel' is vulnerable to sexual violence because the sexuality ascribed to her absolves perpetrators from blame. The 'Welfare Queen' is worthy of derision and blame because her actions are understood as completely her responsibility, outside of the larger structures which affect her decisions and the opportunities afforded to her. The 'Mammy' is portrayed as perfectly happy to care for her 'white family', and thus her complaints about the arduous physical and emotional demands of that 'family' are effectively silenced. In *Disposable Nannies* (1981), Jacklyn Cock highlights the ways in which portrayals of black domestic workers as 'one of the family' and inherently

loyal were key to the exploitation of black women in apartheid South Africa (see also: Cock, 1980; Smith, 1995).

The trope existed in spite of the clear disconnect between how domestic work was perceived by employers, and the meanings it held for the black women who often saw it as a site of struggle, and were fully aware and critical both of the racial and gendered discrimination they faced in society in general, and of the ways in which this discrimination manifested in the white households where they were employed. Far from internally embracing the feelings of gratitude and loyalty projected on them by white employers, domestic workers may have publically conformed to this stereotype as an attempt to stand upright in the crooked room i.e. to find a way to continue supporting themselves and their families financially in a context that severely limited their abilities to earn money. The fact that the apartheid regime purposefully attacked the black family highlights black women's engaging in domestic work as a political act born out of necessity, rather than a desired choice (Cock, 1981).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the trope of the obedient and loyal domestic worker still has traction. This was evidenced by Julius Malema's use of the image of "Madam's tea girl" to describe the alleged relationship between former Democratic Alliance party leader, Lindiwe Mazibuko and the party's leader, Helen Zille, thus misrecognising Mazibuko and negating her obvious social, economic and political influence (Mail and Guardian, 2011).

Motsemme (2002: 648) elaborates on the earlier described concept of misrecognition in the context of post-apartheid South Africa by noting that "a project of fixing black women's subjectivities contributes to distort further their voices and bodies, making it difficult to hear them when they do speak". Extending this concept, fixing black women in certain (biased) subjectivities also makes it difficult to understand what black women mean when they speak and act.

In South Africa, the image-conscious lifestyle woman is vapid and self-centred, focused entirely on her appearance and her accumulation of material possessions and is this not worthy of attention. As a result, her experiences of oppression in a raced and gendered South Africa are not taken seriously. Once the stereotype is widely

accepted as the norm, black women who describe their oppression become the exception to the rule, rather than representatives of a larger group of marginalised women.

2.5 Redefining blackness: post-racialism in South Africa

Apartheid in South Africa operated as a complex system of legal, social and institutional structures that privileged the white minority at the expense of the black majority. The end of the apartheid era, officially marked by South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994, was seen by many as the beginning of a new era for South Africa in which all forms of discrimination would be eradicated. The new South Africa was imagined as one where difference would be celebrated rather than punished. The rainbow was accepted as the symbol of this new South Africa, or 'Rainbow Nation', where a spirit of reconciliation and unity would erase the divisions of the past and build an inclusive future (Møller, Dickow and Harris, 1999).

Crucially, this idea of the new South Africa relied heavily on building a non-racial society. Because race and racism had formed the foundation of the apartheid government's discriminatory practices, the desire to move away from race entirely was understandable. Non-racialism was therefore seen as a way to move away from a society in which the quality of one's life is significantly affected by the colour of one's skin, and towards a society where it was "enough merely to be" (Evaratt, 2009 in Pillay, 2015).

The logic of non-racialism, in large part, relies on an understanding of race as constructed as an antithesis to whiteness, that has been used to justify oppression in many different forms. The slave trade, colonialism and apartheid have all relied on this construction of race, where whiteness is positioned as the highest level of humanity, and their perceived distance from humanity justifies violence exacted on those on the 'lower level'. Non-racialism challenges this logic by rejecting the notion that anything can be inferred from one's racial identity.

However, non-racialism as it was popularly embraced in the new South Africa did little to undo racial prejudice or racist institutions, or prioritise the need for the privileged to acknowledge their privilege on a personal level. Instead, the focus was

on embracing reconciliation, and effecting change by desegregating those spaces that remained the most visible, such as in schools or government (Pillay, 2015: 143). To that effect, non-racialism was largely successful: the ANC-led government comprised mostly black people, especially in the most influential positions, and the integration of black children into previously white or Model C schools was hailed as a great success for the generation of children who would grow up in the new South Africa (Sharp, 1998: 244-245). However, none of these interventions required substantial change to the attitudes of South Africans, especially white South Africans who continue to benefit from the structural inequalities that have been built into South African society. As a result non-racialism came to be understood as a sort of colour-blindness that framed race as no longer important.

The movement towards visible transformation can be understood given the context of black people at the moment of transition, and the history of their experiences of marginalisation in apartheid South Africa. Black women in particular felt the brunt of apartheid policies in terms of the limitations placed on their options. While black men were able to enter the migrant labour system, which was extremely exploitative but did provide some access to the formal economy, black women's economic options were more limited, especially in rural areas. For many black women in rural areas, maintaining the hearth was the priority while her husband or partner earned money far from home.

For those women living in urban areas, domestic work was one of the only options for formal employment. However, the homes of white families were often sites of hyper-exploitation of black women. They had to contend with gruelling work, extremely low pay, and no legal protection, all in order to take the burden off white women. The home's construction as a private space meant that the hardships of black women who did the work behind the scenes was seldom aired in public, and did not receive the public attention that other spaces of black exploitation did (Cock, 1981).

The new South Africa has not undone the exploitation of black domestic workers, but one of the notable changes is the number of middle class black women who are now able to afford domestic help themselves. This rising black middle class is one of the markers of the new South Africa: a group of black South African's who are often part

of the skilled economy, and who are able to use some of their financial freedom to buy the labour of others (Southall, 2004b). The appearance of this new black middle class is seen as proof of South Africa's success because the new South Africa is one in which black people can afford the things that used to be solely accessible to white people.

The success of the new South Africa became linked to ideas of non-racialism, as it conflates black people accessing those privileges previously reserved for the white minority as a sign of progress for all black people. However non-racialism has been criticised for ignoring the lack of real transformation in favour of glorifying black people's assimilation into whiteness. "The aspirations of black people" notes Xolela Mangcu, "can no longer be reduced to equality with white people without, in so doing, using whiteness as the cultural norm, with all the problems attendant on that norm – including exceedingly high standards of living" (Mancu, 2015: xx). In short, it is not enough simply to measure progress in terms of how close one can move to whiteness.

"In all aspects of public life except formal politics, the hierarchies which existed before 1994 remain intact: the elite has absorbed new black entrants but the power relationships in the economy and society endure. Equally important is that the elite follows much the same rules and adheres to many of the norms which prevailed before democracy... It is becoming clearer that what happened over the past two decades is not a 'negotiated revolution' but, in the main, the absorption of a section of the black majority into the structures and institutions which once served a minority" (Friedman, 2015: 45)

One of the strongest critiques of non-racialism is that its obsession with creating a society in which race no longer determines one's quality of life has constructed race as a taboo subject. The success stories of the new South Africa serve to delegitimise the stories of continued racial oppression, serve as a distraction from the more desperately needed focus on creating racial equality. As a result, "disadvantaged racialised groups will be discouraged from organising around racial identities to improve their condition in the interests of justice" (Jablonski, 2015: 44).

2.6 Black womanhood as performance

The Luminance woman is one of the main characters of the new South Africa, as a black woman who has access to lifestyle and beauty options that were once almost exclusively the realm of wealthy white women. As with many luxury brands, the emphasis for Luminance is on the public performance of a classy and elegant lifestyle. The Luminance woman, as one of many representations of black women in post-apartheid South Africa, provides insight to new imaginings of black womanhood.

Magazines are one of the spaces in which black womanhood is imagined, particularly in those geared towards black women. Magazines have long been seen as cultural tools that create a platform for the interplay of capitalist consumerism and ideas of social mobility (Laden, 2001: 516, see also McRobbie, 1997; Storey, 2009). *True Love* and *Destiny* are two South African magazines that are popular and that cater to a readership that is primarily black. *True Love* is South Africa's oldest black women's magazines and follows the typical format of women's magazines, focusing on beauty and lifestyle tips, celebrity culture and the reinforcement of heteronormative patriarchy. *Destiny* magazine's content, while also addressing lifestyle and beauty, also caters to black women interested in political and economic events in South Africa, and globally (Gqola, 2016: 123-124).

These magazines speak to the generation of the new South Africa, as they promote and sell a lifestyle that has become more accessible to black women after 1994. However, public explorations of black womanhood in South Africa have not been limited to the post-1994 era. South Africa's first newspaper targeting black South Africans, *Bantu World*, was launched in 1932, and included a section dedicated for women. In her exploration of young black womanhood in 1930s South Africa, Lynn Thomas highlights what many writers at the time called the 'modern girl': "In the Anglophone black press in West and southern Africa, writers commonly used 'modern girl' to describe young women, often with some schooling, who had a panache for fashion and choosing their own lovers" (Thomas, 2006: 563-464). The 'modern girl' was an identity that rejected many of the norms affixed to black womanhood at the time; as both "a social category and performative style" (Thomas, 2006: 464), she was a ideal of black womanhood which sometimes contradicted the

dominant ideology of *AmaRespectables* – so-called respectable blacks who embodied Victorian values imported by white British settlers, and who had elite aspirations (Thomas, 2006: 466).

Constructions of black womanhood in South Africa in the 1930s were heavily influenced by respectability politics at the time. The work of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Du Bois and others who talked about a new kind of black individual who would serve as an example to (white) society that black people were worthy, could conduct themselves well in (white society)” (Thomas, 2006: 464). Notably, because men owned the majority of magazines and other media, women were often excluded from the process of deciding what was considered acceptable.

“The men behind *Bantu World* viewed attractive and carefully groomed women as contributing to a project of racial upliftment that would connect a ‘heroic past’ to a politically progressive and commercially vibrant future” (Thomas, 2006: 472)

Despite being juxtaposed with the *AmaRespectables*, the ‘modern girl’ was still subject to standards of racial respectability that went beyond physical appearance: in addition to looking the part, the ‘modern girl’ was one who took seriously her responsibility to other black people. “[While the] Bantu race is certainly proud of its beautiful women... it will be more proud of women who take interest in the welfare of the people’. What on-going *Bantu World* discussions about the modern girl make clear is that the emergence of a group of school-educated young women committed to racial betterment could not be disentangled from the cultivation of new looks and consumptive practices.” (Thomas, 2006: 476).

The post-1994 era provided more opportunities for black women to perform their identities, but these performances were not free from criticism. Women like Brenda Fassie and Lebo Mathosa, icons of the entertainment industry, were heavily criticised for embracing unapologetically embracing themes of sex and sexuality. Their decision to live a life that was both public and alternative to prevailing ideas of what was ‘acceptable’ for black women led to them being labelled as ‘bad girls’ (Impey, 2001; Gqola, 2016). Respectability politics therefore continue to inform the kinds of black womanhood that are publically acceptable, even in the new, supposedly non-racial South Africa.

Performance of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa has also become about the way style is used to convey important messages about one's identity. Young people in particular are increasingly concerned with using style and accessorisation to recreate and re-invent racial and cultural identities in post-apartheid South Africa (Jackson, 1999; Nuttall, 2004).

2.7 Black womanhood as consumption

As new identities become more linked to style and fashion, consumption becomes increasingly important in order to better understand new iterations of black womanhood. Consumption, especially within black communities, has been a topic of interest in post-apartheid South Africa. A distinction is made between the more mundane consumption to satisfy, and 'lifestyle shopping' which contains elements of recreational activity (Jackson, 1999), and the latter is a particular point of interest as it applies to black people.

Conversations about black women's consumption exist in the wider context of black women's perceived position in South Africa's economy, both as consumers and producers. In terms of the latter, representations of black women are limited: when black women are considered as business owners in their own right, they remain restricted to the typical "shebeen queen", or participants in stokvels (Verhoef, 2001; Ngidi, 1997; Edwards, 1988; Rogerson and Hart, 1986;). While these are legitimate activities and contributions to the economy, small-scale and informal economies are seldom given the same regard as their larger, more visible and formalised counterparts. While there are black women in the latter, high-skilled economic sectors, the South African government's 2015 report titled "The Status of Women in the South African Economy" reported that only 16 per cent of women (black and white) are employed outside the services sector (Department in the Presidency Responsible for Women, 2014: 77).

Consumption practices have been fraught with meaning for black South Africans for the decades spanning the apartheid era and beyond. Historically, part of the mechanism of apartheid was the economic disenfranchisement of black people, which distributed wealth – and therefore the ability to consume – along strict colour lines. The wave of economic de-racialisation and policies such as Black Economic

Empowerment (BEE) led to the growth of a black elite who were able to participate in sectors of the economy as never before, both as consumers and producers (Southall, 2004b; Iqani, 2015a; Iqani, 2015b).

BEE has been criticised both for failing to racially transform South Africa's corporate sector, and for being beneficial largely to those who are already elites or whose connection to the ANC government gives them access to economic opportunities (Tangri and Southall, 2008). However, BEE and its successor Broad-Based Economic Empowerment (B-BEE) have had some success in creating a larger black middle class. The term middle class and its application to black families is a site of contention, as it fails to take into account the social realities of black families that change the ways in which class operates (Southall, 2004a). Despite this, the consumption practices of those black South Africans who are considered middle or upper class has long been a point of interest, both socially and academically.

In her work on consumption in post-apartheid South Africa, Deborah Posel makes an explicit link between race and consumption as an expression of political liberation, and suggests that “the making of the racial order was, in part, a way of regulating people's aspirations, interests and powers as consumers. The desire and power to consume was racialised, at the same time as it was fundamental in the very making of race” (2010: 160). To be black, then, was to be excluded from the ability to choose and buy. In part, this historical exclusion and financial deprivation has been used to try and understand the consumption cultures of black South Africans, most notably in the case of conspicuous consumption.

Conspicuous consumption can be defined as the “visual consumption of certain goods that are associated with social status” (Burger *et al.* 2015: 41), the purpose of which ranges from impressing others to improving one's social standing. Explorations of the relationship between race and consumption have identified the ways in which consumption has been framed as, in some way, an expression of freedom by black South Africans (Southall, 2004b; Posel, 2010; Chipp *et al.* 2011). However, black conspicuous consumption has been read as both a sign of liberation and a selling-out of one's principles.

On the one hand, black people's entry into the formal economy has been praised to the extent that the opening black-owned shopping malls has been hailed as a testament to democracy's progress and to the opportunities created by neo-liberal capitalism (Posel, 2010). On the other, it is impossible to discount the criticisms levelled against individuals like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, a prominent figure in the anti-apartheid struggle, who was denounced for the way in which she presented herself to the public, which was considered too glamorous by some. This is despite interpretations of Madikizela-Mandela's deliberate entrance and disruption of consumer spaces reserved for white people as a form of political activism (Iqani, 2015a).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that underpins this research on the Luminance woman. It traces the various origins of feminist theories, and the interconnectedness of feminist movements across time and geography. This chapter argues that any feminist movement needs to ensure that it understands the ways in which oppressions intersect in order to truly be inclusive. Furthermore, feminist movements need to challenge the marginalisation of women within their ranks or risk driving women away from spaces that purport to defend them. The chapter has identified misrecognition as one of the most important recurring themes in the marginalisation of black women. Furthermore, it is argued that ideas about post-racialism in the new South Africa serve to complicate misrecognition by discouraging black women from mobilising around their blackness while simultaneously failing to address continuing racial oppression in post-apartheid South Africa. The chapter has discussed consumption and performance in order to point out that they are relevant to black women in post-apartheid South Africa because they are understood to signify social standing and respectability. The chapter argues that they are spaces in which both male privilege and class privilege continue to operate, hence black women's entry into these spaces of consumption ruptures held ideas about their place in society.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology: Subjectivities in black feminist research

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methods that informed this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of research methodology as a strategy to gain greater understanding about the empirical world, as well as a discussion of the various paradigms which can inform the research process. Following this, the chapter outlines the importance of doing feminist research, and discusses the ways in which feminist theory should inform all aspects of the research. It is argued that the value of feminist research lies in its transformational potential, as this type of research seeks both to create better understandings of women's experiences, and transform the empirical world to address the ways in which women are marginalised.

The chapter then outlines the research design of the study, and includes discussions of sampling, chosen research methods, and the analytical tools used to make sense the data collected. In terms of analysis, this chapter argues that it is important to identify any biases within one's theoretical and methodological frameworks which may be contrary to the stated intentions of the research. In doing so, the work of African feminists such as Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997) and Ifi Amadiume (1997) is used as a reminder of the dangers of so-called Western theories' failure to be adjust itself to difference spaces and experiences. They argue that the result of such research is often a one-dimensional understanding of the experiences of African women, which serves to further misrecognize them in the name of feminist research. This is followed by a discussion of the analytical tools chosen for this research, namely narrative and thematic analyses. Finally, the chapter closes with an overview of the actual research process, and discussion of some of the challenges faced by the researcher during this process.

3.2. Research approach

“Methodology constitutes a whole range of strategies and procedures that include: developing a picture of an empirical world and turning these into researchable problems; finding the best means of doing so – that involve choices about methods and the data to be sought, the development and use of concepts, and the interpretation of findings” (Blumer, 1969 in Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2009: 1). The choice of methodology is thus one not to be taken lightly, as the chosen methodology informs every step of the research process, from the lens through which the world is viewed, to the way in which questions are framed and the setting of the interview.

The aim of this research is to understand the experiences of black women in post-apartheid South Africa, while taking into account the intersections of their privileged and marginal identities. As such, qualitative research methods are the most appropriate, as given their focus on understanding experiences, unlike quantitative methods which are more suited to analysing some type of measurable phenomena.

While the available research methods differ in many ways, it is useful to frame them in terms of the paradigm (or basic set of beliefs, or worldview) to which these different methods belong. For the purposes of this research, it is useful to distinguish between the positivist, critical theory and interpretivist paradigms. A solid understanding of paradigm is necessary to any research project as it informs: the ontological framework, i.e. beliefs about the very nature of knowledge and what can be known; the epistemological framework i.e. how the researcher can uncover the known; and the purpose knowledge should serve (Grix, 2002: 177-179).

Historically, academic research has tended to be rooted in a positivist paradigm or worldview. The epistemological premise of positivism is that there exist external truths or knowledge that can be uncovered by those who use the appropriate method. Additionally positivist knowledge is confirmed and legitimised by its replicability (Neuman, 2010: 68). The positivist theoretical framework dominated the social sciences for many years, as social scientists attempted to emulate the scientific rigour of the ‘hard sciences’ such as chemistry and physics. It is characterized by a pursuit for objectiveness and a desire to ‘uncover’ generalizable laws of human behaviour,

and assumes that the researcher is detached from whatever topic they are investigating (May, 2001: 10).

Other paradigms depart from positivism's rigid objectivism. The critical theory perspective aims both to critique and transform society. While this paradigm also takes the ontological stance that there is an objective and observable reality, it departs from positivism in its belief that the social world is formed and reformed by factors such as political and economic systems, and that the aim of good research should be to fundamentally transform society and empower the disempowered (Neuman, 2010: 77). For critical theorists, reality may be objective but knowledge cannot be; it is inherently subjective and depends on the experiences and values applied to it.

Interpretivism offers yet another alternative to understanding and embarking on the journey of methodology. Interpretivism's ontological position is that the only social and political reality that can be known is individual-dependent; people's experiences shape the meaning that they give to the world around them, and their interactions with the people around them help to maintain that world (Neuman, 2010: 72). As such, the way to discover knowledge (i.e. the epistemological framework) is to use methods that paint as accurate a picture of an individual's experiences as possible. Knowledge is therefore subjective, and while generalisations can be made, discovering universal 'scientific' laws is not the goal of interpretive work. Instead, the focus is understanding how individuals experience and construct meaning in the worlds in which they live (Neuman, 2010: 71).

Feminist theory falls into the category of critical theory, as it contends that women are constrained by the social, economic and political context of the society in which they live. Feminist theory's aim to produce research that gives women the tools to understand and change the world around them also aligns it with critical theory (Neuman, 2010: 79). This aligns with the research's aim to unravel some of the ways the Luminance woman experiences marginality, despite her significant class privilege. However, the research also aims to privilege the experiences of a specific group of black women in South Africa, and seeks to understand how they interpret the world in which they live and the role they play in it.

Black feminist theory is inherently interpretivist, as it contends that attempting to draw conclusions about women without first trying to understand her experiences is simply another way in which black women are oppressed. Looking for meaning in spaces that have been deemed meaningless, or that have been allowed limited meaning, is one of the goals of black feminist theory. As such, the research has elements of interpretivism.

This theoretical duality, rather than hindering the research, provides an opportunity for this research to bridge the gap between understanding and emancipatory action. Through a better understanding of the experiences of the Luminance woman, this research aims to illuminate a pathway to ways of thinking, writing and engaging with black women in South Africa that are not currently taken seriously.

3.3. Conducting feminist research

“Yet if the violence toward black feminist bodies happens through epistemological means, then the obverse also must be true: a different kind of knowledge production can carve out a space in the academy for black feminists.” (Kungwon Hong, 2008: 98)

As this research is underpinned by black feminist theory, it is crucial that the research design takes an explicitly feminist form, and takes seriously the need for new approaches to both *thinking about* and *doing* research. While some have criticised this distinction, claiming that feminist research is often guilty of sacrificing the latter at the expense of the former, there are others for whom the two are inseparable. Approaching research from a feminist angle also demands recognition of the need for the research itself to *do* feminist work by creating space for the experiences of women to be taken seriously, and by bringing those experiences into feminist conversations. Ultimately, feminist research needs to be “not research *about* women but research *for* women to be used in transforming their sexist society” (Cook and Fonow, 1990 in Letherby, 2003: 72, emphasis added).

Feminist researchers are sceptical of the majority of mainstream research, arguing that a combination of dominant sexist cultural beliefs and large numbers of male

researchers has created male-biased research in the sense that it “overgeneralizes from the experience of men to all people, ignores gender as a fundamental social division, focuses on men’s problems, uses male points of reference, and assumes traditional gender roles” (Neuman, 2010: 83; see also Reinharz and Chase, 2003). The bias inherent to traditional research methods has led to a critique of what some feminists have called “malestream theory” (Letherby, 2003: 63). The Enlightenment era’s advancements in natural science and technology led to a preference for the positivist worldview as the most ‘accurate’ way to try and understand the natural world. Social sciences, in trying to understand the social world, took on positivism’s propensity for dogmatic objectivism and rationality. This, combined with the historical preponderance of male researchers, means that the conflation of rationality and objectivity with masculinity itself is rather unsurprising (Letherby, 2003: 65). This bias towards the masculinity makes positivism fundamentally unsuited to feminist research because of the latter’s privileging of experiential and subjective knowledge.

This critique of male bias in research is important as feminist researchers acknowledge that researchers, no matter how rigorously objective they may claim to be, come to research from a perspective that colours the entirety of the research process. The type of questions asked (before, during and after the actual research is conducted), and the phrasing thereof, and the subjects of those questions have an undeniable impact on the answers provided (Letherby, 2003: 3).

Feminist researchers, who tend overwhelmingly to be women, see the privileging of women’s experience to be especially important as they argue that “the subjective experience of women differs from an ordinary interpretive experience” (Olsen, 1994 in Neuman, 2010: 82). Perhaps more importantly, feminist researchers do not make the distinction between their personal lives and their research, as they do not try to maintain the aloof and objective stance that other forms of research (especially qualitative research) demand. Instead, an intimate and collaborative relationship with the research is considered to increase the likelihood of achieving the outcomes of any research endeavour (Neuman, 2010: 83).

Whether the focus is debunking stereotypes about women, challenging assumptions about the impact of social structures on the experiences of women, working to create

better-informed policy that serves the interests of women, or attempting to fill a silence in the research community about the experiences of a certain group of women, feminist research distinguishes itself from other methods (including other critical theories) because its overarching aim is to improve the lives of the women who are the focus of the research.

3.4. Research design and method

3.4.1 Research sampling

Before beginning the discussion of the methodological framework and the research method to be used, a note on sampling is needed. While qualitative research usually involves small sample sizes, the adequacy of a sample size depends on the researcher's judgment and the extent to which the researcher acknowledges the effect of sample size on the research (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 120).

The subject of the research, the Luminance woman, is defined as a black South African woman for whom the lifestyle sold by the Luminance boutique is a feasible reality, and to whom the 'high-end luxury goods' in the boutique are marketed. The high cost of the items for sale in the boutique is representative of the cost for the lifestyle which owning those goods partially constitutes. Considering that the average South African woman's median income was R2340 in 2010 (Statistics South Africa, 2010), the boutique is far from accessible for the average South African woman. The Luminance woman is therefore a member of a minority group in South Africa. In addition to this, there is no accessible list of customers, as many of the individuals who shop there do so through a personal shopper, and prefer to remain relatively anonymous. Attempting to obtain such a list would constitute a major violation of the privacy of these women.

To avoid these limitations, a form of nonprobability sampling called snowball sampling was used. A few members of the target population i.e. Luminance women were contacted, and in the process of collecting data from them, I asked them to suggest other women who fit the profile of the Luminance woman to participate in the research. In this way, participants accumulated as the research progressed (although to

a lesser degree than expected, a phenomenon explored further in the analysis of the data) in much the same way a snowball grows as it rolls downhill (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 193).

3.4.2 Feminist interviewing

Interviewing as a method is motivated by the belief that each person has “significant views and feelings about life that are accessible to others who undertake to ask about them” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003: 6). The method of interviewing, in which the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee responds, is a way of hearing the stories that people tell about their own lives and experiences. And within those stories is a multitude of meaning: “every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1987 in Seidman, 2009: 7). More than that, the very act of asking women to tell their stories challenges the silencing of women and self-censorship that are characteristic to many societies (Reinharz and Chase, 2003: 77)

Feminist interviewing is “interested in getting at the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women’s realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated” (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 113). This research used open-ended and semi-structured questions, the former to try and ensure that the women being interviewed felt minimally constrained, and the latter to make sure that the topics identified by the research objectives were addressed. More formal and structured interviews are better suited to a project that aims to test a theory, rather than gain in-depth understanding (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 117).

The in-depth interview allows the researcher focus on a particular topic and explore said topic through the information provided by the interview participants. Perhaps more importantly, in-depth interviews allow the researcher to uncover the coveted subjugated knowledge that is ignored by so many types of research, simply because it allows women the space to talk about what is important to them in their own words (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 118).

3.5. Analysis

Taking seriously the subjectivities of both the researcher and the research participants is crucial when one considers the ways in which research has and continues to be used to frame people in problematic and limiting frames.

While feminist theory claims to take seriously the experiences of women as human beings in their own right, the subjectivities inherent to feminist theory (white feminist theory in particular) have created a bias in feminist research about women in Africa, which frames them as problems and/or victims. Topics such as poverty, gender based violence, disease and childcare are often the focus of such studies (Bhana and Mthethwa-Sommers, 2010; Cock, 1981; Cock, 1980; Hunter, 2010; Posel, 2005). While there is no denying the important of these experiences, the focus on them often comes at the expense of recognizing the multiple and intersecting positions in which black women operate. African feminists such as Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997) have criticised so-called Western theories' failure to be adjust itself to difference spaces and experiences. The result of this research is often a one-dimensional understanding of the experiences of African women, which serves to further misrecognize them in the name of feminist research.

African American feminists are not exempt from critique by African feminists, as it relies on an assumption of womanhood which does not sit well with some African feminists. Instead, they argue, the undue attention given to biological difference by Western theories precludes meaningful engagement with those individuals and groups who cannot or refuse to be placed into neat biological categories. Social categories such as 'woman' (which are underpinned by certain biological assumptions about what it means to be a 'woman') are of limited use "in societies where social roles and identities are not conceived to be rooted in biology" (Oyewùmí, 1997: 9).

This critique of mainstream feminism is indicative of a problem in the wider academic project. In *Re-inventing Africa: matriarchy, religion and culture*, Ifi Amadiume (1997) critiques not only 'outsiders' or non-African scholars for imposing Western lenses of meaning onto African societies, but also highlights the way in which African and Africanist scholars use those same lenses to refocus conversations

about Africa. One specific target of this critique is VY Mudimbe's analysis of the racism inherent in the colonial and imperial project of the 20th century (and the racist anthropology used to justify this project of conquest). While Amadiume acknowledges that the colonial project relied on an invention of African that was explicitly racist, she challenges Mudimbe's failure to apply the same critique to Europe i.e. the failure to unpack the 'invention of Europe'. That the concept of Europe, and its accompanying theories and epistemologies, is allowed to go unchecked is unsurprising since, in Amadiume's words, "[he] himself has been totally dependent on a Western episteme, since he did not state a contrary or alternative body of knowledge from which he is challenging European-invented Africa" (1997: 3).

This notion of leaving things unquestioned is part of the wider critique of Western feminism by African feminists. As noted, Oyewùmí critiques the assumption of womanhood that underpins mainstream feminism and Amadiume's critiques follow in the same vein. In *Re-inventing Africa*, Amadiume challenges Afrocentric scholar Cheikh Anta Diop's use of the same logic to explain the links between economic and political inequality in feudal Europe and pre-colonial Africa. This approach, she notes, fails "to look at the different situations contextually" (1997: 11). In his analysis of the villages surrounding areas of wealth in these societies, Diop refers to them as "'backward tribes ... in every way comparable to the still-unassimilated barbarians who roamed on the outskirts of the Roman Empire'" (Diop, 1987: 130-1 in Amadiume, 1997). This framing of a European empire as the point of reference for understanding pre-colonial Ghana is yet another example of the way in which Western ideology, even in work that claims to challenge Eurocentric assumptions about Africa, can become part of the problem.

The irony is that these male scholars were writing to critique the methodologies with which Africa was studied by colonial and neo-colonial academics, and the consequences of those methods that led to Africa's marginalised position in the global academy. But because their interventions and critiques are not truly intersectional, they continue to tell incomplete stories of Africa.

It is for this reason that methodology, both in terms of choice and implementation, is so crucial to the outcome of any project. In her ground-breaking critical anthropology,

Male Daughters, Female Husbands, Amadiume shows how a rejection of Western understandings of sex and gender (and the accompanying gender dynamics) allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of society that takes into account the various ways in which sex and gender both inhibit and facilitate expressions of power.

“The question, then, is this: On what basis are Western conceptual categories exportable or transferable to other cultures that have a different cultural logic? This question is raised because despite the wonderful insight about the social construction of gender, the way cross-cultural data have been used by many feminist writers undermines the notion that differing cultures may construct social categories differently... The potential value of Western feminist social constructionism remains, therefore, largely unfulfilled, because feminism, like most other Western theoretical frameworks for interpreting the social world, cannot get away from the prism of biology that necessarily perceives social hierarchies as natural. Consequently, in cross-cultural gender studies, theorists impose Western categories on non-Western cultures and then project such categories as natural” (Oyewùmí, 1997: 11)

In relation to the Luminance woman, there can perhaps be a justification for adhering to some Western feminist ideals; the Luminance woman, by virtue of her participation in and glorification of an overtly Western conception of fashion and luxury, is in many ways a woman who is assimilating to the West. However, considering the context in which these women move, a space that continues to be highly raced and classed, it is clear that the theoretical logic that operates for a white, wealthy woman cannot be applied wholesale to the life of a black, wealthy woman, as her surroundings necessarily impact her life. It is for this reason that those who are sceptical of the use of so-called universal theories must frame their projects in ways that disrupt the status quo and one-dimensional understandings promoted by Western feminists.

“The way in which the conceptual categories sex and gender functioned in feminist discourse was based on the assumption that biological and social conceptions could be separated and applied universally. Thus sex was presented as the natural category and gender as the social construction of the natural. But, subsequently, it became apparent that even sex has elements of construction....

In Western conceptualization, gender cannot exist without sex since the body sits squarely at the base of both categories ... The categorization of women in feminist discourses as a homogenous, bio-anatomically determined group which is always constituted as powerless and victimized does not reflect the fact that gender relations are social relations and, therefore, historically grounded and culturally bound” (Oyewùmí, 1997: 9-10)

The problem, then, with Western modes of feminism is their reliance on the assumption of asymmetrical gender as given, and the uncritical stance taken on the differentiation between male and female bodies (Oyewùmí, 1997: 15). While black feminist theory offers a critical departure from dominant and exclusionary modes of feminism, this criticism applies to that body of thought, as it evolved from that which was taken to be universal in Western thought. It is also notable that, while African feminists do allow that these gender categories can hold water in the modern world (especially given the overlap between what is considered ‘African’ and what is considered ‘Western’ visible in multi-faceted spaces such as Luminance), this critique is necessary given the dominance that Western ideologies and their descendants have over alternative ways of thinking. The crux of the argument, then, is that whatever research methods are used must be cognizant of the potential for theoretical assumptions to drown out the actual experiences of research participants.

3.6 Thematic analysis: letting the data speak

Many authors have recognised the importance of stories when uncovering different truths of black women: in her work *Gendered Experiences of Blackness in Post-Apartheid*, Nthabiseng Motsemme (2002) noted that it is important to note that, while some black women may use silence as a strategic tool to protect themselves, the telling of stories can also be an avenue of freedom for black women. In future work (2007), she continued to make use of methodologies that aimed to take seriously the subjectivities of black women, this time exploring the lived experiences of African women in relation to their own sexualities and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Both projects explicitly try to avoid the pitfalls raised by Amadiume and the like by placing experience firmly at the centre of the work and extrapolating from there, instead of

trying to impose an external (and Western) logic onto the experiences of black women and simply discarding what cannot be explained.

In addition to analysing the various ways in which stories are extracted from the interview process, it is important to examine the themes that are present in the data itself. Thematic analysis “involves the search for and identification of common threads that extend across an entire interview or set of interviews” (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013: 400). Thematic analysis is therefore a tool that can be used to take analysis beyond the narrative: narrative analysis uses the story to extract meaning from data, while thematic analysis examines those stories more closely and find the patterns that occur there.

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that “[a]n 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/theme, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers” (2006: 80). Themes, therefore, should not be understood as emerging from the data. This understanding of themes as, to a large degree, curated by the researcher is a useful and necessary limitation on feminist research; as much as the work may aim to project the voices and experiences of the participants, there is always a process of editing involved in research which guarantees that any conclusions reached are interpretations rather than unquestionable fact.

A theme can broadly be defined as that which “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82, original emphasis). For the purposes of this research, the themes that stood out were those that spoke to the meanings attached by the women interviewed to Luminance and the Luminance woman. Braun and Clarke identify two primary ways in which themes can be identified. When using an inductive approach, the researcher identifies themes that are “strongly linked to the data themselves” (2006: 83). This approach largely removes the researcher’s interest as a deciding factor for what is considered a theme, and instead requires that the data be coded without privileging preconceived ideas of what the themes should be. Deductive analysis provides an alternative approach to analysis, and tends to be “driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in

the area” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84). This approach allows the researcher’s theoretical interests to be more prominent in the process of deciding what constitutes a theme.

This research made use of the inductive method: themes were decided on by carefully reading and re-reading the interview data, and focusing on the patterns that occurred. Inductive analysis was also useful in that it provided more insight in several points of interest in the data, rather than only focusing on a few. Braun and Clarke note that, in cases where the aim is to gain insight into an under-researched area, it can be useful to opt to provide a rich description of the data collected, rather than focusing on and exploring one specific aspect of it (2006: 84). In the case of the Luminance woman, little has been written about wealthy black women in South Africa that goes beyond discussions of conspicuous consumption and/or postfeminism. This project aims to explore some of the interpretations of wealthy black womanhood, as made by wealthy black women themselves. Considering the novelty of the research, the data set was described as richly as possible to provide more insight into views that are not typically voiced.

3.7 Possible critiques

It could be argued that narratives may not always contain truths, and that participants are likely to try and mould their answers to suit what they think is appropriate (Riessman, 2007: 12). However, this critique privileges the positivist notion that there exists a universal truth that should be pursued above all. (In addition, the ways in which participants potentially model answers forms part of the data for analysis.) As noted by the constructionist and interpretivist epistemologies that inform this project, ‘the truth’ is less important than trying to understand how a group of people construct the world around them, and situate themselves in that world, especially when those constructions disrupt taken for granted assumptions that are made about them. The opportunity to self-story is one that is not often afforded to black women. While class mediates this ability, and allows some women to ‘buy their way in’ to some sort of legitimacy, the gendered and raced nature of South African society continues to put the stories of black women at a disadvantage.

It is also important to note that the process of inferring theoretical possibilities from the data collected differs significantly from the statistical approach of generalizing about an entire population from the findings of a sample. Rather than claiming to find any universal truth, narrative and thematic analyses are here used to make what Riessman refers to as “conceptual inferences about a social process” (2007: 13) – in this case, the ways in which black women of privilege in South African imagine themselves (and the Luminance woman) moving through society.

3.8 The Luminance women

3.8.1 Participant profiles

In-depth interviews with seven women who met the definition of ‘Luminance woman’ were conducted. As noted, these women were contacted using snowball sampling, and thus the many of the contacts were made via word of mouth. Of the seven women, 2 were in their early twenties: one a recent university graduate, and one a fashion student. The other five women ranged from 31 to 36 years old, and were all employed. While two were entrepreneurs in the fashion industry, the other three were involved in the private sector: two in the banking sector, one as a private media consultant. While all the women but one had visited the boutique on more than one occasion, only two could be described as semi-regular customers in the sense that they had made recurring purchases. Interviews were conducted during August 2015 in Johannesburg.

3.8.2 The interview process

The collection of data in and of itself presented challenges, some more unexpected than others. Practically, accessing the women with whom I aimed to speak proved difficult at times, as many of the participants were wary of the anonymity of the project, even after the strict conditions of anonymity were explained. Most notably, before one of the interviews commenced, one woman expressed surprise that I had even been able to make contact with her, as she had made an effort to keep her patronage of the boutique something of a secret. This was an example of a common theme throughout the interview process; the women who shopped there did not do so

publicly, and as such were concerned (to varying degrees) about the possibility of their patronage being made public.

As a result, conducting interviews with women who shopped at the boutique was difficult. While many women expressed that they had had a positive experience after the interviews were completed, making initial contact often took long periods of time, and many women simply refused to take part. In hindsight, the discourse that surrounded the opening of the store may have served as an advance warning of this obstacle. The former owner, Khanyi Dhlomo, was publicly pressured to justify the existence of the store on several occasions, which may have translated to a general sense of defensiveness regarding the boutique.

The interview questions were designed to provide participants with the opportunity to express their experiences in their own words, in line with the principles of the interpretive method. However, in order to keep the research feminist, there was also a need for the questions to draw out possible critiques of the Luminance boutique, and of the Luminance woman herself. While the questions attempted to meet both objectives, in practice it became necessary to privilege the former over the latter, and draw out critiques during the analysis process instead of directly during the interviews.

My expectation of explicit self-critique from the participants proved unrealistic, especially as the complexity of the boutique (perceived as both a symbolic opening for black women and a space which very few black women could actually engage with) became more apparent. Only one of the questions asked addressed the latter issue:

What do you think of the perception that the store is there to serve a particular section of women, and that most South African women cannot afford the goods at Luminance?

The conversational nature of the interviews meant that I did not necessarily ask the question exactly as stated above, but rather attempted to work it more naturally into the conversation. Whenever the topic was introduced, I made sure to frame it as an external perception, and not a personal opinion (in contrast to other topics that were introduced) in order to try and avoid creating a divide between participants and

myself. Given that many women appeared defensive about their involvement with the boutique, this proved a useful way to introduce a more critical element to the conversation without alienating participants.

As noted above, one of the key points of feminist research is its recognition of the difficulty in distinguishing between the individual as a researcher and a human being. In practice, this meant that building a rapport with participants was crucial to the process. This contrasted with other forms of research, which demand that researchers maintain a degree of distance between themselves and participants. In this case, it was necessary to cultivate a more intimate relationship during the interviews. Considering that many of the participants felt defensive about their involvement with the store, it was necessary, as the researcher, to appear friendly and approachable. It was important that it was clear to participants that the project was not about 'getting an explanation' or justifying the boutique. Rather, the aim was to better understanding their experiences of lifestyle and beauty in post-apartheid South Africa, and understanding what meaning, if any, the boutique held for them.

Lastly, the biggest difficulty was in obtaining a sufficient number of interviews to achieve the goals of the research. In order to make any claims about the experiences of the Luminance woman, more participants would have always been better. Ultimately, it was only possible to make prolonged contact with seven women given both financial and time constraints on the research. While this number is small, I believe it is still possible to gain insight into the Luminance woman given the large amount of information generated during the conversations. A smaller sample of women also allows for more detailed analysis of the collected information that might not have been possible had there been more participants.

3.9 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the fact that subjectivities exist in all stages of the research, and need to be actively sought out. Privileging the subjectivities of the black women who participated in this study was, as argued above, a necessary way to avoid some of the pitfalls often associated with research that claims to be feminist. The goal here has been to do research that not only creates a better understanding of

the Luminance woman, but also arrives at conclusions that have the potential to transform her empirical reality. This chapter has also introduced the research participants, and outlined some of the practical and theoretical challenges experienced during the interview process.

CHAPTER 4

Research Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews conducted with women who shopped at the Luminance boutique located in Johannesburg's Hyde Park, which was the only branch of Luminance operational at the time. The purpose of this chapter is to present various perspectives from the participants about Luminance, their personal experiences with the boutique and how they conceptualised the Luminance woman.

As outlined in the previous chapter, privileging the voices of the participants was paramount to this research, and as such this chapter presents portions of the interviews. Interpretation in this chapter is limited beyond the choice of themes and the order in which they are presented. The first section of the chapter provides a profile of the seven women who took part in this research, and states their age, educational qualifications, current professional position, and their level of engagement with the Luminance boutique. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, which are used throughout the next two chapters.

The section on main findings of the study identifies seven themes that emerged from the data. The first theme explores who the women came to hear about Luminance, and the degree to which the 'scandal' of Khanyi Dhlomo's relationship with National Empowerment Fund (NEF) affected their impressions of the boutique. Next, this chapter presents the women's first impressions of the boutique itself when they visited the first store in Hyde Park. Following this, the prices of the merchandise are discussed, and the women's opinions on the justification of the prices are explored. This discussion of the merchandise leads into the next theme: various perspectives on the limitations of the Luminance boutique for those women who consider themselves to be seasoned shoppers.

The next theme diverges from referring directly to the Luminance boutique, and rather explores the relationships between the boutique, the Luminance woman, and race in post-apartheid South Africa. The penultimate theme explores the women's

perspectives on the relationship between the Luminance woman and the progress of black women in South Africa at large. Lastly, the women's perceptions of the quintessential Luminance woman are presented.

4.2 The Participants

The women who participated in the interview process were all black women who had spent the majority of their lives in South Africa, and had had varying levels of interaction with the boutique. All of them were women to whom the Luminance brand could be marketed, either because of their current economic position, or their potential and desire to achieve a certain level of economic success. Names have been changed to protect the women's identities.

A total of seven women were interviewed, five of whom had shopped at the boutique and two of whom were in the fashion industry themselves, and had modelled their own businesses on Luminance. Table 4.1 below presents a summary of their biographical details. For the purposes of this study, a 'regular shopper' is one who makes a purchase at the boutique at least once every four months.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Highest Educational Qualification</u>	<u>Professional Position</u>	<u>Engagement with Luminance</u>
Thembisile	24	BA degree in English and Psychology; BA Hons degree in Fashion Theory	Media management	Once off shopper; regular browser
Amanda	22	BA degree in Fashion	Student and fashion design intern	Once off shopper; regular browser
Lerato	37	B Comm (Hons) in Investment Management	Investment banker	Regular shopper
Lusekho	31	B Comm (Hons) in Management	Media consultant	Once off

Nandi	33	B Sc (Hons) in Town Planning	Boutique owner	N/A
Palesa	32	MBA	Boutique owner	N/A
Nthabiseng	34	B Comm (Hons) in Financial Investment	Investment strategist	Once off shopper

Table 4.1. – Participant biographies

Thembisile, 24, was born in Johannesburg (Gauteng). She completed her undergraduate studies at the University Currently Known as Rhodes, and then returned to Johannesburg to pursue an Honours degree in Fashion Theory. She currently works in media management. She had visited the boutique once and made a few purchases, but since then had returned only to browse.

Lusekho also works in media, as a consultant. She is 32, and grew up in Butterworth (Eastern Cape) before leaving for the University of Cape Town to pursue a degree in management, and to embark on her career. She had visited the store only once, and although she had made a purchase, did not have any intention of returning because she had not enjoyed her initial experience there.

Nandi is directly involved in the fashion industry, having opened her own boutique to fill a niche she had identified in the market. She is 33 and had left her previous job in the as a town planner in order to dedicate more time to her brand. Although she had not visited the boutique, she had both a professional and personal interest in it, and had plans to visit in the future. I decided to include her interview in the study because her branding strategy was to cater to the women who would normally shop at Luminance, and encourage them to buy something that was both ‘high fashion’ and locally sourced and inspired. As such, there was value in her perspective on the boutique as a space that appealed to the same clientele but focused on the international rather than the local.

Palesa, 32, is another woman in the fashion industry, and her brand could be considered part of the luxury lifestyle industry that Luminance caters for. She was born and raised in King William's Town (Eastern Cape), and studied Marketing at the University of Cape Town after completing high school. After completing her undergraduate degree, she spent three years working in the banking sector, and then completed a Masters degree in France. After returning to South Africa, she left the banking sector and started her own business, also in the fashion industry.

Amanda is 22, and aspires to join the fashion industry after completing her studies at LISOF, a fashion institute in Johannesburg. She had visited the boutique a handful of times, and considers it a place to engage with brands otherwise inaccessible in South Africa. Her parents were from different countries within the SADC region, but she was born and raised in Johannesburg.

Lerato is a 37 year old woman who is the most regular customer at the boutique. She works in the financial sector, and unlike some of the other participants, had no intention of leaving her private sector job for an entrepreneurial endeavour. She was born in the Eastern Cape and had attended a private high school there. After completing her secondary education twelve years ago, she moved to Johannesburg to attend Wits University, and pursue a career in the banking sector. At the time of her interview, Lerato was pursuing an MBA from a business school in Johannesburg.

Nthabiseng is a 34 year-old economist and investment strategist. Despite having visited the boutique, and having both the financial means and the interest in the goods on offer, she did not have much of an interest in patronising the store. She was born in Durban, and attended high school there, before pursuing degrees at Wits and the University of Cape Town. She had a particular interest in travel, because her career had allowed her to both live and work in the United States and Western Europe.

4.3. Main Findings

The main findings are organised in themes chosen based on their relevance to the objectives of the study, namely exploring how the various costs associated with the Luminance woman are negotiated; exploring the ways in which the lifestyle and

beauty options on offer at Luminance are made manifest in the lives of the women who patronise the boutique; and exploring how the Luminance woman relates to other black women.

Themes were arrived at using an inductive approach, and as such were data-driven. Rather than coding data based on pre-existing research interests, the patterns that occurred in the data itself were explored and used to identify various themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83).

The first theme presented explores how participants came to know about the boutique, and their opinions on the boutique's establishment. It is followed by perspectives on the different impressions that Luminance has left on participants, and conversations about the various ways in which the prices of the merchandise on offer is negotiated. Next, this chapter outlines some of the perceived limitations about the boutique, specifically engaging the perceived authenticity of Luminance as a boutique providing an authentic luxury experience.

Race in post-apartheid South Africa, and the Luminance woman's engagement with race constitutes another theme, and situates boutique in the context of South African society as a whole rather than an isolated phenomenon. Relatedly, participants' perspectives and critiques of the Luminance woman's significance for the progress of black women in South Africa as a whole are explored. The last theme gathers the various understandings of what or who constitutes the quintessential Luminance woman.

4.3.1 Pathways to Luminance: Khanyi Dhlomo and the Scandal

For many of the women I spoke with, Khanyi Dhlomo was the reason they had an interest in the store. For some women, the controversy around the boutique and the origins of its funding were what had stood out the most. Both Amanda and Lerato knew about the launch of the boutique through the news and social media, as well as an interest in general fashion. For Lusekho, Dhlomo was someone who had been a presence – albeit a distant one – since her time at university.

I was someone who had frequently followed Khanyi Dhlomo, as a media personality, a refined elegant woman to look up to. Um, so, I think it was when I was in my undergrad years, when *Destiny* was launched. So, with the pocket money that my parents would send me as a student, I always made sure that I bought a copy of the magazine. And I loved it because, um, it was a different kind of magazine ... they were talking about entrepreneurship, they were talking about style, they were talking about networking, they were talking about your presentation. They were talking about a lot of progressive kinds of things that we had not seen in magazines in South Africa before. We were not catered for, as progressive black women. (Lusekho)

For Lerato, Dhlomo and *Destiny* magazine, which has been published under Dhlomo's flagship organisation Ndalo Media, represented a type of black woman and lifestyle that was not prominent in the media at the time, and in particular, represented black women in business new ways. Similarly, fashion student Amanda identified Dhlomo as someone she considered a role model in the industry. The boutique was seen to appeal to a certain type of black women, and to a certain ideal of black women: accomplished, knowledgeable about fashion and 'put together'. I also had the impression that, for many of the women, their knowledge of the brand was directly linked to Khanyi and the public persona she had cultivated before the boutique's opening.

I knew of the brand, to be honest, I knew of the brand because Khanyi Dhlomo was part of that, is part of the brand. So if she hadn't been, I probably wouldn't. I don't think it would have come out, to us as the public, as much as it did if she wasn't part of the brand. And I'm like a hectic groupie of her, she's the only person who I think that, if I were to meet her, I'd have, like, a groupie feeling and want an autograph and want pictures, because I don't do that. But with her I probably would. So, I, I admire her, what she's about ... the way she carries herself, her work ethic. And, so that's how I know of the brand. (Nandi)

The criticisms that had been levelled against Dhlomo in the media for obtaining funding through the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) had also formed part of the initial impressions of the boutique for some of the women.

Well, [I heard about the boutique] through news, mainly through news media. I just heard that there was also a loan that Khanyi Dhlomo was supposed to pay, she got a R250 million loan, and that seemed unfair because, um, there's so many other businesses that need the money more. (Thembisile)

For some of the women, these criticisms did not carry much weight, as they did not acknowledge the start-up difficulties for black businesses in South Africa.

[I think that] especially for black people, just knowledge about business and educating ourselves about business and how to even obtain that funding is completely different to how a white person has connections. I think as much as they always say, you know, if you're a black woman it's so much easier to get funding from [the credit] industry, I just feel like, I really feel like that might not be the case (Thembisile)

Nandi also drew a link between the perceived inexperience of black people in the business world and the need for government support as a way to justify Dhlomo's use of NEF funding.

Black people are only coming to the party now with regards to businesses, and, like, if you, for example, say to particularly black parents that I want to go and open a business, as opposed to I want to go and pursue my studies, they'll most likely say to go and study, don't, that's crazy, why do you want to go and do that. As opposed to, like, white people where you find that the child is trained to take over the business from when they're young ... You'll find that most white people don't go to these state, to these funders, because they've got someone who's going to, they've got *access* to people, to funders and investors. Unlike a black person, uh, you don't know where to start, and all you hear is, 'Go to CIDA [the CIDA Empowerment Fund, an endowment created to provide education for "previously disadvantaged black South African youth"] or to the IDC [Industrial Development Corporation]. Go to all these institutions who can assist you. And if you ask your parent, they'll also refer you to [them], unlike a white person who's asking their parent, they'll say, 'No, I've got an uncle, so-and-so, who can invest in your business'." (Nandi, her emphasis)

She went further, and dismissed the criticisms of Dhlomo's wealth as being based on speculation, and therefore not relevant to the conversation. In her eyes, people were all too happy to criticise based on outward appearances and that was both unfair and unproductive.

You know what I always say, is don't judge a book by it's cover, first of all. Just because something appears to be a certain way, doesn't mean that it is. So, you might look at someone and think that, unless you can actually quantify it, I don't, personally I don't know of her wealth. I don't know what she has, I don't know, like, I wouldn't be able to, unless you're someone who works for SARS [South African Revenue Service] or unless you're someone who works *in* that bank and, like, you're her private banker ... cause we don't know that she actually even

had that money to start that business to begin with. So... so you speculate, because of what you're fed, cause we all assume and we all think, oh, Khanyi, *Khanyi*, she's Khanyi so *obviously* she has that money. But we don't actually, but when you actually sit down and, and think about it, do you actually know that she, that's got a – one minute you're hearing so-and-so is bankrupt, so-and-so is, he's back home living with his mom, you know things like that. And people don't always announce things like that to the world. You only know of it when it actually happens. (Nandi, original emphasis)

Others acknowledged that, while Dhlomo did come from a privileged background, what mattered was that Dhlomo had been 'smart enough' to access funding for her business venture, and that others should not begrudge her for taking the initiative to do so.

I went [to Luminance] after I'd first heard the rhetoric on Facebook of people, some people, successful like, I mean as in upwardly mobile black people, were like "wow, I mean, the NEF chose to fund Khanyi", which I think that I empathise, I sympathise with but then, you know, it seems then that they don't really know the details, um, and they don't know why it was actually, I can see why people would get upset, but at the end of the day, Khanyi wrote up a business plan, the NEF is available to fund projects anywhere from I think R250 000 to R75 million. So, and I think there's a stigma on it being retail and luxury that made people so upset ... I also think that, it was the case that Khanyi is such a successful black woman in South Africa, why does she need another leg up? Um, funding is funding, um and if I'm smart enough to go to the NEF and get a better rate or a better cost of capital than going to a bank, I don't see why we should begrudge her that because people didn't get up off their bums and in essential terms that's really what it is, where people just, they didn't think of it before and then they speak out of turn." (Nthabiseng)

However, some of the women agreed with the criticisms, noting that Khanyi's privileged financial background was far from that of the people the NEF claimed to cater for. Unlike Thembisile and Amanda, who perceived the boutique's black-ownership narrative as 'empowering', Lerato did not identify any narratives of empowerment in the boutique, and said that Dhlomo's involvement in the boutique had had no impact on her decision to shop there. Instead, Luminance was simply another store promoting a high-end, luxury lifestyle that would have very little impact on the lives of those not directly connected to the store.

So, for example, if I look at NEF and the National Youth Development Agency, for me, those are, those are government-set-up so they can assist, whether it's the

youth or start-up black businesses that don't qualify for bank funding. So, for example, the big investment bank is not gonna borrow you money if you don't have money. You have to have collateral worth what they're borrowing you. And we know a lot of black businesses don't have that. A lot of black individuals, like youth who are coming up with *great* business ideas, don't have that. So, for me, those agencies are set up to do that kind of work. Now, where I get offended, or at least, where I got offended with, with how that funding went and how I understood it, was this was someone who has opportunity, and someone who has been in business for quite a while to have accumulated some kind of money, to then go back to the same coffers that are supposed to benefit people who are less fortunate, *and* coming up with great ideas, that, that didn't sit well with me. And secondly, while black businesses are struggling, I, one of my, um, of my expectations is that those agencies prioritise businesses that move South Africa forward in terms of economic value add, in terms of, you know, social issues that need to be addressed at the end of the day. So, how sustainable is this business, and, um, how is it linked to the communities that you're in? And I'm not saying the start-up businesses that are just, you know, gonna take care of the community. We're still making money, in a sustainable manner, that looks after the societies that we're in. For me, I think that type of business is what moves South Africa forward. Luminance sets up business whereby money goes into someone's pockets, they pay tax, end of story. It's nothing, there's nothing that talks about business sustainability and communities and bringing up the black women and... Unless they have some fund that contributes and schools, black girls and whatever that I don't know of. But I, I cannot make that link. I cannot make it. And I think that's what I found offensive in all of this. I found it wasteful that it was funded via those structures, it shouldn't have been funded, she should have just gone to a bank or used her own cash. (Lerato)

The NEF scandal had perhaps the biggest impact on Lusekho, who had considered Dhlomo to be a role model throughout her university years. She had been aware of media interviews with Dhlomo in which mention had been made of the supposed empowerment structures built into the boutique.

I remembered Khanyi saying, being quoted as saying that she's also looking to, you know, empower rural women in this luxury endeavour. And I was like, how are you gonna empower women in a luxury endeavour when, you know, typically, rural women are not about that luxury endeavour, um, luxury venture life? And she said that, apparently she was looking to make something like, I don't know, some percentage of the owners or the shareholders be rural women. So she wanted rural women to have a stake in the company, and these would be the rural women who are also creating some of the work ... Some of the garments, some of the bags, which would be sold at Luminance ... To me, even from there, I wasn't convinced. I was thinking, is this just, you know, grandstanding because, Khanyi, to me, wasn't someone, in my mind, that I would think of, uh, when it came to looking at the empowerment of rural

women. The empowerment of young middle class and upper middle class and upwards kind of women, fine. But rural women, to me the connection just, it didn't come to me naturally. Which is not to say that that's not what she was about at all, but to me, I just couldn't make the connection. So, and then somewhere in there came up what was framed as quite a scandal in the media, about the Empowerment Fund funding. And *that* to me was something that *actually* did upset me, I must say, being someone who had *admired* Khanyi for so long. And I found myself becoming quite cynical towards her, as a brand even, and even just towards her ventures. In as much as I was still able to respect her hustle, so to speak, I wasn't someone who was going to the newsstands to buy *Destiny* anymore, I wasn't interested ... It just came to me, like, you know, 'This woman, what is she doing?' Because, you know, those kind of funds, for someone who's an established brand, who was a media personality, who'd also worked for, I think Tourism SA in France? You know, who was kind of a privileged person. Privileged enough to start up her *own* magazine that was distributed by one of the biggest media companies in Africa . To go back and go into the public kitty, and get money to start her new baby, to me was wrong. Because she had more than enough opportunity, I felt, to fundraise. She could have done fundraising events instead of taking what I thought was the easy way out. Because those NEF funds are, even for people like, for instance, me, you know? A young woman, who had finished varsity, who had worked, you know, for a public broadcaster. And if I identified a gap in the economy that, you know, I would build some kind of a enterprise to go and contribute back to the economy and empower other people, for example like me, or perhaps who are in a far lesser position than me economically speaking, that, to me, yeah, people of this country, not people who have had a number of opportunities, who are *thriving* entrepreneurs, you know? So, to me, it became a thing of, uh, Luminance became this thing of cynicism. (Lusekho, original emphasis)

To Lusekho, the NEF's involvement with the venture was perceived as an abuse of public funds, funds that could be better invested in those who, unlike Dhlomo, could not rely on personal finances and private sector investment.

4.3.2 First impressions of the boutique

Moving away from its origin story, impressions of Luminance itself tended to be positive. For Amanda, the visual aesthetics and atmosphere were what set Luminance apart from other luxury boutiques.

Firstly, I thought it was beautiful. The interior is amazing, I mean, it's, it's the first of its kind, of that calibre ... It's the first of it's kind of that calibre, in terms of the customer service, in terms of the infrastructure. In terms of the boutique, I've never seen anything like that before in this country ... When I walked in,

um, I remember I got greeted. By the staff, which is very rare when you walk into shops. Um, I never felt looked down upon. Um, I was given my space to browse and look, and no one was following me, you know, like, on my back, asking me questions. I mean, obviously, like, they did ask me how can they help me, what am I looking for. And I just told them, “no, I’m just browsing”. And yeah, I love the way it turned out. All the different labels, and all, how the makeup is set up and the coffee shop at the back. It’s beautiful. (Amanda)

The aesthetic impression of the boutique exceeded the expectations of Nthabiseng, whose extensive travel had made her something of a connoisseur when it came to high fashion and style:

“I’m very picky when it comes to clothes and things like that, hey? Okay, so when I walked in the store, the first thing I thought was, “okay, plush” – it was surprising, I didn’t expect it to be such a boutique, like a European style store. So it has the feel of a Chanel store, it felt like a Chanel store, you know? Plush carpets, good lighting.” (Nthabiseng, pp. 134)

Other women agreed with Amanda and expressed feelings of pleasant surprise regarding the service they received, especially in light of previous experiences they had had at other establishments in Hyde Park Corner:

“One of the things that I, that impressed me about the place, literally you’re treated like royalty when you walk in. I hate it when people faff around me when I shop, but they do it in a very, a welcoming, nice manner. They get you a drink, and they’ll guide you, which is quite nice. I like the experience, it *is* a shopping experience ... people still treated me as a potential client, whereas what I tend to find in other boutiques around Joburg, especially around Hyde Park, is you walk in, and people look you up and down, and decide if they will approach and offer you help or not. Or, even the way they ask you if you need help with anything, it’s as if they’re just doing it because it’s their job but their not really there to serve you because they made an assumption that you’re not gonna afford to buy anything in the shop. I have never felt that at Luminance since the first day I walked in, and I think that’s why I went back. (Lerato)

However, not everyone was happy with the level of service. For both Lusekho and Nthabiseng, the mannerisms of the staff did not fit in with the ambience of the boutique; they were perceived as overly familiar, as not having the expected in-depth knowledge of the brands on offer, and, in Lusekho’s case, appeared to question whether she was able to afford anything in the store. She elaborated that this was

something she had perceived amongst black women in the service industry on multiple occasions:

And that's a problem with a lot of people in Joburg, not only in boutiques like Luminance, just generally in the service industry. Whether it's something even as simple as the person at the till at Pick n Pay. Black people are always sizing each other up, and that to me, it drives me, it drives me nuts. Because, I told you now I'm 31 years old. There's a lot of people who don't realise that I'm 31, some people think I'm 26 or whatever, right? So by virtue of that, they have this thing in their heads that a 26 year old shouldn't be buying certain things. And to me that's rubbish. If I'm 23 and I'm a millionaire and I'm spending my money, who are you to say that I shouldn't spend it? It's my damn choice. And that's one of the things that, again, drives me nuts about, I don't wanna talk about the rest of Africa, I wanna talk about Joburg specifically. I know we have similar problems in the Eastern Cape, but in a different kind of way, but here in Joburg, and I compare it next to New York, New Yorkers don't care. If you've got the money, you're paying for it, that's all they care about ... So there's a lot of sizing up of each other *amongst blacks particularly*. And blacks in the service industry, in retail, don't size the white people. They don't do that. They only do that to blacks. And it annoys me so much, it happens all the time, you know? (Lusekho)

This resonated in some ways with my personal experience of the boutique, when I had felt very out of place upon walking in. I had no intention of purchasing anything in the store, and I had the sense that the staff had internally identified me as someone for whom the goods and lifestyle on offer were out of reach. There was certainly no rudeness, but rather a downgrading of the level of attention I was worthy of. Considering that I visited the boutique purely for research purposes, I did not feel insulted. Instead, I became interested in what my experience would have been had I projected an air that marked me as a potential client. Lusekho, however, felt as though she had been categorised as a 'dreamer' rather than a paying customer and had taken offense.

And so what if we're here to dream? Let's just put it out there. So what if that was it? You don't know what good fortune's gonna befall us tomorrow such that we can come and wipe up the whole damn store ... And even there, why does it have to come down to the actual money and if you can afford or not? What does that have to do with them? All they're supposed to do is pushing product, and they're not pushing product by behaving like that. They are pushing you *away* from the product, and *away* from the entire experience. And that experience is supposed to *enable* them to push the product, without even saying much. All they have to do is smile and nod, and ask you do you need help. That is all. And

I'm sorry, it sounds very reductionist and elitist on some levels when I'm saying all they have to do is smile and nod. Especially to, to other women. But that is the nature of the merchandise ... You're not supposed to be there to come and look you up and down and think, "oooh, this one, she belongs in at Edgars" or, you know? It's not their place. (Lusekho, original emphasis)

This feeling of being judged and categorised before even really engaging with the products on offer did not dissuade Lusekho from engaging the store, but instead drove her to buy something to prove a point to the staff members who did not take her seriously in the way she had expected.

You know, I paid three thousand and something for a wallet, right there and then, without even thinking too much about it. If I feel the environment was a little bit, uh, warmer? And more conducive to me browsing around, instead of me feeling the pressure to, okay, now that I've walked in and these people have looked me up and down on some 'Little girl, what are you doing here, you can't afford this'. I wanted to prove to them that I can buy this thing, you know? Even though I haven't necessarily budgeted for it, and I was like, okay, I'll make up for it over the next month or two, it's fine. But, the experience made me annoyed. And I was like, you know what, I'm actually gonna walk out with this stupid wallet. And that's what I did: I went in there, bought the wallet, walked out, and I have never gone back there again. (Lusekho)

Nthabiseng's critique of the store was linked both to their approach towards customers and what she perceived as insufficient knowledge of their products and inappropriate engagement with clients. For her, these failures served only to discourage people from actually walking in and making purchases, when the sheer cost of the items should have been motivation enough to please clients as much as possible.

The staff isn't good, mmm, I felt uncomfortable. The staff followed me around, not in a way, they didn't make me feel like I was gonna steal, they just made me feel like very nervous shopping. So they were excessively uncomfortable and followed us around, and constantly asked us what we need as if we were... so it was the kind of thing you do at a [place like] YDE [a clothing store in South Africa showcasing young local designers], like you don't do that in a boutique, so they didn't seem to understand how you're supposed to do things. And when I asked questions, they didn't, uh, and I asked, I was purposefully just gauging where they uh stood on labels. They didn't really understand much about the fashion that they were selling, they didn't know about tones to use, the appropriate tone to use with clients, um, they got very familiar very quickly (Nthabiseng)

4.3.3 ‘Not just any old thing’: Luminance prices and their justifications

Lerato, a senior executive at one of South Africa’s largest investment banks, visited the boutique every few months and considered Luminance to be firmly outside of her price range. When asked to describe the ‘quintessential Luminance woman’, her first response was “Surely she’s not a banker, bankers don’t make that much money ... [she’s] someone who has a lot of money to maintain that lifestyle, because it *is* expensive brands”. The price of the goods on offer was also a regular point of reference. Because so many of the clothes and accessories were sourced in Europe and the United States, and were also ‘luxury’ items, the prices were daunting to all the women interviewed, even those who shopped regularly.

First of all, I knew it was gonna be an expensive store. I sort of had a guide of the prices based on people who had gone, who had gone in the store. And, um, shoo, I still think nothing prepared me for some of the prices there! So when I went, I think the decision I quickly made when I walked in, I love shoes, so I, that was gonna be a place where I buy shoes and handbags. But, like, I remember seeing a skirt, like a silk skirt, for R35 000, and I was like heck no! I, I cannot justify buying fabric for that much. But, um, when it gets to shoes and handbags, there’s some justifications that my brain can make? So, that was my impressions of the place: very expensive. (Lerato)

The monetary cost of the clothes was also seen to represent a standard of quality in the clothing, above and beyond South African designer brands. Part of the justification of the cost was the fact that these items were produced by some of the most recognised and respected brands in the world. Prada, Gucci, Versace, Louboutin: participants associated all of these and more with a degree of quality that South African brands just did not have. And one of the most basic justifications for the store was that it provided access to South African (and other) consumers who would otherwise have to source these goods overseas, or online. Despite acknowledging that most of what the boutique had to offer was currently outside her price range, Thembisile praised the boutique for sourcing brands that were “quite legit, brands you actually can’t get in the country” which could be “beneficial to someone who likes buying these luxury brands”.

I think for me, it’s variety, it’s range, and that’s what they’ve managed to do, especially on the shoe side. As I say, I love shoes, so when they came in I knew,

um, sort of knew the brands they were gonna bring in because I'm interested in those brands. So I think that's what I enjoy about them. It's the variety and, um, maybe the shopping experience again." (Lerato)

For Lusekho, the Luminance branded items, which are designed and partially manufactured in South Africa, did not have the same clout. "[When I was looking through the stock] I was thinking, okay, you have a Marc Jacobs, you have Prada, you have Manolo Blahnik, next to a bag that's made somewhere in the Eastern Cape. It's interesting, but I'm not too sure about that". Nthabiseng echoed those sentiments in her reflections on her first visit to Luminance: "The thing that I think is sometimes a little bit cheeky is that they've got an in-house brand, and they're trying to charge Carolina Herrera prices, and I'm like 'but where did you come from', you know? I don't know if you have the right". The presence of locally produced content, while still considered upmarket relative to other South African brands, was considered somewhat irreverent in comparison with the imported luxury items.

Not only was the price justified, but there was also the assumption that everyone would both understand the justification, and desire the clothing on offer. "It's still European fashion that appeals to everyone, black and white", noted Lerato. Palesa also made the connection between style ideals and the international fashion world: "The black woman is not in isolation when it comes to fashion, you know? They're still influenced by what they see on TV and how other people get dressed, they're still influenced by what they see in magazines".

Despite acknowledging that prices were high enough to discourage more regular visits to the store, when asked whether they would lower the prices if they had the power to do so, some of the women declined.

I think there's definitely a place for that, there's definitely a place for, for the exceptional kind of designs, there's a place for exceptional, because what it is about is not the price point, what it is, is there a willing buyer? I'm giving you something exceptional, you know, are you willing to buy it? Do *you* think it's valuable? And for as long as there's a customer that thinks that, there's a space, you know, for as long as there's a market then there's room for that kind of brand, that kind of shop, (Palesa)

This justification of the boutique based on the idea that people should be given the opportunity to consume luxury items if they so chose, and that equal access should not be a concern for such spaces. Amanda agreed, explaining that people's patronage of the store was reason enough for it to exist, even though she personally did not have the financial resources to be a regular shopper.

When I walked in there, there were boots for R30 000, you know? I mean [laughs] there's very few people who can just go into a shop and spend so much money at a go and it's not a problem ... I do feel like it does only, only market to a very few people in this country, but I don't think that it's a, it's a bad thing as well. Because I feel like those people need shops to also shop in, you know? For me, I don't think it's a bad thing, I don't think the people who made it thought that in any way. Because, I feel like if a shop is targeted for a specific type of group of people, that's its target. And if you don't meet that target then don't shop there. You know? I don't know, maybe that's the fashion, like the fashionista coming out of me, but that's just my, what I think. Like, I don't think people should feel bad about it ... it's not a bad thing, and it's not personal. It's just, if you have the money or not ... I think that there is a market, I mean, I know women who are very, I know black women who are very, um, successful, you know, who've *got* money, who *can* go spend R30 000 like it's nothing and like, it's not a pinch, you know? So I think there *is* a market, and I think there's a growing market as well. (Amanda)

4.3.4 Not the 'real' Chanel experience: the limitations of Luminance for 'experienced shoppers'

While the general consensus was that Luminance certainly provided greater access to luxury fashion, there was a degree to which the boutique's usefulness was recognised as limited. On the one hand, it provided consumers with a variety and range of foreign brands that would otherwise require a significant investment; one could not simply browse a 'real' Chanel store overseas every weekend because travelling to do so would require both time and money.

However, not all participants necessarily thought this was a drawback to accessing luxury fashion brands. Nthabiseng said, "I think my biggest concern was, as a person who travels a hell of a lot, a Luminance doesn't really help me at all. I've always held the thought that with luxury purchasers, if you can afford a Caroline Herrera dress

then you can afford the flight there”. This sentiment was echoed several times in different interviews, with the additional criticism that, for many, part of the experience of buying designer goods was travelling to visit boutiques on site. Despite describing Luminance as similar to the Chanel store in New York City, Nthabiseng ultimately concluded that it did not compare to the ‘real deal’.

The ‘Chanel experience’ was so desirable because it of the travel and access to leisure that are required to access it. Having a ‘Chanel experience’ was a sign of access to places like Paris and Milan, places where Chanel is more readily available than it is in South Africa, places where one would expect to find Chanel. This desire went beyond travel as a signifier of wealth, and framed the ‘seasoned shopper’ as someone who has extensive knowledge of the places she goes, the places to shop, and the places off the so-called beaten track. That knowledge was seen to have value in and of itself, as it was indicative of a woman who was somehow a cut above the rest.

[The woman who shops at places like Luminance is] somebody who’s very crazy about travel, crazy about experiencing new things, um, and who, who’s seen a bit of the world, you know, and who’s probably seen a bit, or a lot of the world. So you can’t lie to her about what you’re giving to her, um, she’s seen it in Milan, she’s seen it, um, in, in, Paris, she’s seen it in New York and she just wants it here too at home, you know. (Palesa)

I lived abroad, and while I was living abroad I had a few trips to Czech Republic and whatever, and that’s not my business trip whereby my boss sends me for a week’s training and I’m happy to go and whatever, I do it quite regularly. And I live, I don’t live life as a tourist, I live in and amongst, like I’m going to see my mates, I’m going to brunch in Paris and then I’m going to lunch in, and um, and I’m seeing increasingly that my friends, you know, people older than me even, they’re increasingly approaching life this way and I’ve, like during the US Open I was finding it surprising that people were posting photos of the US Open and saying, “like, guys, we should think about going to the US Open before Serena stops playing” and I was like, but I was sitting courtside since 2007, where have you guys been, man? But you could never say that out loud because, you know, you would sound quite snobbish and quite full of yourself. But it is, but I am aware of the fact that I’ve had a different, like, developmental arc than some of my friends, even some are more successful than me, higher positions, whatever, you know, older than me but I’m just saying that I never needed a fancy car, you know, I wanted an amazing experience. So I’m a little different in that way. (Nthabiseng)

Ultimately, the Luminance woman was seen as one who, among other things, prioritises finding good experiences that go beyond simply meeting the criteria for being among ‘the finer things in life’. Or rather, the Luminance woman redefines the finer things to include an unforgettable, one of a kind, and (almost most importantly) authentic experience of luxury. And because these experiences were perceived as being located in places like Paris and New York, there was a sense that Luminance provided a simulation of luxury, rather than providing access to ‘real’ luxury.

4.3.5 Luminance and race: ‘I don’t want to sound racist about this’

Present race relations in South Africa rarely came up in conversation, despite much of the conversation focusing on black women specifically. As noted above, some women praised Luminance for representing black people’s entrance into private sector spaces dominated by white capital. When this idea was explored, the perception was that women, especially black women, continue to experience discrimination in the workplace.

In the workspace, though, you’ll find that, as a black female, you still have to prove yourself more. That’s my experience of being in a work, corporate environment. If you’re black, you have to, you don’t automatically gain respect, you have to convince them, why must we respect you, why must you... so you’re the CEO, you have to convince us to feel like, no, you actually deserve this title. It’s not automatic, it’s, I always say men have it forty per cent easier than us. You don’t, they don’t fight as much to prove anything to anybody. You walk into a room, you’re a guy, you’re automatic – you’re wearing your suit, you’re automatically [accepted]. You walk into a room, you’re a female, they’re immediately thinking, ‘Did she sleep with someone to get this position? Did she... did she *buy* something, is she someone’s daughter or... Is she pretty? Oh, she’s pretty, that’s why she has this job.’ Or nepotism, ‘She got it from her aunt’, things like that. Like people have questions and then they’ll try and test you, and they’ll try and, and see if you can actually fit, are you fit to be in this position. (Nandi)

For Nandi, black women in corporate spaces were at a clear disadvantage in terms of working against the entrenched prejudices of those who were able to occupy those spaces with ease. Despite her sympathy and empathy towards these experiences, her impression of black people’s approach to business framed them, especially older generations, as inexperienced. It seemed to Nandi that there was perhaps some

justification for black businesses' marginality, as they did not have the same level of experience.

Historically, uh, I think black people are only starting to catch up *now* with things like, white people usually save for their kids, that's why you get trust fund babies. And you don't have those with black people. And black people don't... black people are only coming to the party now with regards to businesses, and, like, if you, for example, say to a particular black parents that I want to go and open a business, as opposed to I want to go and pursue my studies, they'll most likely say to go and study, don't, that's crazy, why do you want to go and do that. As opposed to, like, white people where you find that the child is trained to take over the business from when they're young. It's, and they'll save and white people are very good, *were* very good with saving for, like, they start saving before the child is even born so by the time you're twenty-one, you've got all this money that you can, you don't you don't actually *need* to go to the government to get, to get funds. And, I think also... black folks are not... um, white people share, amongst themselves. I don't know if this is gonna sound like racism, white people share amongst themselves, so they will... black folks, that's why you get witchcraft, because black people are very jealous of each other, so they won't want to build, so, for example with white people, you'll find that ... which is why you'll find that most white people don't go to these state, to these funders, because they've got someone who's going to, they've got *access* to people, to funders and investors. Unlike a black person, uh, you don't know where to start, and all you hear is, 'Go to CIDA [the CIDA Empowerment Fund, an endowment created to provide education for "previously disadvantaged black South African youth"] or to the IDC [Industrial Development Corporation]. (Nandi, original emphasis)

Thembisile also made a distinction between white and black people in business, although she acknowledged that business knowledge was not as readily available to disadvantaged groups.

I think, especially for black people, just knowledge about business and educating ourselves about business and how to even obtain that funding is completely different to how a white person has connections. I think, um, as much as they always say, um, you know, if you're a black woman it's so much easier to get funding from credit industry, I just feel like, I really feel like that might not be the case. And I also, yeah, I think it's just a general lack of education. ... I really think it should be a part of an education. I think business should be a standard subject in schools. So that people know what to do, where to go. Even some of the simple things, like how to register a company online. Those are the kinds of things that women should know about. So even holding seminars, forums, but that's also a problem because... is it gonna be a class thing, are people gonna pay to go there, are people interested? (Thembisile, pp. 7)

Access to the business world was therefore made difficult, not only because of a lack of investment in black business, but also because there is a lack of information about

the limited resources that do exist. Success in business then became predicated on the personal connections one had, rather than the individual merits of the enterprise.

I feel like we live in a country where it's all about who you are? Um... I think... black people are looked down upon, number one. So I would think that's why it's so hard for the state to be able to give them so much money. I feel like, um, yeah, I just feel like black people are looked down upon. And people don't think that that, as a black person or as a black company, like you can't do well. Um, but I also feel like it's all about who you and connections and your family. Um, that's just in the country that we live in, unfortunately. So ... I just still think that, okay, it's, we, we are over apartheid, but I still feel like racism is still alive in this country, a hundred per cent. So, um, and I think people's mindsets have changed, but they haven't changed a hundred per cent ... Yeah, because even as black people we are still also racist to some extent, you know? So, um, yeah. I don't wanna just point... I don't wanna point at the white people and say they were the ones complaining [about support for black business]. Because I can even tell you now, I know for a fact that there were black people who were also like, "No, she's not gonna succeed". (Amanda, pp. 29)

I noticed a contradiction between what Nandi had preciously said about the difficulty black women faced in corporate spaces, and her description of white people's approach to business. She had noted that women were constantly under pressure to prove that they were worthy of their jobs, and that they were not just 'somebody's niece' who had gained her position through nepotism. Later in the conversation, she had praised white people for taking an approach to business in which using family connections to progress was almost a given.

Interviewer: I think it's interesting then that, you know, white people can be a trust fund baby or, you know, be raised to take over the company but then, it was like what you were saying earlier, if a woman walks into a boardroom, people will say, 'Oh, her aunt gave her this job' or 'She must be somebody's child, that's why she has this job'. So why is it... why do you think it's read in different ways?

Nandi: I think it's that white superiority thing that feeds into the white culture. Remember I said black women have to fight? Just like a black man will have to fight against a white guy because he is a step ahead of him. So that, that links with that, also. It's, with white people, the difference between black folks and white folks is that... black people, like, are very sure of, 'I did this for you, you owe me this'. Like, it's a *status* thing with black people. White people are not status-minded, they're not really status-minded, so if you, if, if they, if someone has done something for someone.... He won't go and stand on a hill and say, and shout it to the world that, 'Hey, the reason why you're driving that now, the reason why you're staying in Constantia, you know, is because of me'" (Nandi, original emphasis)

Although she became reluctant to speak more about racial politics, Nandi did reflect on the media's role in perpetuating racial stereotypes, noting that whiteness and blackness were too often associated with goodness and badness, respectively. She expressed frustration with this tendency for one-dimensional representation, and tried to make sense of it in the context of South Africa's apartheid history.

Even in politics you see, like with things like that, like even in the media, you hardly hear about stories of white people doing things like [abusing power in business], unlike people, black people doing things like that, if you read the newspaper, if you watch the news... most of the stories report on, if it's fraud, it's black, if it's nepotism, it's black. You will hardly, eh, I don't know if it's... comes back from our apartheid days where the media was told that, like it was controlled by them so anything bad to do with the white person wasn't reported, so I think it has, maybe it hasn't changed, or... cause, even to, to date, even the white newspapers, they're, if it's, like, got to do with crime, if it's got to do with fraud, the only thing that it, you will find that it's mostly black people that get reported... And I feel like our politicians are not helping to change that because if the white politicians could control the media, then, then why isn't the same happening now? Why is this 50/50 thing that's happening in the workplace, I think it also needs to feed into the media spaces as well, let's not hide the white stories, let's also put them in the front page of, of newspapers. Let's not get shocked that Oscar killed his girlfriend, but we read about, every second day we'll read about a black person murdering [someone], so it becomes normal but now, because it's a white person, it's unbelievable. (Nandi)

All of the women I spoke to were economically privileged compared to the average black woman in South Africa who held executive positions in the private sector, or were successful entrepreneurs or attended tertiary institutions full-time. While they may not have had access to the financial freedom that they associated with the quintessential Luminance woman, their current circumstances differed from those of the typical black woman in South Africa. At times, it appeared that they believed that, individual experiences of racism aside, structural marginalisation was increasingly fading away, perhaps because that was what resonated with their own experiences as black women who had experienced personal successes. Palesa in particular was explicit about her frustration with the way discourse about race limited rather than promoted progress.

People expect you to think that this [black] woman is almost disabled, right? Whereas now, for me anyway, no one is disabled by virtue of colour, by virtue of whatever, you know? The issue is people's perceptions and trying to implement what the constitution wants... We need to challenge ourselves as well to go into

those spaces that are un-, you know, that we consider as white. Go! Go, and turn them into what they should be, which is South African and a rainbow nation, turn them into that, you know? You've got every single right, no one is going to kick you out, *that's* the perception you need to give, *those* are the kind of children that we need to raise, the children that know they can jump on a plane and go anywhere, go anywhere in the world and no one is gonna say, 'you're not allowed in this country'. Because that's the reality. No one can do that." Palesa, original emphasis)

In Palesa's opinion, both society and government policy had transformed enough to give everyone access to the kind of life they wanted. What remained were individual perceptions that did not align with these changes. In this case, the relevant perceptions belonged to people who are marginalised, and who were being held back, according to Palesa, by their own limited idea of their own potential.

The born-frees are who I'm looking forward to seeing and the kind of children that they're going to raise. If you're talking about us, the 84s or whatever, we're still very much scarred by what we saw in the 80s. But at the same time, we are also thinking about the kind of children that we're going to raise, but we're still scarred. But those kids, you know, there's very little scarring that's happened to them, so for me, that's what I'm looking forward to. And those kids *are* having this, they *are*, they're a lot more free, they're a lot more... um, open about the kind of people that they want to be. They're not limited in how they should think about themselves. If anything, when the limitation comes, it comes from the home, it doesn't come from outside, you know. It comes from the home, people bring that to schools and they start saying things that they shouldn't be saying, you know? But when it comes to reading and all of that stuff, you know, there's more than enough that's still saying that you can do all of those things. (Palesa)

4.2.6 Luminance as proof of black women's progress

The women interviewed fell into two general camps regarding Luminance's potential to positively impact the lives of black women. For the first group, the criticisms about the boutique being exclusionary were valid, and the narratives surrounding its opening had been somewhat misleading. Most notably, Lerato was blunt about her understanding that the boutique provided limited opportunities for black women outside the clientele and owners.

It's a business transaction like any other. And, if you went to Luminance, I would even venture to say, their biggest clientele isn't even black women. They're not going to stop anyone who comes in to shop, because, 'we opened this for black women', no, it's not. I don't see *why* it was for black women.

There's nothing in the store when I walk in that says 'black culture', 'black women'. It's, it's still European fashion that appeals to everyone, black and white. So there's nothing, in my, in my mind, that carves out anything special for black women. (Lerato, original emphasis)

Lerato was also troubled but she had perceived as the tendency to focus on the personal successes of the Luminance woman, often at the expense of recognising the structural challenges that black women in South Africa continue to face.

The reality is that the Luminance woman is not a true representative of most women in South Africa. Most women in South Africa are dealing with poverty, they're dealing with inequalities, issues like those. They're dealing with inequalities at work, even, there's challenges to access work, when we've accessed work, there's still issues between how they're seen versus their male counterparts in the workplace. So those are the challenges that these guys are dealing with, and the, those are their daily lives, that's who they are. And, you're talking unemployment, a lot of women sitting unemployed. (Lerato)

However, this perspective was tempered by the belief that the boutique was not actually meant for everyone. Rather than having a problem with the boutique itself, Lerato struggled with the story that many people associated with the boutique, the story that claimed that the impact of Luminance's opening had resonated for black women around the country. Despite that, Lerato made it clear that she believed that people, herself included, should be able to spend their money on whatever they chose.

And not everyone can shop there! And it's not a bad thing, and it's not personal. It's just, if you have the money or not ... I think that there is a market, I mean, I know women who are very, I know black women who are very, um, successful, you know, who've *got* money, who *can* go spend R30 000 like it's nothing and like, it's not a pinch, you know? So I think there *is* a market, and I think there's a growing market as well." (Lerato)

The store's limited positive impact was generally accepted, especially by the women who considered themselves seasoned shoppers who would visit Luminance more regularly, or even preferred to travel directly to the source, so to speak, and do their shopping in Western Europe and the United States. But there was another potential worry about the store, concerning black women's exploitation under the guise of promoting their interests.

As noted earlier, some participants were sceptical at the idea of hand-crafted South African goods sharing the same space as international brands such as Chanel and Tom Ford, despite the latter being praised for being connected to a narrative of craftsmanship and quality to which the former could more easily lay claim. After all, it would be easier to make contact with the woman who made a handbag in the Eastern Cape than it would be to parse the sometimes murky and morally dubious world of designer factories. Lusekho in particular was critical not only of the local goods' place in the boutique, but also of the potential for exploitation in so many empowerment programmes.

We need to empower people who are producing these things a lot more directly than we currently are. Because you always find, even in Butterworth for example, there's a place called Mnquma Craft – Mnquma is the name of the municipality – Mnquma Crafts is basically, uh, somewhere across the road from the town hall in Butterworth, and they sell traditional clothing, Xhosa outfits, blah blah blah blah blah. You find that each of those different garments, whether it's the beadwork, or the skirt, or whatever, each of them have a pin tied to them that tells you where the item was made. But the actual label that goes on there is the Mnquman Crafts label. So after I buy the traditional outfit, I remove the note with the pin that says "Made by Zomele, a woman in Ncubakazi Township" or whatever, or "Zomele is a woman in Mission Village" whatever, and what I'm ultimately left with is the label of the distributor, who, by the way, has added quite a huge mark up for their distribution. So do you see what I'm saying? The scenario has to change. It's not helping ... We need to stop having savvy businesswomen from Joburg exploiting women, I'm sorry I'm using women in workplaces, but in the context we're talking, exploiting women in rural and peri-urban environments. It mustn't be exploitation, there must be a double empowerment somewhere somehow, you know? At least to start. (Lusekho)

Lusekho's intervention was particularly interesting as her concerns contrasted the boutique's rather pristine image with the tarnishing reality that black women have been and continue to be largely marginalised in the formal economy. As the other participant that was most sceptical about the boutique's usefulness, Lerato was also quick to challenge the idea that the boutique had some obligation to be an empowering space, especially considering how little she associated the boutique with any particular sense of empowerment or black womanhood.

There's nothing wrong with the business at all, that's why I support it. If you can afford the high end goods, go and buy! For me, don't sell the business as that. High-end business looks at high earners, that's it. You can shop – I mean, look at

Tom Ford. When they advertised their business, they're not saying, "Oh yeah, we, we're trying to do this for *society*, but if you don't mind paying fifty grand". No! They're unapologetic. "This is what we will give, for someone who understands and appreciates brand value, and this is what they're willing to pay for it." End of story. (Lerato, original emphasis)

On the other side, and sometimes on the same side, of the fence, the consensus was that, despite its drawbacks, it provided new imaginations of black women, which were useful to and inspirational for black women as a whole. This was especially important to the two youngest participants, who saw the Luminance woman as a departure from the kinds of aspirational womanhood that had been available to previous generations of black women.

I definitely think that there's a different way to a black woman in SA, because I feel like as black people, I mean, like, our grandmothers for example were raised to be women who stay at home. Women who are submissive to the husband. I think the Luminance woman is different because she has proven that, no, I actually *can* go get an education, I actually *can* work my way up, I actually *can* afford this lifestyle. Um, I think also, as black people now, I'm speaking in general, we're so used to getting stuff handed to us. Um, and this woman is different because she's gotten all, she actually worked hard to get where she is. Nothing was handed over to her. So I think that's how she differs. Like, she kind of makes me look at life in a different way. [Black people] are so used to getting stuff handed over to them. Um, women are so used to having their husbands be the ones who are the breadwinners, who bring the money home. Whereas the woman who shops at Luminance makes me kind of feel like it's, It's okay for me to have an education, it's okay for me to be interested in my own stuff. To have my own money, to live a certain lifestyle. (Amanda, original emphasis)

Amanda's insights were particularly interesting, as she made a concrete link between the concept of the hardworking and self-made black woman, and the ability – and moreover, the desire – to shop in places like Luminance. The 'typical' black woman, the black woman who existed in opposition to the Luminance woman, were trapped by a sense of complacency that prevented them from achieving financial freedom.

Nthabiseng agreed with the idea that the Luminance woman encouraged, in fact, gave permission to a younger generation of black women to 'dream bigger' than their mothers and grandmothers, and to extend their imaginations beyond what she considered the usual imagined future for black women. While Thembisile considered

alternative imaginations of black womanhood to be important, she framed the Luminance woman more as a representative of the strides black women were already taking, rather than a trailblazer illuminating new paths.

It was really important to have a black face, black people, especially black women who don't want to be known as nurses and social workers anymore. I mean, we have proper career goals and it also just shows that you can have a business in fashion. You can run a fashion business in the country, and not just be a designer or be an intern at a runway show. I think that we, as black women, we especially have been able to adapt to so many different cultures and spaces, so if that's the case, we should be seen. (Thembisile)

Entrepreneurship, and the associated ownership of one's work was one of the things that the Luminance woman represented. The fact that both the previous and current owners of such a prestigious and, thus far, successful venture (Khanyi Dhlomo and Dr Judy Dlamini, respectively) was perceived as inspirational for black women.

For other participants, the boutique's success was notable, not solely because it was evidence of individual effort, but because it had happened in the context of an economic sector in which black women often find themselves at a disadvantage, regardless of wealth. Luminance's opening was a more visible example of the on-going trend of black women entering spaces that were previously white male dominated.

I think a Luminance woman represents power. So... which is a, which is the, the new South African sort of woman, if I can call it that. Um, she represents, it represents power, it represents a woman who has achieved, who is very successful... All of those things are very new to South Africa, we still celebrate it when it, when a black woman becomes CEO. Whereas when a white man becomes CEO it's just normal. When a black man becomes CEO, it's normal. But if it's a black female you'll see it on social media, you'll see it being, people will be shouting and screaming and making a hooaha about it, understandably. So, it does actually represent, um, where women are headed towards in the country, where women are *aspiring* to be in the country. (Lusekho)

And the notion that spaces like Luminance were an 'investment' and made positive contribution beyond providing 'superior' fashion choices was noted by other participants. Beyond encouraging black women to be consumers in the world of luxury, the store also promoted conceptions of black women as 'climbing the

corporate ladder' and progressing to new, and better, standards of living. These 'new' black women not only made a tangible contribution to the economy, but were also a source of inspiration for other black women. Lerato had already noted that Dhlomo had been a role model since her time in university, and had motivated her to make entrepreneurial ventures in her own right.

The interviews also explored the way that impression that black women were being acknowledged in ways that they had not been in the past. As Amanda was one of the participants who saw Luminance as a venture that was spearheaded and driven by black women and their interests, it was unsurprising that she saw the store as acknowledging black women in ways that other retail spaces did not.

I love the fact that it was marketed for black women ... the whole purpose of it, I don't know if I should put it that way. Like, the whole purpose of the fact that it was the first made-for... well, not made for, but targeted at black women, um. Yeah, I think it's really special that Khanyi Dhlomo, like, acknowledged that... I don't know, it's hard to say this, but she acknowledged black women of that calibre. I mean, in terms of like black women who are successful and who can afford things from there, that's what I mean. Because before, I feel like black women never really had anywhere to shop from that marketed to them.
(Amanda)

Some women went beyond that justification to highlight the need for 'high-fashion' spaces, and to link them to the messages of empowerment that they associated with Luminance. For Thembisile, the Luminance brand provided an opportunity to create an identity, a place where "you can kind of epitomise the kind of person you want to be based on what you buy". The store also gave women the opportunity not just to create an identity, but also to display what kind of person they were to the outside world.

Lusekho, who had expressed a sense of betrayal at Dhlomo's use of NEF funding when she was already an established entrepreneur, nevertheless supported the endeavour because of what it represented to her: "Luminance became this thing of cynicism. But on another level, I desperately wanted to support conceptually another black woman".

4.3.7 The quintessential Luminance woman

At the beginning of every interview, I asked the women to describe who the quintessential Luminance woman was, as I was interested in seeing what they thought it meant to embody the brand. More importantly, it seemed an important first step in understanding where the women located the Luminance woman relative to existing iterations of black womanhood in South Africa.

She's somebody who likes distinction, she likes standing out from the crowd, she's somebody who's very, um, who's proud of like her achievements, um, but also is still very ambitious, you know, still wants to achieve a lot out of life. Um, she's somebody who's very crazy about travel, crazy about experiencing new things, um, and who, who's seen a bit of the world, you know, and who's probably seen a bit, or a lot of the world. So you can't lie to her about what you're giving to her, um, she's seen it in Milan, she's seen it, um, in, in, Paris, she's seen it in New York and she just wants it here too at home, you know. She's somebody who's, who her family looks up to in terms of her own personal achievements, who her business colleagues, you know, look up to, friends, you know they look up to *because* of how stylish she is, you know, she takes great pride in what she looks like, um, and she also takes great pride in where she goes, she takes great pride in her work, she takes great pride in whatever she kind of puts her name, you know, it's very important that it speaks to the kind of person that she is because as much as she's an individual, you know, she's not just any individual, she's an extraordinary and an exceptional individual, you know? (Palesa)

I would think of a woman who is very, um, who, who's calm. A woman who's sophisticated. Um, a woman who knows what she wants, a woman who's hardworking. Mmm, when I think of Luminance, I see a black woman, in her late thirties to forties, in a black pencil skirt, in a her black, red-bottomed Louboutin shoes. A crisp white collared shirt, and um, nicely, simple makeup with a very nice bag, handbag. Yeah, someone who walks with confidence. Like I said, someone who looks, who knows what they want, someone who's hardworking, and I see. (Amanda)

I think it's a woman obviously who has great choice in style. I mean, their garments, even though I wouldn't buy there, but the fabric as I say, they're beautiful, they're stunning. It's someone who has a lot of money to maintain that lifestyle, because it *is* expensive brands. And it's someone who has the platform to, to wear and showcase all of these clothes. Some of the stuff they have in the shop, I can't wear it to a bank, I can't go on a daily basis and just go into an office and sit in a bank. So, for me it's almost as if it's a woman who's always out in the public eye, um, easygoing in life, maybe? [laughs] I picture someone who has no stresses in life, you know? Like, you have, you have it all figured out. You have all the money, literally I can decide to go to tomorrow and I'm

there. Here's an outfit, around five minutes and they pick out something for me, I'm in Monaco." (Lerato)

For some, former owner, Khanyi Dhlomo, and certain other public figures best captured Luminance. The cost of the merchandise, and the type of careers that would allow one to afford those items, meant that many of the women who came to mind were public figures in some way, whether they were celebrities, prolific businesswomen, or both. It was therefore unsurprising that being a Luminance woman was associated with being a public figure.

I think the owner [Khanyi Dhlomo] definitely epitomises the brand. But other than that, I feel, it's a woman who runs a company, who has a lot of money. Maybe single, maybe married. Who really takes pride in what she wears, and works really hard for what she has. Really classy, elegant. But still fun. And black. (Thembisile)

Khanyi represents that brand very well. She's in the public eye, she's, you'll never hear scandals about Khanyi, you'll never hear about her drunk somewhere, so she's, like, quality woman, dignified woman. Like Gerry Rantseli would shop there, for example. I'm trying to think of the kind of women that would shop there. Gerry Rantseli, um... Bonang, Uyanda Mbuli, all these celebs that are known to actually enjoy, to, to *appreciate* those finer things in life. And, it's a very, the brand is, is, is, is, celebs, it's got a lot of celebs that, you get like Bonang saying 'Dressed by Luminance' ...Your Precious Motsepe, those kind of women would be the, the women that would represent Luminance women. So they wouldn't choose just *any* celeb, if they did... And she's mature also. So she wouldn't, they wouldn't be your 22 year old, 23 year old, so it's, it's your, your older but not very old, but she's older... maybe between 27 and 45, that bracket, age bracket. So, it's a matured, classy, stylish, elegant woman that represents the Luminance woman. (Nandi)

Both Nandi and Thembisile were the only participants who explicitly identified the Luminance woman as black. For others, the image of a woman who had achieved success, often in the business world, came to mind.

"Someone who's really powerful in business, it's not someone, it's not some *poppie* [doll] who's in pop culture, and they're just some celebrity who tweets on everything, instagrams everything that they do. Someone who's highly respectable, highly powerful and is a strong voice in business and, um, very influential from that side, in terms of driving the economy from the business side." (Lerato, pp. 41)

While the style and appearance of the Luminance woman was obviously an important factor, there was also a sense of freedom and carefreeness that was associated with

her. She was the kind of woman, as Lerato mentioned, who could be ready to drop everything and jet off to Monaco at the drop of a hat. But, more than that, she was seen as a woman who saw the personal value of taking such a trip, who saw the finer things in life as a way of taking care of herself.

She loves life, she loves it, um, she loves music, she loves great events, she loves going to wine farms and trying out new wines, um, she loves champagne with friends, she loves her family, she loves her children, you know, if she's got children, you know, um, but at the same time she, she understands that, in order for her to be the best for that family, she needs to be her best, right? She needs to take care of her first, um, and sometimes it means taking time away from the kids and actually coming to a fun event and spending time with your friends, just to feed your soul, you know? (Palesa)

Interestingly, none of the women I spoke to self-identified as a Luminance woman. Even when they met many of the criteria they themselves had outlined – ambitious, accomplished in her career, possessing a certain sense of style. Lerato, who visited the boutique the most regularly, to buy shoes and handbags, identified that being a Luminance woman was about more than just being able to afford the goods on offer, or even wanting them; one's lifestyle also played a role. She had already mentioned that, as a banker, she didn't feel that the merchandise was appropriate for her to wear in a relatively private context like work.

I think if I could get over my hang-ups about buying a R30 000 top or whatever it is, I could walk in there and find something that suits my style that I could wear. But as I say, for me, because my lifestyle is different to that, I do not, I wouldn't dress like that every day, so it's not a lifestyle that I would maintain. But, I can see Bonang dressing like that on a daily basis and portraying that convincingly. (Lerato)

It seemed as though the title of Luminance woman was one that was bestowed by others, rather than something one could claim on their own. As a result, Luminance women seemed to be few and far between.

4.4 Conclusion

Overall then, the boutique represented excellence and progress for black women on many fronts. The merchandise was superior, and the black women who patronised

Luminance were economic pioneers, the first of their kind in the post-apartheid era to unabashedly occupy such spaces and demonstrate that excellence could wear a black, female face. And while the number of black women who could afford the costs of this demonstration was small, the consensus seemed to be that making the ‘Luminance experience’ financially viable for a wider range of people would negatively impact the store’s position as a site of excellence. Despite this limitation in terms of accessibility, participants seemed to conclude that the boutique still represented a positive step forward for black women, even if that category did not encompass the majority of black women in South Africa.

The following chapter analyses the themes explored above in the context of the research objectives, namely how the ideas of beauty and lifestyle sold in Luminance manifest themselves in the lives of the women who patronise it, what the various costs of doing so are to these, and how these women fit into society at large. As discussed in the previous chapter, the themes discussed above were arrived at deductively, but were selected for their relevance to these objectives. Through analysing these themes, the next chapter it explores paths of thought about Luminance and the Luminance woman that are useful in creating a better understanding of this particular iteration of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis: The tangible and intangible costs of Luminance

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides space for analysis of the findings discussed in chapter four, and draws some conclusions about who the Luminance woman is, and how she is positioned in the context of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Luminance woman is an interesting construction for several reasons, not least the contradiction of her public existence and the lack of engagement with her life beyond the surface. I argue that the Luminance woman needs to be understood in terms of more than just the tangible costs of buying the lifestyle on offer at the boutique; the social costs of maintaining that position often involve silence and the projection of a composure that is unattainable in reality. The Luminance woman is in some ways, a new iteration of the strong black woman stereotype. However, her experiences also resonate with those of wealthy white women who struggle to ‘have it all’. Because of her marginality, her simultaneous privilege, and the limitations placed on her by those limitations, the Luminance woman is something of a bridge between black and white womanhoods in post-apartheid South Africa.

In light of her extreme privilege, it is easy to write off the Luminance woman as a phenomenon that has little meaning. However, I also argue that the Luminance woman does present a rupture in current understandings of black womanhood, in the way that she embraces her right to pleasure and play. While the specific ways in which she consumes pleasure and play feed into well-established and exclusionary modes of consumption, the very fact of her consumption as a black woman is radical.

Lastly, this chapter explores how the Luminance woman is positioned in relation to post-apartheid South African society, specifically in terms of how she engages with racial politics.

5.2 The cost of Luminance: both justified and unrealistic

The cost of being a Luminance woman is one that not all women are able to or willing to pay. The steep financial barrier to entry makes Luminance a space that women are hesitant to enter. Another contributing factor to this reluctance is the general acceptance of the fact that the items on offer in the boutique are worth, in economic terms, a small fraction of their selling price. While there is symbolic value in the garments by virtue of what they represent – a worldliness and appreciation for ‘the finer things in life’ – the actual cost of creating such garments is near negligible compared to the selling price.

It is therefore necessary for the women who shop at the boutique to make sense of these discrepancies for themselves. In some instances, it is enough to simply acknowledge that Luminance and the lifestyle it promotes are simply not worth it, at least not for the average consumer, regardless of her class privilege. The economic disparity between the cost of production and selling price are enough to render some of the goods on offer almost ridiculous, especially considering that the same effect can be achieved at a fraction of the cost.

I remember seeing a skirt, like a silk skirt, for R35 000, and I was like heck no! I cannot justify buying fabric for that much.” (Lerato)

In other cases, the entire store is devalued by virtue of it not being authentic enough. Luminance occupies the curious space of being lauded for bringing Paris to Africa, and simultaneously not being Parisian enough *because* it is located in Africa. As a result, the goods on offer, and by extension the lifestyle they reference, are merely an imitation of ‘the real thing’, which would require that one actually go to the source.

I don’t wanna go to Luminance and buy Chanel, I wanna go to Chanel to buy Chanel. I want the full experience, I don’t wanna be cheated of my Chanel experience. (Nthabiseng)

This perceived lack of authenticity has interesting implications for the Luminance woman herself. Her sense of worldliness is always at odds with her South African identity, as the truly luxurious and high-end can only come from outside the country. Finding the real ‘Chanel experience’, rather than making do with attempts to recreate

those spaces of meaning, came at a cost that all but the wealthiest of Luminance's clientele could afford.

There is another, less tangible cost attached to being a Luminance woman. The boutique maintains a connection, however tenuous, to those spaces that are considered authentic drivers of fashion and style, and uses this connection to justify prices that make its contents inaccessible to the majority of women (black or white) in South Africa. Despite this, the general consensus was that the boutique, while expensive, was not problematic despite being accessible only to a minority.

Their prices... as much, um, uh, instinct would be to change the prices so everyone can afford it, then it kills what the brand is for, right? And, in my view, and in my mind, again, I know it's not about woman empowerment, it's about high-end fashion. And there's a place for it anywhere. Even in a society like ours that's so polarised and, you know, with inequalities. There are people with cash to spend somewhere... People still have a right to choose, and just because they're rich, doesn't mean they must go and pour all their money in Soweto or in the Eastern Cape (Lerato)

As a result, the Luminance woman's implicit and explicit support of the boutique and its priorities comes at the cost of empathy with those who cannot access that space. It is difficult to justify the right to spend money in places like Luminance while simultaneously acknowledging the fact that the boutique's continued existence relies on an economic structure that is extremely unequal.

Luminance relies on a logic that encourages its patrons to turn their attention to the authenticity and attractiveness of its merchandise, instead of examining the realities that prevent all but a small minority from being able to interact with the boutique at all.

However, in terms of the space it occupies in South African society, and who is welcomed into that space, Luminance's exclusivity is not considered a shortcoming, or something counter to its original narrative of black women's empowerment. The Luminance boutique's exhortation to 'live life beautifully', therefore, is largely a solitary undertaking; one's own right to spend on pleasure, a theme explored below, is considered more important than finding ways to extend that pleasure to others.

I argue, therefore, that the costs of being a Luminance woman are varied and worthy of further exploration. The objective cost of the merchandise is one that should not be taken lightly, as it speaks to an accepted and ratified superiority of standards coming

out of the West. The more subjective and implicit cost, captured in the avoidance of the less aesthetically pleasing realities of South Africa such as economic inequality, is also important. It challenges the idea that the Luminance woman is evidence of the successes of the new South Africa, and encourages us to rather think of her as a 'success story' *in spite* of the new South African context, rather than one which came about *because of* the carefully constructed story of the post-apartheid era.

5.3 The 'right' to pleasure and play as earned and not given

One of the defining and most noticeable characteristics of the Luminance woman is the air of effortlessness surrounding her. She always appears perfectly turned out, she does not seem to have to deal with the million little ways in which life throws challenges to others. In short, she appears to live a charmed life. At the same time, however, she is someone who invests a significant amount of her time and energy in her career in order to be able to reap the financial benefits that she does. She is hardworking, and considered an economic pioneer by her peers and admirers.

I think the owner [Khanyi Dhlomo] definitely epitomises the brand. But other than that, I feel, it's a woman who runs a company, who has a lot of money. Maybe single, maybe married. Who really takes pride in what she wears, and works really hard for what she has. Really classy, elegant. But still fun. And black. (Thembisile)

I think she is an inspiration because she's an outcome of hard work and she is there to show us that it's actually possible to achieve all your stuff and it's possible to be able to afford shoes worth forty grand, you know? ... This woman is different because she's gotten it all, she actually worked hard to get where she is. Nothing was handed over to her. (Amanda)

At face value, the Luminance woman appears to taunt other women with the sheer perfection of her life. Her home which is always ready to grace the cover of a magazine, her loving and supportive (heteronormative) family, her high-powered corporate job: all of these serve to remind other women of the lack in her own life and the ways in which she falls short of perfection on a regular basis. However, the point of her financial security is arguably one of the most important about her, as any engagement with Luminance requires money.

The Luminance woman stands in contrast to other new versions of black womanhood that have money at the centre, most notably that of the 'blessee'. A 'blessee' is most

often imagined as a young black woman, who engages in a (often) sexual relationship with a black man, usually older, in exchange for financial support (Shamase, 2016). There are those who claim that ‘blesser/blessee’ relationships are simply the new modern relationship that deals with the unavoidable issue of money in an upfront way (Verass, 2016).

There are also those who acknowledge that such relationships can have a sinister side; the men who take on the role of ‘blesser’ occupy a position of power in the relationship that tarnishes the younger woman’s supposed financial freedom as she cannot always guarantee that what happens is on her terms. However, even those narratives that are critical of the ‘blesser’ phenomenon tend to frame the women as the problem in the relationship. In June 2016, the South African Department of Health launched a programme to address some of the negative consequences of ‘blesser/blessee’ relationships, including gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and increased transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV (Gqirana, 2016).

Despite this, the initiative was branded as a programme to “wean girls off sugar daddies” (Gqirana, 2016). Doing so erases the fact that many these ‘blessers’ are older men prey on and exploit young women in these relationships, and reinforces the belief that these young women are instead seeking out older men as an easy way to earn money (Pilane, 2016). It also serves to erase the fact that those relationships in which the girl is younger than 16 years old constitute statutory rape.

This is not the first time that the economic activities of vulnerable black women have been scrutinised. During the apartheid era, when the formal labour market provided almost no opportunities for black women, shebeens and taverns became viable sources of income, as black women opted for sources of income that would not require them to leave their households (Edwards, 1988; Rogerson and Hart, 1986).

More recently, Mark Hunter’s work has explored the various strategies working class black women use to overcome their economic marginalisation post-apartheid South Africa, including informal trading and industrial work when such opportunities were available. Situations in which women benefit materially from sexual relationships

with men are far from a new phenomenon, as Hunter notes that, historically, these material relationships have taken place in rural and urban areas (2010: 47).

Black women's available economic options often exist on the fringes of what is considered acceptable, partly because their marginal position makes them the first to absorb the shock of any economic crisis (Hunter, 2010: 88). However, despite these economic activities often being motivated by some combination of necessity and choice, they continue to be considered illegitimate in the wider economy.

The Luminance woman stands in contrast to the black women described above; she is a working woman whose financial freedom is a direct result of her engagement with the private sector, a respected part of the formal economy. Her freedom is seen as more legitimate, and therefore 'respectable'. The Luminance woman therefore falls into the category of people whose economic activity is praiseworthy. As a result, her consumption of leisure, and her prioritisation of pleasure are also seen as legitimate.

As much as she is very vocal about deserving leisure, and doing things purely for pleasure, she doesn't complain about how hard she is expected to work to maintain that lifestyle. The right to work has formed part of the foundation in feminist struggles. As noted in Chapter Two, the second wave of feminism specifically made demands on society that allowed women access, not only to work, but also to the kind of work that is considered useful in a society and is rewarded as such.

There were some forms of labour that were considered inherently feminine, often linked to the home, and women who attempted to move into other spaces were often demonised. This applies even more to corporate spaces, which have long been, and continue to be, conceptualised as masculine spaces. In such spaces, traits that are considered masculine – aggression, confidence, determination – typically allow the individual that embodies them to succeed, assuming they are male.

However, women who embody those traits in the corporate world are often vilified for doing so. This is simply one of the many ways that women continue to face oppression in the workplace, despite the gains that have been made in simply accessing these spaces. Black women face the additional barrier of continued racial prejudice that makes corporate and entrepreneurial spaces difficult to enter.

You'll find a lot more black women in executive positions, and those are spaces that before were predominantly male spaces ... you find more women doing Masters, you find more women opening businesses and not being scared of that space, and not letting fear cripple them into not actually pursuing that ... I think women, it's actually become a trend, it's *cool* actually for a woman to start her own business. Because it's a very risky, very unsafe space to be in. So now we're more *confident* in pursuing that. (Nandi, her emphasis)

For black women, then, the right to work is particularly meaningful because of the historical limitations of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that part of the Luminance woman's appeal is linked to her perception as an economic pioneer. She represents not simply disruption to a male-dominated space, but also a disruption to a predominantly white, male-dominated space. The gains of white women, as has been noted throughout the history of black feminist theory, seldom translate to women of colour. The Luminance woman, therefore, represents tangible progress for black women.

However, while women have made several institutional and legal gains, the modern woman now turns her attention to the right to pleasure. The third wave of feminism, prioritising as it did the importance of finding one's own way to be a feminist, was fertile ground for theories about the right to pleasure to flourish. For the Luminance woman, part of why her consumption of leisure and pleasure are so validated comes from how hard she works. Extreme leisure is the norm in contrast to the type of work the Luminance woman does.

I think that's wonderful because, I think that's another thing with black women, I mean very few really felt that it was okay to, you know, *spoil* themselves, cause they're so busy on the hustle, um, and have now learned that actually there's room to be spoiled and to spoil themselves, which I think is great. (Nthabiseng)

Luminance itself reinforces this demand for leisure and pleasure, encouraging women to unapologetically purchase merchandise that fulfil desires rather than needs. This encouragement to prioritise individual needs above those of others has its roots in the earliest conversations about self-care in the feminist movement, when black women were encouraged to practice self-preservation.

Narratives of self-care are a challenge to the constant pressure black women have felt to put the needs of others before their own, and is therefore an extremely valuable for women who are reclaiming spaces and experiences that have been denied them.

However, self-care as projected by Luminance has become inextricably linked with neo-liberal capitalism; pleasure and leisure are things that have to be bought, and at a high cost. In fact, the more expensive the experience, the higher the quality of the self-care being practiced.

I argue that the Luminance woman thus personifies a very specific kind of self-care, one that has come to be defined in terms of how extravagant and luxurious it is. Self-care is less about doing what one wants to, but rather about performing a certain kind of leisure that is worthy of both her financial position and how hard she has to work to maintain it. Self-care for the Luminance woman, therefore, often appears to be more about “consumer-based identity construction” (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995: 140) i.e. about creating and maintaining the image of the Luminance woman than embracing the sense of vulnerability that black women are so seldom afforded.

5.4. The Luminance woman: another strong black woman?

On the surface, the Luminance woman certainly appears to be a fully empowered form of black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa. She successfully disrupts white- and male-dominated spaces, she is able to access a lifestyle and forms of leisure that are out of reach to the majority, and is able to prioritise her wants in a direct challenge to the constrictions generally placed on black women. However, I argue that below the surface, the Luminance woman continues to be limited in terms of what she can project to the outside world. As a result, the Luminance woman is unable to escape the “crooked room” (Harris-Perry, 2011: 29), rich as the furnishings may be.

This argument comes from an examination of what the Luminance woman can acceptably project to the outside world, and the characteristics that are seen as antithetical to her. Her position in the corporate world provides a useful example: the Luminance woman is, in part, constituted by a sense of performed dignity and properness. She differs from male iterations of black South Africans with access to wealth – namely the ‘blessers’ and ‘tenderpreneurs’ – in that a sense of propriety is attached to all her financial dealings. A ‘tenderpreneur’ is understood in post-apartheid South Africa, most often a man, who “has enriched themselves by gaining

contracts in an illegal way or as a result of nepotism, political loyalties and pro-struggle credentials” (Vorster, 2012: 136).

In contrast, not only has the Luminance woman earned all of her wealth, but she has also done so in ways that are all above board. This is in contrast with the sense of suspicion that follows the financial achievements of ‘tenderpreneurs’. Part of the reason for the Luminance woman’s position as an aspirational figure is because her hard work is perceived as the source of her success. This is regardless of whether she her background was conducive to success or not: former owner Khanyi Dhlomo was identified as the quintessential Luminance woman many times and praised for how hard she worked despite the fact that her considerable personal wealth has surely been an advantage in her business ventures.

Even her consumption of leisure is tightly restrained, and is not an expression and acknowledgement of her vulnerability to the pressures of the world she lives in. Rather, spaces of leisure and play exist to reward her for her efforts. Her leisure only exists because of how hard she works, and therefore is a constant reminder of how amazing she is. She does not book a spa weekend because she is exhausted, or depressed, she does so because she has worked 80 hour weeks for a month straight, and has earned some respite. Importantly, her respite is not *needed* so much as it is *deserved*.

While those who theorise about self-care certainly frame it as a right that all women should have, they also take care to acknowledge that self-care is necessary not only because women want it, but also because they do themselves harm by never practicing it (Dineen, 2016). The Luminance woman is one who does not appear to need the healing that self-care affords, and therefore practices it to fulfil her desires rather than to continue functioning in society.

It is important not to misrepresent this lack of visible vulnerability as a lack of vulnerability overall. The Luminance woman, despite her numerous achievements and privileges, is only human. Her blackness and femininity mean that she is guaranteed to experience some form of oppression, tempered as it may be by her wealth. Even Oprah Winfrey, one of the wealthiest women in the world and a public figure on an international scale, is not immune: in 2013 Winfrey was denied service in an

exclusive Swiss boutique not unlike Luminance because of the racist prejudices of the sales assistants (Thompson and Magnay, 2013).

However, it is difficult for the Luminance woman to express any kind of vulnerability. In a capitalist society such as South Africa, where success and wellbeing are largely measured by one's wealth, vulnerability from the Luminance woman is unlikely to be met with sympathy. Because so much of her identity revolves around her successes in her public and private lives, she becomes trapped in a space in which sympathy is simply not deserved.

In a feature article in *Destiny* magazine, South African businesswoman Phuti Mahanyele recounts the story of how her high-powered corporate job was one of the causes of a stress-related stroke in 2013. While she acknowledges that the pressures of the corporate world were literally harmful to her health, she also refers to the stroke as something that motivated her to continue working in corporate spaces:

The one thing that became clear to me was that work was where I felt the most comfortable. After I was discharged from the hospital, I was actually uncomfortable being at home. I simply wasn't used to being there. It was weird for me to sit in the lounge doing nothing. Home was where I went to sleep, take a shower or have something to eat and then go. All of a sudden, here I was, looking at the garden and relaxing – it was weird. (Mahanyele, in Adams, 2015)

Mahanyele is in many ways the embodiment of the Luminance woman: a black woman in a high-powered corporate field; ambitious and hard-working (to the point of collapse in her case); someone with an appreciation for fashion and the finer things in life. What is interesting is that, even in the context of a life-threatening event, she still reaffirms her commitment to working hard and overcoming even the most daunting of obstacles. Leisure in a time of recuperation was seen as something uncomfortable because it was not being justified by hard work.

In some ways, then, the Luminance woman appears to be a new iteration of the stereotypical *strong* black woman. The strong black woman, historically, was characterised by her prioritisation of the needs of others above her own while never complaining. Her lot was to suffer in silence. In some ways, this is the stereotype that has been the most difficult to challenge, as it is seen by some to be a positive model around which to shape one's life. The strong black woman is competent, capable and

efficient. What she has to do and sacrifice to do so are less important than the fact that she does. Selflessness and resilience have long been associated African women in particular. As Motsemme, 2011: 116) explains:

The stoic figure is, of course, a very common one in African women's iconography. A stoic person is basically someone who appears unaffected by emotions, and is generally admired for showing patience in the face of adversity...themes of resignation, endurance, and grief so memorably embodied in women's stoic bodies, are strong themes in surviving oppression and poverty. In this sense stoicism is then strongly associated with *performing dignity* in the midst of hardship. (Original emphasis)

While the Luminance woman's commitment to leisure seems to be at odds with this stereotype, she is still expected to make things work at all times. Her career, relationships, family life – the wellbeing of all is predicated on the Luminance woman's ability to keep it together. Even her consumption of leisure becomes something to get done. The combination of identifying as someone who is constantly hardworking, and the belief that hard work is the main criteria for reward, means that the Luminance woman becomes yet another person she needs to serve in order for the logic of her identity to make sense. Her respite is not needed so much as it is *deserved*, and she is obliged to give herself what is owed to her.

At the same time, she needs to make all of the hard work she is doing look easy. Complaining does not sit well with the perception of the Luminance woman; after all, what does someone with her life have to complain about? As a result, much like the strong black woman, the Luminance woman has to do a lot of work in private to maintain a public appearance that is acceptable. The cost of carefreeness thus becomes another price the Luminance woman needs to pay, and its accepted currency is silence.

However, this case is different: any hardships she may face are not to be aired in public. This is a new way in which the Luminance woman is forced to stand upright in the crooked room – even when she has achieved such a tangible level of success, she still does not have the space to stand upright and be honest about the realities of her life. Women whose lives display any degree of 'messiness' or complexity are disqualified from being Luminance women. She deals with any problems with aplomb, without resorting to any form of 'ghetto' or 'ratchet' behaviour that is so

often associated with black women. In some ways, she is an attempt to create distance from the negative connotations associated with black women.

Khanyi represents that brand very well. She's in the public eye, she's, you'll never hear scandals about Khanyi, you'll never hear about her drunk somewhere, so she's, like, quality woman, dignified woman. (Nandi)

The fact that none of the women interviewed self-identified as a Luminance woman, even when they fulfilled the criteria they themselves had set out, takes on a new significance in light of this further cost of being a Luminance woman; projecting perfection is difficult. It was telling of the fact that, while the Luminance woman may 'have it all', it does not follow that this elusive 'it' is all it is made out to be. Perhaps this was a result of the costs of being a Luminance woman, which seem only financial on the surface, but prove to be more complex upon deeper investigation.

Being the Luminance woman means embracing this strength that has been equated with dignity, hard work, and public invulnerability. Despite the attractiveness of the trappings of the Luminance woman, the clothes and the travel and the worldliness, the sacrifices it entails – having to seem unfazed by the messiness of the real world and keeping up appearances – are ultimately unattractive.

5.5. Beyond blackness: the Luminance woman and race

The Luminance woman has a complicated relationship with race. In some ways, in terms of her public life and public consumption, she appears to have more in common with white women. She has entered and occupies spaces that have previously been reserved for wealthy white women. In fact, she has a lot in common with white women who struggle with juggling a high-powered career and personal life. This struggle reinforces the belief that a woman's commitment to her home and family should be unwavering, but simultaneously disparages those women who do not commit themselves entirely to their careers (Slaughter, 2012).

The Luminance woman has something else in common with wealthy white women in that her successes, while often praised as representing progress for all women, have little tangible effect on the lives of black women in South Africa.

I struggled to draw the connections between how that business and that that strategy she said at the time was going to empower or change a black woman's life who's sitting in Soweto and can't even shop in that shop. So when I broke through and went through all of it, and filtered it to make sense for myself, I came to the conclusion that it is a *business*, at the end of the day. She has to make money. And who is she gonna take care of? The women who walks *in*, with the card, with the money. Now, when we're doing that, don't tell me that's now bringing change or transformation to women. It's a business transaction like any other. (Nthabiseng)

However, her experiences in post-apartheid South Africa are undoubtedly tempered by the fact of her blackness, even despite her position as the poster child of the new South Africa. I argue that the Luminance woman's existence embraces, contradictorily, post-racialism in a society in which it is impossible to escape one's blackness.

It is by no means uncontroversial to say that the story of the making of the new/democratic/post-apartheid South Africa is often told as a narrative of the heroic struggle to overcome the entrenched and vicious racial past and to found a constitutional republic based on the refusal of racial identifications and exclusions. (Scott, 2015 in Mangcu, 2015: xi)

In this story of post-apartheid South Africa, the Luminance woman is one of those who 'heroically' overcame racial oppression to arrive at the promised land. She is in many ways the emblem of the rainbow nation, an aspirational figure that is only possible in the post-apartheid constitutional republic of South Africa, and proof (to those who preach non-racialism) that the constrictions based on racial and ethnic discrimination have been broken down. It as if, in some way, her very existence was proof of the progress that South Africa has made towards giving people equal opportunities.

Because so much the Luminance woman's narrative is centred on her self-made nature, she is even better placed to be an embodiment of the post-apartheid South Africa. Not only had she transcended so many of the barriers facing black South Africans, but she had done so through sheer hard work.

The Luminance woman exists as an exhortation to other black women to work hard so that they can live life beautifully. She is also used to justify the myth of post-apartheid South Africa in which one's ability to thrive is based on individual merit and not institutionalised prejudice. As a result, she and the women who praise her highly are

hesitant to recognise the structural oppression that black people, and black women in particular, continue to face.

If the rest of us can't afford it, you must have, you mustn't be angry and wanna burn the shop down [laughs] We must work harder, I guess. Cause I guess when you shop there you'll feel like, 'I have arrived' type of thing so I guess it will motivate you. (Nandi)

Communicating your oppression in the face of privilege shouldn't be about being antagonistic and fuelling tensions, that's not the point. Communicate your frustration, but see if there can be some kind of a process that you can agree on to move you away from that oppressed position, you understand? It's an on-going conversation. (Lusekho)

There is much more that needs to be understood about how wealthy black women interact with race – in the story of the Rainbow Nation, the black character that attracts the most attention is the male tenderpreneur. Next, the coconut i.e. a young black person who, by virtue of attending a so-called Model C school, has assimilated to/expresses themselves/performs in a way that is associated with whiteness. Stories of black womanhood complicated by privilege are given far too little space. This study makes an important contribution to a literature about black women that has failed to ask enough questions about what this type of woman means in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. It also makes an important contribution to literature about racial complexities in post-apartheid South Africa, and the continuing but ever-evolving intersections of race, class and gender for black women.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the symbolic meaning attached the Luminance boutique and its contents, which is used to inform and justify its exorbitant prices. This justification, I argue, contributes to the depoliticisation of poverty in post-apartheid South Africa by prioritising the rights and desires of the wealthy over the needs of the economically marginalised. This chapter also argues that the Luminance woman's consumption of leisure and pleasure, rather than being an act of self-care, is a function of her high-powered corporate position, as well as an act of public performance. The performance of vulnerability, however, is not accessible to the Luminance woman who, as a black woman continues to face pressure to project an air of stoicism, regardless of her experiences.

I argue that the Luminance woman is something of a bridge between white and black women, but that her position does not allow her to reap whatever benefits may exist on either side. Unlike white women, the Luminance woman cannot rely on racial privilege in any meaningful way. In addition to this, her class privilege makes public vulnerability even less accessible than it is to black women in post-apartheid South Africa. As a result, the Luminance woman's class privilege and its origins i.e. her career are an important site for her to exercise some sort of agency.

This chapter also frames the Luminance woman as a rather lonely character in the story of the Rainbow Nation i.e. the new post-apartheid South Africa. She does not experience the camaraderie in business so easily afforded to men. Despite having assimilated to whiteness in similar ways to the Model C student, the internal compromises she has made are not publicly recognised. I therefore argue that post-apartheid South Africa's fixation with class mobility, combined with the social prohibition of black women's vulnerability, have created a crooked room for the Luminance woman that is empty but for the luxurious contents.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 Conclusions

Black women in South Africa have and continue to face multiple and intersecting oppressions in post-apartheid South Africa. However, the emergence of the Luminance woman as a new iteration of black womanhood, combined with her public successes and the lifestyle options she has access to, create the temptation to make claims that the new, post-1994 South Africa has truly succeeded in creating an inclusive society. The purpose of this study has been to gain greater understanding of how the Luminance woman is framed. In this final chapter, I explore the outcomes of this framing, and discuss some of the implications of the Luminance woman for black womanhood in South Africa in general.

Under scrutiny, claims that the Luminance woman is evidence of a new, inclusive society do not hold water. South Africa has embraced a form of neo-liberal capitalism that makes it impossible for the Luminance woman to become a widespread phenomenon, as it guarantees that the wealthy will always be the minority. Furthermore, even if she was a more accessible iteration of black womanhood, we cannot conclude that adopting the Luminance woman's particular mode of womanhood would be beneficial for all black women.

Ultimately, the framing of the Luminance woman is evidence of the ways in which social progress for black women is being measured. Economic wealth is increasingly proposed as an antidote to racial and gender oppression. The Luminance woman certainly does have a degree of economic privilege, which does significantly and positively affect her life. In terms of some of the most pertinent issues facing many black women in post-apartheid South Africa – such as chronic unemployment, being the sole financial provider of one or multiple households, having limited access to the less exploitative spheres of the labour market – the Luminance woman has a clear advantage.

However, it is important to look past the economic dimension of the Luminance woman in order to make meaningful inferences about what her existence means for black womanhood in general. Framing the successes of the Luminance woman as a feminist intervention for black women in South Africa fails to address the role she plays in the big picture. The Luminance woman is a disruption, in the sense that she is able to access a lifestyle which, until recently was reserved for wealthy white people. However, the entrance of Luminance woman in these spaces does not require that they transform in order to accommodate her. The duty of the Luminance woman is to assimilate rather than demand change. Black women's presence in certain spaces is understood in and of itself to signify transformation, which is antithetical to those feminisms that prioritise structural change such as black feminist theory.

The Luminance woman's existence and perceived success is therefore used to weaken critiques of continuing racial and gender oppression in South Africa. Or rather, it is claimed that she demonstrates that there are now new and effective ways to deal with this oppression. She diverts attention away from the oppressor and towards the oppressed. Feminist theory in general, and black feminist theory specifically, focuses on identifying and challenging the ways in which women are oppressed. Black women's oppression is constantly evolving and taking on even more insidious forms. The fact that black women are still the most vulnerable and marginalised group in South Africa is evidence of this. As such, using the existence of the Luminance woman now to support the claim that the forms of racial and gender oppression in the apartheid era have been eradicated is disingenuous.

Accepting the myth that black women as a group are better off in post-apartheid South Africa as fact ultimately has the opposite effect for black women, as it erases from view some of the structural oppressions she continues to face. Instead, it places the burden of black women's success on their shoulders without recognising the ways in which her ability to achieve her goals, whatever they may be, is severely limited. This is in keeping with what is understood about the Luminance woman: much of her success is perceived as coming from the work that she, and she alone, performs.

The average black woman in South Africa is unlikely to have access to the tools which could make becoming the Luminance woman a realistic goal. For example,

quality education, including tertiary education, is necessary to gain the skills deemed necessary to flourish in corporate spaces. However, quality education is a luxury which few in South Africa can afford. Without taking such factors into account, it is impossible to make judgements about what black womanhood can and should look like.

While it is important to be critical of the Luminance woman because of the role she plays in justifying and normalising the status quo, it is also important to note the ways in which some of the criticism against her functions as a reaction to her position as a black woman. In part, this study was motivated by a sense of curiosity about the public knee jerk negative reaction to the Luminance woman. When it was announced that Khanyi Dhlomo would fund her luxury venture with partial financial support from the National Empowerment Fund (NEF), the response was largely negative and often vitriolic. As an already successful businesswoman, Dhlomo's new venture was perceived as being greedy. However, a similar logic is not expressed publicly about business ventures headed by men, at least not publicly.

Similarly business ventures of white people in South Africa are seldom given the reaction that Luminance has received. Dhlomo was framed as not taking seriously the mandate of the NEF, and instead pursuing a business venture that would have limited positive impact for black South Africans in general. While this criticism was valid, especially considering the NEF's mandate to create space for black people in business, there is a sense in which the negative response to Luminance was motivated by the fact that Dhlomo was not doing what was expected of her i.e. taking care of other black people. The burden of care has fallen to women throughout history, and black women in South Africa have always felt that burden.

The responses to Dhlomo and Luminance serve as a reminder that black women in South Africa remain burdened by the duty to be sympathetic and empathetic, but are not afforded the same emotional support. Even the Luminance woman, as discussed in Chapter 5, is constantly under pressure to demonstrate how well she can care for others, often at the expense of caring for herself. Black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa has not evolved to create space for black women to prioritise themselves.

6.2 Implications for black women

Responses to the Luminance woman speak to new forms of misrecognition that black women have to contend with in post-apartheid South Africa. In the twenty-two years following the end of apartheid, oppressive tactics have evolved and found new ways to continue to marginalise those who are black, poor, women, or some combination of the three. These new ways are more palatable to society at large, or rather less explicit, but are undoubtedly still prevalent. One example is the misrecognition of the Luminance woman by framing her as a woman who has it all. Doing so restricts her ability to express the hardships she experiences, and contributes to a new form of silence for black women.

In light of the various silences surrounding so many of the experiences of black women in South Africa, it is important to theorise ways in which unwanted silences can be challenged. This is complicated further by the fact that black women themselves are sometimes guilty of reinforcing silences around other black women. The Luminance woman, for example, contributes indirectly to another form of silencing in that she is used to delegitimise the experiences of those black women for whom the Luminance woman is an unachievable identity.

The value of this research is that it illuminates the reality that new iterations of black womanhood are, by necessity, simplifications. The Luminance woman, constructed as she is in magazines, film and other modes of popular culture, cannot be understood as a fully formed and multi-dimensional human being. In some ways, she is best suited to exist in magazines and films because those spaces are inherently sanitising and are able to expertly romanticise the less appealing aspects of her life. Some spaces, such as magazines or films, are inherently misrepresentative.

However, we should not be too quick to dismiss the Luminance woman as a useless phenomenon in terms of understanding black womanhood in South Africa. Her unattainably high standards of living, and the resulting acceptance of her unattainable lifestyle, provide a useful point of departure when imagining what new black womanhoods would actually be useful.

When black women step outside of the identities imposed on them, it is not enough simply to frame them as renegades or pioneers: spaces have to be created in which new forms of black womanhood are not understood in relation to existing forms, but are rather accepted and engaged with on their own merits. It is not enough, therefore, simply to praise a black woman for rejecting the silence imposed on her by the title of ‘Luminance woman’, there needs to be an understanding of what alternative space she claims, and what meanings it holds. Similarly, it is not enough to praise a black woman for entering a white-dominated space and successfully assimilating into it, when this action does very little to create *new* alternative spaces for black woman, and rather disrupts existing spaces.

This brings to mind original motivation behind Luminance, as expressed by former owner Khanyi Dhlomo. Black women, she explained, needed to start entering new and unexpected places, and Luminance represented her personal commitment to do so. However these new and unexpected places, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, have come to mean spaces that are male-dominated, white-dominated, or both. In all cases, black women’s progress is thus measured in terms of they are able to shift the balance of power in their relationships with other, more privileged groups. This focus on cosmetic change precludes the creation of something new for black women, something that is truly evidence of the new South Africa that is so often claimed but so seldom realised. If black women could imagine new ways of being that evolved to respond to their needs, and realised these imaginings in their day-to-day lives, this might go a long way to creating a new post-apartheid South Africa that is actually committed to inclusivity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

My name is Ndapwa Alweendo and I am a student in the Political and International Studies Department at Rhodes University, and Principal Investigator of this project, entitled, “**‘We’ve got to start going into unexpected places’: The Luminance woman in post-apartheid South Africa.**’ This study is being done because, at the moment, there is very little information regarding the experiences of black women in post-apartheid South Africa. This study aims to understand your experiences as a black woman who is participating in areas of life that were previously completely off-limits to the vast majority of black women. I wish to interview you in order to understand what your interaction with a black-owned boutique has meant to you. I will ask you how to recall how you came to hear about the Luminance boutique, your experiences of the boutique, what you think about the lifestyle sold by the boutique, and your thoughts on the opinions that non-clientele might hold of the boutique.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record this interview so I can record the details accurately. The tapes will only be heard by me, my supervisor and the person who will transcribe the interviews. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access. At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or end this interview.

The risk involved in this study is that you may feel uncomfortable discussing some of your experiences during the interview, and should this happen, please know that you can stop at any time. The benefit of your participation is that what you share with me might help us understand better the personal experiences of women in South Africa whose experiences are often presented in a superficial way.

I may publish results of the study, if you wish for your identity to be anonymous, your names or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications unless you do not have a problem with identifying yourself. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at 081 8911595 or g10a7516@campus.ru.ac.za/ndapwa.alweendo@gmail.com, or my advisor Ms Siphokazi Magadla, S.Magadla@ru.ac.za.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

I agree to have this interview audio-recorded please [circle one]:

Yes No

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Rhodes University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I would like to start by asking about where you're from, your place of work/what you study and if you do not mind), your age.
2. How and when did you first hear about Luminance?
3. If you have been to the boutique, what were your first impressions of the store?
4. What makes Luminance different to other boutiques?
5. Up-scale department stores and boutiques often sell a lifestyle in addition to material goods. What kind of lifestyle do you think the Luminance boutique sells?
6. If you were asked to describe the "Luminance woman" i.e. the woman represents the boutique and the brand, what kind of woman is she? E.g. what is she interested in, how does she spend her time etc?
7. How do you think the Luminance woman is different to other ideals of womanhood that exist in South African society?
8. A lot has been said about the fact that Luminance is owned by black women, did that influence your choice in shopping at the boutique?
9. The title of my thesis is a direct quote of Ms Khanyi Dhlomo who said in an interview just after the launch of Luminance that South African women '[have] got to start going into unexpected places'. What do you think the store says about where South African women, or black women in general, are going economically, socially and maybe politically as well, 21 years after the end of

apartheid?

10. Part of the controversy following the launch of the store was around the difficulty of black businesses to access loans from banks to start large-scale business. Why do you think that black businesses still have to rely on state support for such ventures?
11. What do you think of the perception that the store is there to serve a particular section of women and that most South African women cannot afford the goods at Luminance?
12. Would you like to see more black-owned stores like Luminance?
13. Lastly, if you could improve the Luminance boutique in any way, what would it be?

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