

**THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CONSUMERISM IN THREE AFRICAN
NOVELS**

By

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Declaration:

In accordance with Rule G4.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted for assessment to another university or for another qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mary', enclosed within a hand-drawn oval shape.

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Abstract

The portrayal of women and consumer culture is a pertinent issue in African literature. This dissertation examines female characters in three South African novels namely *Hunger Eats a Man* (2015) by Nkosinathi Sithole, *Men of the South* (2010) by Zukiswa Wanner and *Black Diamond* (2009) by Zakes Mda and exposes the effects of feminized consumerism. The theoretical framework for the study is taken from Carolyn Elizabeth Miller's (2006) theory of consumerism and sexist oppression and is used to expose the oppressive effects of consumerism that nevertheless construct feminine identity in a capitalist world. To augment Miller's theory, the work of other theorists are consulted to establish a theoretical framework for analysing feminized consumerism. The first chapter shows the effects of feminized consumerism as oppressive to wealthy women and poor women alike. The second chapter shows that female characters are domesticated by consumerism; domestication referring to the phenomenon of prohibiting women from male spaces or subordinating women within those spaces. The third chapter shows that some of the female characters are engaged in commodity fetishism and that they are affected in adverse ways because of this. The fourth chapter explains how female characters are portrayed as inferior to their male counterparts as a result of feminized consumerism in storytelling. In addition to concluding the oppressive effects of feminized consumerism, the fourth chapter analyses comments about capitalism that the authors make; authors like Wanner and Sithole seem to severely critique capitalism and its effects while Mda seems to verily defend capitalism.

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INTRODUCTION

Feminized Consumerism and its Effects on Women as Depicted in Three South African Novels

1. Introduction: Post-transitional South African literature and Identity

In the era since 1994 there has been a marked shift in the way identities are shaped and understood in South African culture and as Ibinga (2010) points out:

The key element in the classification of South African literature is no longer racial difference but the language used by writers. Whereas during the apartheid era we spoke simply of ‘black’ or ‘white’ literature, now we refer to South African literature as Zulu literature or Afrikaans or Xhosa or English.

Another issue, in post-transitional South African literature is that “the representation of euphoria has quickly been replaced by a feeling of disillusionment as the past continues to haunt people’s everyday lives” (Ibinga, 2006).

For Attwell and Attridge (2012: 385) the transition after 1994 meant that South African authors were now “freer to take the personal and the lyrical as their canvas” but as Barnard (2012:652) observes, some authors were still preoccupied with the past issues such as economic inequalities, racism and sexism.

According to Donadio (2010:1) the end of apartheid resulted in a fragmented space of South African literature. Donadio describes it as fragmented because the topic that once distinguished and united South African literature was not yet found after the 1994 period. Frenkel and McKenzie agree with this sentiment, saying that today South African literature “reflects a wide range of styles and concerns” (2010:1). The effect that this has is the notion that all is well with South African society and that the social and economic racial tensions between black and white identities is done away with by democracy. Whereas literature has the opportunity to change perspectives on the past and to define the present, there is no marked break in South African literature indicating this transition after 1994.

Barnard (2012: 661) comments on the inclusion of gay and lesbian rights in the new South African constitution and accordingly it is reflected in post-apartheid literature. Linked to this is imagining a new society against the background of inequality and ongoing gender based violence against women.

While some authors diagnosed South African literature with an identity crisis, others saw an opportunity for positive change and maturity. According to Ibinga (2006):

A common feature in post-apartheid literature is a concern with nation-building projects. Authors explore the possibility of re-assessing past identities to construct a new national identity based on a transcultural perspective.

It seems that instead of genuine critique, post-transitional South African literature became focused on nation building. The following extract is more telling of this phenomenon. In a special edition of *Modern Fiction Studies* (2000) dealing with South African fiction after apartheid, Attwell and Harlow (2000: 3) point out the reality of South African literature since 1990:

It has taken upon itself the task of articulating the larger predicament. Its fields are the experiential, ethical, and political ambiguities of transition: the tension between memory and amnesia. It emphasizes the imperative of breaking silences necessitated by long years of struggle, the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role of culture – or representation – in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding.

These “new forms of understanding” after 1994 is the endorsement of a separation between the political and the aesthetic, as well as a more accommodating approach to “the re-invention of tradition, to irony, to play” (Attwell and Harlow, 2000: 4). Similarly, Attwell (2006) moves away from what the one-dimensional view on Black writing as being nothing more than protest literature by saying that it has a strong predilection for realism. Moreover, another way of understanding post-transitional literature is through the use of Nuttall’s concept of entanglement:

It represents a means by which to draw into our analyses those sites in which what was once thought of as separate identities, spaces, histories come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways. It is an idea which signals largely unexplored terrains for mutuality, wrought from a common, though often coercive and confrontational, experience. [...] It also signals a move away from an apartheid optic and temporal lens toward one which reifies neither the past nor the exceptionality of South African life. (Nuttall, 2009:11)

Post-transitional literature entangled opposing identities of black versus white as it entrenches the victory over apartheid. Likewise, what characterized post-transitional South African literature either “[complicated] or [ignored] apartheid era racial categories” (2010:2). Examples of this can be seen in my chosen novels: Zakes Mda’s *Black Diamond* (henceforth BD, 2009) which subverts racial stereotypes in a satirical manner. Nkosinathi Sithole’s *Hunger Eats a Man* (henceforth HEA, 2011) and Zukiswa Wanner’s *Men of the South* (henceforth MS, 2010) do a similar thing by utilizing black people as their main antagonists. Furthermore, the novels show that money, not race, is a means of controlling space in post-transitional South Africa (Frenkel & McKenzie 2010:3). These texts also provide examples of how political connections, instead of race, enable the control of and accesses to ‘space’.

It is from within this understanding that my critique of South African literature through feminized consumerism will be conducted. My study will try to untangle the identities and interests of women from the entanglement of post-transitional which assumes that the identities constructed in apartheid and prior no longer apply to black people and women. The experience of the female characters in my main texts will not focus on the ordinary, they will focus on the broad forces that cannot be escaped or done away with by the personal. This is because I believe that South Africa continues to grapple with the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment for most of its population and that this reality is worse for women (African Monitor 2017). Furthermore, I do not believe that the opioid of feminized consumerism whether it be shopping, beauty or sexual liberation will do away with this reality. The following remark by the author of *Hunger Eats a Man* Nkosinathi Sithole (2016) supports the framework that I shall take for this study as he makes his own observation of post-transitional South Africa:

So, when apartheid ended everybody thought their lives were going to change for the better. It did not happen for many people. In fact, most people are worse off than they had been during apartheid. I hoped to write a book that would alert the people in power about the danger that we face in South Africa if the gap between the rich and the poor is not bridged. Indeed, in dealing with poverty, the question of corruption could not be ignored. The idea was to try tell the story of a suffering people in a way that is not so depressing, that people can enjoy in spite of everything.

With that sobering thought of South Africa’s lack of progress, I shall move on to discuss feminized consumerism as understood by this study.

1.2 Feminized Consumerism

Contemporary authors often have different ideas of what consumerism is and the effects it has on women. Stearns (1997:106) sees consumerism as an opportunity for “individuals from various groups to both aspire to and achieve the capacity to enjoy consumer items outside their accepted group boundaries”. Indeed, some of the female characters in this study aspire to and enjoy consumer items that their demographic would not usually allow, such as black women in South Africa. Likewise, Ahn (2017) argues that consumerism offers women the opportunity to shop wherever they want, interact socially on a different level and access to spaces that would usually not be open to them.

Miller(2006) on the other hand, argues that the freedom that consumerism provides only serves the elite women of a society. She argues that consumerism offers “little benefit for poor, disenfranchised women who [can] profit neither from new jobs in the consumer sphere nor from new opportunities for female consumption” (2006:318). To be sure, not profiting from new jobs created by consumerism means that these new jobs pay women less than the minimum wage. People who are payed less than the minimum wage are called “the working poor” (Rogan and Reynolds 2015). The low wage adds further pain to their exploitation. In her critique of late-Victorian consumerist literature, Miller argues that consumerism gave wealthy women greater access to and engagement with the public sphere but it “also distorted their(women’s) desires so that they “advanced” merely to become their own oppressors - or the oppressors of others” (2006:139). Another aspect of this oppression can be seen when wealthy women enjoy consumerism at the expense of labourers and ecosystems in poorer countries. The lure of consumerism can even contribute to the endeavour to acquire or protect commodities through war (McGregor 2003). The woman entrenched in consumerism can be said to be complicit in all of this. Likewise, Miller states that consumerism barely lifts poor women out of poverty, and that it ultimately leads to the oppression for all women not discriminating between rich or poor. This is a tragic situation since consumerism is often associated with feminism and thus female liberty (Johnson and Taylor 2008). Therefore, the question can be asked, is consumerism the Trojan Horse of oppression to feminism and feminine identity? This shall be addressed later on in the discussion. The next section shall introduce the books that will be analysed for this study.

1.3.Hunger Eats a Man

Nkosinathi Sithole's 2015 debut novel has attracted praise for its unique and fresh take on language and style. Wessels (2014) notes that the novel's features make an "important and original contribution to recent writing". Set in KwaZulu-Natal, in a fictional town called *Indlaidlindoda*, (HEA,2015) is about Father Gumede or Priest, who is disillusioned with religion because it has not brought him the economic prosperity that he expected it to bring. The antagonist of the story, Bongani Hadebe, is a principal who obtains his wealth and qualifications through political connections. Bongani oppresses the poor masses through his corrupt dealings. Through this characterization Bongani, represents the BEE beneficiary that post-transitional literature marks as an agent of oppression co-opted by the elite. Sithole does not shy away from this representation as he writes a scene where Bongani opens an apartheid handbook.

As he (Bongani) reads, these words pass before his eyes: General Malan ... black nationalism ... decolonisation ... Soviet inspired ... total onslaught ... Marxist. Bongani shudders as he reads. "Bloody Karl Marx!" ... Reading further revives him a bit: South African response ...total strategy ... political ... economic ... psychological spheres ... military. (HEA, 2015:67)

Bongani's anxiety about communism harks back to the "red danger" propagated by apartheid authorities in the face of African uprising. Nevertheless, by including this passage, Sithole aligns the struggle of the poor with communist and Marxist ideals. This communicates the message that his novel is written from an anti-capitalist and therefore anti-consumerist perspective. Sithole's book speaks of consumerism from the perspective of the poor and this is made evident when MaDuma refuses to work for less than minimum wage. The next section shall discuss Zukiswa Wanner's *Men of the South*.

1.4.Men of the South

The fourth book of novelist Zukiswa Wanner was received with criticism for its depiction of characters through a consumer culture imported from the West (Dlamini 2016:92). Ntwatwa (2015) on the other hand, criticises the novel for its biased and unrealistic depiction of the male characters. These criticisms aside, the story tells of the challenges faced by three men from Southern Africa, Mfundo, Mzilikazi and Tinaye-the study shall focus on Mfundo. Mfundo is unemployed and because of this, he is forced to confront the societal expectations of his gender identity. These societal expectations of Mfundo's story comment on the interplay between feminism and consumerism and thus provides useful comment for this study. Apart from

Mfundo, the study shall examine Slindile, his wealthy girlfriend and mother of his child who is also forced to confront the realities of consumerism. The couple provides an in depth look into the effects of consumerism in the private sphere, whether this look is on gender expectations or on the tension between consumerism and feminine identity. The next book to be discussed is (BD,2009).

1.5.Black Diamond

Zakes Mda's *Black Diamond* (BD,2009) received both criticism and praise for its ability to comment on social issues in post-transitional South Africa. Sarah Thackway (2017) compares it to his first novel *Ways of Dying* (1995), saying that (BD,2009) succeeds in the same manner as *Ways of Dying* in providing meaningful social commentary. On the other hand, scholars like Gail Fincham (2011) describe it as unable to adequately "engage with serious social issues" (149). Nevertheless, the satirical approach to the realities of post-transitional wealth acquisition gives the reader a deep understanding of the workings of capitalism in the black elite cluster. It is also interesting to witness how the women within this society utilize their agency to forward their consumerist ambitions, in particular Tumi who embodies the capitalist and consumerist woman steeped in cosmopolitanism. It seems that this novel portrays the relationship between consumerism and women in a positive light; all the women portrayed in this novel are at the top economically and socially. The next section shall provide an overview of the chapters and the theories that shall be employed to study them.

1.6.Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: 'Women of the South: Analysing the female characters in (HEA,2015), (MS,2010) and (BD,2009) and how they are oppressed through consumerism

In chapter one, I shall examine the representation of the female characters in the three novels and argue that they are ultimately oppressed or have little to no benefit from consumerism. The aim of this chapter is to lay the foundation for the subsequent analyses about the effects of consumerism in the subsequent three chapters by contextualising consumerism and its relationship with women through Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's theory of 'consumerism and sexist

oppression'. The different theorist in these chapters shall be used to support and expand on Miller's theory oppression and consumerism.

Chapter 2: 'Women at home: How the female characters are confined to domesticity by consumerism in (HEA,2015), (MS,2010) and (BD, 2009)'

Using Annabelle Cone's theory of "female consumerism as an extension of domestic roles", this chapter shall examine the female characters and argue that they are being oppressed by being confined to personal and domestic roles. Simultaneously, I shall use Marjorie Swann's theory of "masculinized space", to argue how the masculinized spaces in these books oppress female characters. The aim of this chapter is to establish that the women in these novels are restricted from making any meaningful contribution to the outside world or to their immediate public environments.

Chapter 3: 'Between Men and Women: Analysing how consumerism affects the relationships between male and female characters in (HEA,2015), (MS,2010) and (BD,2009)'

Chapter three shall explore the oppressive effects that consumerism has on relationships between the male and female characters in the text. Monika M. Elbert's theory of "the middlemen of capitalistic desire" shall be employed for this examination. The aim of this chapter is to show how consumerism oppresses women by affecting their desires that ultimately lead to the oppression of men.

Chapter 4: 'Patriarchal Consumerism: How Female Consumerism Asserts Male Supremacy Over Women in (HEA,2015), (MS,2010), and (BD,2009)'

Finally, I shall conclude my study by examining the oppressive consumerist narrative in these novels. This chapter aims to argue how the books portray men as ultimately superior to women by using literary elements. Laurence Talairach Vielmas's theory of 'the ultimate reassertion of male supremacy' shall be employed for this purpose. Chapter four will also contain the conclusion to this study and its findings, as well as include a brief discussion on the nature of economic commentary in post-transitional South African literature.

The next section shall contain chapter one called 'Women of the South: Analysing how the female characters in (HEA,2015), (MS,2010) and (BD,2009) are ultimately oppressed'.

CHAPTER 1

‘Women of the South: Analysing the female characters in *Hunger Eats a Man*, *Men of the South* and *Black Diamond* and how they are oppressed through consumerism

1 Introduction

There’s a commonplace claim that capitalism and free markets are somehow anti-women. Even that capitalism requires gender discrimination in order for it to work. There have indeed been economic systems based upon that sort of discrimination, so the question becomes is this true about capitalism -- not merely an insistence that that could never happen.

It is not exactly a leap of logic to note that if women are hardest hit by the absence of trade, business, markets, and capitalism then they must be the prime beneficiaries of their presence and existence in the first place. (Worstall, 2020)

As is claimed in the above quotation by Worstall (2020) women are victims of the capitalist structures and are restricted from equality by a system that only keeps men in power. Consumerism that is targeted at women can be seen as this capitalist system that promotes the inequality of women or encourages women to subscribe to a thinking that will lead to their oppression and the oppression of other women with lower status than themselves, that will lead to inequality in life. Therefore, this chapter shall examine the depiction of female characters and argue that consumerism causes them to be oppressed and makes them into the oppressors of others. Using the theory in ‘Consumerism and Sexist Oppression’ (2006) by Miller as a departure, the female characters to be analysed are MaDuma and Nomsa (in HEA,2015), Slindile (in MS,2010) and Tumi, Kirstin and Ma Visagie (in BD,2009). The theory of consumerism and sexist oppression shall be discussed in this next section of the introduction.

1.1. Carolyn Elizabeth Miller: Consumerism and Sexist Oppression

The theory that shall be employed for this paper is based on Miller critique of the supposedly feminist writer L.T Meade’s text called *The Sorceress of the Strand*. In her critique, Miller argues that the female characters in Meade’s series are used to expand the national and racial

superiority of colonial Britain. This is not merely a Trojan horse issue that is, women entering a system to further their cause. On the contrary, as soon as Rachel tries to give women control of their bodies by using her vast wealth gained by consumerism to give women access to abortions, she is demonized by the public and put on trial. Rachel, the woman who was a star, the exception in the system, is made into a criminal and a sorceress. Therefore, according to Miller, consumerism is another form of oppression for women, worse than the traditional form and this is because consumerism represents the capitalist market that commodifies everything, including women, and by commodifying them it causes them to become objects for gratification, completely subject to the whims of the consumer, that is why one can become a star in one moment and a criminal in the next. In the case of Rachel, Miller describes her as a woman who used the system to advance herself, “she held a box at the opera and owned a home in the suburbs, that her children had travelled and been educated in Paris” 314. All of this supposedly beyond her reach in a society that despises her and denies her opportunity as someone who is “illiterate, thrice-married, separated from her husband, and Jewish” 314. Rachel’s shrewdness in “bolstering oppressive ideology as a means of selling her products” (319) eventually exposes itself by ejecting her and even using her success against her. As if without agency, Rachel was used, abused and then discarded by the consumer capitalist system she thought she was manipulating.

Sara, not learning from the fate of her predecessor, manipulates the system even further, 327. Unlike Rachel, Sara takes her consumerist oppression beyond the shores of Britain:

Because the English women whom Sara beautifies are initiated into sexual power via the use of colonial-derived cosmetics, their sexual empowerment depends upon the disempowerment of non-Europeans, inherent in the extraction of such products under colonial regimes. (Miller 2006:324)

Sara makes English women complicit in the oppression of not only themselves, like in Rachel’s day, but of other women in British colonial territories. This consumerist oppression becomes more than just gendered oppression; it becomes racial and environmental oppression. The raw materials used for these products are derived from the exploitation of natural resources and the exploitation of black and brown labour. Sara’s racial oppression is further perpetuated in her propagation of the “mastery over dark, Eastern, male servants” 325, thus Sara’s veil of sexual emancipation for English women is directly used to facilitate British Imperialism. Miller focuses on her character to expose Meade’s mission with her series is justified. Meade’s popularization of feminism is not a Greek literary Trojan Horse into masculinized consumerism, it is a Trojan Horse into feminine identity. Like a phallus inserting its

advancement of British Imperialism into the feminine body, feminized consumerism gives birth to oppression, of women themselves and other victim groups, 327. It is from this framework that I shall take my scholarly direction in the examination and critique of characters.

1.2 The Consumerist Oppression of MaDuma, Nomsa (HEA, 2015:2)

We shall start with MaDuma (HEA,2015:2). In the beginning of the story we find MaDuma trying to earn a living by making beadwork to sell to tourists at Zenzele (Do-it-Yourself). Even the name Zenzele, dispels the myth that black people find themselves in the position of poverty because they are lazy and depend on the government. The fact that the word do it yourself is in Zulu suggests that the writer is trying to communicate the fact the self-sufficiency is not foreign to African and or Zulu culture, as some might incorrectly believe. Furthermore, we see that MaDuma seeks to improve her financial situation and lift her family out of poverty by engaging with the consumer market. However this engagement is of little benefit because they are still hungry, it is still “winter” (2) according to her husband. The fact that the consumer market does not lift MaDuma and her family out of poverty with all her efforts, suggests that it is exploitative. The beadwork that will adorn wealthy women and their families is not worth it to feed her and her family sufficiently(2).

Furthermore, the fact that MaDuma dismisses her husband as he complains, instead of joining him, suggests that she is ignorant to the reality of the situation, that no matter how hard she tries she will not escape the exploitive system of feminized consumerism. Feminized because beadwork is usually adorned by women. It is plausible that MaDuma, in not joining her husband’s lament but instead dismissing it, has internalized the lie that hard work and doing it yourself will uplift her from poverty. Focus needs to be given to the organization *Zenzele* as well. It can be deduced that this organisation makes a massive profit by convincing women to spend their time on endeavours that will not bring about good economic return. Something can also be said about the racial and national implications of exploitative labour and prices of beadwork. Considering that beadwork takes great time, focus and artistic skill, the fact that it does not have sufficient returns for her suggests the racist and sexist nature of the consumer market, that gives little value to female African labour and skill. MaDuma should be able to make a living from her beadwork but the consumer market oppresses her in that it makes her work for close to nothing. It can also be said that by complying with the exploitative nature of

the consumer market as she dutifully does her work, instead of protesting it, she is further perpetuating the oppression on herself.

Interestingly, MaDuma when she considers working in Canaan. It is interesting that Canaan, meaning land of plenty, does not provide plenty for its female domestic workers as MaDuma observes:

MaDuma has only once entertained the possibility of seeking work in Canaan but soon decided against it, realising that she cannot manage to work for a black person like herself, especially not for another black woman. She believes that black people, especially black women, oppress other black women if they have the privilege of being their employees...women who work in Canaan come with their groceries when they have been paid their wages, which, as the employers in Canaan have agreed, will never be more than R800 a month. Although she does not like this amount, she envies those who come handling plastic bags from Spar... "It will be finished in one week!" (HEA, 2015:74)

By protesting the oppressive nature of R800 a month wage, that it is not enough for to even buy a week of groceries, MaDuma contradicts her earlier mindset. Her offence can only suggest that MaDuma sees herself in the behaviour of black women of Canaan. MaDum also oppresses her husband by manipulating him to work for below minimum wage. It can only be said that in Sithole's genius he decides make her confront the true realities of capitalism by mirroring her consumerist mindset and behaviour through the black women of Canaan.

As a woman of Canaan, it is of no surprise that Nomsa also exhibits similar anti-poor attitude. This attitude is exposed through her response to the march against Canaan that takes place in Sandile's story at the end of the book:

Nomsa was looking around for the women of the Grinding Stone. It was hard to tell them apart from the other women. But then suddenly she saw them. It was MaDuma and Zodwa, who were close to each other. They were so emaciated that it was hard for her to identify them. "MaDuma! Zodwa!" Nomsa shouted. "What is this nonsense? These people you are attacking are your fellow women of the struggle and their children. Don't let these men lead you astray! As a leader of the Grinding Stone, I order you and those men and street children to stop this craziness!"

"Those men? These street children?" MaDuma could not believe it. What did this woman take them for? "We are here to fight for our rights as poor people, just like we have been fighting for our rights as women. Sometimes these things do clash!" (HEA, 2015:165)

Here we see that Nomsa neglects to show sympathy and solidarity with MaDuma and Zodwa. Nomsa's talking down of poor people can be interpreted as being complicit in their oppression by acting to preserve it rather than join in the fight to end it. It may be out of ignorance that MaDuma talks this way but the fact that she can see how emaciated MaDuma and Zodwa are

shows that the only fight she cares about is that of women's rights. That is why it can be argued that Nomsa's feminism is the Trojan Horse of feminized consumerism. It acts like new imperialism (Miller 2006:327) because it acts to preserve the economic status quo. As Nomsa mentions, true solidarity to this feminism would result in the abandoning of the cause of poor women. Nomsa's passion would suggest that she is unaware that the feminism she so holds dear is only there to preserve her privilege and ultimately her own oppression. The tragedy of this picture is that a politically connected woman could have done more to fight for the rights of the poor but was made impotent by feminized consumerism. It can be that the author desires to highlight the issue of consumerism from Nomsa perspective as he chooses to develop her character and allow the world into her thoughts and emotions, despite this novel being a protest meant to highlight the plight of the poor.

The attention to Nomsa's character can be seen as she is introduced to the audience for the first time as she waits for her husband to come home:

Thinking of phones, when last did Bongani call her at work and tell her that he loves her so much, he wishes that the day was over that he can come home to her, or she could come home to him? The answer to that question, which is "not lately", makes Nomsa breathe faster. She thinks about her age and decides that, at thirty-nine, she is not getting any younger. How many stories has she heard of teachers, especially principals, having affairs with girls in their schools? She gazes at the dressing-table mirror and does not like what she sees. Is she fat? "Not that much!" is the answer, and it is not too bad. Is she uglier than she used to be? She cannot enunciate a resounding "no" to this question, and wonders how many times Bongani has asked the same question. (HEA, 2015:25)

From the above extracts it can be seen that, Nomsa is the more relatable character because the reader is given a glimpse of her anxieties and thus an opportunity to identify with her motivations. I put forward that the author intentionally focuses on Nomsa to can put the spotlight on the dynamic of feminized consumerism. Nomsa's focus on her looks and what her husband thinks of her. Even though Nomsa is not oppressed by the impoverishing effects of consumer capitalism like MaDuma, she is still oppressed by its beauty standards of youth and appearance, (Miller 2006:319). The purpose of this juxtaposition is to show that both wealthy and poor women are oppressed by feminized consumerism. Having said that studies suggest that consumer culture beauty standards can be just as harmful (Greenfield 2018:16-20). Therefore, Sithole's focus on Nomsa may not be intended to draw sympathies towards her from the reader, thus implying that he is on the side of capitalism, it may be to give capitalism a human face that is often overlooked and the sometimes concealed effects that it has on women that can be just as devastating as poverty. The next section shall continue to explore the

juxtaposing dynamics of consumerist oppression of with Slindile who represents a wealthy woman and Mfundo, who symbolically takes the role of a poor woman by becoming a stay at home father in Wanner's (MS,2010).

1.3 The Dynamics of Consumerism in the Relationship of Mfundo and Slindile (MS,2010)

In the beginning, Mfundo enjoys the gender role switch of being a poor woman because he believes Slindile as a feminist enjoys being the provider (MS, 61:2010). However, the frustration of Mfundo's joblessness reveals that Slindile is not a genuine feminist, but that her brand of feminism is one that is corrupted by consumerism. As a result, Mfundo is not only oppressed created by the expectations of capitalist society, he is oppressed by a capitalist girlfriend, "So, tell me again how you are going to make a plan to get my car fixed, jobless as you are and have been for the last year, and unable to even buy your own underwear?" (MS,70). As a capitalist, Slindile is not content to provide for Mfundo in his time of need and she uses sexism to conceal her lack of concern and greed. Her reference to his underwear means that she has little respect for his humanity. Slindile's disregard for Mfundo's humanity can also be seen as an allegory for feminized consumerism's exploitative nature and flagrant disregard for the humanity of the poor, (Miller 2006:324). The extract below shows how Slindile becomes her own oppressor through consumerism.

Then it happened. A week before Noma's first birthday I knew for sure that my Sli was now in the enemy camp, despite all the efforts I was making on the home front.... She (Slindile) looked at me with disdain. "I want you to be the man of the house for once. I want you to actively start looking for a job instead of using Noma as an excuse...I want you to be able to take me out to eat like we used to." (MS, 2010:56-57)

Slindile is blinded to the love and care she receives from Mfundo because she is obsessed with excess, of going out to eat. If she was a true feminist she would have been pleased that she had everything she needed and a man who truly cared for her and her child, and a man who was busy at home. Feminized consumerism makes an enemy of her love and the father of her child. The impact of consumerism does not end there, Slindile's commitment to consumerism impacts her daughter, Nomazizi, in a negative way.

When Slindile decides to exclude Mfundo from her budgeting activities, Mfundo points to the possibility that Slindile's spending will have a negative impact on Nomazizi:

And boy did we take a strain. During maternity leave because there weren't sufficient funds and after maternity leave because of bad money management on her part. Initially we were in agreement that if we budgeted well, we could do without a second income...But after a few months we stopped doing the budget together, because Sli started reminding me, when she went to buy yet another pair of shoes and I told her it might have been better if we stocked up on formula for Noma, "When you chose to work, I never told you what to do with your money, so please don't tell me what to do with mine." (MS, 2015:54)

Slindile's response to Mfundo's concerns for their baby shows that she feels entitled to a consumerist lifestyle. It can be argued that Mfundo is diverting Slindile's attention away from his unemployment by mentioning their child, nevertheless it is telling that Slindile does not wish to investigate his concerns as a responsible mother, who has the needs of her child as her priority. By refusing to manage the budget with him, Slindile protests in a passive aggressive way for her rights to enjoy feminized consumerism of buy in shoes that she does not need at the possible expense of her child. Moreover, it can be argued that by redirecting Mfundo's concern about her spending and their child to attack him for his unemployment, she is attempting not to feel guilt for her actions. With this plot, Wanner may be showing the addictive effects of consumerism by portraying Slindile like a drug addict who chooses her drug of consumerism over her family.

Her addiction to consumerism is evident as when she decides to leave Mfundo for beating her up.

"No, Sli, I mean are you willing to live with the fact that you are separating her from me? ...you know how much I mean to her, how much we mean to each other. Surely you can't be so brutal as to want to separate me from my child...That's my little girl, and since her birth I've been with her every day and tucked her in every night" ... "Because, Mfundo... if you cared anything about your daughter, you would not have brutalised me...If you loved your daughter, as you so love claiming to do, you would be busy trying to get a job instead of waiting for me to pay all the bills, in order to show her just what real men are like...So now it comes out. It's not the fight we had, is it? And don't tell me about my violating you-you gave as much as you got. It's all about you wanting to control my life, making me your project and wanting me to get a job. I told you Sli, that is not happening. I am an artist and the whole office rubbish really stifles me. Besides, I am not really sure what you are complaining about. I stay at home and look after the child and you go to work and wear the pants as you seem to enjoy doing so much. And like Denis Thatcher for Margaret, I will happily continue washing and ironing them....

She smirked. "Nice one bon mot, but perhaps you need to refrain from reading books containing political anecdotes and focus more on what you need to do to be the man I fell in love with." (MS, 2010:76-77)

From this extract we see that she cannot resist to mention his joblessness. The act of dismissing Mfundo's love for his daughter despite confirming it with his actions, shows that she only

values him as a father if he is earning money, money that would allow her to freely indulge in consumerism. Besides the fact that she dismisses his value as a father she dismisses his value as a man, only equating it with having a job. When Mfundo references Denis and Margaret Thatcher he is trying to appeal to Slindile's capitalistic mindset but this does not work because Slindile is aware that commitment to capitalism Denis Thatcher was a wealthy chemical executive (Alvarez 2003). This further shows that Slindile is committed to money, even though she lives comfortably. The story of Slindile and Mfundo reveals the way consumerism oppresses both the gendered identities of men and women in that relational contentment can only be achieved in the presence of consumer excess. The next section shall with an examination of Tumi, Kirstin and Ma Visagie respectively in regard to feminine identity and consumerism in (BD,2009).

1.4 Consumerist Oppression and Feminine Identity (BD, 2009)

The following extract is revelatory regarding the position of feminine identity and capitalist consumerism:

Occasionally young black men in business suits-sometimes with their ladies in ball gowns, or in the company of white-haired or balding gentlemen also in business suites stop to exchange pleasantries with Kenny. These are the new Black Diamonds or Fat Cats, depending on who you are talking to, who revel in their membership of a club that was out of bounds for them only a few years ago. Although it opened its doors in 1906, four years after Cecil John Rhodes death, those who knew him well and worked with him walked through these halls and dined in these very restaurants. The Black Diamonds see themselves as the new Randlords. like the original Randlords, our Black Diamonds come from humble backgrounds and suffer the same prejudices that were piled on them by the snooty English establishment which accused them of being the nouveau riche with garish tastes.... When Don joins the party he says he'll only share their drinks since he already had dinner. At first both men are resentful of being bought together in this way, but Tumi is determined to make this meeting work. (BD, 2009:84-85)

As we can see in this passage, the transfer of wealth to the black elite is still in its infancy, illustrated by the few black individuals at the party. By tracing the history of wealth transfer from white English hands to white Afrikaner hands, the author suggests that the pattern of wealth accumulation is perennial. Moreover, the movement of wealth accumulation between groups signifies that the wealth accumulation of Black Diamonds will be just as fleeting as their predecessors and they will be viewed with contempt. However, what is missing from this pattern is the transfer of wealth to women. Even though the women are present in this scene

they are depicted as beautiful accessories not even dressed for the occasion showing that they are not there to conduct business like their male counterparts. Moreover, neglecting to depict the women without their male partners shows that they have no agency in the situation.

The way feminine identity is constructed in this scene, the pretty, the accessory and the accompanied, mirrors Tumi's position in this storyline. She herself is invited to the event for something other than business (BD, 82) meaning that the accumulated wealth is not passed down to her, she is an accessory. This is oppressive because Tumi desires to be a Black Diamond as well and her arrangement of the meeting for Don shows that as a woman she will not have a chance with the ultimate owners of wealth. Because of this Tumi resigns herself to campaigning for the reluctant Don to become a Black Diamond:

Whereas Don has long accepted his menial status, Tumi has never forgiven any of his former comrades for being successful beneficiaries of the governments Black Economic Empowerment policy, or BEE as it is fashionable called, while her fiancé has to work for a security company. It is a sore point with her that Don's comrades forgot about him when they reached Paradise, after he sacrificed so much in exile fighting for the overthrow of the apartheid state. He, a child of a single mother, even sacrificed his own mother who was tortured to death by the Boers in a vain attempt to get at her son. His name lives on only in songs that the youth sing at parades on such national holidays as Freedom Day, Human Rights Day and Youth Day about AK Bazooka and his battlefield exploits against the enemy. None of the youth knows that AK Bazooka was in fact Don Mateza nom de guerre, he who is today a security guard at *VIP Protection Service: Your Preferred Company Personal, Facility and Events Protection*. (BD, 2009:11-12)

Although it is clear that because of his 'struggle credentials' Don deserves to be a Black Diamond, the fact that Tumi's frustrations is aimed at his comrades is revealing as to her true motives for helping Don. Tumi's urge to facilitate Don's rise is not for his benefit, he is already content with his position in life, her urge is motivated by her capitalist greed. She knows that as a woman she cannot access the very top and so she wants to get there through Don. Like Madam Rachel she desires to manipulate the consumer capitalist system for her gain (Miller 2006:314). The fact that Tumi, with her business savvy and credentials that surpass Don in terms of their usefulness in the business, is not good enough to be a Black Diamond shows the oppressive nature of capital consumerism for women. There is a 'glass ceiling' that Tumi does not dream to break, as her actions with Don show. Nevertheless, Tumi still tries to become a Black Diamond in her own right, below the ceiling.

In her fight to become a Black Diamond of the broadcasting industry, Tumi uses her status as a black woman to benefit from BEE policies through the Mabanjwa Trust:

She [Tumi] will be with the chairman of Mabanjwa Trust, Kenny Meno, and the old lady who runs the orphanage. The two women will be a clear demonstration to the committee of the IBA that is assessing the proposal that this bid truly is representative of the disadvantaged in society and, most importantly, of women. (MS, 2010:82)

From this text it can be seen that Tumi is classified as a disadvantaged woman in society despite being a wealthy businesswoman. It can be argued that Mda includes this storyline to critique BEE, that although it is meant to correct the injustices of the past it can also be a mechanism for greed and paternalism. He extends this comment to include trade unions as well.. In many ways, Mda is saying that BEE is worse than the institution of Black Diamonds because the people who benefit from BEE have not worked in anyway but acquire the benefits through the identity that one is born with. This commentary shows Mda's partiality to capitalism. Nevertheless, this storyline reveals that Tumi, despite being excluded from the top echelons of wealth and power is still a significant player in capital consumerism as it is shown with her modelling agency.

From the extract below Tumi epitomises Miller's views on Madame Rachel and Sara in that her models are used to sell beauty and clothes:

He knows about these deals that take Tumi away sometimes for days on end. She is known as a fighter in her industry. She fights for black models who are being side lined for editorials and runways. When she goes to London or Paris or New York to sign an exclusive contract for her models with one of the big fashion or cosmetic houses she does not come home immediately, even after the deal has been clinched, signed and sealed. She takes advantage of being in that city to host cocktail parties at her hotel to introduce her models to casting directors. (BD, 2009:151)

Considering, Tumi's penchant for greed makes her fight against racist discrimination of her black models duplicitous. Selling her models to the imperial headquarters of Britain, France and America is reminiscent of the slave trade. By doing this, she acts as a mediator to the consumerist oppression of her black models. Tumi therefore uses her wealth, influence, and skills to oppress black women as she seeks to benefit from feminized consumerism. Having said that her models will also participate in the oppression of other women across the globe as they will set unrealistic beauty standards and lifestyles in women's magazines as we shall see with Kirstin.

As we can see below women's magazines contributes to the trauma that she experienced with her husband, Barend.

And that's when he gets caught. Not in Sandton but in the dives of Hillbrow. For he had gravitated to Hillbrow.... For a long time she blames herself. She should have been more accommodating. He gave her the chance to be accommodating before he went to brothels. She should have been more flexible. Couples play sex games all the time, don't they? They play doctor-nurse and are not ashamed of it. You read about these things in women's magazines and you know that in the privacy of their bedrooms upright citizens spice up their sex life that way. She shouldn't have been so stiff, she tells herself. But that just how she was brought up. She knows she shouldn't be blaming herself, but she still does.... Yet she is empty and angry. Until she takes to wearing the whore costume that Barend bought her. It is a way of punishing herself. Her body desperately needs the humiliation that comes with the costume. (BD, 2009:212)

As we can see in this passage Kirstin's dehumanising thoughts are reinforced by women's magazines which act to validate her husband's exploitative desires. Therefore, Kirstin resorts to wearing whorish outfits and becoming like the prostitutes she hates because she feels that she is not enough as who she is with her reservations and repulsions. In this way she experiences secondary abuse from the magazines which communicate that her sexuality is not good enough. It is not only Barend that pushes down on her it is. Some may argue that the issue of female consumerism in the form of women's magazines is not oppressive to Kirstin but that it is her distorted sense of worth that leads to psychological self-harm, however Kirstin's responsibility to her wellbeing does not nullify the harmful and oppressive effects of consumerism that is found in women's magazines. It is important to note that the oppression that she experiences herself through women's magazines leads her to oppress other women who rank lower in status according to the rules of society.

Kirstin uses her powers as a magistrate to persecute the prostitutes with impunity:

At that moment the magistrate is drawing her own battle plans.... Despite the complaints of attorneys that she has been authorizing police invasions of suspected brothels without probable cause, or reasonable suspicion that a crime was being committed there, she will continue to sign search warrants indiscriminately.... She hates the whores for the power that they can unleash in their bodies to render men so insane that they part with fortunes, and with their wives and families. (BD, 2009:75)

The use of the term "crusade" in this passage frames her mission as righteous. However it can be interpreted like the actual Crusades that seemed righteous but were often came with ill-informed or selfish motivations (Jones 2019). In the same way, Kirstin's crusade against the prostitutes is personal and is fuelled by her jealousy. An interesting dichotomy presents itself when she holds more power than the prostitutes as a magistrate, but still sees the prostitutes as

superior to her because of “the power they can unleash in their bodies to render men so insane that they part with fortunes, and with their wives”. From this it seems that the power she prefers is sexual power over men and not that of being a magistrate. Is this because feminized consumerism has made it so that women desire sexual power over real power or that female consumerism represents the reality of society, that a woman true power can only be found between her legs? According to Miller (2006) only the latter is true. If sexism exists consumerism increases tenfold:

When women become enmeshed in modern consumer capitalism, the argument goes, they are subjected to an illusory or false consciousness of the world in which their very perceptions and desires are afflicted by commodity ideology. Because of their lack of power in relation to men, women have a heightened vulnerability to the dehumanizing, objectifying prerogatives of consumer capitalism. (Miller 2006:317)

Women, like Kirstin, through uncritical subscription to feminized consumer culture, objectify themselves by valuing “powerful sexuality” over true power, like in Kirstin’s case, being a magistrate. Because of this, women are likely to opt out of their positions of power or jeopardise them, as in Kirstin’s case where she acts unprofessional by “authorizing police invasions of suspected brothels without probable cause, or reasonable suspicion that a crime was being committed there”(BD, 2009:75). From this one can say that in a subconscious manner she wishes she were a prostitute than a magistrate so that she can keep sexual power over men. This also explains why she chooses to dress up as a prostitute. Kirstin oppresses the prostitutes because she is motivated by Miller’s (2006) feminized consumerism as the women’s magazines exasperate and misdirect her feelings of inadequacy. A similar of sequence of oppressing poor women can be found with Ma Visagie and Aunt Magda.

When the Visagie boys are on trial for running a brothel, the character of Aunt Magda fights for the Visagie boys despite Ma Visagie’s resentment.

Don learns that she [Aunt Magda] genuinely loves the Visagie boys-after all, she brought them up as if they were her own children-though she is bitter at the treatment she is receiving from Ma Visagie who has been plotting to kick her out of the house. (BD, 2009:136)

From this extract we can see that the tension between Aunt Magda and Ma Visagie is a result of Ma Visagie is threatened by the relationship between Aunt Magda has with her boys. This tension shows that Ma Visagie is using Aunt Magda to save her business from the financial ruin that the imprisonment of her son would bring, Although Ma Visagie cannot be readily

associated with traditional feminized consumerism of fashion and beauty, she does participate in the objectifying by being running a brothel and participates in what Miller (2006) calls the 'sexual commodification of women' (319). She becomes wealthy from the oppression of poor women including Aunt Magda who she uses to free her sons. The next section shall contain the conclusion to this chapter.

1.5 Conclusion

The sexist oppression because of feminized consumerism formed the basis of analysis in chapter one. This argument was the beginning in uncovering the effects of consumerism on the female characters in the three novels. The examination of the female characters revealed that indeed feminized consumerism had an effect in various ways and that this effect was oppressive. The oppression manifested itself through self-oppression and the oppression of others. In (HEA, 2015) MaDuma is oppressed by the consumer market that devalues female black labour and creativity. Likewise, the domestic workers are oppressed in Canaan through low pay. Nomsa was found to have oppressed poor women by silencing their fight against poverty. It was also found that Nomsa was complicit in oppression of the poor women in her community by maintaining and perpetuating consumer capitalism through *Grinding Stone*. In (MS,2010) Slindile oppresses herself, Mfundo and her child in the hopes of maintaining and increasing her consumerist lifestyle. In (BD,2000) Tumi was found to be aware of the limited opportunities for women in the world of *Black Diamonds*. In her own space however, Tumi was found to be complicit in the oppression of black women by selling them to overseas buyers for capital gain-it was noted that this was reminiscent of the colonial slave trade era, as consumerism is linked to new imperialism in this study. Kirstin on the other hand, was found to have an unhealthy way of viewing her sexuality as a result of her subscription to women's magazines. In her space of power however, Kirstin was found to be the oppressor of poor women, that is prostitutes, because of her sexual insecurities influenced by women's magazines. Similarly, Ma Visagie was found to be the oppressor of poor women for financial gain through her brothel and abusing Aunt Magda.

The findings that feminized consumerism has oppressive effects on the female character in these texts opens a conversation of whether there has been real progress of women in South Africa since the days of protest literature in apartheid. In relation to the argument on the

oppression caused by female consumerism, the next chapter shall argue that domestication forms part of the effects that feminized consumerism has on women in my three chosen texts.

CHAPTER 2

Women at home: How women are confined to domesticity in the three novels under discussion

The basic human economic unit is the household, not the individual, which means that there is going to be some division of labour among the members of the group. If the men are going to be using their muscles out in the marketplace, then the women will be left with the domestic duties. (Worstell, 2020)

2.1 Introduction

Feminized consumerism in the form of domesticity creates a reality where women are dependent upon men or are subject to them (Cole & Crossley 2009). The culture of domesticity where women are confined to the home as wives and mothers or women confined in spaces to space associated with those roles creates a conspicuous type of slavery among women. In this way domesticity is oppressive to women. Chapter two shall continue the examination of the female characters, MaDuma, Slindile, Mfundo, Tumi and Kirstin and argue that they are confined to domesticity through feminized consumerism. An explanation of what domesticity is in regard to this study shall be discussed in the following section of the introduction. In addition to Miller's theory, I shall employ Annabelle Cone's 'Consumerism as an extension of Domestic Roles' and 'Masculinized Space' Marjorie Swann's respectively.

2.2. Annabelle Cone: Consumerism as an Extension of Domestic Roles

Domesticity or the cult of domesticity is a bourgeois cultural idea born in the 19th century which postulates that women belong in the private sphere, or areas associated with the home. Men on the other hand, are afforded access to the public sphere. The oppressive cult of domesticity continues today and can be seen in "women's magazines, advice books, religious journals, newspapers, non-fiction—everywhere in popular culture" (Lavendor 1998). Likewise, in her article called "Misplaced Desire: The Female Urban Experience in Colette and Rohmer" Annabelle Cone examines the dynamics of space, male dominated environments and their relationship to women. In her examination, Cone argues that society primarily driven by capitalism confine women to domestic spaces. In terms of consumerism, this translates to women encouraged to make purchases that "are destined for the adornment of her home and herself" (1996:424). Cone emphasises this point by citing how Minnie, a character in George

Sand's story, penetrates male dominated spaces: "[I]n the case of George Sand, her restricted mobility in the Parisian streets, cafés, and theatres attract her to these male reserves and consequently incite her to challenge her lack of accessibility through the donning of male dress," (425-426). Minnie's disguise of her femininity in order to access male spaces exposes that women are restricted from these spaces. Conversely, if Minnie were to limit herself by making the purchasing the products that are encouraged by mass media and advertisements like make-up, certain clothes and accessories that are given a feminine identity by the culture attire, she would not have access to male spaces in the city sphere. Moreover, the purchase of products that are considered to be traditionally feminine in society would attract the male gaze in such a way that would oppress women in male spaces, the most common manifestation of this oppression being sexual harassment. According to 'Stop Violence Against Women' sexual harassment discourages women from entering the workforce and/or staying in the workforce and reduces the chances of receiving promotions. This has serious financial implications, and it is no surprise that poverty affects women more than men. Besides, sexual harassment feminine sexuality is prostituted or made into a public commodity. Whereas previously feminine sexuality was owned by the father or husband, consumerism that has made it so feminine sexuality is owned by the capitalist market. Femininized consumerism in sexualized purchase facilitates the oppression of women in this way.

However, Cone for femininity in this capitalistic malady:

If women are to carve out a space of their own in the modern urban topography, reconciling the feminine with the public sphere, they must act not only as consumers of sexual desire, but should also take an active role as cultural producers. What I bring to the surface with my analysis of the relationship between women and the city is a look beyond an essentialist understanding of women gone astray. Rather, I see the possibility of a space for female culture outside the realm of sexual desire and material consumption, in which women can harbour a modern femininity of their own making. (Cone 1996: 429)

As Cone suggest, if women wish to be included or succeed in the public sphere, they are to incorporate production in their engagement and not rely on sexual liberation which leads to exploitation or material consumption which leads to exclusion. Women's true agency shall be found in producing a "femininity of their own making" rather than relying on feminized consumerism to produce it for them. This may also balance the role of traditional masculinity, which is prescribed the role of provider and protector and disempower the irremediable consumerism that only acts against the interest of women by oppressing them according to

Miller(2006). Marjorie Swann provides an explanation as to why women are vulnerable to oppression in the public sphere in her theory on masculinized space.

2.3. Marjorie Swann: Masculinized Space

Despite the city acting as an explosion of male domination as described by Cone(1996), it can be observed that women willingly subject themselves to it. This is because the masculinized city misrepresents itself as a hope for freedom and progress for women, an example of this would be the paradoxical binaries of capitalist sexual liberation and capitalist homemaking. To explain this further the extract below provides one author's analysis on a female character's tragic quest for upward mobility:

Like Dauphine, Mistress Otter attempts to reconcile the economic status and her social standing...The proto-capitalist marketplace, the medium which apparently allows Mistress Otter to threaten the traditional hierarchies of class and gender, actually serves to control her: the "open" female body, possessed not by a sexually proprietary husband but by the capitalist city, is paradoxically controlled by the very conditions of its consumption-crazed promiscuity. As Jonson's blazoning of the female body reveals, a woman cannot create an autonomous identity through consumption- (Swann 1998:310)

As the above passage suggests, the women who use consumer capitalism to advance themselves do not escape consumerism's sexist oppression in the end, as is explained with Madame Rachel (Miller 2006) in chapter one. Having established my theoretical framework, I shall move on to the examination of the main female characters in my three chosen text. I shall start my examination with Mfundo who represents a female character's experience.

2.4. The domestication of Mfundo and Slindile (MS,2010)

As a stay at home father for the first time, Mfundo is exposed to the cult of domesticity:

Who determines what work is? And yet, when it suits them, we are reminded how a stay at home mom works harder than her working spouse. Does this only work if the partner who stays at home is a woman? ... To hear them talk of equality, (Slindile and Buhle) you would think they were both in Beijing with their fellow man-haters. But when it came to me getting a job, suddenly "you can't be a real man without an income" ? Wasn't having a man doing the chores at home the "equality" they yearned for? Wasn't it time for men to sit at home, cooking and cleaning if the men so wanted, like women have been doing since the days of Eve, and for the women to go to work and bring back the bacon if they so chose? A man who cooks and cleans is good enough only when he is paid elsewhere, and yet it is all right for women to sit at home and do exactly what he is doing- without any repercussions? (MS, 2010:60)

As we can see, Mfundo bemoaning the false perception of freedom in the consumer feminism which mistakes for real feminism when he refers to the Beijing conference (UN Women)¹. Mfundo's bitterness and bigotry towards the conference dismisses women's rights and this shows real feminism makes many men feel threatened, this also shows that consumer feminism is less threatening but nonetheless confusing to men who might want to enjoy benefit from the system, as is revealed through Mfundo. Despite Mfundo's discontent, consumer feminism benefits men in that it encourages them to work outside the home and thus earn money and independence. Furthermore, making it acceptable for men to do the same work as women only if they are paid, as Mfundo states, further entrenches the gender hierarchy on an economic level, and reflects the gender pay gap that men are paid more for the same work as women (Benjamin 2015). Another way in which feminized consumerism oppresses women in this way is that consumer is that unpaid stay at home that leads to poverty and dependence, and makes women vulnerable to domestic abuse (Conner 2014), as Mfundo experience in the book experiences, albeit his abuse is mental and he becomes an abuser himself by hitting Slindile. Real women are vulnerable to the extent of death when involved in domestic abuse as seen in South Africa and many other countries with challenging economic conditions.

The ideology of women staying at home is also reflected in fundamentalist Judeo-Christian as Mfundo mentions. According Christian fundamentalism, Adam and Eve point to the roles of man and woman within marriage (Genesis 2:22-25), man being the provider and woman being the helper. Women are encouraged to stay at home and support their husbands through unpaid housework and childbearing because of this fundamentalist view. In this way consumerism and Christian fundamentalism intersect and that is why Mfundo can refer to the reinforcement of gender roles in feminized consumerism as a pattern of gendered relationships "since the days

¹ The United Nations has organized four world conferences on women. These took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. The last was followed by a series of five-year reviews. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, is an agenda for women's empowerment and considered the key global policy document on gender equality. It sets strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in 12 critical areas of concern such as women and poverty, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, the girl child". (UN Women)

of Eve”. The fact that Slindile and Buhle say “you can’t be a real man without an income” shows that they agree this consumerist and fundamentalist view of gendered relations and the economy.

Slindile’s views are reflected in her purchases.

Initially we were in agreement that if we budgeted well, we could do without a second salary. But after a few months we stopped doing the budget together, because Sli started reminding me, when she went to buy yet another pair of shoes and I told her it might have been better if we stocked up on formula for Noma, “When you chose to work, I never told you what to do with your money, so please don’t tell me what to do with mine.” (MS, 2010:54)

Slindile’s female consumer purchase of shoes not only jeopardizes her family’s finances as discussed in chapter one, but the purchases also prevent her from saving money or investing it towards launching her own private practice in the city. Feminized consumerism oppresses Slindile by preventing her from becoming a producer in the public sphere of the medical industry and earning more money. She herself complains about the salary of public hospitals (MS, 61) is too low. However, it can be argued that Slindile’s uses her purchases to rebel against Mfundo, as Miller(2006) suggests that feminized consumer products may be advertised as “acts of ownership, independence, and rebellion rather than capitulation or compliance.” (319). However, as Swann(1998) argues ultimately oppresses Slindile because with it she fails to create an identity for herself in the masculinized space by saving towards a private practice, (301). Not only does she fail to create an identity, but her finances are also stagnant too and in this way feminized consumerism maintains the economic gendered hierarchy. The next section shall be an examination of MaDuma and Nomsa’s creation of space in (HEA, 2015)

2.5. MaDuma and Nomsa’s Creation of Space (HEA,2015)

MaDuma is focused on creating her own space by making beadwork to sell to the market at *Zenzele*:

He goes inside and seats himself on the sofa. MaDuma is fixated on the beadwork she is crafting to sell to the tourists at Zenzele (Do-It-Yourself)...MaDuma does not honour his introspection by raising her head as she answers, “You are hungry.”...MaDuma is greatly annoyed by her husband’s asinine talk. She removes her eye-glasses and confronts him. “Get out!” she roars...But later she calls him from where he is sitting outside and leaves a tray of food on the coffee table. (HEA, 2015:2)

As we can see MaDuma does not want to be distracted from her work by her husband's "asinine talk" which refers to his complaints about poverty. Furthermore, it is implied that MaDuma is the sole bread winner of the household through her engagement in the market with what she produces and sells to tourists. However, her husband's asinine talk suggests that returns from this engagement are not enough. From this it can be deduced that MaDuma's creation of space is not financially liberating at all, from this it can be said that Swann's theory is applicable to wealth women only or women with skills that the market considers worthy of 'living pay'. A closer look to MaDuma's situation reveals that her work, unlike Slindile's profession which may be associated with masculinity as is the case with STEM fields, MaDuma's beadwork is associated with femininity and African femininity at that. So she faces sexist, racist and neo-colonial prejudice from the market which nullifies the space creation theory by Swann (1998) when it comes to poor African women. Despite being an entrepreneur, MaDuma does not escape being domesticated and oppressed by the capitalist consumer market that keeps her poor and unable to adequately feed their family, as Priest's lament (HEA,2) shows. MaDuma cannot find refuge in the labour market of Canaan either.

Some lucky people from Hunger-Eats-a-Man got themselves employment in Canaan. These are normally women who work there as domestics, cleaning and washing for their masters and also taking care of their children. Sometimes these lucky women can be seen taking their young masters to school or creche. Many people from Hunger-Eats-a-Man tried but failed to get employment in Canaan. In fact, it is hard to find employment anywhere. (HEA, 2015:73)

As it can be seen in this passage, the domestic worker market is difficult to enter. Moreover, the few that are able to get in still face exploitation as discussed in chapter one. So MaDuma has no options there either. The sexism that put female farm workers in danger also limit her options besides being exploitative as well (HEA, 34-35). The story of MaDuma shows how capitalist consumerism keeps her at home, without adequate pay and viable work in the market, and because her husband is she is not afforded the privilege of a refuge in the home that bourgeois women have. MaDuma's story shows that the domesticating consumer culture is a trap for poor African women. This is not the case with the character of Nomsa as she creates her own space in the public sphere with Grinding Stone.

To determine if Nomsa's attempts for creating space are successful it is important to first establish her reasons for starting Grinding Stone:

"As long as I can remember, I have not been a complete person." Nomsa says. "There has always been a void in me and I want you to understand. Perhaps then I will be a human being again... One day I did

tell my mother but, as he had said, she did not believe me. She came to ask him if it was true and he said I was crazy, that I hated him and so I was making up lies about him. She only believed my story when I was fourteen and got pregnant. I could see that she was hoping I would say that I had had sex with another boy, but I kept telling her that it was him. My father was the father of the child I was carrying. She then suggested we get rid of the baby, which we did. It was after that that I vowed never to have a child again. In honour of my dead baby. (HEA, 113-115)

According to this passage Nomsa uses Grinding Stone as a way to construct an identity for herself by using it to heal and find redemption from her childhood abuse, not money or consumerism (HEA, 113-115). The same can be said about her refusal to have a baby. Moreover, Nomsa's NGO does not inadvertently act to domesticate her as it achieves its purpose of helping women and exacting justice in the public sphere (HEA,76). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the Grinding Stone has a domesticating effect on women it serves.

Priest's son writes a story about the poverty and inequality, that Priest decides to read at the end of the book. With the inclusion of this story, it seems that Sithole is suggesting that Grinding Stone negative affect on its poor members:

MaDuma could not believe it. what did this woman take them for? "We are here to fight for our rights as poor people, just like we have been fighting for our rights as women. Sometimes these things do clash!"(HEA, 2015:165)

From this extract, we can see that MaDuma's thinks that the interests of the poor are sometimes not align with feminism, that is as I have discussed, consumer feminism that does not challenge the exploitative dynamics of capitalism. This incident reflects MaDuma and poor friends (HEA,74) feeling of exclusion from the organisation. Grinding Stone is under the auspices of capitalism; Nomsa's husband is greedy, corrupt (MS, 19) and he has Marx-phobia (MS, 68) moreover the NGO is situated in a community hall that acts as a buffer zone between the rich and poor(MS, 73) therefore it does have a domesticating effect on poor women. By ignoring the issues of poverty Grinding Stone keeps poor women out of the public sphere or prevents them from thriving in it. This seems disingenuous of Nomsa because it is well known that poverty is linked to violence against women, so the question can be asked, is Nomsa trying to silence the poor with her organisation?

When Nomsa notices the women's behaviour after she makes a speech at Grinding Stone, she disciplines them:

"Have you also become animals?" she demands harshly. MaDuma is astonished at how the stories affect Nomsa. "Have you also become men?" the women sing "No," "Not a chance" or "No ways". For a

moment, being a man is considered the filthiest thing in the world. When MaDuma looks again at Nomsa, she notices for the first time that she has a very round face and her cheeks look like a fat cake. This is only visible when Nomsa's anger has reached its highest point. (HEA, 2015:77)

While it can be argued that Nomsa appeals to the women's sense of virtue and superiority over men in order to encourage them to behave, this scenario is comparable to the one above where she scolds MaDuma and Zodwa for marching towards Canaan by saying "Have you also become men?" (HEA, 165). This means that Nomsa's aggressive discipline towards the women in Grinding Stone is a form of silencing. Nomsa's tyranny towards the women shows that she does not want them to speak up and raise their own concerns, which may involve raising issues about their poverty situation. This oppressive behaviour means that Grinding Stone is domesticating to its poorer members. The next section shall continue with the examination of female characters and the consumer oppression of domesticity in their lives (BD, 2009). The examination shall start with Kirstin and her purchases.

2.6. Consumer Purchases and Domestication (BD.2009)

When Don follows Kirstin to the markets, he discovers that she is modest when it comes to her purchases:

She buys a blue dress with yellow flowers and a black skirt, similar to the kind she wears in court. Don is impressed that she knows exactly what she wants without bothering with the labels. All she cares about is the price. He marvels at how a magistrate can live such a no-name life...Even in the heydays of apartheid young men like him had to boast of Bang Bang jeans, or at least Levi's. They had to wear Crockett and Jones shoes, Bostonians and Ballys. They had to seek refuge...because they had no other way of expressing themselves. Now in the post-apartheid era, what is their excuse? Well, this is the great epoch of freedom. And freedom comes with conspicuous consumption and instant gratification; people of his class don't only wear brands but see themselves as brands. They package and market themselves as such. And here is a magistrate, with all her power and money, living an unbranded life. He feels sorry for her." (BD, 2009:108)

Kirstin's refusal to buy branded clothing shows that she is not "written on" Miller 2006:320 and that she constructs her own identity. This identity is informed by her lifestyle. Her purchases tell a story of who she is; the blue dress with the yellow flowers shows her identity as a church going woman and her black skirt expresses her identity as a magistrate as it is "similar to the one she wears in court". The comparison Don makes between his consumerist life and her "no-name" life links Kirstin's freedom of consumerism with her wealth and position in society as a white woman in South Africa. Her freedom from consumerism is

symbolic of her privilege of being a white woman within the capitalist system. She does not need to seek refuge in brands to feel like she does not need to prove or “market” herself as Don does, she is already at the top. In a capitalist public sphere that prizes and protects whiteness, especially white womanhood, Kirstin is secure in where she belongs. Therefore, her purchases do not confine her to domesticity but reflect her position in the public sphere. However, Kirstin interacts in a differing manner regarding the public sphere and poor women.

After she is successful in putting Stevo into jail, Kirstin turns her attention to the neighbourhood of Roodepoort:

She has a map of Roodepoort and environs in front of her and is highlighting all the spots she suspects are red-light districts. The decaying city centre especially has buildings that have been taken over by pimps and madams and by rundown hotels where johns and their low-class street walkers can rent rooms for ‘day rest’. Despite the complaints of attorneys that she has been authorising police invasions of suspected brothels without probable cause, or reasonable suspicion that crime was being committed there, she will continue to sign search warrants indiscriminately. It is part of her crusades against moral decay that has overwhelmed the city. She hates the whores for the power they can unleash in their bodies to render men so insane that they part with their fortunes, and with their wives and families. (BD, 2009:75)

The fact that Kirstin draws on a map in order to persecute the prostitutes is symbolic in that it shows that she consolidates her power by placing herself above the women. It is noteworthy that she targets poor prostitutes as she refers to them as “low- class street walkers”. Furthermore, the use of the words “street walkers” shows that Kirstin views the prostitutes as less than human and thus targeting them for inhumane treatment by denying them their rights becomes acceptable. Despite being a woman, Kirstin acts as a consumer force that is intent to keep the prostitutes out of the city or oppressed within it, Cone (1996). However, although her goals are pursued in a counterproductive manner, it can be said that Kirstin uses her powers as a magistrate to reconcile her version of femininity, a Christian fundamentalist one, with the city that by seeking the protection of wives and families through the persecution of prostitutes. Kirstin’s plotline again shows the dichotomy of consumer feminism or new imperialism (Miller 2006:327) with intersectional feminism that seeks to protect poor women of colour and is not complicit with the injustices of capitalism (Moon & Holling 2020). Kirstin acts with duplicity as she is a cultural producer according to Swann (1998:301) and a reproducer of oppression at the same time. Although in a different form to Kirstin, Tumi also works to create her own space in the modelling industry.

When Tumi gains success with her modelling agency, she decides to go to the gym despite her schedule:

These are hectic times for Tumi Molefe, what with her TM Modelling Agency gaining more international recognition and her involvement in a consortium that is bidding for a free-to-air television station. But despite all this she will not miss going to the gym. She must stay in shape and must look as good as any of the younger models in her stable. She leads by example. That is why we find her at the Virgin Active Classic Club in Melrose Arch this afternoon sweating it out in a virtual reality enhanced spinning class. She comes here at least four times a week. (BD, 2009:77)

Unlike Kirstin, Tumi allows herself to be ‘written on’ by the same feminized consumer standards that she subjects her models to. While it can be argued that exorbitant prices of going to the gym means that she is investing in her business, the reason Tumi allows herself to be ‘written on’ as a brand of ownership by the system is that she is like Don, who was oppressed in South Africa, needs to prove herself to the capitalist system. The fact that she is forced to “lead by example” reveals that Tumi realizes that as a black woman, she is no different to the models despite her wealth and influence. This is because as a black woman is also oppressed by a capitalist system that values whiteness and masculinity. Unlike Kirstin, Tumi is not above the consumer capitalist system. Even though Tumi is active in making her own space, she is still domesticated by ‘the city’.

However, it can be argued that an aspect of domestication that Tumi is not subjected to is exploitation, poor working conditions and sexual abuse (Safronova 2017) that she subjects her models to. According to the text however, this argument does not stand. Because Tumi shares the same identity as her models she regulates their treatment by being personally involved with the clients, although I believe there is an aspect of “marketing” (BD, 109) herself with these actions. Furthermore, her mission to promote black models shows that she is pushing back against consumer beauty standards. By promoting her own kind of beauty within the industry, she carves out her own space through her modelling agency and reconciles black femininity with the public sphere (Cone 1996:429). The same can be said of Tumi’s relationship with the Mabanjwa Trust.

Tumi is included in a BEE deal with the Mabanjwa Trust:

In addition to the members of the Mabanjwa Trust who are the principal shareholders, the consortium is composed of a Malaysian broadcasting company who are providers of expertise and of some of the capital, the women’s group led by Tumi and her two friends, an orphanage and a church youth group that runs a shelter for the homeless people and street children. These three groups have a very small equity

of about 3.3 per cent each, and serve the important function of proving to the Independent Broadcasting Authority that the television station will benefit the most disadvantaged members of society. The tiny equity does not bother Tumi. All she wants is to have her foot in the door; she and her group are already devising strategies of acquiring more shares should the bid succeed. (BD, 2009: 81)

As we can see, while Tumi is included her group is given little shares. However, it is worth noting that Tumi is not bothered with receiving tiny shares (even though she enlisted as the chairman of the Trust) because she believes that struggle veterans are most entitled to become Black Diamonds. So here we see again the partial exclusion of women in the capitalist system of Black Diamond-hood, it is no surprise since the institution of wealth is passed down from the hoarders of wealth in apartheid days and colonial days before that (BD, 84-85). Tumi accepts this because she feels she can only remove herself from oppression by manipulating the consumer capital that causes it. As is established by this paper, when women manipulate consumerism to their own benefit and they ultimately work to oppress themselves as consumerism rejects them, (Miller 2006:314). Therefore, while Tumi attempts to make her space for herself in the city by becoming a Black Diamond and owning shares in the Independent Broadcasting Authority, she is nevertheless domesticated as her shares in the consortium are very little. Similar to this, Ma Visagie, tries to make space for herself in the city or maintain it.

When her sons face trial in court for running a brothel, Ma Visagie does everything in her power to defend them:

“But the state has failed to make a case against them,” he says. “Evidence given by their mother has shown that the girls found on the Visagie property were their cousins visiting from the *platteland*”...she asked Ma Visagie, the boys’ mother, to leave after she uttered an exclamation of disagreement at something the prosecutor said. It was after she had given her evidence for the defence. Had been cross examined by the state, and had taken a seat in the gallery. Ma Visagie joined the demonstration in the parking lot in front of the courthouse,” (BD, 2009:3)

As we can from this passage, Ma Visagie plays an active role in her sons’ case. It can be said that allowing herself to be thrown out of the building for misbehaviour is a deliberate attempt to join the demonstration outside of the courthouse and push favourable propaganda of her sons to the media. Nevertheless, it can be argued that all the effort of hiring good lawyers and pushing lies to the media is reminiscent of tactics used by large corporations that wish to protect their business interests despite obvious wrongdoing. In other words, Ma Visagie is not battling for her sons as a mother but as a CEO trying to protect her investment. Having Stevo in jail is

a great inconvenience for her business². Therefore, it can be said that Ma Visagie motivated by a desire to maintain and grow her space in the city by ‘struggling’ for sons’ freedom. However, like Kirstin, Ma Visagie uses her space to domesticate other women by seeking to maintain her brothel. Having said that, the next section shall conclude chapter 2.

2.7. Conclusion

The argument of domestication and male space has revealed interesting insights about the women in the three novels. This chapter once again proves that feminized consumerism has the effect of oppression on female characters in the text. However, the domesticating effect was observed in some women more than others. In (MS, 2010) Slinidle is domesticated by making feminized consumer purchases instead of investing in a private practice. In (BD, 20009) MaDuma is domesticated by the consumer capitalist market even as she tries to create her own space by being an entrepreneur. This shows that the idea of space creation as a form of liberation for women does not apply to poor women in a grossly capitalist society. Therefore it was noted that there was a need for intersectionality in critical feminist theory. Likewise as a wealthy woman, Nomsa was successful in creating her own space, unfortunately she used this space to domesticate poor women and their aspirations tragically through her NGO that was meant to help women, Grinding Stone. Similarly, in (BD,2009) Kirstin was found to be undomesticated in her purchases and her position of power, unfortunately, she effectively utilized her position of power to domesticate poor women by her vindictiveness. Tumi on the other hand was found to be domesticated by the nature of her modelling agency. Furthermore, she domesticated her models as well through the agency which promoted consumer capitalist beauty standards. However it was noted that she attempted to create a space for black female beauty in the consumer capitalist market. Moreover, Tumi was found to be domesticated as she was given very little shares in the Mabanjwa Trust and used as a front for the consortium. Ma Visagie was not domesticated but utilized her space to domesticate poor women. Therefore it seems that domestication affects poor women the most in the texts. It was saddening to see that almost all the women who held power in the texts used their power to oppress poorer women.

² This argument is strengthened when Stevo is in jail: “You’ve got to do something, Shortie. The girls have got to start working again,” (HEA, 65) the ‘girls’ being the prostitutes. She talks to Shortie as if she is running the business and needs her best employee working again.

This phenomenon has significance in this study as it shows that oppressed often become the oppressors when they get power. These texts show us that power corrupts and women are not immune. Having said that, the following chapter shall examine the women in three novels and argue that they participate in fetishized consumerism. Furthermore, chapter three will also look at whether these women fetishize the men in their lives to obtain consumer products.

CHAPTER 3

Between Men and Women: Analysing the relationship between male and female characters

A commodity, therefore, is a mysterious thing simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (Karl Marx)

3.1. Introduction

Apart from domesticity, commodity fetishism is another aspect of oppression birthed by feminized consumerism. This chapter shall examine the female characters in the three books and argue that they obsess over consumer items and the ability to acquire them. This aspect of feminized consumerism is called commodity fetishism. The definition of commodity fetishism is from Monika E. Elbert's "The Middle-Men of Commodity Desire". I shall employ her theory to examine the female characters and how their relationships with the men are affected because of consumerism. The next section of the introduction shall discuss Elbert's commodity fetishism in detail.

3.2. Monika E. Elbert: The Middlemen of Commodity Desire

In a study of Mary Wilkins Freeman's work, Monika E. Elbert (2002) examines how female characters interact with various consumer goods, and the effects thereof on various aspects of their lives. Unlike the theories previously discussed in the paper, this theory applies equally to women of all economic backgrounds as "Freeman's women are often poor, or living on the edge of poverty," (Elbert 2002:193). In her analysis, Elbert argues that the relationships that the women have with the consumer objects are fetishist in nature. The fetish that is associated with capitalist consumerism is called commodity fetishism described by Karl Marx:

As Marx explains, the commodity remains simple as long as it is tied to its use-value. People in a capitalist society thus begin to treat commodities as if value inhered in the objects themselves, rather than in the amount of real labour expended to produce the object.... Although value ultimately accrues because of human labour, people in a capitalist system are

led to believe that they are not in control of the market forces that appear to exist independently of any individual person. (Dino 2002)

As we can see, commodity fetishism relies on the disconnect of object from the value that human beings give to them, Because of this, it becomes possible to give a godlike value items or value them more than human beings and this is how commodity fetishism creates friction between human relationships. Dant (2006), provides an explanation to why objects may acquire more value than human beings:

A fetish is created through the veneration or worship of an object that is attributed some power or capacity, independently of its manifestation of that capacity. However, through the very process of attribution the object may indeed manifest those powers; the specialness with which the object is treated makes it special. The fetish object will, for example, influence the lives of its human worshippers, determining some of their actions and modifying their beliefs. In this process the object is mediating the powers delegated to it by worshippers. (8)

In other words, people project their desires or power onto an object and through this the object gains control over the owner. There are many examples of fetishization in everyday life; youths that kill each other for brand name shoes, advertisements that influence violent behaviour towards communities and couples who neglect their children because of work commitments that maintain a commodified standard of living (McGregor 2003). In the same way consumer goods influence and control the lives of women and their relationships with men (Elbert, 2002:194).

The effect of commodity fetishization in women's lives can manifest in various ways which include the denial of "sisterly bonds, lesbian longings, maternal urges, and creative inclinations" (194). In Elbert's analysis of Freeman's fetishist maternal and sexual stories, she notes that "the women seem to lose their desires, their individuality, and their will to live when they are forbidden to express themselves through their fetishes." (210), this implies that the female characters in Freeman's stories are incomplete without their fetishes. Therefore, these fetishes are not an insignificant aspect in the periphery of women's lives, they are central.

Considering the centrality of fetishes, Elbert goes on to outline the causes of commodity fetishism in the women's lives. She finds that "inchoate desires and inarticulate longings" such as "failed maternity, failed artistry, and failed sexuality" (210) are critical factors to determining if women will have or develop a fetish. Therefore, it can be said that these fetishes are essentially coping mechanism offered to these women by the capitalist ideology of

feminized consumerism. When thinking about this phenomenon the popularized term called ‘retail therapy’ comes to mind which suggests that consumer goods can be healing. In the next section, I shall examine the female characters and argue that feminized consumerism oppresses them through the dynamics of commodity fetishism.

3.3. The Commodity fetishes of MaDuma and Nomsa (HEA, 2015)

Despite her intense dislike of the black female employers in Canaan, MaDuma considers working in Canaan.

MaDuma has only once entertained the possibility of seeking work in Canaan but soon decided against it, realising that she cannot manage to work for a black person like herself, especially not for another black woman. She believes that black people, especially black women, oppress other black women if they have the privilege of being their employers. But it hurts her to see the women who work in Canaan come with their groceries when they have been paid their wages, which, as the employers of Canaan have agreed, will never be more than R800 a month. Although she does not like this amount, she envies those who come handling plastic bags from Spar and Shoprite and longs for the smell that these plastics have. “However when that longing makes her feel sad, she consoles herself, “It will be finished within one week!”” (HEA, 2015:74)

The cause of MaDuma’s conflict is obvious from this passage. The strong desire for the groceries makes MaDuma change her attitude about working in Canaan to the point that her feelings of contempt for Canaan turn into sadness toward the end of the passage. This attitude change reveals her inordinate value for the groceries. However it can be argued that groceries cannot be considered consumer objects. MaDuma is hungry and so it is natural that she worships groceries that will alleviate her hunger. Indeed, MaDuma’s poverty situation does not put her in the category of women who develop fetishes (Elbert 2002:210). Moreover, she does not have the desire to “participate in the fantasies and desires of the middle class” (Elbert 2002:193) because she despises the wealthy women in Canaan. The fact that she would suppress her pride and work in Canaan so that she would be able to buy food at the end of each week is not linked to the excess of consumer culture. It would be a necessity from a nutritional perspective as she and her family subsist on pap and potatoes (HEA,2). Therefore the only reason she foregoes the opportunity is because she knows that the groceries will not last. This reveals that MaDuma is not interested in the temporary thrill of delicious food but genuinely

wants to feed her family. Because of this MaDuma cannot be considered a consumerist in the sense of commodity fetishism. The same can be said when MaDuma attempts to convince Priest to find work by suggesting a way that they can make additional income:

“We need to be creative and find a way to make ends meet,” MaDuma continues. The troubled Priest looks back at his wife and asks in a voice of sadness and anger,

“Like what?”

“They say Johnson is going to need people to work on the trees. It’s not a great deal of money, but it can help.”

“What?” Priest shouts. “No ways! I can’t let my wife work on those trees. Like a slave on a farm. Tell me you are joking.”

MaDuma’s countenance changes as her husband utterly misunderstands her. “I was thinking that you should go,” MaDuma’s voice is stern, having decided to forsake her former politeness. “Other men work on the farms if they cannot find better jobs.”

MaDuma has now stood up. She is pacing up and down the room. Priest feels like his head is going to explode. “It’s better to work for nothing than staying at home and watching your children suffer.” (HEA, 2015:10)

As we can see from this passage, MaDuma is frustrated with Priest. She knows that Priest vowed not to work on a farm but her desperation shows as she manipulates Priest to work on a farm after he says that the work will be like “a slave on a farm”. MaDuma’s desperation is sensible, because as a mother she is thinking of her children. Priest himself³ later sees this. Therefore, it cannot be said that she uses Priest to attain a commodity fetish when she wants him to help alleviate the suffering of their children. An examination of her attachment to her rosary shall reveal different motivations.

MaDuma’s reaction to the destruction of her rosary shows that she attaches great significance to it:

³ Priest finally comes to see the need for working at the farm: “Yes. It is hunger that has forced him into this slavery. Not his wife. If they did not have to do without food, he would not be working here. His wife would not have forced him to go. It is hunger that has made her think the unthinkable and be so demanding,” (HEA, 2015:53). Not only does Priest not blame his wife for forcing him to work on the farm, he defends her reasoning for pushing him to do so

She feels some pity for her mentally sick husband, but she is very sorry about her rosary. It has been a part of her life ever since she was a girl. She grew up as a Roman Catholic, and the only thing that mattered to her in the church was singing, because she has a beautiful voice. As she grew up, she showed little or no interest in the God who lives in heaven. She does not care if that God created her and the world she lives in. She does not know Him. Her love and trust is in the rosary, which she can hold and touch and feel. It is close to her. But now it has gone. (HEA, 2015:148-149)

This passage shows that MaDuma values her rosary more than God. Taken with the broader context of this book, Sithole seems to question God's usefulness to poor people with MaDuma. To MaDuma the rosary is something "she can hold and touch and feel"; the "and" pauses in this sentence reveal that there is great significance and emotion to each of these sensations. Moreover, because of the dehumanizing situation of poverty, the reminder of her "beautiful voice" means that she attaches her value as a human being to the rosary. It appears that MaDuma fetishizes her rosary as she projects her desires and personal value onto it. The rosary also influences her thoughts towards her husband; calling Priest "mentally sick" shows that she loses respect for him and put her relationship with Priest in jeopardy. In contrast to MaDuma, Nomsa possess great things. In fact it can be said that Nomsa acts as if she owns people through Grinding Stone.

When Nomsa leads the members of Grinding Stone she does so with an iron fist:

MaDuma fears Nomsa just like the others, although she tries by all means to deny it. When Nomsa is angry and shouting, everyone does not feel well. "Okay women!" Nomsa hits the table in front of her as she calls for the attention of those still whispering to one another. "Let's begin!" she says loudly...Nomsa asks -or rather orders-Ma'am Mchunu to open the meeting with prayer (HEA, 2015:75)

Nomsa is feared because of her domineering and aggressive behaviour. This type of behaviour shows that she has little respect for the women at Grinding Stone as she speaks to them and treats them like children. There may be a connection with her refusal to have a baby and Grinding Stone. It seems that Grinding Stone serves as a replacement for a child that she refuses to have whilst honouring her dead baby. Grinding Stone more than compensates a baby because its members are grown women. In this sense, Grinding Stone acts as a commodity fetish according to Elbert (2002) because of her "failed maternity" (210). It can also be said that Grinding Stone is a vehicle to the advancement of her cause, as she pursues consumer gain and the maintenance of social status, Dant 2003:4)- the paper has established how Grinding Stone can be seen as an agent of capital consumerism in chapter 2. Therefore, Grinding Stone is a

commodity fetish as it is used to compensate for her failed maternity, gain control over women and maintain consumer capitalism. The next section shall examine Mfundo and Slindile and the instances of commodity fetishism in their lives(*MS, 2015*).

3.4. Fetishism in Mfundo and Slindile's Relationship (MS, 2015)

When Mfundo performed the traditional gender role of a man, he saw Slindile through very sentimental lenses, "Mandela was freed the day I met Sli. Coincidence? I think not. The gods of Africa were clearly telling me that just as the country was about to change, so too was my life" (*MS, 2010:1*). Apart from the sentimental aspect of meeting her, Slindile fulfilled Mfundo's desire for personal significance and identity, "I only began to live the day I laid eyes on Slindile for the first time (*MS, 18*)." This means that even though Slindile was wealthier and more educated than Mfundo, his initial attraction to her was not spurned by her wealth and possessions but by his idealised image of her. He also saw in her an image of what he aspired to become himself. Having said that, Mfundo intense desire to have her could be motivated by a desire to escape the township and live a better life as a better person than the rest of his community (*MS, 18*). However, their situation seems to change after he loses he his job.

Nevertheless, Mfundo enjoys the traditional gender role of a poor woman:

I was enjoying the Mfundo Domestic God role and I did not want to get out of it. Thanks to daytime television, Martha Stewart taught me how to get the stains out of cloths with lemon juice and Nigella taught me the best way to make flaky pastry. And I could do all this and experiment with different recipes while spending quality time with my daughter and having time to write new music. Was this so bad?... And I was not totally smooching off Sli, no matter what my sister, her mother, and some of my homies and I was beginning to suspect, Sli herself wanted to say. I had happily sold my car because she could no longer afford to make two car payments in addition to the house keeping bills, the latter doubly expensive because of the baby (*MS, 2010:55*).

As it can be seen in this passage, Mfundo dismisses the concerns of his friends and family and strives to continue his role as a poor woman. It seems that even selling Slindile's car is an act of appeasement rather than being moved to really help her financially. It can also be said that he is deflecting when uses the baby as an excuse for the rising expenses rise. All this effort is to convince Slindile to pay for his domesticated female consumerist lifestyle which is sold to him by "Nigella" and "Martha Stewart". Furthermore, because of his fetish for a female consumerist domestic lifestyle, he puts his relationship with Slindile in jeopardy as he becomes

defensive about his “smooching” even though he suspects that Slindile thinks that he is smooching. Furthermore, instead of confronting the issue of his unemployment which can lead feelings “worry, stress, and insecurity” and “feelings of greater alienation and inadequacy,” (Anne *et al* 2017) he chooses to be in denial and medicate himself with domesticity (Cone 1996) instead. His blind fetishism also leads him to ignore the trauma of his “failed artistry” (Elbert 210) as he lost his job as a musician (MS, 46). However, it seems that Mfundo realizes that if he were to confront his issues his domesticated life would end thus the refusal to look for work indicates that he feels incomplete without it (MS, 210). Having said that, it can be argued that Slindile also has a fetish that she cannot live without.

When Slindile grows tired of surrendering her pay check to Mfundo’s oversight, she begins to spend her money on shoes:

And, boy did we take a strain. During maternity leave because there weren’t sufficient funds and after maternity leave because of bad money management on her part. Initially we were in agreement that if we budgeted well, we could do without a second salary. But after a few months we stopped doing the budget together, because Sli started reminding me, when she went to buy yet another pair of shoes and I told her it might have been better if we stocked up on formula for Noma, “When you chose to work, I never told you what to do with your money, so please don’t tell me what to do with mine.” (MS, 2010:54)

As we can be seen in this passage, Mfundo blames the financial strain facing the couple on Slindile’s spending habits. He seems to portray them as out of control, unnecessary and irresponsible considering their financial situation. However, Slindile decision to deflect Mfundo’s accusations by pointing out his failures shows that she does not want to confront her own culpability to the couple’s financial strain. If this extract is viewed in isolation, it may seem that Slindile is willing to let her baby suffer, thus “denying her maternal urges” (Elbert 2002:149) in order to buy more shoes. However, elsewhere in the novel, it can be seen that Slindile provides for Nomazizi (MS, 2010:56). The decision to buy more shoes instead of baby formula is not jeopardising the well-being of her baby, it may be jeopardising the well-being of Mfundo who wants to live comfortable but still refuses to work. Mfundo’s complaints are therefore questionable. The act of disregarding their joint budgeting is her attempt to show him that “smooching” is unacceptable. However as is mentioned in chapter 2, instead of buying shoes Slindile could have used the money she withheld from Mfundo to invest in a business. Nevertheless, buying more shoes can be seen as a protest and an attempt to force Mfundo to start seeking employment. She uses her purchases of shoes to break free from an exploitative situation and therefore it cannot be said that Slindile has a commodity fetish for shoes. The

next section shall examine Kristin, Tumi and Ma Visagie and their relationship with commodity fetishism in (BD,2009).

3.5. Kirstin, Tumi and Ma Visagie's Fetishize Objects (BD, 2009)

Kirstin seems to find comfort in re-enacting the abuse she experienced with her ex-husband. The extract below explains why she chooses to confront her trauma this way:

After the divorce she is all alone. Empty and angry. One consolation is that the new South Africa arrives and she is appointed a magistrate. Yet she is still empty and angry. Until she takes to wearing the whore costume Barend bought her. It was a way of punishing herself. Her body desperately needs the humiliation that comes with the costume. (BD, 2009:212)

Clearly, Kristin is overwhelmed by her feelings and can only be consoled by wearing the “whore costume”. It can also be said that she chooses to punish herself because she believes that she needs to be a prostitute in order to feel loved and worthy. This also means that she still sees herself through Barend’s eyes, something that is also encouraged by feminized consumerism, see chapter one. Moreover, the magistrate appointment does nothing to console her because she holds traditional conservative beliefs about womanhood which mean that marriage and motherhood⁴ are more valuable than occupational success. Therefore, satisfaction she feels from wearing the whore costume stems from her belief in its power (Dant 1996:8) to regain her “failed maternity” and “failed sexuality” (Elbert 2002:210). And so Kirstin’s emptiness is influenced by her commodity fetish. However, her relationship with Don seems to help her heal from her past.

Kirstin and Don openly express their feelings for each other as their relationship blossoms:

Kirstin and Don spend the first few days of the fortnight at her house which they convert into a love nest. They sit by the pool and have a *braai*. Once again they are like kids playing house. Don feels so liberated, but also feels guilty about feeling liberated. Especially for feeling liberated with a white woman. Kirstin on the other hand, feels dirty. But it is a kind of dirt that she wants to wallow in at this time. It is dirt that is more fulfilling than her night dance, which also used to leave her with a tinge of grubbiness. She feels squalid and wicked and loves every moment of it. (BD, 2009: 222)

⁴ Genesis 3:20: "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."

Proverbs 31:28–29: "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.'"

Titus 2:4-5: "Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."

As it can be seen in this passage, Kirstin fills her emptiness and anger with Don. Don and Kirstin find happiness in each other's arms even if this happiness is at the cost of their personal beliefs. Don is uncomfortable because Kirstin is a white woman and this conflicts with his previous life as a freedom fighter during apartheid. It is interesting however, it is revealed that some Black Diamonds have white wives (BD, 13) this may reveal that Don is subconsciously embracing the Black Diamond lifestyle in a way that he finds comfortable. So it seems that Don is indeed a capitalist at heart. Kirstin on the other hand, feels "dirty", "squalid" and "wicked" for being intimate with Don because of her conservative Christian upbringing which forbids cohabiting with pagans or unbelievers⁵ as black people were generally considered by Westerners (Denis 2006:312). Furthermore, the conservative Christianity which she was brought up in forbids cohabitation altogether⁶.

Despite the issue of paganism and cohabitation however, Kirstin finds pleasure with Don. This is not related to the masochism and self-degradation of dancing in the whore costumes as she confesses that her time with him is "more fulfilling than her night dances" (BD,222). She is fulfilled with Don because she regains her dream of love and marriage with him. Don is a consolation of the pain Barend left her with. As a departure from discounting race in post-apartheid literature, it can be argued that Kirstin's relationship with Don is a sign of race fetishization. The rush of the dirty feeling she gets from Don is similar to the dirty feeling she gets from wearing the whore costume, and from her conservative perspective, her relationship with Don can be considered a way for her to express forbidden sexual fantasies. However, it is

⁵ "You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly" Deuteronomy 7:3-4

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

⁶ "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." (1 Corinthians 6:18)

"But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2)

"But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." 1 Corinthians 7:8-9

"Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Hebrews 13:4)

unlikely that she acts out sexual fantasies with him in the same she does with the whore costume because she expresses real feelings with him. Her sexual relationship with Don is not related to the abusive sexual relationship she had with Barend. Don also seems to soothe the scars she carries from the past, unlike the whore costume which exasperates them or leaves them unchanged. Therefore, it cannot be said that Kirstin fetishizes Don as she has real feelings for him and her relationship with him does not oppress her. In contrast to the relationship to Kirstin relationship with Don, it can be argued that Tumi uses Don to gain her commodity fetish of a consumer lifestyle.

In a way that she is disappointed, Tumi reflects on all the sacrifices he has made in the freedom struggle:

Whereas Don has long accepted his menial status, Tumi has never forgiven any of his former comrades for being successful beneficiaries of the government's Black Economic Empowerment policy...while her fiancé has to work for a security company. It is a sore point with her that Don's comrades forgot about him when they reached Paradise, after he sacrificed so much in exile... (BD, 2009:11)

However, it is clear from this passage that Tumi feels that an injustice has been committed against him by his political connections. It can therefore be said that the fight for Don to become a Black Diamond is a matter of exacting justice for him. It can also be said that Tumi believes that Don should be the only person to benefit from becoming a Black Diamond, not her. Besides that, she has her own aspirations of becoming a Black Diamond and does not need Don to do so, despite recognising the masculinized space of Black Diamond-hood as discussed in chapter two. Despite this however, it cannot be ignored that Don feels oppressed by Tumi's ambitions for him.

After a long time away from Tumi he confronts his feelings of being uncomfortable with the idea of becoming a Black Diamond.

Black Diamond. He hasn't heard those two words for days. Maybe weeks. It is strange how they make him feel very uncomfortable now. As if Tumi has uttered curse words. He does not understand why he should feel this way because he does want to be a Black Diamond one day. He badly wants to live up to her expectations. He knows very well that he represents Tumi's long term aspirations and he doesn't want to let her down. So, it is quite silly to get the heebie-jeebies at the mere mention of such beautiful words. (BD, 20:174)

From this passage Don associates becoming a Black Diamond with Tumi and her ambitions. Although he seems confused about his feelings towards becoming a Black Diamond, his visceral reaction to the phrase "Black Diamond" shows that he cannot compromise with his

repulsion. Even though he holds on to the dream of becoming a Black Diamond, he considers it Tumi's aspiration because he "realises that he would be bringing nothing to the corporate table since he has no political clout that can be converted into capital" (BD, 18). He pays no attention to becoming a Black Diamond because he knows he is not fit to be one, at least not the traditional kind. His comfortability with Kirstin and love for all things bourgeois says that he is the ultimate Black Diamond, the one who would like to skip the upstart and go straight to the top. Therefore, his feelings of oppression or discomfort are not connected to Tumi; they are connected to his fear of being exposed of his inadequacies and the possible revulsion of his former life as a freedom fighter. Therefore, it seems that Don is using Tumi as the middleman of capitalist desire instead of the other way around; Tumi pays for his car deposit (BD, 16), offers to pay for a full-time helper (BD, 60), sets up BEE connections for him (BD, 82) and buys him a Zara Man jersey (BD, 174). To be sure, this is not to say that Don intentionally uses Tumi, as she is the one who offers to make these consumer purchases for him (unlike Mfundo who persists with his demands for comfort despite Slindile's suffering). Moreover, Don does not seem happy to receive Tumi's purchases but still it seems that he does prefer women who earn more than him and pay the bills, as is the case with Kirstin. Nevertheless, Tumi does not fetishize Don.

Having said that, it can be argued that Tumi has commodity fetishizes in other areas of her life such as her desire to purchase brand name items that mark high social status. However, from the book, there seems to be no clues to suggest that she does. For example, Tumi is highly successful in all areas of her life; her sexuality- she successfully seduces Don until the end of their relationship (BD,115) what she cannot control is her lower status as a black woman according to a consumer capitalist society's standard. In terms of her career, she owns a successful modelling agency (BD,29). Furthermore, as mentioned above, Tumi does not oppress people to obtain her commodity lifestyle nor is she oppressed by it. Ma Visagie also seems to enjoy commodity fetishes.

However, the only item that can be considered a commodity fetish in Ma Visagie's life is her Volkswagen kombi:

It is Ma Visagie in her Volkswagen kombi- a rickety sixties model painted with flowers and peace signs all over its body. It is older than the boys and is her own special pride that she used to drive to music festivals as far afield as Durban and Port Elizabeth during those heady days of free love and psychedelia. Inside it is still plastered with fading memorabilia of the bands of the time- Dickie Loader and the Blue Jeans, the Four Jacks and a Jill and the Freedom Children. The roof is wall to wall with their tattered

posters. These days the kombi stays parked and covered with a tarpaulin most of the time, and Shortie knows that when his mother is driving it she means business. (BD, 2009:65)

From this passage Ma Visagie is highly attached to her car. However, this attachment is not just sentimental like the items that remind her of her youth. It is interesting to note that the bands which Mda attributes to Ma Visagie's character are hippies. Hippies were counter-cultural in their era, liberals who cared about freedom and the wellbeing of humanity and the earth. Therefore, these images are contradictory to her character as a brothel owner who loves money and does not care about other human beings, especially the poor. So the images in the Kombi can be said to represent a more human side to Ma Visagie, but still why would she use it to show that she "means business"? it may be because she wants to make her action seem righteous and caring- it must be noted that some prostitutes are in the vehicle with her when she drives to Shortie. Therefore Ma Visagie thinks the vehicle gives her the power to deceive or hide her true self. Moreover, the age, the model and the items in the car that project the vibrancy and influence of her youth. It seems as though Ma Visagie feel inadequate to face serious tasks without the Kombi and this can explain why she has kept it for such a long time; it is older than her fully grown boys. Because the Kombi is a vital part of her life and gives her confidence to carry out her business of oppressing poor women for financial gain, it is fair to say that Ma Visagie has a fetish for her Kombi. The next section shall be the conclusion.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the issue of commodity fetishism was argued for in the lives of the female characters in the three books, Mfundo being the symbolic female character through his circumstances by conservative and capitalistic societal standards. Commodity fetishism was found to have varying effects on the women's lives due to feminized consumerism. In (HEA, 2015) MaDuma was found to not have a commodity fetish because her consideration to work in Canaan despite the low pay and her manipulation for Priest to work on the farm was informed by her literal hunger and desire for her children to eat. However, MaDuma's love for her rosary was found to be a commodity fetish because she worshipped as something that gave her ownership and worth. Nomsa was found have a commodity fetish for Grinding Stone as a means to control other women and as a substitute for a child she did not want to have. Mfundo in (MS,2010) was found to fetishize domesticity once he became unemployed. Slindile's purchase of shoes was not found to be a fetish because it was argued that she was using her

purchase, albeit unwisely to protest Mfundo's attempt to control her finances and his refusal to work. In (BD,2009) Kirstin preoccupation with dressing herself up in a "whore outfit" as an attempt to regain her self-worth and lost dreams was found to be commodity fetishism. Her relationship with Don was not found to be a result of fetishism. Tumi's push for Don to become a Black Diamond was not found to be motivated by commodity fetishism because she was already attempting to become a Black Diamond herself. Lastly, Ma Visagie's attachment to her Volkswagen was found to be commodity fetishism because the fact that she thinks it gives her power to reign in business whilst having a veneer of caring for humanity. Therefore, Elbert's theory of commodity fetishism, although present, does not fit neatly into the women's lives as it affects them at varying levels.

This finding also complicates the significance of commodity fetishism as an oppressive force brought on by consumerism. Nevertheless, using commodities to cope with the difficulties of life does in the end diminish the women's power and their ability to deal with their problems or confront them. the lack of peace and development that commodity fetishism brings therefore can be considered to be an oppressive effect. Having said that, chapter four will contain the last argument on the effect that feminized consumerism has on the women in the text by arguing that the authors depict their female characters in a way that make men appear to be superior.

CHAPTER 4

Male Consumerism: How Female Consumerism Asserts Male Supremacy

Men feel a regained sense of masculinity because they feel powerful and wealthy, and they have confidence in how they look. Consumerism is a direct correlation to a heightened sense of masculinity in today's men. (Kulensc, 2012)

4.1. Introduction

The final aspect of feminized consumerism's effect on women in my chosen texts shall be discussed in this chapter. The reassertion of male supremacy is arguably the most insidious effect of feminized consumerism as it reinforces masculinized oppression and creates a gaslighting effect on the women in these texts. In order to explore this phenomenon in the texts I shall employ a theory based on Laurence Talairach Vielmas' work called "the ultimate reassertion of male supremacy". While Vielmas' theory may seem similar to Miller's (2006) theory in chapter one, it differs in its message; where Miller explains how female consumerism depicts women's oppression, Vielmas enriches the argument of sexist oppression by explaining how female consumerism in novels may depict women's inferiority. Having said that, some of the passages used to assist analysis in this chapter are present in the other chapters of this paper however they are employed to be viewed and analysed from a different angle to emphasise the reassertion of male supremacy and argued whether some of the authors are intentional in their sexist depiction of women in these texts according to Vielmas's theory. Chapter four shall also contain the conclusion to this study. Without further ado, the next section of the introduction shall explore Vielmas's theory in detail.

4.2. Laurence Talairach Vielmas: The Ultimate Reassertion of Male Supremacy

In her article on Wilkie Collins's *No Name*, Vielmas (2005) analyses Victorian era novels and their authors (see the significance of Victorian-era novels in this study in chapter one) to argue that they propagate and justify female subjugation. This is what she says about the novels:

While consumer culture foregrounded how much buying could enable women to engage in self construction - and therefore self-definition - the popular literature of the period used the very same argument as subversive plot devices to turn commodified female characters into dangerous masquerading actresses, and fashioned plots where money and female criminality frequently coalesced. (Vielmas 2005:207)

Vielmas argues that Victorian literature portrayed successful women in the consumer sphere as villainous and dangerous. Vielmas continues this critique by choosing to examine a Victorian author named Collin's. She argues that his portrayal of his female character is sexist, she does this by accusing him of conforming to the sexist ideals of Victorian society which have a narrow definition of femininity. Likewise, she deconstructs the author's narrative and argues that he wants to put patriarchal society at ease by making women's economic and financial power insignificant by subjecting it to a masculine power or overseer. In other words, even if a woman is portrayed as successful, it is done in a way that does not threaten existing power structures. There is no real feminine revolution or sense of progress for women in Collin's work. For example, women start out successful and then by the closure of the story, become subjected to male supremacy through discourse that is used in the story.

Vielmas' argues that this portrayal of superficial success of women in Collin's stories is done through utilizing certain literary elements that enforce gender relationships and hierarchy. For example, a female character is put in a workplace where men are dominant and hold higher positions thus ensuring that the power dynamic and language that is used is skewed towards the male (Vielmas 2005:7). It is with this argument that I shall examine how the female characters are portrayed in the three books, starting with an analysis of the women in (HEA,2015).

4.3. Male Supremacy in Storytelling (HEA,2015)

The dominant themes in (HEA,2015) whether political or religious, revolve around people in power and spaces of power. And since power and spaces of power are dominated by men in this book such as Priest, Sandile and Bongani⁷. It can be said that the author utilizes the

⁷ The dominant narratives in this novel is that of Priest, Sandile and Bongani. Priest is disillusioned by the world around him. For example, he complains about working hard yet remaining poor and how democracy has not brought about the change he wanted in this regard. In the end he rejects religion and politicians for not bringing about the deliverance they were promising when he "happily nurses a fire "in which he is burning everything in the house relates to God or politicians," (HEA, 147). Sandile also seem to reject politicians as he

literary element of plot to assert male supremacy (2005:7). Moreover, the plot that is depicted in Sandile's story at the end of the book contains scenes with themes that are typically associated with masculinity, for example the violent takeover of Ndlalidlindoda (HEA, 153). Likewise, the diction that is used is associated with violent hand to hand combat such as weapons like "sjamboks", "axes", "bush knives", "guns" and "spears" remind the reader of war which is associated with masculinity- even today with more inclusive and progressive military the vast majority of soldiers in active duty are male (Kim Parker *et al* 2017). It has to be said however that some of the carriers of these weapons are female, nevertheless their weapons are inferior to than the men's weapons as they carry guns (MS, 53). Therefore, according to Vielmas (2005), it can be said that the plot and diction of Sandile's story reasserts male supremacy.

Having said that, MaDuma seems to be portrayed as a powerful character by the author through various scenarios where she interacts with men⁸. However, a closer look at these scenarios portray a different reality about MaDuma according to Vielmas. When the family continue to face poverty and hunger, MaDuma becomes desperate and resorts to asking Priest to work on a farm again:

"They say Johnson is going to need people to work on trees. It's not a great deal of money, but it can help."

"What?" Priest shouts. "No ways! I can't let my wife work on those trees. Like a slave on a farm? Tell me you are joking."

MaDuma's countenance changes as her husband utterly misunderstands her. "I was thinking that you should go," MaDuma's voice is stern, having decided to forsake her former

writes in his story "But when they bought their troubles to the new government, they were told that each and every frog should jump on its own" (HEA, 152) politicians have failed to help the people. Meanwhile Bongani, sets himself as an enemy to anyone who criticises the government when he calls Sandile's protest poetry "unpatriotic nonsense about our government...even exaggerating! - all the little shortcomings of our leaders" (HEA,67).

⁸ MaDuma commands great influence and power. She convinces her husband to work on a farm which he vowed to never work at again (HEA, 10). She does this through manipulation as "she almost doubles the money that she heard will be paid to tree workers" (HEA, 31) to encourage him to work there. Besides her the influence over her husband, MaDuma has influence over a group of women who mutilate men.

politeness. “other men work on the farms if they cannot find better jobs.” MaDuma has now stood up. She is pacing up and down the room. (HEA,2015:10)

As we can see in this passage, MaDuma approaches the subject of farm work in a cautious and stern manner. Although she is desperate about wanting Priest to work on the farm, she still succeeds in controlling herself in a way that is depicted as submissive by her actions. One can even argue that the tone and manner in which she talks to Priest about working on the farm demonstrates MaDuma’s feminine wiles, and thus she it can be said that she is smarter than her husband. However, because the manner in which she approaches the urgent matter of seeking work to Priest is dictated as polite by the author, it can be said that MaDuma defers to Priest as her husband. In other words, she respects the authority that her husband has as the man of the house. This is a non-progressive way of depicting marital relations. In addition to that, it can be said that she stands up and paces around the house in order to avoid expressing her frustration out of respect for him.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the reason MaDuma is characterized as a liar in order to manipulate to Priest into taking the job as a farm worker (HEA, 31) is to show that she does not have the power or intellectual capability to directly convince him to take the job. In addition to this, the author portrays MaDuma’s deceitfulness as a feminine trait by saying “she has won her womanly battle of convincing the man to do the right thing” (HEA, 32). This portrays MaDuma as a villain to the audience and undermines her attempts to provide for her family. Furthermore, by describing MaDuma’s actions as a “womanly battle” Sithole ascribes deceit to women in general and that womanly battles are won through immoral tactics. This also suggests that female victory over men is immoral or a result of immorality. Interestingly, this ties into the Judeo-Christian belief that forbids women from ruling over men in respect to the created order, the Fall in Genesis, and the destruction this practice brings to humanity⁹. Therefore, according to Vielmas (2005:7) the non-progressive setting of

⁹“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:11-14.)

*“As for My people, children are their oppressors,
And women rule over them. O My people!
Those who lead you cause you to err,*

marriage enforces gender relationship where the husband is superior to the wife, moreover, manipulation Priest portray MaDuma as morally inferior to him.

MaDuma's immoral attitude is also depicted when she is presented with the opportunity to work in Canaan for R800. Even though it is below minimum wage, it is still almost triple the amount that Priest is paid at the farm. However, by refusing to work for that amount MaDuma is characterized as prideful, hypocritical and sadistic for pushing her husband to work in tougher conditions and for lesser pay when she does not even consider working on the farm herself. Therefore, besides being portrayed as being deceptive, she is portrayed as hypocritical, prideful and sadistic. Despite MaDuma's efforts, Priest is portrayed as ultimately superior due to the literary elements of setting, characterization and the plot of the story. MaDuma's portrayal at Grinding Stone does not seem to be much better.

When MaDuma is fed up from hearing the horrific stories of sexual violence against women, she decides to take justice into her own hands:

MaDuma is at the centre of the voices that are speaking at the same time. She turns toward Nomsa and says, "We think it's no use lamenting these violations without action. Instead of recounting these evil deeds and in the process hurting ourselves even more, we think it's better to pay a visit to these two men you have just spoken about." Nomsa is both gratified and frightened by what is happening.... "No! Women, don't! Taking the law into our own hands will make things worse!"

For the first time, as the leader of the Grinding Stone, Nomsa feels the pain of being negated by the women she is leading. But the women leave from the back door without caring whether she consents or not. Outside it is MaDuma who has taken on the leadership and Nomsa marvels at how well she sings the slogans. "Down with animals, down!"

"Down!"

"Down with men, down!" (HEA, 2015:78-79)

And destroy the way of your paths" (Isaiah 3:12). This Scripture shows the extent of how Israel has fallen through God lamenting the wrong and destructive occurrences of children oppressing adults and women ruling over men.

In this passage, MaDuma usurps leadership from Nomsa and ignores Nomsa's warnings about mob justice. She does this because she thinks she would do a better job than Nomsa as a leader. This attitude can be seen as an extension of her pride. Moreover, the diction and structure of MaDuma's chant "Down with men, down!" portrays her as simplistic and violent, unlike who represents the masculine consumer capitalism, Nomsa who tries to maintain peace and order. Once again, MaDuma's portrayed as using immoral means to achieve her goals. This weakens MaDuma's character as depicted to achieve her goals by cheating. In this way, she is not portrayed as an aspirational character for poor women to tackle the consumer capitalist system, instead she is seen as a character who is so weak that she has to compromise morality in order to get things done. Sithole does not depict her as strong but reinforces her position in society as one who is weak and poor. MaDuma's portrayal is what Vielmas (2005) describes as women being portrayed as "dangerous masquerading actresses" (207) in order to show that men are superior because they are less dangerous. Therefore, it can be said that Priest obtaining the upper hand in end is no coincidence, MaDuma is undermined despite all her efforts through literary elements. Nomsa is depicted in a similar manner.

Despite Nomsa being portrayed as a radically feminist character¹⁰ the background to her refusal to have children undermines her radical feminism:

"For as long as I can remember, I have not been a complete person," Nomsa says. "There has always been a void in me and I want you to understand" It all started when I was about six years old, I did not know what it was then. My father used to be so interested in me, offering to wash me and all....When he washed me, he would sit me on his lap, making sure that I touched his private parts.... One day I did tell Mother but, as he had said, she did not believe me. She went to ask him if it was true and he said I was crazy, that I hated him and so I was making up lies about him. She only believed my story when I was fourteen and got pregnant. I could see that she was hoping I would say I had had sex with another boy, but I kept telling her that it was him. My father was the father of the child I was carrying. She then suggested we get rid of the baby, which we did. It was after that I vowed never to have a child again. In honour of my dead baby." (HEA, 2015:113-115)

¹⁰ She is powerfully built and taller than her husband (HEA, 27), she beats her husband (HEA, 27) and she is also the leader of Grinding Stone where the women there fear her as well (HEA, 75). Nomsa seems born to be a feminist.

From this passage we can see that Nomsa still carries the trauma of her childhood abuse. Besides that, her trauma affects her identity and her decisions in life. Upon initial observance, her refusal to have a baby with her husband can be seen as a decision that demonstrates her power and control over her own body, an example of third wave feminist thought and a defiance stance against sexist gender expectations. However, the way the story of her childhood rape and abortion is told by the author suggests that she has not healed and that her father still has a strong hold over her. Furthermore, by saying that she “is not a complete person” suggests that not having a baby makes her incomplete. Having said that, according to the European Institute of Bioethics (2017) the trauma of abortion, which is common among women, can have a negative impact on her decisions in the future, so perhaps Sithole is drawing on that. But still depicting Nomsa’s decision this way suggests that she operates out of untreated trauma. Furthermore, it can be said that her aggression is also a result of the trauma acquired from her abortion (European Institute of Bioethics 2017:4).

Therefore, initially being depicted as an empowered radical feminist, Nomsa’s backstory portrays her as a traumatised and weak woman thus undermining her strength. Furthermore, the story of her a perverted father-daughter relationship is a gross example of the gendered relationship Vielmas (2005:207) describes. Therefore, it can be said that the ultimate reasserting of male supremacy is achieved with Nomsa, who through her backstory displays trauma and powerlessness compared to her husband who does not struggle with any issues that influence his decisions. The next section shall be an analysis on Mfundo and Slindile in (MS, 2010).

4.4. Mfundo’s Perspective (MS, 2010)

When Mfundo and Slindile begin to take strain financially, their conflict is told from Mfundo’s point of view:

And, boy, did we take strain. During maternity leave because there weren’t sufficient funds and after maternity leave because of bad money management on her part. Initially we were in agreement that if we budgeted well, we could do without a second salary. But after a few months we stopped doing the budget together, because Sli started reminding me, when she went to buy yet another pair of shoes and I told her it might have been better if we stocked up on formula doe Noma, “when you chose to work, I never told you what to do with your money, so please don’t tell me what to do with mine.” (MS, 2010:54)

From this passage it is clear that Mfundo believes that their financial problems are a result of Slindile's behaviour. He also implies that Slindile has a negative relationship with money and that it is only her responsibility to reform. Interestingly, he neglects to mention that his decision to not to look for employment is part of their problem. Furthermore, he makes Slindile sound vindictive with her retort in order to show that he has the moral high ground in the situation. In fact, throughout their conflict, Mfundo complains about Slindile's hypocrisy to imply that he is treated unfairly by her. This is also why he is not self-reflective about his own behaviour and financial responsibility in the relationship but deflects his guilt onto Slindile. As we can see, this is a gross distortion of reality because even though Slindile is more responsible, better educated, employed and pays the bills, she is portrayed as an immoral woman who oppresses an innocent man for consumerist reasons. Therefore, this negative portrayal of Slindile's character through utilizing Mfundo's point of view of their situation reasserts ultimate male supremacy Vielmas (2007). Mfundo's perspective of the couple's situation continues to vilify Slindile's character.

When Mfundo continues to point out that Slindile is annoyed with him about his behaviour and life decisions¹¹, he deconstructs the reasoning behind Slindile demands:

She was a doctor-okay, in a public hospital -but what the heck, she made enough for our needs. Well, okay, maybe she did not as far as she was concerned, but the house was paid for. And yes, maybe doctors deserved more money than the not quite fifteen thou that her payslip stated, but it's not like we needed the money for anything except car payments, petrol and food. Besides, if she was really careful with the cash, we could get all we liked, and some left behind, so why should I go and do a nine-to-five where I would not be happy? She enjoyed her job and I enjoyed being domesticated and composing my music- shouldn't that be enough? I loved Sli, I really did, but I did not think I could take any more of this ...this whatever it was she was giving me. I am human. I have feelings. I could do without the reminders day in and day out that she was the breadwinner and that this was her house, her money and her car. Hell. I wished there was someone who could advise me on how to handle this. But there was no precept. I had thought it was revolutionary myself, the idea of being the man who stayed at home while the woman brought home the bacon (and eggs). But that is the problem with revolutions, is it not? Look at Nkrumah, I thought as I started to play a tune I had written called "Nkrumah". The man had been the torchbearer of African liberation but

¹¹ In chapter 7, the pressure on Mfundo to look for work continues and gets worse as Slindile starts denying him sex (59) and putting Nomazizi in day care (MS, 60).

had stumbled because there were no examples of just how to go ahead in sub-Saharan Africa after the liberation thing. I started thinking to myself, “Maybe I am the Nkrumah of the Equal Rights, Empowered Woman Generation.” (MS, 2010:60-61)

From the first section of the text, we can see that Mfundo believes that Slindile is unreasonable for wanting Mfundo to get a job because she is a doctor and can support all three of them. He even lists their expenses to show that they are minimal. Furthermore, by implying that Slindile has inadequate reasoning and dismissing her complaints, Slindile is characterized as greedy and ungrateful. However because the story is told from Mfundo’s point of view his own greed and ungratefulness is minimised. In fact, the entire passage makes the reader feel sympathy for Mfundo as he goes into detail about how he is oppressed by Slindile. Moreover, his avoidance of working a nine-to-five job because Slindile sustains his living is depicted as a pursuit of happiness by the author and therefore makes Slindile a villain for wanting to deny him that happiness while she enjoys hers as a doctor.

In the second part of the passage, Mfundo continues to make Slindile look bad and uses politics to illustrate this. First he says, “I am human. I have feelings,” to imply that Slindile’s demands and complaints about his behaviour violate his right as a human being. He moves on to compare himself to Nkrumah who fought for the liberation and human right of Africans. This glorifies and justifies his fight to stay at home and not look for work. At the same time it depicts Slindile as an oppressive colonial master. Furthermore this comparison implies that Mfundo is progressive while Slindile is regressive. Nevertheless, victimizing himself in such a gross manner implies that the author is trying to manipulate the reader into sympathising with Mfundo instead of Slindile who is also suffering in the situation.

Ironically though, by saying, “Maybe I am the Nkrumah of the Equal Rights, empowered Woman Generation,” he Mfundo himself is made into an enemy of women who want equal rights and empowerment. One cannot understand Wanner’s thinking in this instance, is she saying that the equal rights movement is hypocritical? Perhaps she is talking about the mainstream feminism that tends to exclude the poor women and women of colour and can sometimes be complicit in their oppression, as discussed in chapter two. Perhaps, Mfundo is the one who is characterized and ignorant and hypocritical for comparing himself to a liberator and then denouncing women’s rights in the same breath. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the sentiment that women want it both ways, fighting against oppression while oppressing others, still portrays women in a villainous, immoral and ultimately inferior light. This

portrayal of women is linked with Vielmas's (2005) observation that women's liberation is perceived as a transgression.

Therefore, despite Mfundo's own moral failures, he is ultimately given the moral high ground in the couple's situation and is shown as ultimately superior than her. Wanner achieve this through the literary elements of point of view, tone and storyline. Having said that, the next section shall examine the treatment given to the female characters of (BD,2009) starting with the power held by Tumi and her friends.

4.5. The Subversion of Female Success (BD,2009)

Tumi and her friends are depicted as successful in their own right before they meet the members of the Mabanjwa Trust:

Then they cruise down Corlet Drive and Oxford Road to the consortium meeting at Sandton Square in a showy convoy of Tumi's Jag, Nomsa's Mercedes Benz SLK, and Maki's BMW 3-series-she already has plans to upgrade to a 5-series as soon as she completes her articles of clerkship.... The bid for the Mabanjwa Trust, a group made up of mostly of former political prisoners on Robben Island, but also from various inland prisons. Tumi is amazed how they have evolved into savvy businessmen who speak the jargon both of the television industry and the corporate world. Albeit occasionally mixing it with military terms since they continue to see themselves as cadres if the liberation struggle. They already own radio stations and newspapers in some of the important markets in the country, and now have this great opportunity of owning a television station that will broadcast nationally and will focus on entertainment with two thirty-minute news slots per day.... At first Tumi was out of her depth in this company, but she was not ashamed to ask questions and read up on the technical aspects of the free-to-air television industry. She also went to the library at Wits University and read extensively on the subject. Now she can hold her own in the debates and is the one who explains concepts to Nomsa and Maki who are still out of their depths.... In addition to the members of the Mabanjwa Trust who are the principal shareholders... the women's group lead by Tumi and her friends.... These three groups have a very small equity of about 3.3 per cent each...The tiny equity does not bother Tumi. All she wants is to have her foot in the door. (BD, 2009:80-81)

In the first section of the passage, one can see that the women have achieved much in life and show their success through the vehicles they choose to drive. However, their ostentatious

show of wealth can be seen as a characterize new money and also set the tone for the dwarfing achievements and wealth of the men at the Mabanjwa Trust who “own radio stations and newspapers in some of the important markets in the country”. Furthermore, Tumi’s surprise at the amount of knowledge that the former cadres have in the media industry not only shows how she underestimates the men of the Trust, but that she is ignorant to of what it takes to become a Black Diamond. Moreover, Tumi’s subsequent willingness to do research at a University library reveals that her ignorance extends to the industry itself. Furthermore, the fact that she has to go to University for the first time shows that her success in the modelling industry is meaningless¹² in the television industry and corporate world. This setting undermines her profession and success. However, this undermining of profession and success extend to her friends as well because they are also left “out of their depth” in the mission and have to rely on the least educated woman in the group to help them. Tumi and her friends are brought down from the success and status they had before arriving at the Mabanjwa Trust meeting. To the women’s credit however, they are humble enough to accept their low position, learn and be grateful for their tiny equity. This humility on their part can also be seen as a way of normalising male supremacy as they are willing to accept their situation and not challenge the status quo. This further emphasises that the Black Diamond world is not their space and so there is nothing progressive about Mda’s storyline and plot. Therefore, not only does the author use military and business discourse to enforce gender relationship, he uses plot and storyline (Vielmas 2005:7) to reasserts male supremacy. Likewise, the author treats Kirstin in a similar manner with her profession as a magistrate. When Kirstin arrives at work after a successful getaway with Don she has to deal with the frustration of being challenged on a previous judgement by an attorney¹³:

¹² To contrast her success in the modelling industry with her struggle in the BEE world of the television industry, she is satisfied with the 3.3 percent equity which is very little even though she becomes sufficient in her technical knowledge. Where she is established in the modelling industry, she just wants “to have her foot in the door,” when it comes to the owning shares in the television industry. The women struggle Tumi has go to a university library to learn about the “technical aspects if the free-to-air television industry,”. Going to university was something she did not have to do because she was successful and established in modelling.

¹³ In chapter 3, Kirstin sentences Stevo Visagie to six months in prison with charges of contempt for insulting her in court after she unduly called him “the scum of the earth” (BD, 21). However, when Krish Naidoo

“You look different, Kirstin,” says Krish Naidoo. “Gorgeous. The way you used to look at Wits.”

“Don’t pretend to be nice to me, Krish Naidoo,” she says tersely. “Not when you have stabbed me in the back.”

Naidoo decides to let that go and returns to his folder. Kristin is miffed because she was gearing for a fight. Bangani Mbona rushes in and apologises for keeping them waiting. He takes a seat opposite the magistrate, and his eyes betray his amazement. “Well, Ms Uys, I wouldn’t have recognised you,” he says. “You should take more holidays.”

“With all due respect, sir, I’d appreciate it if we just get to the point,” she says. The chief magistrate is taken aback and looks as though he may erupt into something, he will later regret, but common sense gets the better of him. He takes refuge in Naidoo’s calm face and says, as if talking to him: “We are quite testy today, aren’t we?”

She gives the chief magistrate an apologetic smile. “My reaction to your compliment was uncalled for,” she says. “I am very sorry.”

“It’s all right,” says the chief magistrate smiling condescendingly. “WE are all used to your little tantrums by now.”

He passes documents to the magistrate and Krish Naidoo, sliding them across the table. She knows what this is all about immediately she sees the letterhead: The High Court of South Africa- Transvaal Provincial Division. ‘As you can see,’ says the chief magistrate, ‘the finding of the Judge is that Stevo Visagie was in contempt, but that the sentence was irregular. The maximum for this crime is three months. ‘But they were two incidents of contempt,’ says the magistrate. ‘What did they say about that?’ Instead of responding Mr Mbona points her to a paragraph in the document. The High Court finds that there was no separate contempt to warrant the extra three months...The magistrate is crestfallen while Naidoo is happy, although he does not want to display outright glee. Kirstin Uys does not take kindly to defeat. More than just the humiliation of having her decision reversed by a superior court, she is struck with terror when the image of the pig’s head dripping with blood flashes before her eyes. (BD, 2009:233-234)

As we can see in this passage, Kirstin’s depiction as the feminist ideal in her successful career in a high position and her sexual freedom is undermined by her co-workers. After

protests the sentence, she dismisses his concerns on the basis that she is the magistrate (BD, 22). In chapter 18 Krish is proved right in his desire to appeal the sentence against Stevo.

Krish gives her a compliment, her response to him exposes her as rude, temperamental, and weak. Furthermore, Kirstin's feelings of betrayal portrays her as needy for friendship and thus lacking in professionalism. Whereas Krish's calm and cool response to Kirstin's irritation depict him as having the upper hand in the situation and thus more powerful and strong. Furthermore, it can be said that Kirstin's frequent ill treatment of Krish¹⁴ can be attributed to the fact that she sees Krish as her big brother. In other words, she thinks of him as her familial punching bag to let out all of her frustrations. He lets her as he is the 'bigger man'.

Likewise, even when she tries to regain ground by belittling Bangani's compliment she gets immediately cut down. This time it is less subtle. To emphasise her failure at her attempt of dominance, Bangani berates her by referring to her past behaviour and in doing so enlists Krish's support. Kirstin becomes outnumbered as two men try to bring her down.

Furthermore, it can be said that the High Court ruling is there to illustrate the point that Bangani tries to make about her immaturity. Indeed the High Court ruling reminds the reader of Kirstin's vindictive behaviour in the beginning of the book and by so doing she loses sympathy with the reader as well. Kirstin's unfavourable characterization is especially noticeable with Krish Naidoo, who is below her in rank, but has self-control and reasonableness that make him practically superior to her. This portrayal of a lack of emotional self-control reminds us of a stereotype's about how women cannot be trusted with good judgement because they are emotionally unstable. The backlash against the #METOO movement in the workplace is caused by this stereotype¹⁵.

In addition to her weakness and domination by men being depicted in the workplace, Kirstin's ultimate weakness is exposed when she remembers what she must confront at home.

¹⁴ Kirstin has not grown from her emotional outbursts since chapter one when she humiliates Krish for not wearing the right attire to court. However, Krish shows his maturity and professionalism by "[suppressing] his irritation and [[apologising] to the court" (3)

¹⁵ A study from the Pew Research Centre says that many Americans see the increased focus on sexual harassment and assault as potentially creating challenges for men at work while not necessarily having a positive impact for women in terms of career opportunities. About half (51%) think the increased attention to the issue has made it harder for men to know how to interact with women in the workplace, while 12% say it's made it easier for men and 36% say it hasn't made much difference. At least a plurality of men (55%) and women (47%) say the recent developments have made it harder for men to navigate workplace interactions. (Graf, 2018)

Kirstin is shown as weak and vulnerable on all sides. In fact, the dictation used to describe Kirstin in this passage like “tersely”, “miffed”, “testy”, “apologetic”, “tantrums”, “crestfallen”, “defeat”, “humiliation” and “terror” have the effect of utterly stripping down Kirstin’s character. At least Tumi and her friends are shown to have some dignity with humility, whereas it seems that Kirstin is given no such redeeming quality. Furthermore, these words also undercut her status as a magistrate; the status she is supposed to find comfort and redemption in is taken away from her and she is left completely vulnerable.

However, it can be argued that Kirstin’s behaviour is a result of the traumatic experiences she experienced with her husband. However, the author seems to anticipate this excuse for her character and rebuts it by suggesting that Kirstin’s vindictiveness is unreasonable and unhealthy. Once again, he does this through Krish Naidoo when he refers to the time Barend cheated on her: “All I’m saying is just because Barend fell into disgrace is no reason for you to go out on a moral crusade” (BD, 142). Furthermore, Krish explains that Barend has moved on¹⁶. It seems that Krish highlights these things to shame her out of self-pity. Therefore, it is clear that the author does not want the reader to excuse Kirstin’s behaviour. Instead, it seems that her unresolved trauma about Barend is used to show how Kirstin’s is. Kirstin’s character is brought down to such an extent that all the men in her life are superior to her, even the man who cheated on her. The characterization of Kirstin is a gross assertion of male superiority by Mda. although not brought down as much, Ma Visagie is characterized in a similar manner.

As Stevo languishes in prison, Ma Visagie seems to oversee the family business:

Ma Visagie gets out of the kombi and Shortie follows her into the office, which is a shipping container near the gate.

‘What gives, Ma?’ he asks.

“You gotta do something, Shortie. The girls have got to start working again.”

“But, Ma, that’s Stevo’s side of things. My side is the scrapyard.”

“Stevo’s rotting in jail right now, boy. Things can’t stand still till he comes back.”

Shortie tries to assure his mother that Stevo will be back soon because Krish Naidoo is working hard to get him out. (BD, 2009:65)

¹⁶ “Krish Naidoo is certain that he moved on. He did not push away those who wanted it help. He picked up the pieces... and glued them together.” (BD, 143)

As we can see in this passage, Ma Visagie looks to Shortie to get the business running again. However, despite being busy with the scrapyard, Shortie is not keen to help with the business because he knows that he is not sufficiently qualified to do so. As a mother and a leader of the business, Ma Visagie is likely aware of this. Ignoring Shortie's insufficient qualifications for the job shows that she is indeed desperate. Her desperation indicates that she cannot do anything for herself, including looking for someone more qualified than her Shortie. She is completely dependent on her sons to run the business. Her dependency does not make sense from a literary perspective because she does not have a disability nor is, she too old. Nevertheless, her desperation is also shown through the tone in which she speaks to Shortie. Instead of being calm about the situation, she panics and must be reassured by Shortie. Her behaviour does not display a woman who is in charge but a woman who is overwhelmed, emotional and powerless. This makes it difficult for the reader to recognise that Ma Visagie is the boss because her characterization makes it seem like she is the one being bossed around. Therefore, the fact that Ma Visagie is desperate and anxious enough to ask for help from an incompetent man and needs assurance from him shows that despite being a mother and a seasoned boss, her sons who are less experienced are portrayed as superior to her. Furthermore, her dependence on her sons is also shown through her undignified and desperate behaviour that leads her to be thrown out of a courtroom in the first chapter (BD, 3) and this further explains her resentment of Aunt Magda. This also explains her insecurity about Aunt Magda also shows that she is dependent on her sons and does not want to lose them. Again, this reinforces a stereotype that women are emotionally unstable and need men to ensure their survival in the world. Therefore, it can be said that Ma Visagie is written as inferior to her sons through the authors characterization and plot, even as she represents female consumer capital success. The next section shall be the conclusion.

4.6. Conclusion

Chapter four has argued for that the storytelling in the chosen texts has asserted male supremacy. The assertion of male supremacy was the final effect of feminized consumerism of the women in these texts. In (HEA, 2015) the assertion of male supremacy was achieved through themes, plots, diction and characterization. The story is set in with conservative religious and political themes, diction uses language that favours men and the

characterization makes the women inferior through moral weaknesses. Even Nomsa's feminism is depicted as a result of unresolved trauma. (*MS, 2010*) mainly uses characterization and point of view to assert male supremacy. Slindile is portrayed as morally inferior and Mfundo's point of view portrays her as greedy and oppressive. (*BD,2009*) asserts male supremacy through characterization, plot and point of view. Tumi and her friend's success and power in the public space is dwarfed by the men, even Don is made superior to her by characterizing Tumi as greedy and overbearing through point of view and plot. Similarly Kirstin, who is the most powerful and successful female character in the book is diminished by being portrayed as an incompetent and emotionally immature, even the man who cheated on her is portrayed to be morally superior and stronger than her. Similarly, even though Ma Visagie appears to be the boss, she is characterized as a helpless and insecure woman compared to her Shortie who is less competent.

The assertion of male supremacy through storytelling is relevant to this study the effects of feminized consumerism because the subversive effect of feminized consumerism are revealed. It is also significant as it shows the mentality of the authors and how the craft of writing truly empowered women has not been fully developed in South African post-transitional literature. It can be argued that these storytellers are reflect the reality of consumer capitalist oppression that women have to endure in south Africa. However, I think there is room in South African literature for aspirational fiction like the superhero fiction in the US that offers catharsis and hope to the people. The findings of storytelling that is comparable to mid-Victorian literature indicates that post-transitional literature in South Africa has a long way to go and it reflects a bleak picture for women, especially black women. The next section shall be the conclusion to this study.

CONCLUSION

Consumerism, Sexist Oppression and Female Characters

Black diamonds are part of a quite different phenomenon, though they raise similar questions and no doubt this is why Mda has chosen the neatly referential name. "Black diamond" is a label attached to black South Africans who, since the first democratic elections in 1994 have rose to prestigious and remunerative public and corporate positions. The dismantling of the apartheid state in the mid '90s opened up not just new civil liberties for non-whites but also *new economic prospects and opportunities*. *Sadly, this potential for financial betterment remained for many just that, a potential*. Amongst a select few though, there ensued a scramble to fill the power vacuum left by the outgoing officials. The radical benefits enjoyed by these lucky few, the black diamonds, *kept the flame of hope* alive for the remainder of the population. The black diamond then, is a permutation of the American Dream -- though modified to the context of post-apartheid South Africa -- ostensibly available to all, but enjoyed by few. (Julian Murphy – my italics.)

This quote from a review of Mda's novel, captures the main issues analysed in the three novels in this dissertation, in particular the parts marked in italics. But my analysis focuses on how the female characters are affected and often suppressed by female consumerism. From my reading of the texts I wish to establish to what extent economic prosperity in the imagined post-colonial societies presented does not result in economic freedom for women. The basis of this assumption is that black and poor people continue to experience oppression in democratic South Africa because of consumer capitalism.

The inequality of Victorian society in the 1900s underpins several critical studies on the relation between women and consumerism and some of the points raised are applicable to our post-transitional inequality. Ngugi (1993: 91) in discussing post-colonial politics and culture is of the opinion that much of the population is usually alienated from economic prosperity, thus calling it "a perfect replica of colonial practices".

Upward mobility, as depicted in the three novels under discussion, benefits only a few women who are associated with powerful men. The female characters in the novels are given agency by their male counterparts and their political connections, struggle credentials, economic status, and employment status.

The three characters Nomsa, Tumi and Kirstin in the three novels respectively, embody the impact of consumerism and they utilise their agency to position themselves within a traditional patriarchal society. Admittedly, before undertaking this study, it was assumed that

the female characters, especially the black female characters, had no agency when dealing with the issues of consumerism. However, true to the nature of post-transitional literature, race was no longer a determining factor when it came to victimhood and oppression.

Moreover, examining the novels from that point of view led me to discard the bias that women, especially black women, were hapless victims of oppressive systems. In fact, it was discovered that the women of colour co-opted the system and became oppressors themselves.

However, I was not without sympathy for these characters as the way the stories were told made it seem that the only way of success was the co-opting new imperialism, notwithstanding that they were victims themselves of the system they were using to get ahead. This once again highlights the need for South African literature to evolve and become literature that escapes storytelling that conforms to a consumer capitalist world. With that said, I shall explain how I answered the above questions by outlining the findings of the study below.

Chapter one explored feminized consumerism and its association with female exploitation, in particular the exploitation of poor women by wealthy women. It was found that MaDuma directly and indirectly experienced oppression from wealthy women through the tourism market and the labour market of Canaan (HEA,74). Nomsa as a wealthy woman was to be oppressive by impeding the cause of poor women through her NGO, Grinding Stone. Mfundo symbolises a poor woman, oppressed by Slindile who desired freedom to live a consumer capitalist lifestyle. Moreover, the white Kirstin Uys, was not found to be oppressive to herself and poor women through her sexual insecurities brought on by the feminized consumerism in women's magazines. Furthermore, Tumi was found to contribute to the oppression poor women by selling them to first world countries which symbolised old imperialist centres, through modelling contracts. However, it was noted that Tumi treated the models with concern as they shared her identity as a black woman. Ma Visagie, who was not traditionally associated with feminized consumerism, was found to participate in the most in the oppression of poor women as she fought to keep her brothel running. This chapter observed that female consumerism had an oppressive effect on women in the texts and the brunt of this oppression was the poor women.

Chapter 2 explored the effect of domesticity and the restrictions caused by masculinized space on the women in the novels. Domestication occurred when women's agency or values were surrendered to consumerist forces such as women's magazines and fashion. Likewise, in

the rural setting it was found that MaDuma created her own space in the tourist market by making and selling her own beadwork but because of the discriminations of consumer capitalism her own efforts of creating space were ultimately unsuccessful. The labour market of Canaan also kept her domesticated. Nomsa, however, because of the privileges of her wealth and connections was successful in creating her own space through Grinding Stone. Because of this it was noted that the theory of space creation to escape domesticity lacked intersectionality and did not apply to poor women. Kirstin as a wealthy woman, was not domesticated by her feminized consumerism. Tumi was found to be domesticated by feminized consumerism although it seemed like she had some agency in the process as it was her decision to conform to the consumer capitalist standards of beauty promoted by her modelling agency. Nevertheless, it was found that Tumi attempted to carve her own space by working to include black women in the beauty standards set by consumer capitalism. Although, Ma Visagie, as a wealthy woman was not domesticated, she subjected the poorer women to domestication through her brothel. Therefore, this chapter showed that only wealthy women were afforded the opportunity of escaping the effect of domestication by feminized consumerism through the creation of space. The troubling thing however is that it also showed that all the wealthy women in the texts used their freedom to domesticate poorer women.

Having said that, chapter three examined the relationship between female characters and consumer objects and the possible effect this relationship had on the men in their lives. MaDuma had a commodity fetish in her rosary and despite its religious connotations, it does not make her think any better of her husband, Priest.

Nomsa's failed maternity made her develop a commodity fetish with her NGO that gave her the opportunity to control women and act as a replacement for children. Mfundo's fetishized domesticity is because of her failed artistry. However, Slinidle did not have a commodity fetish in this chapter but bought commodities as a form of protest against Mfundo's behaviour. Kirstin's commodity fetish is her prostitute outfit, which reiterates her perceived failed sexuality. Tumi on the other hand, was found to not have a commodity fetish but used her love for consumerism to help other women and Don to do better in life. Ma Visagie was found to have a commodity fetish with her car as it masked her true nature and gave her power to reign in her business. Like the previous chapters, chapter three showed the oppressive nature of feminized consumerism and how it entrapped women into unhealthy

behaviours with sometimes negative consequences on men. Chapter three also showed how the power of women was diminished they transferred it to commodities instead.

Chapter four explored feminized consumerism's effect of making men ultimately superior. This chapter was unique in that it analysed the authors use of storytelling to depict their female characters in consumer settings and how they, wittingly or unwittingly, showed men to be superior. This chapter revealed female consumerism was impeded in the way female characters were written and this was no surprise as post-transitional literature drew from the confines of consumer capitalism. MaDuma was made inferior to her husband through her poor moral choices. Nomsa was characterized as inferior to her husband due to her traumatic past that she had not healed from. Through Mfundo's point of view, Slinidile was made to be the villain that caused financial trouble and discord in the relationship. Furthermore, women in general were characterized as morally inferior by Mfundo's point of view. Kirstin was characterized as professionally and morally inferior to her colleges, including Barend, the man who cheated on her. Tumi and her friends were portrayed as incompetent and out of their depth when confronted with the realities of the broadcasting industry. Ma Visagie was characterized as inferior because she needed the help of her less competent son to run her business. To be clear, the presence of weakness and failure in the women's lives was not merely an issue of character development as the effect that the storytelling had on the reader was to undercut the achievements of the women and make men seem superior despite their lower achievement in profession, status, initiative and moral character, Don was a clear example of this as he was made to be the hero of the story and a martyr despite living off women and cheating among other things. This chapter revealed the oppressive effects of feminized consumerism in that the veneer of empowerment for women was dissolved upon closer examination.

There seems to be no ostensible sexist agenda at work in the three novels, as is evident from commentaries on the three authors and their work. According to various studies on Mda's work, subverting gender stereotypes and roles for his female characters is the norm. For example, a study by Twalo (2011) states that Mda's *Way of Dying* (1995) "introduces ironical twists to its gender politics: women fend for themselves in unexpected ways." Mda often depicts women in the grips of oppression but then does not allow the oppression to overcome them or dictate their choices. Zukiswa Wanner was also interested in subverting female gender stereotypes, as her book *The Madams* (2006) suggest. In an interview about writing on contemporary issues, she states that she writes her female characters as a "sort of testament

that someone forty years from now can pick up and get an idea of how South Africa was in these, our present times.” In her writing, it seems like Wanner is more interested in reflecting society rather than influencing it with her feminist values (*SA history* n.d). Sithole on the other hand, makes his stance clear on a society that oppresses women and writes narratives that punish men who commit crimes against women. That is suggested by the incident where MaDuma leads a mob against a man involved in sexual abuse. Both Wanner and Sithole portray society realistically, but also give agency to their female characters enabling them to avenge themselves. Therefore, it can be said that the authors do not intend to assert male supremacy but do so as they depict the gendered fault lines present in society.

Except for *Black Diamond*, the texts are critical of feminized consumerism and avaricious ambition. A more favourable and traditionalist view of consumer capitalism is presented through the sympathetic portrayal of Kirstin and her relationship with Don. Even the story of Don and his arch of finding happiness with Kirstin revealed the author’s positive view of capitalism.

It is my view therefore that generally black South African fiction literature that comments on the pertinent issues South Africa have a left leaning point of view when telling their stories, but not leftist enough when it comes to depicting their female characters, since there is still a traditionalist view when it comes to women, as this study has revealed.

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