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# South African chick lit and the ghost of the township: Cynthia Jele's happiness is a four-letter word

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# SOUTH AFRICAN CHICK LIT AND THE GHOST OF THE TOWNSHIP: CYNTHIA JELE'S *HAPPINESS IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD*

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By

Zoe Chiriseri




Submitted in the partial fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Arts

In the Department of African Literature

University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Isabel Hofmeyr

March 2017

## Declaration

I declare that this is my own original work. It is in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in African Literature in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination or to any other university.

_____

Zoe Chiriseri

24 April 2017

The University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg

## Acknowledgements

This degree has been a personal journey to attempt to understand myself as a black African woman. Converting from a law degree I had very little understanding of how the Humanities worked and I must admit to being a little lost in the first few weeks of the year. For the first time in my life I felt out of place with my quick legally inclined brain, my nice weave and my sense of style. My lack of political activism and 'consciousness' was glaring, it was hard but that's what I came for. Through the process, I have learnt some hard truths about being black, and about myself as an individual. I am far from done but the process had begun. The first thing I've done since finishing my research is reorganized my bookshelf. It's when I look at it and the change in my reading choices that I can see an outward change over the last year, however the more significant change is not visible to the outward eye.

My deepest gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Isabel Hofmeyr, who has been so patient with me in all things, so kind and supportive of me as an individual and for helping me to refine my method of thinking. Thank you to Dr. Dan Ojwang for encouraging me to join the Department of African Literature and for the cheering me on throughout the year. To my uncle, Prof. Kupe for talking me through my ambitions and passions, and for all your guidance and conversations that led me from my law degree and down the path I am currently on. To my Aunty Violet at the University of Botswana, who I found out to my delight has the same academic interests as me. Thank you for helping me perfect this work. To my friends who I spent hours in the post grad labs with, discussing black feminism as we worked, thank you for enriching me, and soldier on!

My sister Nissi for being the light of my life, Tanya, for showing me that the Ivy Leagues are in our league, and Lisa for inspiring me with your numerous successes, in this context, founding the African Woman Awards, a celebration of African women. My big beloved brother for always listening and just generally being amazing. My mum and dad in love, the Ramushus thank you for your love and support at all times. I must acknowledge my mother, Petunia Chiriseri, currently the Commissioner of Human Rights, who from a young age showed me (not taught me) that the color of my skin does not limit me from being, achieving and being acknowledged for anything. For walking in places that most black women would never dream of and demanding things that even black men are afraid to. Teaching me to be unapologetic about who I am, and to speak up for what I believe even if it makes me and others uncomfortable. You are my role model and so many people's super hero. And finally, my dearest friend and husband, Herbert Ramushu. I cannot thank you enough for allowing this thesis to take over all our dates, couch time and anytime conversations. For encouraging my passions, and helping me realize all my ambitions. For pushing me always and telling me things I needed to hear even if they were not true at the time. You have made marriage and now dad's passing so easy for me by picking up every piece that I drop. You are an amazing man. When I started this degree, we had just gotten engaged, and you asked me if I was going to turn into an 'angry black woman,' I will leave you to answer that question.

## Dedication

To my dad, the late Apostle Charles Chiriseri.

It has only been six months but it is already clear that you will never be forgotten.

## Abstract

This research reads the popular literature genre, chick lit, as a site for the elaboration of new forms of womanhood in post-Apartheid South Africa and through an analysis of the novel *Happiness is a Four-Letter Word* seeks to discover how new constructs of black female identity in the genre of chick lit disrupt as well as extend earlier representations of female experience in South Africa.

The literary aspect of this research is essentially a genre study that attempts to identify how we recognize genre. Chick lit was initially read as a homogenously white normative genre, it was imagined, theorized and researched through the western gaze to the exclusion of other races and classes. This research rejects this essentialism of gender and as such recognizes that when addressing gender in Africa not only race and class need to be contextualized but further historical and cultural contexts are fundamental when constructing the black woman's subjectivity.

Postfeminism is understood as a modern social sensibility declaring that women are 'now empowered,' and celebrating and encouraging their consequent 'freedom' to return to normatively feminine pursuits. There is a growing field of research around postfeminism and chick lit pertaining to black African women and this is where this research locates itself. By positioning existing western literature, on chick lit, in dialogue with scholarship around chick lit in Africa, a transnational analytic and methodological approach to the critical study of chick lit and postfeminism can be made.

Chick lit signals a transition for black women living in post-Apartheid South Africa, one of upward social mobility. This research looks at the contradictory space that black middle-class women occupy in this transition. There is a spectral 'other' that restricts black women in fully expressing their agency in the private sphere despite the progress made for women on a national scale. This I have called 'the Ghost of the Township.'

I explore the extent to which the narrative opens up alternative avenues for writers to represent women's interests. The author, Cynthia Jele, like other authors writing chick lit about black African women, illustrates how women writers can rethink and reposition the roles of women as they continue to live in patriarchal societies that marginalize and oppress them. In this research, I endeavor to explore if and how these new roles for women create contradictory zones for women by at once empowering and oppressing them. I also ask to what extent things have changed for black women and examine the effects of these changes.

# Table of Contents


***Declaration*** ..... ***i***

***Acknowledgements*** ..... ***ii***

***Dedication*** ..... ***iii***

***Abstract*** ..... ***iv***

***Chapter One: Introduction*** ..... ***2***

*What is Chick Lit?* ..... *6*

*Chick Lit's Problematic Relationship with the Romance Novel and Media* ..... *9*

*Locating Chick Lit within Feminist Discourse* ..... *10*

*The Gap in the Discourse around Chick Lit* ..... *12*

*Hello black African chick lit!* ..... *13*

*The Haunting of Happiness* ..... *16*

*What is the Township that Haunts?* ..... *17*

*Reading the Chick Lit Novel* ..... *20*

***Chapter 2: Negotiating the Paradoxes of Patriarchy*** ..... ***26***

*Whose Culture are You Practicing?* ..... *28*

*You Both Want a House* ..... *33*

*Living Beijing* ..... *38*

***Chapter 3: It's a Woman's world; Men just live in it*** ..... ***49***

*Complicity with Patriarchy* ..... *58*

***Conclusion*** ..... ***62***

***Works Cited*** ..... ***65***

## *Chapter One: Introduction*

This thesis examines the subgenre of 'Blafrican' chick lit, which can be defined as a subset of chick lit but pertaining specifically to black African female authors writing narratives concerning the black, largely middle class female experience in Africa.[1] It provides a close reading of the novel, *Happiness Is a Four-Letter Word*, (which will be referred to as *Happiness* from hereon) by Cynthia Jele, against the background of the postfeminist debates as well as critical race and transnational feminist critiques about chick lit in South Africa. Although the scholarship on chick lit as a genre is vast, there is a normative assumption that the genre is homogenously white. While much of the work assumes a normative white subject, there is also a growing body of work that has started to explore black chick lit in Africa. I will build on this work. By exploring existing academic work on chick lit in Africa, this research finds its relevance by building on and diversifying these outcomes in hopes of further unearthing the subjectivities specific to black South African women.

Furthermore, this research uses hauntology as a means of better understanding the ways in which national history and the political and cultural constructs responsible for the creation of the South African township affect issues pertaining to black South African women today. By viewing the issues which repeat themselves both in the past and present one can see how the national narrative playing out in the public sphere affects the trajectories of the individual characters in the private sphere. An exploration of how the subgenre of black African chick lit conforms or subverts the key characteristics of the genre of chick lit will foreground the intersections of race, class and gendered\sexual tension. Through this

[1] The term blafrican is recognized as a slur originating from when an individual is about to say the word 'black' and then quickly changes to the American politically correct term, 'African.' Like the terms, chick, queer and chica just to name a few, which originated as slurs this research looks to revive and subvert this term by taking ownership and distinguishing that one must realise that black and African are not synonymous but that each term carries a different set of realities. The term will be used to describe the subgenre of chick lit pertaining to black African females. This is used to distinguish firstly between females who identify themselves as African who are white, and also black females who are not African for example sistah lit, which is for African-American women. This is important because although the experiences of these females may overlap in some ways, they cannot however be homogenised.

analysis, the research identifies the subjectivities of the urban black woman living in South Africa today and defines what experiences are unique to her, and what experiences are shared across borders.

The issues raised through the genre of chick lit as a whole have been extensively debated and explored. However, within the scholarship around chick lit there is an assumption that chick lit is a homogenously white normative genre read primarily for its relationship to femininity and feminism, to the exclusion of all other forms of social difference (Desai, 2008, p. 2). At the inception of this research there was the assumption that there was little, or no scholarship on chick lit about black Africans. After further reading, it emerged that there was a growing field of research around postfeminism and chick lit pertaining to black African women. Simidele Dosekun's paper, 'For Western Girls Only? Postfeminism as a Transnational Culture,' argues that much of the literature surrounding postfeminist is imagined, theorized and researched through the western gaze to the exclusion of other cultures. She argues for the dialogic positioning of this existing western postfeminism in dialogue with transnational feminist cultural scholarship, a transnational analytic and methodological approach to the critical study of postfeminism. Dosekun contends that such an approach provides an understanding of post-feminism as a transnationally circulating culture, and thus can better account for the fact that the culture interpellated not only women in the West but also others elsewhere (Dosekun, 2015). She concludes by outlining what postfeminism means and how this could offer a new/broader conceptual view of postfeminism as transnational culture. This research uses Dosekun's work for reading African chick lit as postfeminist work and as transnational culture.

Spencer uses research on established black women writers as the analytic and theoretical bedrock, and foregrounds the voices of emerging black women writers who represent female subjectivity in and of the nation (Spencer, 2014, p. 6). The central focus of her research is on the new imaginings of women in and of the nation that are being produced through the narratives of emerging women writers in post-repressive nation states. In the process, she

shows how women are negotiating identities for themselves in post-repressive nation-states (Spencer, 2014, p. 6). The study proceeds by tracing the textual oscillations between positive images of change, on the one hand, and the portrayal of debilitating continuities for women living in the aftermath of oppressive regimes, on the other (Spencer, 2014, p. 6). Spencer accurately describes how, women may have benefitted from feminism, which opened new possibilities for them; however, underlying this emancipation is an explicit complicity with patriarchy. She points out that chick lit refuses to offer a clear-cut construction of women's lives, instead it suggests a messy terrain inherently ambiguous and contradictory, while it simultaneously empowers and oppresses them (Spencer, 2014, p. 94). This research aims to build on these contradictions by exploring what restrictions and oppressions are specific to the black woman despite her upward social mobility.

This research is cognizant of the dichotomy that is usually created when exploring the local in an African context, the binary thinking associated with what is traditional and what is modern. As Danai Mupotsa's doctoral thesis 'White Weddings' does, this research also refuses "the dichotomy of tradition/modernity, which like others work to make natural deeply problematic conceptions, [it rather seeks] a mode of thinking that recognizes motion and is therefore nomadic" (Mupotsa, 2014, p. 7). She highlights that "Nomadic thinking works particularly well for those examining the "local" in African spaces as subjects work and produce themselves more fluidly than more confined models of temporality suggest or allow" (Mupotsa, 2014, p. 7). In this research, I endeavor to steer away from the binary thinking which either idealizes the traditional as pure and uncorrupted due to its connotations of the rural and pastoral, otherwise discards it as backward and non-progressive, or else glorifies modernity as an escape from the confines of primitive society or alternatively demonizes it as morally corrupting.

This research also draws on some of Mupotsa's musing on female 'becoming,' finding personhood through the ritual of marriage. Mupotsa 'queer-ys' this notion of heteronormative marriage as being the epitome of personhood for females. This thesis

makes further inquiry into the elusive identity and personhood that the black female living in post-Apartheid South Africa desires to assimilate. *Happiness is a Four-Letter Word,* the title of the novel insinuates that love and being in the perfect romantic entanglement is what it is to be happy, to be fulfilled and complete in this modern world where women have access to equal rights and opportunities to an extent. The author complicates this by exposing the complexities in these relationships, however there is the sense that once the romantic elements of these women's lives fall into place that they will achieve happiness. Although happiness is one emotion that the characters are searching for, it is evident that there is also a quest for being, belonging and identity on the part of female characters. In post-Apartheid South Africa conspicuous consumption by the black middle class appears to be part of attaining status and an indication of belonging. Mupotsa exposes how 'capital, labor and consumption come to a head with the work of race, class, gender and sex' (Mupotsa, 2014, p. 7) and in this thesis the negotiations around the ability to consume are irrevocably intertwined with race, class, gender and sex.

When speaking of South African poetry written by black women, Pumla Gqola states that, 'Although refracted through a different strand of feminist analysis, [different works can be in] conversation with this notion of a community of writers at different spatial levels' (Gqola, 2011, p. 7). Chick lit, described by Spencer as a genre depicting sisterhood, is possibly one of the different strands which speaks to the idea of a community of women exchanging private dialogue at different levels, articulating the subjectivities particular to women. Like the poetry Gqola speaks of, the feminine and intimate manner of writing of the genre of chick lit as well as other feminist writing is 'dangerous not only for what it contains and suggests about the worlds of women, but also because of its institutional ruptures in publishing and critical reception' (Gqola, 2011, p. 7). It is crucial to note that chick lit is one, amongst not only, other genres termed by Spencer as 'uprising genres' but other contemporary forms of writing such as poetry, that are emerging or becoming more visible, to redefine the female experience in South Africa. Gqola states that we expand the world of post-apartheid literary scholarship, not only by paying attention to it but by responding to it, and this what this thesis hopes to do.

This work analyzes the complex subjectivities of middle-class black women living in South Africa, and what these realities reflect about the interaction between the public and private sphere. Taking this and much more scholarship into account, this research endeavors to provide a close reading of the novel *Happiness*, against the background of the postfeminist debates about chick lit in Africa. The novel centers on the romantic narratives of four characters and this thesis examines how they either conform or fail to conform to the trajectories of typical chick lit. This research investigates the elements of the text that appear to conform to the conventions of chick lit and also the ways in which these subvert the characteristics of the genre.

Like all texts, *Happiness* cannot be read as a single thing. The complexity of the text is apparent in the tensions it displays, particularly the deep contradictions that haunt the text. Using the theme of hauntology, the term coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book *Spectres of Marx*, this research further explores the subjectivities of the black middle-class South African woman by analyzing the ways in which despite upward social mobility, the lives of the women in the novel are still haunted by, not only their personal pasts but perhaps a national past. This research explores these repetitions in order to analyze the issues that surface while also using these insights to deepen debates on the notion of chick lit.

### *What is Chick Lit?*

The name chick lit comes across as contradictory in that the word "chick" at the height of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s, was considered "an insult, a demeaning diminutive, casting independent young women as delicate, fluffy creatures" (Young, 2006, p. 87). The use of the term 'chick' was questioned as it carried disempowering connotations, and herein lays the contradiction because the genre purports to be empowering for women

by expressing their experiences, struggles and tensions whilst navigating life in the twenty-first century. The word "chick" was revived generations after its first appearance and subverted for use as a term of solidarity and empowerment, like the term 'girl' used to infantilize grown women, and 'queer' which was later appropriated by the homosexual movement. Now, it is not uncommon to hear the expressions, 'Girlpower' and 'Chicks Rule!'. Just as the name can be viewed as ambiguous and contradictory, the genre itself carries contradictions and ambiguities that have led to vast debates on its taxonomy, value and intentions.

As to the intentions of the genre, Cris Mazza admits that when she was asked to run a book contest aimed at discovering unacknowledged and/or unappreciated contemporary women writers, she had no idea that the authors and stories that she picked as winners would come to form the cornerstone text of what is now referred to as contemporary chick lit (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 1). In the introduction to her first anthology entitled *Chick Lit: On the Edge: New Women's Fiction Anthology*, she goes further to say:

> I just thought 'postfeminism' was a funky word- possibly a controversial one if read as anti-feminist- so I didn't define it. I probably couldn't have if I wanted to. It was almost a joke, an ice-breaker … I was looking for something different, something that stretched the boundaries of what has been considered 'women's writing' … [something that might] speak to the diversity and depth that women writers can produce rather than what they're expected to produce (Mazza, 2000, p. 104).

This apparent light-hearted flippant manner in which chick lit was first defined is reflective of some of the works of chick lit themselves, which have been criticized for their light, humorous, unserious subject matter. Many feminist literary critics have dismissed it because of its "seemingly formulaic and homogenous plotlines, simplistic … subject matter, and altogether absence of the characteristics academics use to judge literary merit" (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 10). Arguments have been made that chick lit focuses too much on the individual and not the collective female experience. But in the same manner that the discovery of the

genre led to an important movement and created new ways of thinking about and viewing the female experience, the works within chick lit highlight many fundamental issues that women struggle with, but also expose the fact that these experiences are not unique to the individual but are in fact common experiences. According to Imelda Whelan, the author of *The Feminist Bestseller*, woman enthusiastically consume chick lit (as is evident from both the book sales as well as online consumption through websites such as chicklitbooks.com, chick-litus, and chicaslit.co, sistah-litbooks.com and chicklit.co.uk) because of what she defines as the "identity crisis" for late-twenty and thirty-something working women (Whelehan, 2005, p. 187). Whelan goes on to quote the author of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, said to be one of the first chick lit texts. Helen Fielding says:

> Single women today, sort of in their thirties, are perhaps a new type of woman that hasn't got an identity. And that's all very worrying. Women have said to me: it [*Bridget Jones's Diary*] makes us feel that we're a part of a club and we're not the only ones that feel stupid (Whelehan, 2005, p. 187 quoting Fielding).

Whelan elucidates what this means: "the idea that reading the novel will make these women feel part of a community suggests a longing for an inclusive female sphere of experience - this longing seems to be what chick lit can speak to in quite specific ways" (Whelehan, 2005, p. 188). Although the tone of the literature comes across as light, it does carry the weight of the experiences of the modern day, working woman: "the books reveal tensions regarding how restrictive societal norms contain and maintain gendered, racial and class identity; these moments of tension offer the greatest insight into how the heroines and authors negotiate the complexity of these norms" (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 3). Another critic notes: "It's writing that says that women are independent and confident, but not lacking in their share of human weakness and not necessarily self-empowered; that they are dealing with who they've made themselves into rather than blaming the rest of the world" (Mazza, 1995, p.105). Chick lit affords the individual the ability to laugh at oneself and the experiences and struggles of juggling the career, home, social life, marriage and children. "The humor often resides in [the woman's] perception of herself: that is, the recognition of the ironic distance between the woman she dreams of being – the perfect, artificial woman her magazines and

movies and mother tell her she should be – and the flawed, very real woman she is" (Young, 2006, p. 93). The appeal of the protagonists in the chick lit genre is their fallibility, the gap between reader and protagonist appears smaller as readers are welcomed into the private thoughts and feelings of the characters. The realism in the novels allows the reader the satisfaction of seeing their own faults without having to openly admit them. Similarly, the genre itself is not infallible and is admittedly flawed.

### *Chick Lit's Problematic Relationship with the Romance Novel and Media*

One critic differentiates chick lit and romance in these terms: "The key difference between chick lit and traditional romance fiction is the latter's focus on the heroine's involvement with 'one, and only one, man'" (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 4 quoting Young). By giving the woman the ability to express her sexuality through choice, chick lit departs from the distinguishing characteristics of the romance novel. Although chick lit does attend to serious issues within the domain of female experience, it is problematic in that it is characterized by happy endings, likening it to the romance fictions from which chick lit desires to be distanced. Janice Radway points out that readers of romance are generally interested in reading narratives of heterosexual success to address the lack of success in their own lives and to reassure themselves that the perfect relationship is attainable (Radway, 1984). Chick lit readers by contrast are drawn to the fact that their heroine is fallible, makes bad decisions and makes human mistakes. The realism to the narrative is what they admire. Chick lit author Jennifer Weiner has claimed that chick lit achieves a certain form of "authenticity" that is missing from the mass-market romance novels to which chick lit is often compared. Chick lit heroines, she argues, elicit readers' identifications through their fallibility, pluckiness, and self-deprecating humor (Young, 2006, p. 89). However, what is problematic in the narratives of chick lit is that despite the errors, the conclusion is usually that of a perfect ending making it akin to the romance novel. This is the norm within the genre although this notion is somewhat subverted in this research as will become evident later in this thesis.

Chick lit also has a problematic relationship with the media. Chick lit is purposefully marketed for quick consumption. "Girly, flirty colorful covers depicting women's body parts, martini glasses, shoes, or handbags entice potential customers to read about heroines struggling with shoe, food, Botox, and sex addictions" (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 15). It needs the media in order to popularise it and generate sales. According to Arosteguy, "The genre is presented as a stylish reading venture rather than serious literature" (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 16). Many a-time the authors are not in agreement but are bound up "in a web complicated by desires to make money and achieve fame as a writer" (Arosteguy, 2009, p. 16). There is a paradoxical relationship between the genre of chick lit and media, "Media is at once the reason for the genre's and author's success even as it detracts from the genre's ability to be taken seriously" (Arosteguy, 2009, pp. 15-16). This relationship continues to be problematic but is not the focus of this research.

### *Locating Chick Lit within Feminist Discourse*

The critics that will be useful for this study are those that have grappled with how and where to locate chick lit within the larger body of feminist theory (Mazza, 2000; Mallory and Young, 2006; Ferris, 2006; Butler, 2008; Desai, 2008). Mazza admits that she did not know what exactly she was looking for when she was seeking out postfeminist scripts (Mazza, 2000, p. 89). This organic and laissez faire 'coming to being' of the genre lies in sharp contrast with what is known as the 'second wave of feminism' which was structured, hard and serious. These feminists fought for the rights that women enjoy today. The right to vote, the right to equal opportunities, the rights to have choices in the area of reproduction are just a few of the societal changes implemented due to second wave feminism. Postfeminism is understood as a "contemporary cultural sensibility proclaiming that women are 'now empowered,' and celebrating and encouraging their consequent 'freedom' to return to normatively feminine pursuits and to disavow feminism as no longer needed or desirable" (Dosekun, 2015, p. 1). Postfeminism is said to move away from the man-hating stance that

second wave feminism took. There is a distinct relationship between postfeminism and femininity; namely an embrace of one's femininity.

Chick lit as a genre is situated within postfeminism according Mazza (Mazza, 1995). Discourse on chick lit and feminism is extensive and well documented. Mazza in her second anthology titled 'No Victims', says postfeminism is not necessarily a complete departure from second wave feminism; but that chick lit as a genre just chooses not to focus on the old struggles of feminism which define women as victims. She says, "We're more than oppressed victims. We can start things instead of just react. We have so many significant things to say that have nothing to do with how – I wasn't allowed to have a paper route/ My boss touched my butt/ my man left me when I no longer looked 21" (Mazza, 2000, p. 110). She states that the victim narratives perpetuate the idea that females lack agency in patriarchal society. According to Mallory and Young:

> Third wave feminism has, mistakenly in our view, been called "postfeminism" which implies that it rejects feminist ideology, or, alternatively, moves beyond it seeing no need for feminism now that women have achieved much of what they originally fought for. By contrast those classed as part of the third wave have not abandoned women's concerns, but changed the strategies for highlighting and exploring them (Young, 2006, p. 88).

Whether defined as postfeminism or third wave feminism, the desire was to move away from "man-hating" as described by Natasha Walter (Walter, 1998, p. 36) and away from "victim feminism" as described Naomi Wolf (Wolf, 1993). According to Whelehan, "'second-wave feminism' may have succeeded in opening up professional and educational opportunities for women but at the cost of further complicating their lives than alleviating their burdens" (Young, 2006, p. 88 quoting Whelehan). She explains that there is a "huge chasm between the aspirations of their [young women's] personal lives and those of their professional lives" and argues that "freedoms of choice are presented either covertly or overtly as burdens to the women in question, as if they were juggling two entirely separate identities" (Whelehan, 2005, p. 162). A point of departure is the issue of sex, where instead of viewing sex as a site

of oppression and domination as many second wave feminist did, third wave feminists argued in favor of women's sexual freedom and pleasure as signs of independence and power. Kate, a character in Alison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It*, puts it succinctly when she says "Women used to have time to make mince pies and had to fake orgasms. Now we can manage the orgasms, but we have to fake the mince pies. And they call this progress" (Pearson, 2002, p. 5).

Debates as to whether chick lit as a genre is anti-feminist in that it portrays women as unserious and 'air-headed,' or whether the genre is postfeminist in that it deals with new issues that were solved to a large extent by second wave feminist are prevalent (Whelehan, 2005, p. 163). And further arguments that imply chick lit is represented by third wave feminism, which does not aim to distance itself from feminism but rather sees itself as an extension or continuation of second wave feminism are also widespread (Young, 2006). While not the central focus of this thesis, these postfeminist ideas will inform the reading of *Happiness*.

### *The Gap in the Discourse around Chick Lit*

Within chick lit there are sub-genres attesting to the popularity and demand for these female narratives. There is mummy lit, nanny lit, sistah/black lit, chica lit, Bollywood chick lit, Jewish chick lit, teen chick lit, Brit chick lit and mystery chic lit just to name a few. However, within the scholarship around chick lit there is an assumption that chick lit is a homogenously white normative genre read primarily for its relationship to femininity and feminism, to the exclusion of all other forms of social difference (Desai, 2008, p. 2). Critics like Dowd identify these subgenres as simply new twists on familiar mainstream chick lit, and maintain the familiar argument that they are apolitical, consumerist, and tawdry (Dowd, April 18). Butler and Desai argue that Dowd's essay and examples are unmarked by ethnicity or race, thus suggesting a singular chick lit that is white-normative. They point out that she re-centers

white women as the subject of feminism by assuming that chick lit's women and their concerns and interests are identical to or derivative of their white counterparts; she sees ethnicity and race as not worthy of mention or distinction (Desai, 2008, p. 3). Rather than viewing these subgenres as more of the same, an investigation as to what these alternative subgenres and what they are revealing is essential. In her paper Arosteguy states that,

> Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a chief characteristic of Chick Lit is its ability to adapt to the needs and interests of diverse audiences and expand into alternative markets … The women who write Chick Lit are a very diverse group … Chick Lit has grown and branched out to include the voices of others … as the mainstream narrative moves into these different subgenres and begins to reflect different realities, it increasingly has the potential to reveal insightful voices (Arosteguy, 2009, pp. 6-8).

There is much to be gained by analyzing texts from these subgenres as they can offer something specific or interesting for feminist and cultural critique. Butler and Desai emphasize the necessity of intersectionality and the demands of attending to multiple forms of social difference. They argue that, "While the frame work of postfeminism hegemonically predetermines how chick lit is read … critical race feminist critiques, when coupled with a broader understanding of literary and cultural analysis, can proffer different interpretive hermeneutical and theoretical frameworks" and that "rather than simply dismissing chick lit or genre fiction as apolitical, retrograde, or fluffy, [they] suggest that there is much to be gained from readings that ask how, and why, this literature operates in regards to race, nation, and political economy" (Desai, 2008, p. 27).

### *Hello black African chick lit!*

An analysis of the subgenre of blafrican chick lit is essential in that the 21st century black middle class woman in South Africa can identify with the characters. The author of *Latina Like Me*, Alisa Valdes-Rodriquez says:

> If a novel by a Latina hit the shelves, I bought it. I wanted to read about someone like me … While I was impressed by the writings I found, I usually couldn't relate. Most 'Latinas' in American fiction were culturally isolated women who, as an editor once joked, 'always seemed to wash their clothes on a rock in the river,' women defined by an exotic ethnicity- women in other words who were more like my grandmother than they were like me (Valdes-Rodriguez, 19 August 2003).

It is necessary to bridge the gap between generations and to handle the issues that pertain to the modern South African woman who must balance between her professional and personal life as well as navigate between the traditional and the cosmopolitan. Butler and Desai argue that, "Chick lit and the practice of reading chick lit may expose as well as legitimate, may promote opposition as well as conformity to structures of power. That messiness, the sites of disidentification, and the ruptures and contradictions … can tell us something about the anxieties and issues at play in the chick lit" (Desai, 2008, p. 27). The significance of the black African chick lit novel is magnified by the lack of scholarship around it, hence it is the subject matter of this research.

While the question of black African chick lit is yet to be fully broached, there is a growing body of work on this, and related topics from which we can draw. In her PhD thesis Lynda Spencer draws on Njabulo Ndebele's thoughts that the ordinary is sobering rationality which forces attention on necessary details and that paying attention to the ordinary contributes to the growth of consciousness (Spencer, 2014, pp. 71, quoting Ndebele). She speaks about how the gathering of women to talk may be ordinary but it creates a space for them to imagine alternative possibilities for themselves and how chick lit as well as romance capture aspects of women's lives that are not addressed in other forms of writing (Spencer, 2014, p. 71). Because chick lit is usually written by women, it gives a specific and necessary insight to the pressures, fears and anxieties felt by women and because it is located in the popular, the female authors are at liberty to address the mundane and seemingly trivial aspects of their lives which if writing in a 'serious' genre and possibly with an audience of men, the authors possibly wouldn't feel at liberty to disclose. Stephanie Newell observes, "women

writers in Africa use romantic fiction to respond to what has been considered a male-dominated process. Women's fiction 'is a risk-taking art form in that it transcribes women's comments, moving the oral responses of audiences and readers into published narratives and expressing shared, but previously unwritten interpretation of domestic affairs'" (Newell, 1997, p. 397). Newell also expresses how romantic narratives [and I believe chick lit] are often regarded as 'learn-by-example' discourses which relate directly to their own experiences with the opposite sex, in the professional world and with one another as women (Newell, 2000, p. 144). Spencer says, "Romantic fiction may seem escapist, but love could also be read as a trope for the desire to change: not just for "an other", but for something other" (Spencer, 2014, p. 77 quoting Bryce & Dako 1999).

As mentioned above, this research seeks to speak specifically to the experiences of black women because as Cheryl De la Rey puts it, "we cannot talk about my experience of being a woman without talking about my race and my class" (De la Rey, 1997, p. 7). When speaking about the female experience within South Africa it would be a pivotal error to essentialize gender and assume that all women have a shared experience of patriarchy. According to Jacklyn Cock and Alison Bernstein,

> Before 1990 the majority of those South African women who had access to feminist literature and claimed political identity, were often living privileged lives financed by their husbands and serviced by black women they employed as domestic servants. While there were important exceptions, such as Ruth First, there was a tendency for these particular white, educated women to generalize from their own experience and prioritize their own needs in a set of feminist demands. The feminist voice that has been strongly heard in South Africa until very recently is that of an elitist feminism, more concerned with extending the power and privilege of middle-class women, than with total social transformation to eliminate the source of that privilege (Bernstein, 2001, p. 145).

This research rejects this essentialism of gender and as such recognizes that when addressing gender in Africa not only race and class need to be contextualized but further

historical and cultural contexts are fundamental. It is important that there be an understanding that within feminism there are times when commonalities exist, however there are also times when no common ground exists for women of color and white women. According to Mary Kolawole, "The attempt to globalize African women's experience and ignore cultural factors explains the negative attitude to feminism of many African women" (Kolawole, 2002, p. 94) A failure to address these differences is what caused an early rejection of feminism in South Africa as it was seen as something imported from America to ruin nice African families (Kolawole, 2002, p. 92). In line with the view of African feminism this research recognizes the need for ethnic and cultural specificities to be taken on board. However, with the evolving nature of culture as well as the multiplicity of cultures within the nation of South Africa the research does not purport to be fully representative and an accurate depiction of South African culture.

## *The Haunting of* Happiness

Wolfrey argues in *Victorian Hauntings* (2002) that 'to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns' so that 'all stories are, more or less, ghost stories' and all fiction is, more or less, hauntological. There is an anxiety about the way in which the past uses us to repeat itself. These ideas will be used in exploring the novel *Happiness* which is haunted by the pasts of the individual characters as well as national history. As I explain below in more detail, the novel traces the lives of four black middle class South African women. On the face of it, they lead Westernized and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Yet, they are always haunted by the specter of the township.

In tracing these themes of haunting, the idea of hauntology is useful. We can distinguish two directions in hauntology. The first refers to that which is no longer, but which is still effective as a virtuality (the traumatic ''compulsion to repeat,'' a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern). The second refers to that which has not yet happened, but which is already effective

in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behavior) (Fisher, 2012, p. 18). This research will take the first direction using the unseen township or rural South Africa as the spectral 'other' that haunts the narrative which plays out in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Because it is not given a physical presence in the novel it takes on a spectral quality; not physically present but having real effects on the narrative of the characters. Although the majority of the scenes take place in the suburbs these ghosts continuously influence the trajectories and narratives of the characters, there is the anxiety that the spectral creates an obfuscation of the possibility of novelty (Fisher, 2012). Through an exploration of these hauntings this research purports to see what issues and contradictions the genre of chick lit exposes, and how the experience of the modern black South African woman is interrupted by ghosts from the past.

### *What is the Township that Haunts?*

By setting the novel in the affluent and suburban side of Johannesburg, Cynthia Jele steps away from the common narratives of the city, in which an individual comes from the rural areas to the city and is corrupted by the lifestyle, ambition and people. The city is usually depicted as a place of moral decay and crime in comparison to the pastoral which is signified as pure and uncorrupted. Johannesburg in particular is heavily associated with the 'Jim comes to Joburg' narrative which demonstrates these themes. Where the city is depicted as cruel and hard, the township is seen as an extension of the city, a space on the margins of the city in which 'the community' lives. I use the words 'the community' which has become a euphemism in South Africa for black people and where they live (Callaghan, 2003). According to Mangaliso,

> The townships were created in concert with the migrant labor system which emerged in the days of the discovery of diamonds and gold and created a need for cheap labor. Since Africans were traditionally hunters and gathers or subsistence farmers, they were not too keen to leave their land and work in the mines. It therefore became necessary to coerce males to leave. One method of coercion was Pass Laws instituted by the Apartheid regime. African males sixteen years and

> older had to carry passes, which restricted their movements. They had to pay yearly poll tax in cash. The need for cash thus forced most to look for formal employment in the mines located in the urban areas (Mangaliso, 2002, pp. 197-198).

Inevitably some migrants settled in the towns and were joined by others seeking permanent employment and hence the township emerged. With the black migrant work force moving from the rural to urban areas a modern geographical and political invention was constructed through Afrikaner nationalist ideologies to separate blacks from whites (Ellapen, 2007, p. 114). According to Jordache Abner Ellapen, "Developed on the fringes of the cities, the township was a 'port' into major South African cities and a means of monitoring and controlling the urbanization of black South Africans" (Ellapen, 2007, p. 116). The dream of 'whiter' cities could not be fully realized because white people who inhabited the cities were dependent on the cheap black male labor in order to build the cities as well as black female labor in the domicile which essentially enabled 'whiteness.' I say black labor enabled whiteness literally, in that the hands of black male laborers built the cities and dug for the wealth that established the status and wealth of the white body, and black female hands kept the clothes and homes of white South Africans clean so they could live the clean and gentrified lives of their aristocrat counter parts in European nations. I also refer to it figuratively in the sense that in order for the white household to operate as it did, with the white male working a non-laboring job and the white female managing the home without having to physically exert herself, there was a definite need for the black laboring body. This laboring body had to be close at hand but not continuously sharing the same space, hence the township's marginal location.

According to Ellapen "the project of the township was to construct black identity and culture as premodern" (Ellapen, 2007, p. 114). The township space became a space of liminality and in-betweenness positioning the black body between modernity (represented by the city landscape) and pre-modernity (represented by the rural areas) (Ellapen, 2007, p. 117). Homi Bhabha says in the liminal space there is the production rather than the perpetuation of

cultural meaning (Trewick, 2003). As such we see how the liminal space of the township in South Africa was, and continues to be, a place of cultural production. The intention was to create a premodern black identity and with the original intent intact, this is still prominent to an extent as the township is perceived and depicted as a place in need of development, suffering from poverty, oversexualized black male bodies, violence and disease. According to Mupotsa,

> Colonial administration worked with African patriarchs in a process of codifying customary law, freezing traditions … This process had the result of inventing traditions if we follow Hobsbawm's definition of "traditions" as those practices which appear or claim to be old [but instead] are often quite recent in origin and are sometimes "invented" (Mupotsa, 2014, p. 15 quoting Hobsbawm ).

The codifying of supposed 'African tradition' was ill suited for a liminal space such as the township, it led to an invention of a static black identity that continues to be reproduced when representing the township. Liminality as per postcolonial theory evokes a space for hybridity and with the constant influx and movement of blacks between township spaces and other spaces, rural and urban, meant that there was a constant exchange of ideas, practices, opinions, cultures and belief systems contradicting the possibility of a single identity. "The township space became a place of convergence within which many black South Africans found their sense of belonging" (Ellapen, 2007, p. 117). However, the constraints of legislature as well as the intention to create a pre-modern identity for the black subject made it difficult for a fluid creation of identity.

The sense of belonging attached to the township must be renegotiated now that in post-Apartheid the black body has access to previously white-only suburban spaces. The urban black body then finds itself with little or no identification to the rural, an attachment to the hybrid culture of the township and a need to exhibit modernity and western traits in order to gain social upward mobility in the new South Africa. Keeping in mind that the percentage of blacks who now inhabit these previously white spaces is but a small fraction and therefore they do not represent the experiences of the majority, an investigation into their experiences,

which Jele depicts in her novel, does provide value in that it exposes the issues accompanying social upward mobility in white suburban South Africa for the black female body whose identity was formed in the township. This leads to an examination as to whether the issues remain the same regardless of geographically location, or whether as Foucault said, "Social spacialisation is an essential component of understanding everyday life and is used to create and ground social forms" (Ellapen, 2007, p. 119).

### *Reading the Chick Lit Novel*

This project seeks to understand the particular features of the South African chick lit novel. In order to put this project into practice, one requires a working definition of chick lit as a genre drawing on the scholarship I have cited above. Briefly put, the key features of such a definition would include the opposition as well as conformity to structures of power, the fallible protagonist, the negotiation between the personal, professional, social and domestic, the 'happily-ever-after' romantic narrative, and the move away from victim feminism by portraying female agency.

In this report, I undertake a close reading of *Happiness is a Four-Letter Word.* While pointing to the features that it shares with chick lit, I highlight those aspects of the novel that depart from, complicate or exceed these features. The fallibility of the characters as well as their ways of negotiating with the different roles they must play is analyzed as well as the ruptures and tensions with regards to structures of power will be explored to reveal the existing anxieties. And finally, within the four characters' narratives, the depictions of female agency through sex as well as consumerism is explored.

The choice of the novel over any other form of writing is due to its literariness. The chick lit novel is a work of popular fiction and popular genres are recognized as having literary forms.

Butler and Desai suggest that, "popular genre fiction can actually forward and/or incite critical race and transnational feminist critiques and understandings of feminist subjects" (Desai, 2008, p. 27). As opposed to simply working with the content, the form is used as a point of analysis. Moreover, the content is not used simply as sociological evidence but rather as a site from which to investigate further meaning. I use this piece of literature for its ability to do intellectual work. Chick lit - like any other cultural production - is not seamless in how it produces its subjects. Rather than reading literature simply as representing ideas and solutions, we understand reading to be about subject-formation and yoked to processes of (dis)identification (Desai, 2008, p. 27).

Novels are exploratory in that they do not ascribe meaning so definitively but instead allow the fictional world to generate its own significance. While the themes of consumption and professionalism in the novel may carry definite social messages of upward social mobility for the black female, on the other hand the romantic narratives appear to be less definite, and more open to meaning generated from the reader.

The literary aspect of this research is essentially a genre study that attempts to identify how we recognize genre and through this lens investigate how the novel conforms to or subverts the characteristics of chick lit. This will give insight into the extent that black middle-class women in South Africa share the modern female experiences of women from different races or ethnicities across the globe and how these experiences differ. I will also be considering the form itself, which appears to be saying there cannot be one single chick lit story, that there are multiple narratives that are unique in themselves, even within the same race, class and ethnicity, despite having some shared experiences. I approach my study by examining the plot of the novel by looking at the romantic narratives of the four main characters and the trajectories they follow. The problematic relationship between the chick lit and the romance novel sets the ground for an analysis of the trajectories of these relationships. The romantic narratives are discussed to access the personal, as the chick lit character has been described as the female bildungsroman, there is an examination of how the relationships

either conform or subvert the normative narratives. This investigation explores how far the South African chick lit follows the conventions of the broader genre. I discuss the manner in which the women navigate their relationships focusing specifically on the issues of fidelity, political economy and status. This exploration probes whether there is a perpetuation of victim feminism or if in fact in the realm of the personal, women are depicted as having agency, and if so to what extent. I consider the theme of consumption and the "right to consume." I look at physical locations described in the book; i.e. the restaurants, the spa, Sandton Convention Centre, and the unnamed bookstore in Sandton, presumably Exclusive Books. I use these sites of consumption to map out the location of the middle-class black South African female in the social hierarchy of South Africa. These themes show the agency gained by these women and explore if and how they conform to the global and cosmopolitan lifestyles represented in the normative chick lit novel and to what extent agency is in fact expressed through this consumption. Through the lens of both the romantic and the sites of consumption, I discover the extent of agency expressed by these women, if any, as this is an important thrust within the genre of chick lit. The agency of the women in the novel is restrained to an extent by what I call the ghost of the township. These are the spectral issues that form part of either political or cultural structures which have dictated the lives of black people in South Africa over the past few decades. I explore how societal norms for black South Africans, have been dictated around some of these constructs and how this at many times is to the detriment of the black woman.

The second chapter deals with the multi layered nature of the trajectories of the female protagonists in the narratives. A key feature of chick lit is the move away from victim narratives in order to portray the agency of women. Crucial to the genre is the depiction of females negotiating the complexities of the restrictive societal norms which contain and maintain gendered, racial and class identity. As my analysis will indicate, these are key concerns of Jele's novel. In '*Whose Culture are you Practicing'*, the issue of agency within a marriage is looked at and how the cultural restraints of being a woman must be negotiated or broken in order to express agency within the marital space. The equal rights promised in post-Apartheid South Africa can ostracize black women who practice them, particularly

within the private sphere. There is a tension between practicing these rights in the public sphere where there is an open call for women to be equal and having that equality practiced in the private sphere where it can be said patriarchy is still an expected norm in many black South African families. The pressure to conform to patriarchal domination in the home is external in the sense that judgement within the communities that most black women were raised in was and still is severe against women who choose to speak up against or challenge patriarchy in anyway. The pressure also comes from within, from the contradictory teachings of being submissive to the man in the household and the 'progressive' teachings about gender equality and rights. This is the paradox many women face as they explore their personal freedom within the context of the national freedom. I look at the global culture of young women dating older men for material gain in the section *'You Both Want a House'*. Where this is common place globally, when looked at through a transnational lens there is an historical context to black women being predisposed to attaching themselves to men, even men who are married, in order to be within the city space. There is a natural instinct of survival that cultivated this practice as well as systematic legislation which further encouraged this behavior. Although the legislation is no longer in place and the economic pressure may not be as dire, the mentality seems to echo and haunt the national narrative of black South African women.

*'Living Beijing'* analyses how post-Apartheid, the class distinction amongst blacks has become more defined with the political drive to empower the prehistorically disadvantaged race. I read into how the intersection of class has affected women with in the race group, although some black women are able to access a certain lifestyle on their own it is still primarily their male counterparts who are the true beneficiaries of Black Economic Empowerment. I discuss how by creating identities and societal roles which specific individuals could play, white patriarchy withheld the rights of black women to define their own realities and establish their own identities. I query whether white patriarchy, which consciously forced black females into the submission of the black male in order to control the entire race, isn't echoed in post-Apartheid South Africa where most women are still only able to access middle class living through attaching themselves to an 'empowered man.' The

purpose of this chapter is to expose that although these are the individual stories of the characters in the novel, they are also the story of the reader, as well as the story of the women from previous generations. The ability to identify with the issues the women in the novel experience is characteristic of chick lit and gives a shared sense of common experiences, however the ability to identify the issues of the present-day woman with those of women from generations passed creates a suffocating anxiety of the obfuscation of the possibility of newness. In this chapter, I explore how although the characters may feel that they are expressing agency, to an extent they are being used by the past to repeat itself. This understanding of history repeated is necessary to begin to engage with the postfeminist issues which are raised in the genre of chick lit, in a transnational manner.

In the third chapter of this research I take a closer look at being a woman in a patriarchal world by examining being a single woman, single motherhood and being a superfluous appendage to a man. When exploring single life for a black woman in modern South Africa, the anxiety around absent men comes to the fore as not an individual anxiety but rather a national one with women experiencing a deep anxiety of being alone or being left by men. The research looks at how issues of fertility and desirability are interlinked with a woman's self-worth. Deemed overly aggressive and unfeminine, 'bad single mother' are seen through the controlling image of the matriarch depicted in Patricia Hill Collins' work, this image is tested in a South African context. I explore how some women who would rather not break the mould and would rather take on the domestic, submissive role carved out by society. In post-Apartheid South Africa, this role offers upward social mobility and can allow a black woman to transcend race and class through practicing white femininity. However, although middle class respectability can be purchased through the practice of white femininity, the fact that the system is essentially patriarchal threatens this new purchase and places a woman, despite race or class, in a dispensable position within the family structure. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the advances for women in the public sphere are translated in the private sphere. In gaining certain equalities, to what extent are women still restricted in forging their own identities because of the stereotypical images which control what women desire to be perceived as.

I end my chapter by taking a glimpse at the level of complicity with patriarchy that the genre shows, albeit through this single text. This reflexive analysis is a necessary exercise for any work that purports to have an intention, as it is possible for the intention to be lost or diluted in the execution of the task. Gqola calls for a response to the work of female writers and I look at the ways in which the genre of chick lit plays into the stereotypes about women and this research seeks to respond by being cognizant of the ways in which the genre can be empowering for women but also the ways that this may perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes of women. As Spencer describes the terrain as messy, it is necessary to sort through the mess and identify and be aware of how we can be simultaneously empowered and oppressed in our own writing.

Given the constraints of this thesis, I have chosen one novel out of the many chick lit novels written by and about black South African women, because at the time of my writing it is recognized as a recent prominent example of chick lit in the media (Tjiya, Feb 09, 2016) (Mkhwanazi, 04 Mar 2016) (Publishers, 23 March 2016). The recent adaption to a major motion picture was produced by Bongiwe Selani, a black South African woman which speaks to women amplifying one another's voices. The success of the feature film has intensified the success of the novel with most bookstores having sold out or having very limited copies of the novel the week after the movie's release.[2] These factors are relevant as the success of the text (in terms of the large numbers of readers) speaks to its identifiability as a novel. This success is important as one of the main characteristics of chick lit is the reader's ability to relate to the characters in the novel and their shortcomings. In terms of selecting this novel for analysis, my choice was made due to the ways in which the novel both conforms and departs from the characteristics of the greater genre of chick lit. I also contemplated the fact that this novel focuses on the South African experience which allows me to narrow my research to a rather specific location.

[2] This was my personal experience at various Exclusive Books stores.

## ***Chapter** 2: Negotiating the Paradoxes of Patriarchy*

The novel *Happiness* is centered around the narratives of four black South African female characters, Nandi, Tumi, Zaza and Princess. It gives access to their personal and professional lives, in which they are dealing directly or indirectly with the struggle of a maneuvering within a patriarchal system. The novel follows these four friends living their lives in the affluent suburbs of Johannesburg, in post-Apartheid South Africa. This novel was adapted into a highly successful film (which due to constraints of space will not be included in this thesis).

Although the novel is a multi-protagonist narrative, Nandi appears to be the linking factor between the four women. Nandi is a Chartered Accountant at a local firm at which she is about to be made the first black female partner. She is in a relationship with her fiancé Thomas and the narrative is a build up toward their wedding. Tumi is friends with Nandi through Nandi's ex, Chris who left Nandi in the lurch when he was offered an opportunity to work in London. In the novel, Chris has just returned and is attempting to woo Nandi who still has a soft spot for him, something which will cause major complications in Nandi's relationship with Thomas. Tumi is a school teacher, married to Tshepo a young black wealthy business owner. Their relationship appears to be perfect despite their failure to have a child. Tumi is completely taken aback when she is approached by a young lady, Nomkhosi, who claims to be carrying Tshepo's child. This leads to a tumultuous time in which Tshepo vehemently denies any knowledge of the girl or the baby. Eventually he confesses and they make a decision to try to patch together their marriage.

Princess, a housemate turned lifelong friend of Nandi's, is a cut-throat lawyer who has mandated herself to defend women. She is single and free in her sexual endeavors never keeping one partner for more than a few weeks. She falls in love with a Zimbabwean artist, who impregnates her and disappears having stolen from her in order to feed his drug

addiction. She eventually finds him in hospital and it appears that she forgives him and that they will continue their relationship. Zaza and Nandi grew up together in the township and refer to each other as 'blood friends' (Jele, 2010, p. 61). Zaza is married to Bheki a wealthy black man who has been empowered by the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies put in place to alleviate black poverty, and create equal opportunities for blacks after apartheid. Zaza runs a charity organization as well as an imported shoe store. She and Bheki have two boys and she identifies herself as trophy wife (Jele, 2010, p. 67). Zaza is having an extramarital affair with Bongani, a young business man she met at one of the social events she attends with her husband. She gets anxious when he decides to leave his wife for her as she does not want to risk losing her marriage and the security it provides. She ends the affair and is determined that her husband never finds out and so has to push Bongani back towards his family and wife, Lebo, who has told Zaza in no uncertain terms that if she doesn't get her husband back then "she will not go down alone" (Jele, 2010, p. 265)

Jele moves away from depicting the township spaces as the living space for blacks and rather interjects them into suburbia, an historically typical white space and develops the narrative from here. The narrative plays out like any other chick lit novel with all the designer names, signature restaurants, expensive toys and lifestyles firmly locating it in the global culture surrounding the genre. Despite apartheid having ended twenty years ago, having black bodies in this white space is not yet a fully accepted norm in the sense that many black people living in suburban South Africa now either grew up in the township themselves or else still have parents or family living there. This is the case with the characters in the novel: Nandi and Zaza grew up together in the township (Jele, 2010, p. 61) and Tumi and Princess both make references to their parents still living there (Jele, 2010, p. 118 & 259). As such chick lit can be seen as a utopia for Africanness of sorts, and true to the features of the genre it steers away from the victim narrative, which for South African women would be poverty, disease and violence usually associated with black women in township, and rather presents a progressive and positive image of black women, working in corporate South Africa, living in and buying beautiful homes and generally experiencing a sense of well-being. However, to portray an honest albeit optimistic image of the urban black woman which the reader can

still identify with, which is one of the major aims of the genre, there are intrinsic aspects and predicaments of the black woman, rural, township or urban dwelling that would ring false if completely ignored. In this chapter I investigate some of these intricacies (fidelity, political economy and status to name a few) by analyzing the romantic relationships that each of the four women are engaged in and to what extent they truly experience the agency to which their lifestyles seem to speak.

### *Whose Culture are You Practicing?*

Tumi's husband Tshepo started a local IT company which experienced great success culminating in a major investment by a big international player. They are well off and it shows in the lifestyle they lead, with the big house in Kyalami, an affluent suburb in Johannesburg, the trips with the girls, as well as the regular patronage of restaurants in upmarket areas like Melrose Arch. It is clear that this lifestyle cannot be attained solely through Tumi's school teacher salary, despite the fact that she teaches at a private school. Tshepo suggests that Tumi take a few years off work to focus on having a child as they have been trying for some years (Jele, 2010, p. 136). This speaks to the fact that a loss of her income will not lead to a significant change in the financial status of the family. It is interesting to observe that when the fight around Tshepo's extra-marital affair begins, Tumi's immediate reaction is to leave their house. Her departure could appear to have cultural links to most black traditions in southern Africa which stipulate that the woman marries into the man's home, there is usually a bride price (lobola) paid and then the woman becomes an addition to *his* family. Danai Mupotsa explains that it is important to recognize that lobola is not a static or fixed process but that the definite intention surrounding the negotiations is to build relations between two families and for the woman to be passed over into the male's family. She highlights,

> For instance, in the bride's "arrival" at her new home, in her being dressed in clothes intended to signal her symbolic entry to the "family" as well as in rituals specifically related to her fertility. It is a process that seems unending, for even when children are born into the

> marriage, exchanges and relations marking the child's belonging to the patrilineal kin continue this process (Mupotsa, 2014, p. 15).

For these reasons if a dispute happens the woman leaves her marital home to return to her parent's home as the marital home was originally and is always the man's and she is simply an addition to it. Everything that is accrued in the marriage belongs to the husband and his family as they have essentially paid for the woman to become a part of their family. This includes children. Yet, despite these traditions, Tumi does not return to her parent's home. Instead she stays the night at Nandi's. Lynda Spencer speaks of an alternative family, a self-selected one that meets women's needs and replaces familial bonds in a modern society (Spencer, 2014, p. 93). In a similar manner to the shift experienced when rural dwellers made the transition to urban dwellers, there appears to be a shift within the urban dwellers as those who migrate out of the townships into suburban South Africa begin to form new practices suited to their geographical location.

In due course Tumi returns home but in no time, there is a second altercation and Tumi again decides to leave:

> As she was packing her bags into her car a thought abruptly entered her mind. Why was she running away like one who was guilty when it wasn't she who had committed adultery? (Jele, 2010, p. 221).

Two things appear significant, the first being that Tumi begins to question her own instinctive action to leave. She asks 'Why?' It is clear that Tshepo's instincts are the same, when Tumi instructs him to please leave, he responds, "What?" (Jele, 2010, p. 214). We read that there is arrogance in his response, this stems from the fact that the patriarchy of culture would not have him told what to do by a woman, and secondly would not allow for a woman to remove him from his home. It is possible that Tumi's actions are a result of the space she lives in and the cultural context in which their marriage is being played out. This idea is reinforced by the fact that she threatens him with police intervention. In white suburban Kyalami, a call from a wife to remove her 'threatening' black husband (even if he is not) will

be dealt with immediately. This feeds into the constructed identity of the black male body as violent and dangerous, therefore it will be received and treated as a priority in order to keep the other inhabitants of this now shared space (shared by blacks and whites) safe. This same domestic situation playing out in the township is unlikely to warrant the same attention. The cultural systems operating in this space enable and empower Tumi to take over the marital home during their marital dispute.

Tumi begins to rationalize and reason, she identifies that she is not the one guilty of an affair and therefore she is not in the wrong and for this reason she should not be the one punished or put into discomfort. Her manner of reasoning is to evaluate who is guilty and who should take blame. We see how distinctly different this is to what black South African culture would stipulate as Tumi visualizes what her mother would say to her if she knew she had kicked her husband out of their home.

> You threw a man out of his own house? Modimo, what nonsense is this my child? Who gave you this idea? I don't care what marital troubles you're going through, but chasing a man out of his own house doesn't solve anything. Whose culture are you practicing, huh? Are you a white woman now? What are you going to do next time you have an argument – slap him in the face? Do you even know where he's staying and with whom? My child, a man is a man. A man is the head of the family and deserves to be treated with respect, no matter how angry you are with him (Jele, 2010, p. 247).

The voice of her mother represents what black township culture would prescribe in this case. We see the emphasis of 'his own house' which is repeated. This speaks to the fact that the house does not belong to Tumi but rather to Tshepo, the man. There is the reiteration of tolerance from the female's side due to gender dominance, 'I don't care what marital troubles you're going through … a man is a man.' The mom's opinion is that because he is a man he deserves to be treated with respect despite his actions. This speaks to the fact that men can do as they please and retain respect yet there are so many things that a woman can do to fall into disrespectability - actions such as throwing one's husband out of the house. Questions

are posed, 'Whose culture are you practicing? Are you a white woman now?' She suggests that this is not found in their culture and goes as far as to racialize this. It is a clear indication of the mental space that Tumi is occupying, likely because of the physical space she is in. The system of reasoning she is using is rather feminist, speaking to males and females as equals who should then negotiate from equal ground, and westernized in that a wife can speak back to her husband without fear of serious repercussions. This mentality can be linked to her current geographical space: this can be seen as an appropriation of the culture of the suburbs as it is clear what she was taught in the township where she was raised. This internal paradox is reflected on a national scope where South Africa is a democracy which supports gender equality in its constitution, however Mupotsa points out that,

> The irony as it is presented is that the same constitution supports a legal structure premised on customary laws that are fundamentally patriarchal and problematic, in fact anti-constitutional. The worked dichotomy between modern civil codes and traditional or customary practices presumed to be initially outside of "the Law", and brought into its language through a process of codification by missionaries, native administrators and members of a black elite. These processes reflect not only a desire to enter African customs into a civilizing "Law" and "language", but have the effect of fossilizing cultural practices in the location of "origins", or "roots", read against a progressive teleos and this origin is frozen here as always already patriarchal.

There is an inconsistency in the law that at once empowers and oppresses the black female and this inconsistency at a national level is reflected in the private sphere of Tumi's marriage.

The shock and dismay at Tumi's actions is reflective of the early rejection of feminism by Africans. Kolawole quotes, "Feminism. You know how we feel about that embarrassing western philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African homes" (Kolawole, 2002, p. 93 quoting Aidoo). This is the dilemma the urban black South African woman is faced with, either asserting her rights and using the systems enshrined by western governments to support these rights or ascribing to culture which is the place most identify with, as it is the location and basis of most women's upbringing. In

this case Tumi clearly chooses to use the social structures available to her in the suburbs but both she and Tshepo are very aware that this drama must play out in the suburbs as there is no place for it in the township. However, Tumi's mothers voice speaks to her in a spectral way reminding her of who she is and where she is from. She chooses to ignore this and forge a new identity where she is located.

Despite her show of agency in kicking Tshepo out of the home, Tumi still has reservations or fears about him truly leaving. She has a dream that he comes to tell her he is leaving her for Nomkhosi, and she starts driving past the guest lodge where he is staying in the evenings to see if his car is there, to her satisfaction it always is. (Jele, 2010, p. 232 ) She muses,

> Tshepo and Tumi Modise.
>
> Mr. and Mrs. Modise.
>
> Miss Tumi Modise.
>
> No, Miss Tumi Tladi.
>
> She quickly withdrew the thought (Jele, 2010, p. 211).

Tumi cannot think of herself on her own because she clearly loves her husband but it cannot be ignored that without her role as Mrs. Modise there would be a definite change in financial status as well as social status. Even though Tumi expresses her agency by kicking Tshepo out, it is apparent that this is neither permanent or sustainable. Thinking back to her mother's words, "Do you even know where he is staying and with whom? My child, a man is a man" (Jele, 2010, p. 247) it is clear who would be blamed by the family and township society for the divorce if it were to come to that. This statement speaks to the identity created about black men in the township as oversexualized. Because of this identity, it is assumed and even acceptable that if chased out by his wife a man will immediately find sexual relations elsewhere. Not only will she be looked at as less of a woman because she is divorced but the community, outside of the suburbs will condemn her actions rather than his. Furthermore, her salary alone cannot fund the lifestyle she lives, and despite being in the suburbs and

appearing to live by the social ideals of the location, Tumi ultimately forgives Tshepo's infidelity.

### *You Both Want a House*

Where Tumi appears bound to an extent by the specter of the township despite being in the suburbs one wonders if this is the same for Nomkhosi, the young lady who engages in the affair with Tshepo. Approaching this notion with caution, an investigation into the social norms for young girls from the township entering relationships with men could offer some enlightenment. The endeavor of this course of enquiry is not to discover who was to blame for the affair but rather to investigate the lenses from which the relationship would have been viewed by both Tshepo and Nomkhosi. A study conducted with pregnant teenagers in a South African township revealed widespread male coercion and violence within sexual relationships (Jewkes, 1997, p. 41). The study found that for most of these young ladies, "the agreement 'to love' … was equated specifically with having penetrative intercourse and being available sexually … as one adolescent woman explained, 'he told me that if I accepted him as a lover we had to engage in sexual intercourse, and do the things that adults do'" (Jewkes, 1997, p. 42). The research goes on to reveal that these relationships are not purely based on the 'love' spoken of but are "often contractual in nature, with the girl being expected to have penetrative sex when the man want[s] it, in exchange for presents of money, clothes, school fees, and food" (Jewkes, 1997, p. 42). These girls are also threatened against having any other interactions with males besides their particular lover, yet the men are not held to this same standard, furthermore the men set the rules for the relationship, stipulating when, how and where to engage in sexual intercourse (Jewkes, 1997, p. 43). This research notably has its limitations in that it was carried out with teenage girls, markedly younger than the character Nomkhosi, as well as the research itself being quite dated. However, there is something to be gleaned from these experiences. Nomkhosi refers to going home to her parents in the township in Kwa Zulu Natal indicating this is where she grew up. It is possible that as a teenager herself, if she was not engaged in such a relationship, it is highly likely that she

witnessed such relationships occurring around her. Such exposure programs an individual to accept the things they see as an inevitable part of relationships. There is the possibility that Nomkhosi carried this perception of relationships with her into her adult life in the suburbs of Johannesburg.

When we look closely at the relationship that she and Tshepo shared, it appears to fit the brief. In Tshepo's confession to Tumi he says, "the whole thing was my fault, Tumi. I wasn't honest with her. I painted a wrong picture, made her think our marriage was folding … I don't know what happened, it's as if I opened my eyes one day and Nomkhosi was there, available and eager" (Jele, 2010, p. 256). The expression 'Nomkhosi was there, available and eager' speaks to the mentality of the males in the research who see young females as available for sexual engagement. In this statement Tshepo again feeds into the constructed identity of oversexualized males in the township with no control of their sexuality. The statement about Nomkhosi being 'available and eager' also speaks to Tumi's mothers chastising, "a man is a man" (Jele, 2010, p. 247) suggesting that the black male body has a lack of sexual restraint and self-discipline. Tshepo uses this in his explanation-cum-apology to his wife and as such appropriates this constructed identity of the black male body.

Although Tshepo's coercion is not as aggressive as the violence of the township males, his is equally as predatory. His manipulative method is to convince her that his wife is not in the picture and that he too is available. He does this verbally as well as by the actions of taking her into his marital home (Jele, 2010, p. 183). What can be noted here is that even if he had not implied he was not with his wife, it would still be acceptable to a young girl raised in the township to have a partner who is unfaithful. As Jewkes states, "it was normal for men to sustain double standards, taking multiple sex partners for themselves, while disallowing their regular girlfriend from even speaking to other men" (Jewkes, 1997, p. 43).

Tshepo appears to have been fulfilling his side of the contractual love faithfully as we see he takes her on trips to Cape Town, expensive dates and we also see how tastefully her apartment is furnished with a rug like one that is in Tumi's home (Jele, 2010, p. 136 & 232). Tshepo appears to play out the stereotypical predator of the township male in his behavior even with his wife. "'We should use protection' she whispered nervously … ****, Tumi, I don't believe this!' He jerked away from her and rolled over onto his back. His face was full of hard anger. 'You don't just pull **** like this out of nowhere!'" (Jele, 2010, p. 150). Tshepo's anger is palpable at the suggestion of using protection with his wife. At this stage, he is still in denial about the affair so the suggestion to use protection indicates that Tumi does not believe him. However, this is also symbolic of his psyche which is to be in control of his sexual relationships. From the research, it was found that, "Men also controlled the relationships in other ways. Several girls described how their partners had torn up their clinic contraceptive cards in anger … thus for some, protection against pregnancy in the form of 'invisible' hormonal methods appeared to be non-negotiable" (Jewkes, 1997, p. 43). In this case Tumi and Tshepo having been trying for a child for many years, the suggestion of using protection is not against pregnancy, but rather against infection as Tumi is unsure of his fidelity. There is something about this suggestion that truly enrages Tshepho to the extent that he does not speak to her for days afterwards. What is it that is so non-negotiable about a woman protecting herself whether against pregnancy or infection? The issue is one of control. This same desire to control could possibly have been used on Nomkhosi, resulting in her pregnancy. As mentioned this is not an investigation into blameworthiness, as both Nomkhosi and Tshepo are consenting adults, rather an attempt to understand the frame of mind of the individuals engaging in the affair. Despite this identity being one constructed to "other" the black male body, one constructed on behalf of the black male and not being a true identity, it still has bearing on Tshepo's emancipated mindset. Although he is out of the township and living in the suburbs, he still partly carries the identity of himself constructed in the township.

Is Nomkhosi the victim of a predatory Tshepo or is she more of the girls described by Nandi, "the Kgomotsos and Thandis of this world [that will] snatch him" (Jele, 2010, p. 75) She says,

"Girls these days are ruthless. They don't care who they mess with. They take any man who can buy them airtime and cocktails at News Café" (Jele, 2010, pp. 107-108). These girls described by Nandi are ones who find economic freedom through attaching themselves to a man able to provide for them. Residing in the peripheral townships, unable to afford the lifestyle in the city and with the odds stacked against them to ever truly succeed due to their background, these women use what they have, namely their bodies, sex and their youth, to barter with men who have access to wealth, in order to attain social upward mobility. These women Nandi describes sound like the evolved versions of the contractual love spoken of by the township girls in Wood and Jewkes research (1997). As Deborah Posel's 'Marriage at the Drop of a Hat' (Posel, 2006) indicates, these patterns could have a longer history. She narrates how the Natives Affairs Commissioner in 1938 said that the Natives (Urban Area) Act of 1923, "did contain provisions to banish 'idle' [native] women from urban areas" yet many authorities regarded the terms as "unduly restrictive, and complained that they lacked effective measures for 'exterminating the nuisances'" (Posel, 2006, p. 61). This described the phenomenon where, "countrywide, [black] women were migrating townwards, fleeing the rigors of rural poverty and patriarchy, or journeying in search of errant husbands" (Posel, 2006, p. 61). During this period, there was a massive influx of black women into the townships and towns in search of economic relief. These women were perceived as a nuisance and there was an insistence that they were "'undesired and undesirable women … [and] loose women … under no control" (Posel, 2006) and that they be controlled in some way. According to Posel, "These broadsides were saturated with familiar colonial assumptions about the rapacious lust of African men and the essential lasciviousness of African women. From this standpoint, the rigors of marriage were indispensable, imposing some order of discipline on otherwise boundless sexual urges" (Posel, 2006, p. 60).

The authorities could not institute the same movement restriction on females as they did the men as this would have been seen as a usurping of the black male authority and would likely lead to explosive opposition to the presumed "challenge to the African manhood. The problem was deemed to be females with a lack of rehabilitative male authority, therefore for the state to intervene and seize male authority would be counterproductive" (Posel, 2006, p.

62). With the restriction of state housing to married couples only, "Here was an opportunity for a suitably mediated intervention which did not displace the authority of the man, but rather acted to prop up that authority at an apparently appropriate remove from the 'private' realm of gender relations" (Posel, 2006, p. 62). Thus, the introduction of the 'Hat Marriages.' To put pressure on the native black population living in urban spaces to enter marriages, the government made it a condition in order to access housing. Posel recounts,

> African men and women in search of state housing would assemble at the office of the Native Commissioner. While the women waited outside, the men were instructed to leave their hats, and leave the room. The hats were lined up on a table, and the women filed in. Each one selected a hat, and was married, there and then, to its owner (Posel, 2006, p. 57).

This was a marriage forced out of necessity, a marriage based on economic upward mobility, "It amounted to choosing a hat, because the man wanted a house as well as you wanted a house, so you only get married because you both want a house" (Posel, 2006, p. 57).

Nandi says, "I blame the men for flashing their wealth from empowerment deals and whatnot and enticing young women. I imagine it's not easy for these girls to say no to money for weaves and Guess bags in exchange for the occasional bump and grind" (Jele, 2010, p. 108). Today the spectacle of 'blessers and blessees' has horrified and fascinated the population. This is where an older wealthy man *openly* engages in a contractual relationship with a young woman in which sex is exchanged for material gain. The fascination and horror is not at the existence of such liaisons, but rather at the formalization of this transaction as well as to the openness of it, where there are websites to engage in such a relationship as well as television shows documenting these contractual relationships. These women feel they are displaying a form of agency by choosing who their blesser is, as well as making the decision to be a blessee. They are accessing a lifestyle that they may never be able to attain on their own economic standing and as such they feel they too are entitled to enjoy the benefits that BEE and the new South Africa is offering to the historically disadvantaged black population.

However, they may simply be 'picking hats.' Echoing the situation in 1938 where the black male body is given access to some resources in the city, although in this case empowerment programs, based on gender in a patriarchal system. Some females are empowered although they are few and far between (this is the subject matter of the section below), and as such the black female body finds itself as a nuisance, without agency and therefore looking for a male body to attach itself to in order to gain access to the resources available. It is ironic how the past uses us to repeat itself, the Kgomotsos and the Thandis are not inventive in their ways of survival, it is an inbuilt instinct and a mental programming that pre-dates even their mothers. Despite the novel playing out in the well-off side of Johannesburg, and despite Jele displaying facets of chick lit through the sites of consumption, there is a national history that appears to haunt the narrative, a history which is not yet fully been extinguished from the seemingly new pages of the South African novel. This creates the anxiety that the spectral obfuscates the possibility of novelty (Fisher, 2012).

### *Living Beijing*

At one-point Nandi observes: "I think our generation was different. We strived for independence. We didn't look to men to provide for us. We footed our own bills – going fifty-fifty wasn't just an empty phrase. We were living Beijing [a reference to the 1995 World Conference on Women]" (Jele, 2010, p. 108). Nandi grew up in the township the same as Zaza, however Nandi's father is a judge and she herself is a Chartered Accountant, indicating that both she and her father had access to tertiary education. Although she grew up in the township she cannot fully be representative or speak on behalf of women from the township as she is not the same as Zaza who barely got her high school and even describes herself as "an uneducated township girl" (Jele, 2010, p. 93). When Nandi speaks of 'her generation' which was different, her positionality cannot be synced with that of township women who would have no understanding of what it meant to 'live Beijing.' When Beijing happened in 1995, independence for South Africa would only have been a year old, as such, the situation for the average black woman would not have changed significantly. So, when Nandi speaks

of a generational difference she, despite being a black woman raised in the township, is speaking from a class privileged position. The practicality of what she speaks of 'going fifty-fifty' with men reveals the extent of her privilege, where the average township woman has limited education and is raised in poverty with little or no prospects, she is unlikely to be passionate about paying half a bill to assert her equality. Nandi can go fifty-fifty on house payments with both Chris and Thomas, their romantic narratives starting in places like the Sandton Convention Centre and Exclusive Books in Sandton Mall respectively, with personal issues discussed over cocktails or at the spa with her friends. She is clearly no longer just a township girl like Zaza, but instead represents the emergent black middle-class female who has access to global consumption on her own account. As the two grew up together in the township, it is only natural to compare their trajectories. Zaza who has access to this lifestyle but as a superfluous appendage to a male- she can easily loose her access, she is not the same as Nandi who has an education and more of a stake in this lifestyle.

Jele could be creating the separation between township and suburb to create a progressive view of the urban black middle-class woman in South Africa. This narrative steps away from the continuous black victim story that authors present when writing about the black female body. Instead Jele puts the black female mind on the political landscape and presents it as an active participant and player. In line with the ethos of the chick lit genre, she speaks to the representation of a black woman who is not so weighed down by economic challenges, by the basic need to survive, but rather one who is globally conscious and capable of consuming and appropriating intellectual premises like the one 'Beijing' represents. This puts black South African women on the academic map not only as consumers of global knowledge but also as producers as Jele, the authors of *The Madams*, *The 30th Candle* and *Behind every Successful Man*, to name a few, demonstrated in the writing of the black African chick lit novel.

Being resident in the northern suburbs and to an extent oblivious to the reasons behind the behaviors of the women she stereotypes as the Kgomotsos and Thandis of this world, Nandi

embodies a set of contradictions that arise in part from apartheid space itself. Where apartheid shored up the geographical landscape and put distance between races, it appears a new sense of distance is constructed with the distinguishing factor being class. There is a disconnect from these 'other girls' and 'the community 'where the people live' and it is symbolized by the suburban sites set out in the book. This distance embodies the upward social mobility of the black female in South Africa, but this is done at the expense of perpetuating a discourse of the peculiar other who lives in the township. The reader is left without a lens to view the perspective from the township besides the brief description when Princess goes there to visit her father. When she is in the township, the only moment where the novel steps out of affluent Johannesburg is when we hear the narrative of a friend of Princess's, ironically named Kgomotso, born in a family considered wealthy by township standards, but dead at the age of twenty-eight from AIDS. For a reader with no prior knowledge of the country, the identity of the township dweller becomes set and one dimensional, one of violence, drugs, sex and death. Without any exposure to the complexities of the African subject or the 'peculiarities of African culture', the identity of the township dweller, as traditional African and pre-modern gains more and more currency. This said, in order to write within the genre of chick lit, perhaps Jele did not want the novel to do the work of constructing the identity of the township dweller but rather the suburban dweller. This reveals the complexity of writing a novel that is true to the chick lit genre and at the same true to the narrative of the black South African woman.

Nandi is a Chartered Accountant, this is a specialized profession and as such she is likely to be remunerated quite well. She appears to be the kind of woman who can 'live Beijing' and stand on her own financially. She seems to be empowered in the new South Africa, however she is one of the few women who are experiencing this empowerment. Nandi points out that there are only forty or so women who work at the same firm as her, the suggestion is that this is a small fraction of the whole. One of these women who Nandi says she considers a friend is a secretary, so not one of the professionals like Nandi. It is evident that this is a vast improvement from five years ago, when Nandi joined the firm, she says "the female head count was less than six, middle-aged white males ruled the office [and] every woman's name

was Tjerie" (Jele, 2010, pp. 48-49). There appears to be great improvement from this period however, as Bernstein so succinctly puts it,

> The fear is that as the concept of black empowerment may shrivel and reduce to the creation of a black, business class, the concept of empowerment of women will reduce to the creation of a few women politicians and managers (Bernstein, 2001, p. 148).

Nandi is made a partner and is welcomed into the big boys club, clearly indicating that this is a male dominated space and that she is one of the few, privileged as a female to be accommodated, rather than accepted in. There is further indication that she is privileged to be welcomed in as a black individual as we see the that Le Roux and Associates just concluded a BEE deal a year ago to become Le Roux, Mathaba and Associates (Jele, 2010, p. 133). As a black female in these upper echelons of the corporate ladder, Nandi represents progress but hardly genuine transformation. The corporate ladder is essentially now opened to the black individual as suggested by the name change, however the big boys club has not changed its status. Instead there is an invite extended for select females to join the club, though it remains essentially a 'boys' club. This acceptance into the boy's club speaks to a shared experience by all women despite race which continuously needs to be addressed, however the fact that 'Mathaba' a black name has only recently been added to the name of the firm indicates that it is crucially important to assert an indigenous feminism with a transformative promise and potential, which will represent the unique issues of the urban black woman in South Africa. A black woman high up the corporate ladder is not yet a norm; this speaks to the complexity of the intersection of being a black and a woman. By essentializing race and failing to address the needs of black women specifically, there will be a generalized progress for women which will result in a few 'token Nandi's' in every company and organization.

Nandi has made partner on the grounds of her hard work but also based on the fact that BEE legislation has created room for the black body, male and female, to occupy these spaces in corporate South Africa. As partner, she will now be allowed access to a space she was

previously denied. This access is granted for necessities sake. Black females are a necessity now in the corporate world, in a similar way, domestic labor was required in the past. They're treated with the same sentiments, a grudging acceptance and occasionally respect. BEE appears to echo the Pass Laws which gave the black body access to previously all white spaces, however the bodies are there to labor for the white body. There are still only a few women who are given access to the upper echelons of corporate society, the rest who are not being used in some form of employment are like the nuisance spoken of earlier. The black bodies given these 'passes' must work, albeit this is no longer manual and domestic labor, it is labor nonetheless. As Bernstein suggests above, a few black women can become managers and politicians. Both positions are still employed positions, they represent how black women have yet to truly cross the threshold from employee to employers. The aspiration is still to be employed and paid well as opposed true transformation where they themselves become the employers. Zine Magubane states how the idea is reinforced that 'the highest form of freedom is the freedom to sell one's own labor power and use the proceeds to fuel further consumption' (Magubane, 2008, p. 222). Nandi seems to represent this phenomenon, working a professional with a decent salary that allows her to spend on a few luxury items. It is not immediately apparent that the black body is still used as a laboring body, there is simply a creation of new roles for black women to fill. This echoes the domestic work that was previously given to black females, these are still jobs and at the mercy of the white employer.

Princess presents an interesting case study in that she lives her life completely independent of men, she is neither financially nor emotionally dependent on any man at the opening of the narrative. Since Jele has used geographical mapping in the novel as a social mobility indicator, it is interesting to note that Princess does not live in the suburbs but rather in Johannesburg city. This speaks to the fact that a black woman on her own economic strength cannot fully attain the life depicted in the novel. Despite Princess consuming from some of the same sites of consumption as the other ladies, she is distinguished by her lack of a male and this is reflected in the area of her domicile. This speaks to the fact that despite Apartheid coming to an end as well as economic measures to empower those who are prehistorically

disadvantaged, black women still cannot access suburban Johannesburg on their own economic strength.

It is clear that the fear from the 1930's of black women described as "undesired and undesirable women … [and] loose women … under no control" (Posel, 2006) is still a reality. The 'control' spoken of when describing these women, is male authority, and Princess represents such women in that she rebelled against her father at a young age and does not appear to have the desire to commit to any man at the beginning of the narrative. The fact that she regularly changes sexual partners without an issue represents a sexuality that may be perceived as threatening to the male ego. She is the undesirable woman who needs to be controlled. An echo of these tactics persists into the present. Although there is no indication that Princess is suffering financially living in the city, she is however vulnerable. She is confident about the security in her building- she reminds herself that "They live in a well-secured high-rise with a compound gate, security guards, a twenty-four-hour neighborhood patrol and a secure main entrance with cameras" (Jele, 2010, p. 24). The city being mapped as an undesirable location to live is contrasted with the safety of the suburbs where none of the other three ladies need to remind themselves about what security their premises have. To gain the lifestyle that is lived in the suburbs she would need to attach herself to a man who she can 'go fifty-fifty' with or a man who can take care of her. In essence, she needs to 'pick a hat' to have not only the financial security, but also the ancient idea of physical security and protection; having a man.

Princess is described as having short hair and preferring trousers to dresses. Her physical description, speaks to the image of a conventional type of feminist wanting to shed some of her feminine traits and rather take on masculine attribute. She and Zaza have an ongoing conflict as they seem not to understand each other's characters. Zaza is characterized as the epitome of femininity: a mother of two, desiring to be seen as attractive, even saying of herself, "she was expected to look good. She was, after all, a trophy wife, as they said" (Jele, 2010, p. 69). Princess seems to condescend to this typical soft expression of femininity, but

interestingly enough she feels compelled to protect it. We see her desire to defend these defenseless 'soft' women in her career as a brutal lawyer defending women against men and helping them to assert their rights. It's clear that she feels she needs to be masculine in order not to be a victim of masculinity and this is even reflected in her sexual life where she takes on rather typically male behavior of sleeping with multiple men and rejecting any emotional relationship. Unlike Nandi who is ambivalent in her views of independence, wanting to be free but have a man who will go fifty-fifty with her, Princess's independence is just that; no dependence on a man at all. She represents an anxiety of a woman outside male authority.

What is the preoccupation with the black woman 'out of control?' One way to think about this question is via Patricia Hill-Collins who speaks to the fact that binary thinking sees people, things and ideas in terms of their difference from one another. This is to say, white/black, male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, fact/opinion, mind/body, and subject/object gain meaning only in *relation* to the 'other,' their counterparts (Collins, 2000, p. 70 quoting Halpin 1989). More specifically these 'others' "threaten the moral and social order. But they are simultaneously essential for [society's] survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries. [Black] women, by not belonging, emphasize the significance of belonging" (Collins, 2000, p. 70). This process of objectification of the 'other' involves thinking of difference in oppositional terms, one part is not simply different from the other, it is inherently opposed to the 'other' and not complementary. When one element is objectified as the 'other' it is viewed as an opposing object to be manipulated and controlled (Collins, 2000, p. 70). Collins goes on to say,

> History can be seen as that in which human beings constantly objectifying the natural world in order to control and exploit it. Culture is defined as the opposite of an objectified nature. If undomesticated, this wild and primitive nature might destroy more civilized culture. Feminist scholarship points to the identification of women with nature as being central to women's subsequent objectification and conquest by men. Black studies and scholarship and postcolonial theory both suggest that defining people of color as less human, animalistic, or more 'natural' denies African people's subjectivity and supports the political economy of domination that characterized slavery,

> colonialism, and neocolonialism (Collins, 2000, p. 71 quoting McClintock 1995; Chow 1993; Said 1993; Bannerji 1995).

With the binary thinking of the Apartheid government, black women were objectified as the inherently opposed 'other' to white patriarchy and therefore the need to control and manipulate the black woman was and is a continuous obsession. Through this binary thinking the black woman occupies a position whereby the inferior half of a series of these binaries converge, and this placement has been central to our subordination (Collins, 2000, p. 71).[3] She is not only an 'other' to white patriarchy but also within the same race group, the black woman is twice marginalized.

Within black culture the process of controlling women involves disinheriting them and controlling their sexuality. Patriarchy is perpetuated through inheritance where property is passed down through the male line of the family. A woman was and still is, in some cases, considered property of the man and therefore not entitled to any property herself. As the man's property, her role is to ensure that his wealth is passed down to the next generation of males, her sons. For this reason, if a woman's sexuality is not limited to monogamy, then there is no guarantee of the legitimacy of the children, therefore "monogamy is mandatory for women and sexuality for men is normalized" (Spencer, 2014, p. 105 quoting Tamale 2005). There is a desire to restrain a woman's sexuality in order to perpetuate male dominance under the pretense of cultural values. When looking at the narrative of the text as a whole, the depiction of Princess as promiscuous, Tumi refusing to accept her husband's philandering and Zaza rebelling against monogamy, speaks to the fear of what feminism will do to the 'nice African homes' (Kolawole, 2002, p. 92), which is to destabilize the perpetuation and domination of patriarchy. Jele is true to the genre of chick lit by representing this rebellion from societal norms and this circumventing of patriarchal structures. However, in the end it appears that convention settles in and Tumi takes back her

[3] The alleged emotional, passionate nature of black women has long been used to justify black women's sexual exploitation. Similarly, restricting black women's literacy, then claiming that we lack the facts for sound judgement, relegates black women to the inferior side of the fact/opinion binary (Collins, 2000, p. 71).

adulterous husband, Zaza ends her extramarital relationship and Princess ties herself willingly to one unreliable man.

The anxiety about the black-woman-out-of-control in a South African context is also distinctly a white patriarchal anxiety. Princess owns the property she lives in and invites Leo to live-in with her during their relationship. In the opening chapters of the novel, Leo is brought home in the middle of the night by some unsavory characters who threaten Princess and demand some payment from Leo. The shift in the power dynamic when Princess confronts Leo about the people in '*my* house' (Jele, 2010, p. 40) is different from when Tumi asks Tshepo to leave their house (Jele, 2010, p. 214). She is fully entitled to her house because she paid for it and is clearly the breadwinner. As previously discussed, white patriarchy realized that the only way to control the black female without laying assault to African manhood, was to ensure that she was under the authority of a black man, the black man who was controlled economically (Posel, 2006, p. 62). Without the authority of the black man the black woman is living outside of the white patriarchal system, she cannot be controlled or manipulated and does not conform to any of the roles society has cut out for her and from the view point of those in power, this is problematic.

By creating identities and societal roles which specific individuals could play, white patriarchy withheld the rights of black women to define their own realities and establish their own identities. By looking more closely at the proliferated image of the black woman as a mother, nurturer and caregiver, the specific contours of the objectification of the black woman are revealed. Black women have played the role of mother, nurturer and caregiver - a 'mammy' not only to their own children but to their white children and 'family.' Within this role, the mammy wields some authority but ultimately knows her 'place' as a faithful and obedient domestic servant. She has accepted her subordination. The mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal black female relationship to elite white male power (Collins, 2000, p. 73). Princess is depicted as not having mothering or nurturing characteristics, nor submitting to any form of patriarchy, that is why it is a big shock when

she falls pregnant. She presents a rather hard character and this speaks to patriarchal anxiety of the black woman not playing the mammy. The anxiety surrounds the relation of the black woman to white patriarchy but it also extends to the role of the mammy- which is to transmit to her own children the deferential behavior that they exhibit in their jobs. As such a mammy is the one who soothes over any rebellion by chiding people to 'know their place.' Zine Magubane speaks on modern day mammies, black female bodies on screen for the purpose of teaching people to be their own panopticon, essentially to remind white people how to be white and remind black people of their place (Magubane, 2008). With Princess defying all forms of patriarchy and refusing to conform to the soft, nurturing definitions of womanhood, she presents a considerable threat to the systematic oppression of patriarchy as she herself will not submit but will also transmit this 'insubordinate' mindset to the next generation. Even today the role of the mammy remains pivotal in maintain social constructs in relation to race, gender and class.

Overall it may be said that in her novel Jele depicts forms of agency within the marital space for black women, agency attributed to equality on a national scale but also to a consciousness that permits a break away from the restricting legislation of tradition laws entrenched by a patriarchal system, as well as the moral judgment of the community. She indicates that with in the suburban space one can defy the ghost of the township to an extent, however these acts of defiance are restricted and can only play out in the suburban space, circumventing these constraints within the township space may not be as successful.

It becomes apparent that the intersection of class is irrevocably interlinked with the black woman's ability to express agency in post-Apartheid South Africa. The class division within the race group becomes more pronounced when examining mentalities. The ability to reimagine oneself as capable, equal and able to go 'fifty-fifty' comes with a certain privilege no afforded to black women across the board. This is a defining factor with many young black women who still see their only means of empowerment or upward social mobility as linked to a man. The South African economic empowerment strategy itself is questioned, when the

intersections of race as well as gender are not addressed concurrently then the result is a few 'token Nandi's' to symbolize transformation as opposed to true transformation.

As a fictional genre, chick lit is supposed to describe a desirable lifestyle of luxury and freedom. The character, Princess can be described as the 'most feminist' as her rebellion to patriarchy seems complete, she could be said to be the most evolved of the four characters. It is interesting to me that despite being a feminist scholar and a self-proclaimed postfeminist, she is not the character that I identify with or whose life I desire to live. There is something precarious and unsafe about the space that she inhabits and I explore the anxieties around operating in spaces outside of the roles defined for women in my next chapter.

## ***Chapter 3****: It's a Woman's world; Men just live in it*

The experiences of the female characters in the novel typify how female authors explore the themes of femininity, gender and of women resistance to patriarchy, a resistance typified in the genre of chick lit. However, the characters' engagement with resistance, femininity and gender are often articulated through questions of race, nation, ethnicity and socioeconomic class (Desai, 2008, p. 4). Although there are shared experiences and anxieties found when exploring the issues of the modern woman, it is necessary to do specific exploratory work to reveal the effects as well as the origins of those specific to the modern black South African woman. In this chapter, I will explore the anxiety of operating outside societal prescribed roles of being a wife and mother and instead being alone as a woman and single motherhood. I then engage with what it means to conform to the role of wife and mother and how it can render one as a replaceable, superficial appendage to a man. These are global anxieties that women across race, nationality and ethnicity experience, however the assumption cannot be made that the effects and origins are common across the board. It is pertinent to use an analytical framework which is guided by critical race and transnational feminisms (Desai, 2008, p. 4) when reading these experiences.

The anxiety of being alone as a woman is a keen one. The fear of remaining single forever is a reality that women regardless of age, race, nationality and ethnicity are constantly bombarded with. There is a clear trajectory for the ideal woman which stipulates finding, or rather being found by a romantic interest, some form of courting and then settling down with motherhood on the horizon. Women are bombarded with this image from a young age, through media, education as well as socialization. When looking at advertisements as a form of media, whether the advert is about clothes, hair and beauty products, food, or cleaning products, there is always some connection to a male counterpart, whether it is going out in a beautiful dress, with good skin and great hair and being desirable, eating out or cooking food to be enjoyed and praised by your family and male counterpart or cleaning your household to fit into the mold of being the perfect housewife. There is a stigma that is

attached to being alone as a woman. It is debatable whether it's worse to never have had a significant other or to have been abandoned by one - both situations are seen as equally bad. This is due to the perception that if there is no male, then the woman is not, or was not good enough. This stems to an extent from the fact that males across traditions and cultures, with a few exceptions, have been seen as the ones to desire and pursue the female. If you have always been alone as a woman, there is the suspicion that there must be something wrong with you as no male has desired and pursued you. If you are no longer with a man, there is the assumption that there was something wrong with you or that another female was more desirable than you and hence your abandonment. In South African, as well as other cultures, there is a bride price, lobola, that is paid by the man's family for the female. This practice is the subject matter of much feminist research but will not be discussed in this research, however what this practice alongside other intricacies of South African culture does, is make a woman's self-worth irrevocably intertwined with her desirability and attractiveness to a man amongst other things. The simplistic thinking behind this is that if a man is willing to part with something of value, money/cows/land, in order to have me in exchange, then I must be something of value.

The novel begins hours before Nandi is set to walk down the aisle on her wedding day. She is excited with all her female relatives and friends fussing around her. This is her day to be celebrated, she has made it. As with many cultures, marriage for a woman is seen as an achievement. Mupotsa documents her personal experience saying,

> There has been no other time when my friends and family have expressed such a dearth of emotion towards me and indeed it did feel like an arrival to the peak of my life as my grandparents reached out in tears and told me that they had never been so proud of me (Mupotsa, 2014, p. 9).

Yet, Nandi's husband-to-be is nowhere to be found a critical few hours before the wedding, Nandi is already in tears when he shows up and enters the room seeing her in her white wedding dress which is considered 'bad luck' in some Western cultures. At this point she

wakes up and realizes it was all a dream. Nandi's fear of being left at the altar is a female fear shared across cultures. If a man has pursued a woman, then abandoned her, there is the stigma of something being wrong. She is unwanted or returned goods, placed back on the shelf. Goods that sit too long on the shelf are in danger of expiring. This analogy reveals how self-worth is linked to desirability but also how it is connected to fertility. A woman's value was perceived to be in her ability to reproduce firstly; heirs to carry on the family name and wealth, and secondly children who would add to the family work force of the agricultural based society of pre-colonial South Africa. Sitting on the shelf, alone, 'unwanted,' one has to consider the fact that they are 'losing value' as they are perceived as less fertile as time goes on. Her groom's appearance magically dispenses all these fears.

Nandi's fear of being alone is not hers alone. As the narrative begins, all the women wake up to missing husbands. Nandi wakes up from her dream of Thomas disappearing on their wedding day to the real Thomas not being in her bed but at his ex-wife's house on the allegations that their son is sick. Princess wakes up in the middle of the night to find Leo still not home and is confronted with two strange men entering her home with Leo in tow. When Tumi wakes up Tshepo has already left for work, and Bheki is out of the country on business when Zaza wakes up in her lover's arms. Besides Thomas, the men in the narrative are absent from their women for economic reasons. There is a culture of the man going further afield to find better financial prospects and we can see this in Bheki, Zaza's husband who is constantly in Tanzania working on a business deal. The anxiety is deep seated for Nandi as Chris, her ex-fiancé left her when he migrated to the UK for better career opportunities - it was there that he decided to end their engagement. 'Absent men' is not Nandi's individual anxiety but rather echoes a national anxiety. Although this affects these modern women, the fear of abandonment and absent men is not a modern issue. The insight given earlier in this research highlights how the migrant labor system worked, forcing men to leave the rural areas in search of work in the towns. Even within the towns, where a man resided was determined by where work was available, if the work dried up in one place, the instinct was to move to the next place. These moves did not always accommodate women, children and a family structure as many time men lived in hostels and not their own accommodation. A man could

have a traditional wife in the rural areas, a 'hat wife' in the city and a girlfriend close to where he had work. This man would leave in his wake women and children with an absent father and husband, creating a vacuum within the family structure. The migrant system which created a culture of absent men did damage to the psyche of the black South African woman, who felt unable to express her self-worth through her attractiveness to a man and through fertility. This in itself is problematic as it reflects how deeply embedded the idea that self-worth is linked to desirability and fertility and how despite being empowered women can still buy so fully into patriarchal ideologies. For this reason, many women express their self-worth through the act of having children, this affirms them and confirms to society that they were desired by a man and that they are fertile. Although there is some validation in the act of having children, there is the stigma attached to single motherhood that problematizes this 'solution.'

With many absent men, female-led households have become a norm in South Africa. The anxiety around single motherhood is explored in the book, through Princess' narrative. She finds herself in the situation where she is pregnant with the child of a man who is absent. Patricia Hill Collins elaborates on the stigma of single motherhood, specifically where the black woman is involved. Without negating the differences between the USA slavery system and the apartheid regime, one can find commonalities in the gross violation of the black subject's human rights in these systems resulting in certain perceptions and stereotypical images of the black woman. One of the controlling images of black women, associated with black single mothers is 'the matriarch.' According to Collins,

> The matriarch represents the 'bad' Black mother … the Black matriarch thesis argued that African-American women who failed to fulfill their traditional 'womanly' duties at home contributed to social problems in the Black civil society. Spending too much time away from home, these working mothers ostensibly could not properly supervise their children and thus the major contributing factor to their children's failure at school. As overly aggressive, unfeminine women, Black matriarchs allegedly emasculated their lovers and husbands. These men, understandably, either deserted their partners or refused to marry the mothers of their children (Collins, 2000, p. 75).

With her preference of trousers over dresses, her male emasculating career in woman's rights and her assertiveness, Princess fits into the image of a black matriarch. Despite Leo leaving without knowing of her pregnancy, the perception of Princess as a single mother will be that she was abandoned by her man because she is 'overly aggressive and unfeminine.' This image of single motherhood is generated from a patriarchal position that seeks to see black women as the mammies spoken of earlier in this research, the mammies who are submissive and obedient black women. Many women who find themselves in this position blame themselves for being too strong, too dominating, less feminine, taking culpability away from the system that created a culture of migrating men, marriages for economic gain and priorities that value economic advancement over family. Collins also speaks of the criminal justice system which so readily imprisons black men in the U.S. leaving far fewer men than women creating unfavorable conditions for matchmaking, similarly in South Africa the black male body is perceived as violent, criminal and menacing and as a result make up a large majority of South Africa's prison population.

'Bad' backgrounds are given as a reason for these criminal black male bodies, and essentially this is a failure on the part of the black woman to play her womanly role of a mother. When looking at the character Leo, who is a black artist with a drug problem, it is not as easy to see him in the romanticized light of a tortured but brilliant artistic mind as one would view a white male with the same behavioral traits. Because he is black the natural reaction is to criminalize his behavior and assume that he wasn't raised well. The blame falls on some errant black mother who was unable to teach him how to behave. This is in comparison to a white male where assumptions would be that he turned out that way despite all the good parenting he had. The matriarch is criticized for failing to raise her children and therefore increasing the rate of crime, and most significantly for being unable to keep a man. An economic imbalance is established in the household with an absent father, and so the black women does tend to spend long periods of time away from the household working in order to provide. Without the privilege to pay someone to watch their children they find

themselves caught in a dilemma of providing and being absent or not providing and being present. In the words of Collins, "the image of the Black matriarch serves as a powerful symbol for … women of what can go wrong if White patriarchal power is challenged. Aggressive, assertive women are penalized- they are abandoned by their men, end up impoverished, and are stigmatized as being unfeminine" (Collins, 2000, p. 77).

For the modern black woman, it appears that personal success and upward social mobility is not synonymous with happiness. It's no wonder that the Kgomotsos and Thandis of this world do not want to 'live Beijing' and forge their own way because to be independent is to be the image of the 'Black lady', successful yet unable to find a man, or the Matriarch so powerful and aggressive that you become a threat to men and they leave. There are many women who would rather adhere to the feminine, submissive, non-threatening 'angel of the household' image and become a 'superfluous appendage' to a man. Of all the women in the novel, Zaza appears to have the ideal life, with a husband that loves her, two lovely boys and enough money to keep her entertained. It is interesting to note that this lifestyle was previously reserved for white women, as the ideal white female body was seen to be idle except when engaged in the act of consuming (Magubane, 2008, p. 227). This is in contrast to the black female body that was perceived to be a laboring body. Jele through the character Zaza, indicates how there has been a transformation in the depiction and perception of the black female body. In her study of the advertising of detergents in South Africa, Shireen Ally, points out how black female bodies were always seen as laboring bodies and not entitled to idleness. She says,

> Against the [washing] machine that fantasized white domesticity outside physical labor, detergents for black consumers centered on the muscular strength of powerful powders in aiding the manual labors of the hand … The public ritual of washing clothes by hand in the backyard confirmed women's propriety to their neighbors and families, so much so that one of the [black] families with a washing machine installed a double basin wash sink in the back yard to maintain the ruse of hand-washing, thus the respectability of the household's women in manual labor (Ally, 2013, pp. 342-343 quoting Helen Meintjies 2001).

Zaza admits that, 'She herself hadn't mastered the domestic domain and struggled terribly when Thembi wasn't around. [She] had come to the conclusion many years ago that domesticity was an art of sorts, talent of which she clearly had none. She was perfectly fine with this realization' (Jele, 2010, pp. 63-64). Her ability to proudly declare a lack of domesticity seems to symbolize that Zaza appears to have transcended the race requirements stipulated in Magubane's article. Magubane points out that,

> White women occupy a highly contradictory ideological space. The requirements of their race dictate that they become industrious, active and frugal. The requirements of their gender and class are that they appear idle, except when engaged in the act of consumption. Become too active and they risk a dangerous gender transgression. To consume too much and work too little, however, is to risk a dangerous racial transgression. It was thus that McClintock (1995:161) describes the idleness as 'less regime of inertia imposed on wilting middle class wives and daughters than a laborious and time-consuming character role performed by women who wanted membership in the respectable class' (Magubane, 2008, p. 227).

With her charity work and boutique store selling imported shoes, Zaza does not risk gender transgression by being too active and successful like Nandi and Princess. At the same time, she is not the Kgomotso- and Thandi-type who make a racial transgression by being 'lazy' and simply wanting to consume without working. The black female body is usually depicted as being excessive and large indicating laziness and a lack of self-discipline. Zaza's slim body shows how active she is and as a housewife, despite her conspicuous spending, she shows her frugal nature in giving back to the poor and a respectable amount of industriousness through her shoe boutique. She manages to appear idle as she does not engage in the domestic labor of her household. Zaza has bought herself a first-class membership pass into the 'respectable' class. Here in the suburbs she can practice this 'white' lifestyle without having to lose propriety, Zaza can transcend her identity of an "uneducated township girl who has struck it lucky with a wealthy man" (Jele, 2010, p. 193) by practicing these rituals of white femininity.

Zaza seems to have it all, hence her domestic helper, Thembi's outburst, "I don't understand you modern women. You have everything - rich husband, beautiful children, big house, fancy cars- and yet you're never satisfied" (Jele, 2010, p. 191). Although it appears to be a charmed life, Zaza's position as a 'respectable' middle class woman is problematic because she and other women like her, despite their race, are dispensable. She is terrified when she hears from her helper, how the madam from next door was caught cheating and thrown out empty handed by her husband (Jele, 2010, p. 191). Zaza referring to herself as a trophy wife reiterates the understanding that she is an object rather than a subject in her relationship, an object that can be discarded if it proves useless or unwanted. Although she has transcended the laboring role of the black woman and entered into white middle-class respectability, Collins quotes Nancy White saying,

> My mother used to say that the black woman is white man's mule and the white woman is his dog. Now she said that to say this: we [black women] do the heavy work and get beat whether we do it well or not. But the white woman is closer to the master and he pats them on the head and lets them sleep in the house, but he ain' gon' treat neither one like he was dealing with a person (Collins, 2000, p. 193).

Zaza responds to Thembi, "What I do know is that having the house and cars and money doesn't guarantee one's happiness. Sometimes you have everything yet have nothing" (Jele, 2010, p. 191). Shifting upward in an oppressive hierarchy is not transformation. Although she is no longer a mule, she is now a dog, neither of these are subjects, they remain objects and that is to say they remain disenfranchised. Although attaching yourself to a man and playing the role of submissive wife may appear to be the path of least resistance for the modern black woman, it comes at the cost of denying one's right to be a subject. Once the modern black woman demands to be recognized as a subject she faces the full force of white patriarchy, and is criticized or discredited through one of the negative constructed images of a black woman.

Jele opens the novel with a scene of marital-bliss-about-to-be but complicates it by the missing fiancé. She then continues the fairytale by bringing him back and then she

problematizes it by him seeing her white dress. She reveals the complex and unpredictable nature of the female's relationship with the male. By contrast, her friends around her are the ones she can rely on, the sisterhood shared amongst females appears to be more stable than the relationship all the characters share with their men. The issue of single motherhood also reveals the bonds that are created between women, the sisterhood which Lynda Spencer describes as being more reliable than relations with a man. When a single mother has to work, it is the community around her that raises and takes care of her children for her. The black family creates the need for the evolved extended family with multiple mothers standing in for one another when it comes to not only raising the children but dealing with financial and emotional issues. The conventional family structure is adapted to encompass non-blood relations, who serve the roles of family members. In the face of complicated and unreliable romantic entanglements, lack of blood family support, as well as conflicting views of the role of the woman and her place in society, it appears that the bonds between these modern women are formed.

> Lauren Berlant's ideas on women's culture offer a way of appreciating women's relationships with one another. Berlant defines an intimate public as a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general. In this case, one could argue that chick lit as a genre becomes a place of recognition and reflection where 'women share a world view and emotional knowledge' derived from a broadly common historical experience. It is an achievement which 'flourishes as a porous, affective scene of identification amongst strangers … it promises a certain sense of belonging and provides a complex consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as [a woman]. All forms of chick lit can be seen as an avenue for 'women's culture' which speaks specifically to issues of femininity and permits women to share their personal experiences in spaces that are both intimate and revelatory. Chick lit serves as a 'commodified genre of intimacy' that enacts the fantasy that a woman's experience is not her own, but an experience understood by other women, albeit not shared by many (Spencer, 2014, p. 74 qouting Berlant).

Lynda Spencer argues that the connections between these women are stronger than their romantic entanglements (Spencer, 2014, p. 93). She draws from the work of Carroll Smith-Rosenburg and argues that, within "this secure and empathetic world, women share

sorrows, anxieties, and joys, confident that their friends have experienced similar emotions (Spencer, 2014, p. 93 quoting Rosenberg 14). She goes on to say that "by providing emotional and physical support, these friends construct an alternative family; a self-selected one that meets their needs and replaces familial bonds in a modern society" (Spencer, 2014, p. 93). It is this sisterhood that is characteristic of the genre of chick lit. Navigating the societal restraints imposed by patriarchy, whilst negotiating positionality in the public and private sphere to find some standing and escape the stigma of oppression. The modern black woman in South Africa must make compromises and lean on this self-selected family of sisterhood as she finds herself standing somewhere, but not there yet, but a place on the way to happiness.

### *Complicity with Patriarchy*

The novel feeds into the romantic genre with its happy-endings conclusion. It is unclear whether Zaza's husband finds out about her philandering but if he does, he forgives her, Princess finds Leo in a hospital and it appears that they will continue their relationship, Tumi takes the philandering Tshepo back and Nandi apologies to Thomas who seems to be willing to forgive her. All the women make up and repair their relationships with their significant other and it appears that all is right in the world. This is often criticized as complicity with societal ideals that suggest that for women to be happy they need to be in successful heterosexual relationships. Chick lit is likened to the romance novel in that its readers are interested in reading stories of heterosexual success to address the lack of success in their own lives and to reassure themselves that the perfect relationship is attainable. This research queries the notion that happy endings for heterosexual relationships are problematic in feminist narratives. The criticism around happy endings limits the ways in which women can reimagine themselves. When viewed through a postfeminist lens that steps away from man-hating feminism, the objective is to over throw the restraints of patriarchy, be empowered yet still freely pursue typically feminine desires which second wave feminism vehemently rejected, heterosexual relationships being amongst them.

As discussed in the section, *Chick lit's Problematic Relationship with the Romance Novel and Media,* there is a perception about chick lit that it is in fact anti-feminist because it portrays women as air-headed and materialistic with its pink glittery covers promising a similar experience to that of a glossy magazine read. In the novel *Happiness,* this perception is reinforced by the constant descriptions of designer clothing, fashion, travel and the countless lunches and spa dates that the women have. This depiction of similar characters' spreads across the genre and is criticized for portraying women as frivolous with petty addictions like shoes, food and sex. While this is problematic as it can be deemed demeaning and part of the reason that men will continue to condescend to women, like the name of the genre, there is a use of what was previously used to disempower, namely the word 'chick,' which is then appropriated and used as a tool of empowerment. In this context, speaking to the petty issues that women experience is empowering for two reasons amongst others. The first being that there is a break from the patriarchal mould which dictates for women in society to play the role of the 'angel of the household'. Placing women on a pedestal by comparing them to an ethereal being places an unrealistic expectation on women to be perfect- perfect wives, perfect mothers, perfect citizens, morally without fault and selfless, without earthly desires. The perpetuation of women in this romanticized light in many texts is not flattering but rather restricting for women because if in reality they transgress on any of the expectations they are demonized for it. This same expectation is not placed on men, hence their ability to commit moral and selfish transgressions without backlash. Secondly by showing the frivolous side to women, a conversation is started that has not been had. The realities of women's experiences are being narrated and as a result the two dimensional, simple depictions of women are falling away and being replaced by fuller, thinking and complex characters with opinions. Spencer articulates it well when she says,

> I suggest that in reflecting the messy terrain of women's lives, the narratives of emergent writers re-inscribe women as inherently ambiguous individuals with multiple, shifting, complex and contradictory identities. The alternative roles and identities speak to the images of women that have previously been neglected, silenced, or rendered inaccessible or simplistic by dominant discourses. The voices and concerns of women that had been subsumed by the dominant literary tradition move from the periphery and are placed at center stage. Since women writers are concerned with interpreting their

> experience from a female perspective, they widen the scope of female characters and mark the heterogeneity of women in a departure from the representation of the homogenous woman figure in the African literary tradition (Spencer, 2014, p. 199).

It becomes apparent why these depictions are necessary and how their subversion is empowering for women. In terms of transnational culture, the depiction of black women as being materialist and consumers of this middle-class lifestyle has further significance. For black women, living in South Africa to be part of a global consumption culture signals a transition in their status from non-players, then to domestic consumers[4] and now global consumers of luxury items previously reserved for those in power. It heralds the arrival of the black women on the global stage as a player, as well as represents a shift in the way black women are perceived and perceive themselves.

When the women gather for lunch or a spa date, their conversations are usually centered around their problematic relationships with men. This congregation of women which creates a powerful space for dialogue can be seen as contradictory, as these are empowered women (as the genre of chick lit prescribes) yet their conversations are not about politics, the economy or other 'high-minded matters' but about their male counterparts. This can be perceived as disempowering as again it portrays women as focused on rather trivial matters, however Spencer points out that,

> Women who have internalized patriarchal customs and practices are implicated in their own and others' oppression. I contend that the narratives reveal that although women face multiple forms of oppression, along with issues of subservience and subjugation, there are subtexts of defiance, manipulation and control by women (Spencer, 2014, p. 198).

[4] Shireen Ally describes how black women were identified as relevant due to their consumption of domestic products, and how advertisements for washing powder were then tailored to them. She points out however, that until very recently the advertisements featuring black women were always geared toward manual labor whilst those for white women featured washing machines which were considered a luxury (Ally, 2013, p. 338).

With an acknowledgement to the problematic nature of women gathering and their primary subject matter being men, it is necessary to also take into consideration the defiance in the reversal of roles that takes place through this process. By giving the female characters a space in which to express themselves and speak about men from a female perspective, the author has transferred the power, that was previously male dominated, the power to write the 'other.' Historically female authors were not given a voice, and the female narrative was written through the male gaze, through these discussions on men, women are not only empowered to write themselves and their realities, they are given the ability to tell the male narrative from a female perspective. Being able to speak to your own experience as well as the experiences of others has been a racial and gendered privilege of those in power, but the creation of a space for black women to speak is an empowering tool.

Despite the groundbreaking progress for feminism and contrary to the title of this chapter, it is unfortunately still a man's world which women are living in. The creation of spaces where women can gather to discuss the issues they are facing in a patriarchal system are not only good but they are necessary. The necessity lies in insights from Zine Magubane's paper which speaks to the fact that historically black women have been, and continue to be used as figures of instruction on how society should function. She touches on how figures on screen, such as Oprah, Judge Hatchett and Iyanla Vanzant in the show *Starting Over* are a few prominent examples of how the role of the mammy is replayed through these women. In a South African context, we have Noleen and Anele to name a few. The mammy essentially instructs white people how to be white and black people to know their place, as Patricia Hill Collins states 'the mammy is a "surrogate mother in blackface" whose job [is] to articulate the values of the socially powerful about the proper class, gender, and racial order' (Collins, 2000, p. 74). The black female has been the voice used to maintain and ensure the perpetuation of both the gender and racial order, and we see that in a local context where Tumi hears her mother's voice in her head, chastising and instructing her of her place as woman. When these women gather to discuss men and the issues they have with them, they

are disrupting the cycle passed down for generations, where black women instruct and teach younger black women to maintain the status quo and not question their lot. This intimate space of transparency for women to freely express themselves and their thoughts on men, themselves and their place in life, is a space of empowerment and place where the status quo can be questioned and changed.

## *Conclusion*

This thesis has provided an in-depth analysis of one sample text of South African chick lit written by a black female author, which speaks to the experiences of the modern black woman living a middle-class life in South Africa. This research has demonstrated how in post-Apartheid South Africa, new spaces are opening up for the black woman, allowing female writers 'to envisage and narrate new possible stories and selves for women' (Spencer, 2014, p. 207). By stepping away from the usual narratives which depict black South African women as pre-modern and in need of Western aid and rather depicting them as consumers of global culture as well as agents of change in their society, this thesis foregrounds women's issues and struggles and imagines new ways of understanding women's experiences in Africa.

I have argued that by approaching the gendered experience of South African women through the popular fiction genre of chick lit, one can gain a different perspective due to the frank, accessible, intimate and "confessional style" nature of the writing which gives access to experiences and thoughts that were previously marginalized and hence gives them centre stage, where they would usually be excluded. By creating these new realities for women, this type of writing, as Spencer puts it, disrupts patriarchal attitudes and social constraints that marginalize, manipulate and impinge on women's worlds. The move towards depicting the realities of black women as they are, fallible protagonists and all, offers alternative ways for black women to see themselves and society.

In chapter two I discuss agency within the marital space for black women and how this agency can be attributed to equality on a national scale but also to a consciousness that permits a break away from the restricting legislation of tradition laws entrenched by a patriarchal system, as well as the moral judgment of the community. However, it becomes apparent that the intersection of class is irrevocably interlinked with the black woman's ability to express agency in post-Apartheid South Africa. The class division within the race group becomes more pronounced when examining the phenomenon of young black women who still see their only means of empowerment or upward social mobility as linked to a man. The target market and primary readers of the genre is middle-class women, this research recognized that this is problematic as this is a minority of the black women in South Africa and so effectively the genre is only empowering an elite group of women. As De la Rey puts it, the experience of being a woman cannot be discussed separately from the intersections of race and class. It is unfortunate that the genre does not speak to the class of the majority of black women in South Africa, however it does begin the dialogue that paves the way for many similar works which address and access the different classes and as we have seen through this novel's adaptation to a screenplay and successful feature film, not only through the medium of novel writing. This also opens up other areas of interest that may be researched as the experience of rural women amongst others can be explored. What is also pivotal to consider is that the experience of race also cannot be essentialized, as this leads to a few women being used as symbols of transformation as opposed to group experiencing transformation.

In the third chapter, I explore life as single woman, single motherhood and life as a middle-class trophy wife and mother. An examination of these three areas exposes how despite upward social mobility and economic freedom, there are other constraints that black women must overthrow, namely the controlling images which seek to vilify and define black women who live outside patriarchal expectations. We see how even white femininity is not a safe

space in a patriarchal system, and so black women hiding under the guise of white femininity is a temporary resolve.

What can be viewed as the beginning of definitive change is the dialogue between black women that chick lit opens up. This dialogue allows black females to create counternarratives which redefine and reconstruct their subjectivities and reimagine themselves as they desire. It brings to the fore that homogeneity amongst females is inaccurate and that despite being part of a sisterhood, there are intricate differences even within the same gender, race and class. These differences are what recreate the complex and opinionated characters that readers can identify with. These characters also define how different narratives speak for the individual's experiences and desires. This space also allows black women to 'write back' to male nationalist texts or the narratives of their literary foremothers or dominant genres. Spencer points out how sometimes the emergent gets implicated in its own critique, she says, 'the emerging writers find themselves running into cul-de-sacs that force them to back-pedal and find alternative ways out of the maze they have created' (Spencer, 2014, p. 199). Although it may be a messy and unordered process this can be expected when forging through new and unknown terrain and is necessary in order for a path to be created.

Progress for the black woman in South Africa is undeniable, however the extent and nature of the progress is something that needs to be queried continuously. There is a need to not only recognize but also address the constraints and contradictions that restrict the black woman. At the same time' it is essential that the strides that black women are making in the literary space be celebrated and responded to accordingly. As more black female voices join the conversation, there can be a deeper understanding of the contradictory and complex spaces we inhabit. The more we question that which is the status quo, the more we will begin to reconstruct our identity. The more we read, write and rewrite our own narratives, the less likely it is that history will repeat itself through future generation of young black women.

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