

Dahala Gabaake

Radboud University Nijmegen



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Introduction

The word ‘beauty’ is simply defined as “a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight” (Google). This definition carries the assumption that ‘beauty’ is an innocent subjective concept as it is popularly accompanied by the proverb ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’. However, the reality is that the concept of beauty has been utilized as a socio-economic tool which specifically targets and affects women globally.

In July of 2019, *Business Insider* reported the global Beauty industry to be valued at \$532 billion and was expected to rise rapidly in the years to come (Biron). This rise can be credited to the emergence of social media platforms, such as *Instagram*, which have served to transform human culture to a prominently visual one. In this sense, social media serves the Beauty industry by consistently projecting beauty standards across all parts of the globe at every hour of the day. Thus, the global Eurocentric beauty standard is inescapable. This, however, has also had a negative impact as the exclusivity of the industry has become painfully apparent and majorly widespread. As a result, there has been a major shift towards global inclusivity as individuals use these platforms as an opportunity to share, consider, and include different versions of beauty from all across the globe. However, this has simultaneously revealed a variety of problematic beauty norms internalized by individuals. One of the most crucial issues being the global attitude towards black beauty.

In April of 2017 a dark skinned black model named Shudu appeared on the global digital stage, *Instagram*. Enthralling the world with her beauty, she instantly attracted thousands of followers and currently boasts a growing 197k followers on her account. The only catch is that she is not in fact a human in the real world, but rather the digital creation of the white English male photographer Cameron-James Wilson. The presence of Shudu thus highlights a variety of factors the Beauty industry capitalizes off of, that being: Real vs

Authentic individual; Gender relations; Racial power relations; Colourism. This thesis will examine these factors in relation to Shudu in order to answer the research question: How does the presence of the digital model Shudu affect the standard of beauty for the black woman in society?

Before this question is explored the turbulent relationship between blackness and beauty will be contextualized in literary review in the first chapter to follow. Regarding the theoretical framework, the work of French postmodern theorist, Jean Baudrillard, will be used. In his treatise, *Simulacra and Simulation* published in 1981, he argues that human society simply experiences a simulation of reality because our society has ultimately replaced reality and meaning with signs and symbols (167). This concept is highly significant in evaluating the concept of reality with regard to the hyper realistic model Shudu. A method of visual analysis will be employed using Roland Barthes Semiotics theory in order to answer the abovementioned research question.

Literature Review

Traditionally ‘Blackness’ and ‘beauty’ are concepts which are commonly viewed as antonymous of each other. One is either black *or* beautiful but can never be both as blackness is far from Eurocentric. But why is the beauty standard Eurocentric? More importantly, how has such a superficial concept become one of the defining qualities to determine a woman’s worth in society? In her 1977 essay titled *Women on the Market*, feminist Luce Irigaray examines this.

Using a Marxist analysis, she uncovers how women have come to be recognized as commodities. She credits this to the patriarchal societal structure where the value of a woman is tied to being a product of a “man’s “labor”” (175). Cross culturally women are recognised as “scarce commodities” due to the fact that they have the natural ability to create human life (170). This has ultimately served to validate and maintain these social roles as it is commonly viewed and accepted as the natural order of things (173). Irigaray evaluates quantity as a means to elevate the status of a man. If a man is able to possess all, or many, women and advertise this as his sexual conquests he is able to elevate his status in comparison to other men (174). However, the idea of quantity clashes with the exchange operation of women as it can only take place when reduced to features such as their feminine qualities (175). In other words, when comparing products, one needs to measure the most valuable features of a woman – her beauty.

To further understand the way in which a woman serves a man in the patriarchal society Thorstein Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption can be used. Coined in his 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, the notion refers to the act of spending money on luxury goods and services in order to enhance the individuals’ prestige in the public as opposed to spending money on luxury items for their personal wants/needs (127-128). In this

theory, the woman functions as the item whose beauty determines her luxe which can increase the prestige of a man.

In her 2015 book *The Global Beauty Industry* Meeta Rani Jha explores topics of race, gender, colourism, etc. in relation to the beauty industry. The introduction observes the role of beauty pageants play in society as these are literal spaces where women compete using their beauty. Jha states, that, masked as purely entertainment, Pageants serve to pressure women into accepting and investing in these unattainable beauty standards (3). Pageants, and other forms of representation, cultivate and control the beauty narrative at a national and global level (2). Physical attractiveness, whiteness, and youthfulness have “accrued capital just as darker skin color, hair texture, disability, and aging have devalued feminine currency” (3). As a result, the skin lightening faction of the beauty industry has grown targeting women of colour, as well as the faction of cosmetic surgery.

Beauty, Jha states, has become an integral part of human culture and “integrates characteristics that derive from fashion, media, and advertisement discourse” (3). This means that Beauty is a valuable means in investigating power relations at all three levels being: personal, national, and global (3-4).

This objectification of women is cross culturally shared and highly dangerous as it strips the humanity and power from them. It has not only proven to maintain the patriarchal societal structure but a racial one too. In her 2008 research article, *Normative White Femininity*, Kathy Deliovsky explores how racialized beauty norms invoke a cultural discourse of racially coded degrees of femininity and beauty. In the same way that the white patriarchal discourse represents the woman as the extension of a man, the white women is viewed as the "Benchmark woman" - a hegemonic ideology and social location that define dominant and subordinated femininities (49).

Deliovsky makes a connection between white femininity and Gramsci's theory of Hegemony stating "where domination of the ruled is internalized as an unquestioned feature of their own moral conscience", the consciousness of white women is "subject to a similar form of complicity" as "whiteness operates beyond the visible" - an internalized identity (51). Regarding the concept of beauty, Deliovsky evaluates that it operates much like Michel Foucault's Panopticon theory. The contemporary regime of beauty acts to train the female into docility and obedience to the cultural demand" of a "recognizably feminine" image – that being the Eurocentric standard of beauty, thus it is racial exclusive (51). This is a standard which has been implicitly inscribed with an inferior other, meaning that if one fails to fit into this specific standard, they are not considered valuable/important in society.

This is achieved through media representation as white people are represented everywhere and yet precisely because of this they are projected as the norm and not *white* specifically (54). Deliovsky acknowledges that when other ethnicities are represented in media they are granted spotlight within the context of their *otherness* (55). Thus when constantly presented in these exotic contexts it suggests there is a standard model of beauty they deviate from, that being white femininity.

Visual representation is an important tool for not just maintaining the beauty standard but destroying it too. In the 2004 Journal of feminist studies, *Reclaiming Histories*, Jessica Dallow examines the contentious history surrounding the representation of black womanhood within visual arts through the works of African American artists Betye and Alison Saar (75).

Dallow views the lack of representation of the black feminine body as a result of colonial history and 19th century science. She states, 19th century science has culminated the black body as both taboo and a fetish which was validated through photography (76). Dallow notes the infamous story of Sarah Baartman who was exhibited throughout 19th century Europe as a means to prove race theory as she represented the savage and sexual woman (76).

These stereotypical and racist views found their way into visual expression where European fascination with the non-white aesthetics was emphasised. Thus, black artists too avoided the black feminine body due to negative cultural codes as the black body was, and still is, viewed as a sexualised object (79).

The works of Betye and Alison Saar, however, represent a crucial step to reclaiming the contentious history surrounding the visual representation of African American women' (75). Their works rejected the label of being 'feminist' works and instead focused on exploring the consciousness of the depicted figure. In visual art, white femininity reclaims the identity by focusing on the feminine aesthetic, which is determined by sexuality, however, in feminist discourse the issue surrounding the black body cannot be tackled in the same way as the black body has been hypersexualized (79). Therefore, the works of the Saar's served to humanize an exoticised body. By exploring this, Dallow ultimately demonstrates the importance of intersectionality and highlights the politics of the black body on the global stage (87). In other words, when exploring the feminine body, one cannot simply take a feminist approach but a racial one too.

However, to truly understand issues regarding race and representation one must further limit the scope of their view. Even within the black community a form of racism operates in the categories of 'light skin' and 'dark skin', otherwise known as Colourism. Aisha Phoenix explores the politics of beauty and colourism in the journal article *Colourism & the Politics of Beauty* 2014.

Phoenix links the privileging of light skin to the intersection of racism and the patriarchal patterns of desire. As explained by Irigaray, this "pattern of desire" mean that women are judged disproportionately on their looks as this grants individuals access to advantages within the marriage, job, and educational markets (97). Therefore, women with darker skin face an unchangeable disadvantage as "skin shade is central to assessments of

beauty” (97). As evidence of this, Phoenix reflects on the 2014 backlash *Vanity Fair* magazine received for depicting a much fairer skinned Lupita Nyong'o (99). Even though Nyong'o is a critically acclaimed actress, this controversy revealed that magazine editors considered her too dark to be featured, regardless of her successes within the industry.

This the specific scope of colourism in the beauty industry is a highly lucrative issue and is maintained due to the advantages that come with having a lighter skin complexion. Phoenix notes the 2016 film biopic *Nina* where light skinned American actress Zoe Saldana was cast to play the dark skinned American musician Nina Simone. To produce an 'authentic' image of Simone, Saldana was fitted with an Afro wig and prosthetic nose, and even had her skin darkened for the role (101). This ultimately mirrors the tradition of black face where black characters were performed by white actors. Thus, showcasing that non-Caucasian light skinned women are able to access similar privileges white women can, as long as they are not *too dark* or *ethnic looking* (101).

Phoenix attempts to trace the history of colourism noting its' emergence in American society, at least, to the transatlantic slave era where preferential treatment was given to enslaved people with light skin assigned to house labour and dark-skinned slaves were assigned to the cotton fields (100-101). However, in countries such as India the caste system also promotes colourism as dark skinned people were placed at the bottom of the caste and made to serve those 'above', *lighter than*, them (101). This ultimately suggests that colourism predates European colonialism, though it has surely contributed to it.

Like white femininity, colourism operates in the same way that they are both internalized and thus operate at a subconscious level. Fritz Fanon examines this in *The Fact of Blackness* 1996. This chapter of the book explores the dynamic between the black woman and the white man using the 1948 semi-autobiographical novel *Je suis Martiniquaise* by Mayotte Capécia, a woman of colour living in early 20th century Martinique.

Fanon uses her autobiography to reveal a variety of internalized issues faced by black women in the 20th century. Instead of recognizing simply recognizing her Caucasian DNA, Capécia states that she is something she is proud of (quoted in Fanon 132). Fanon states that Capécia ultimately searches for a type of lactification for herself upon learning of her own whiteness as she associates whiteness with positivity (133). Fanon states that “blacks” are not denied having any sort of good qualities as a while but rather that it is so much better to be white as this inferiority of the black body is validated economically through, what is referred too as, the logic of illusion (132). Within the ‘logic of illusion’ *one is white because they are rich and rich because they are white*. Therefore, for the black woman to attain a white man it is viewed as a matter of saving the race, and more specifically, saving herself as she is admitted white privileges too (138).

With this in mind, it is easy to understand how mulatto women, mixed race, are placed at the top of the racial hierarchy as their lighter complexion grants them access to similar privileges, ‘goodness’. Within the discourse of colourism, a sort of fetishism becomes present regarding the view of white and black bodies. David Mariott’s 2010 text *Racial Fetishism* explores how the power dynamic has contributed to a fetishized view of the black and white body. However, he states that it is a paradox and presents no solution to the issue of fetishism (215).

The reason it is paradoxical is due to, what Fanon already mentioned as, the *logic of illusion*. Mariott states that the racial fetish is ultimately synonymous with the stereotype and is reliant on it too (218). Racial fetishism can only exist within the racist ideological framework and the stereotypical fantasies that sustain it. He further expresses that the racial stereotype “seduces, not because it is a secret, but because it represents, in fantasized form, a myth of immemorial sameness, no matter the different particularities to which misrecognition gives rise or the contradictions of social reality” (220).

In western society, “white individuals are only granted access to symbolic life in colonial culture but having been excluded from the legitimate inheritance and assumption of culture, the colonial subject is, as it were, in the position of a permanent stereotype” (225). Ultimately, the same can go for the fetishism of the white body through the black eye as explained by the logic of illusion. Whiteness is tied to positive attributes whilst blackness to negative, therefore the white body is fetishized as a symbol of success, as can be understood in Fanon’s evaluation of *Je Suis Martiniquaise*.

What this literature reveals, is that the black feminine body is faced with a plethora of issues on a personal and global level. Therefore, in order to truly examine how the presence of the digital model Shudu affects the black standard of beauty for real life black women, the intersectionality’s of race, gender, fetishism, and colourism must be considered. Though she is not organically *real*, Shudu indeed has *real* impact on *real* women. As a digital creation she is clearly a simulation of the black feminine body, and as a seemingly unnatural figure Shudu is simultaneously a natural product of human society. This is a concept which can be understood through the postmodern philosophical work of the French sociologist Jean Baudillard. The theoretical framework to follow will explore his theory.

Theoretical Framework

Jean Baudrillard is one of the most significant postmodernist theorists. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, his philosophical treatise, *Simulacra and Simulation* published in 1981, is where he first formed his concepts of society and hyperreality. In it he argues that human society simply experiences a simulation of reality because our society has ultimately replaced reality and meaning with signs and symbols (167).

The two most important phrases needed to understand his theory is ‘simulacra’ and ‘simulation’. Simulation is the imitation of a thing or real world process. Simulacra, on the other hand, is simply understood as a copy which depicts a thing that no longer, or never had, an original: a hyperreal (166). Yet, both are intertwined as a thing must first be a simulation before absorbing and replacing that thing and becoming simulacra. Baudrillard acknowledges four stages in this process: [1] it is a faithful copy of basic reality; [2] it masks and perverts a basic reality; [3] it masks the *absence* of a basic reality; [4] it bears no relation to any reality and is thus its’ own pure simulacrum.

To clearly articulate these four processes and function of hyperreality, *simulacra*, Baudrillard examines Disneyland. Disneyland, he views, is an imaginary and utopian world which envelopes American ideological values (171). The hyper realistic presence of Disneyland, he states, serves to conceal the third order of simulation that is the fact that Disneyland is the *real* country of *real* America (172). Disneyland is presented as imaginary to convince individuals that the rest of the world is real, concealing the fact that the real is no longer real thus saving the principle and ideology that is ‘reality’ itself. He ultimately theorizes that imaginative spaces such as Disneyland are set up to convince us that reality lies outside of that given world (172). Baudrillard, therefore, views simulacrum as a weapon of power utilized to reinject realness everywhere to convince the masses of the reality of the social (179).

With regard to the digital space, social media platforms operate in the same way. The digital space presents hyper realistic fragments of things that exist in the real world. Within this hyperspace, simulation liquidates the referential origins and thus substituting signs of the real for the real itself (Baudrillard 167). The key principle of simulation and simulacra, Baudrillard states, is that the sign and real are equivalent (167). However, “to simulate is ultimately to ‘pretend’ to have what one does not, and this implies an absence of that thing, which threatens the difference between the original and imaginary” (Baudrillard 167-168). Thus, the real and the sign cannot be equivalent.

Simulacra, in this sense, threatens the real as it serves to replace it. Within this theoretical framework, and with the regard to the context of blackness and beauty, issues surrounding the existence of Shudu become increasingly apparent. As Baudrillard states theorises that society has replaced reality and meaning with signs and symbols, these signs and symbols Shudu and black women are associated with will be examined using Barthes semiotics.

Methodology

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their production of meaning. This is a field of study that was cultivated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure created a system of sign analysis to demonstrate how language operates. However, French literary theorist Roland Barthes updated Saussure’s system of sign analysis by adding a second level of signification where myth operates. This is articulated in his 1957 book *Mythologies*.

Barthes views Myth as an essential factor in understanding the way language operates culturally as myth contains cultural codes. In Saussure’s sign system the relation between the signifier and signified are purely arbitrary and analytical. For example, the word ‘black cat’ [signifier] and coloured creature labelled as such [signified] together work to produce the

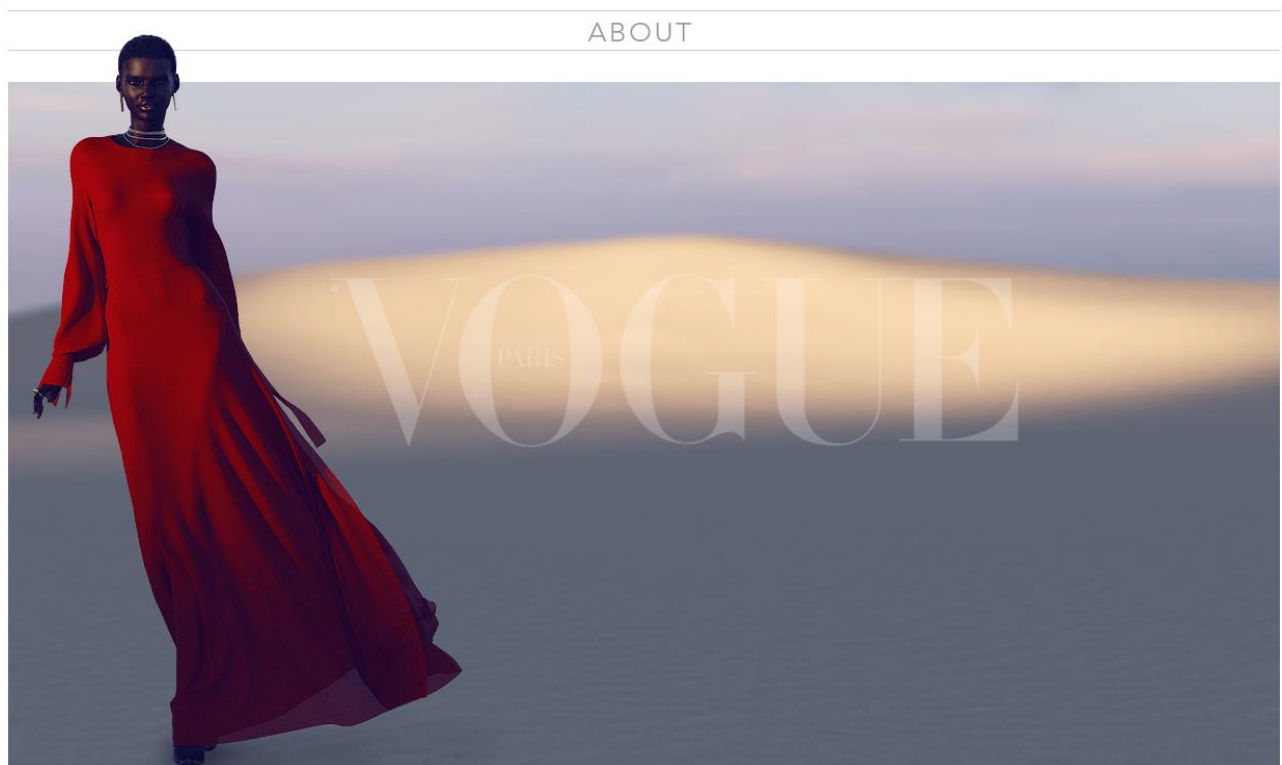
sign that is consciously represented in the mind of the individual. This system produces a superficial understanding into the way language operates. The second level of signification is where Barthes showcases a deeper understanding into language as cultural discourse.

Regarding the just explained black cat example, the produced sign now becomes the signifier and the signified is the associations produced when this first sign is created, such as bad luck and evil. The final sign produced is the myth of black cats equating to evil.

The myth does not describe the natural state of the world but rather it reveals the intentions of its storyteller. With the power to ascribe and organise myth, myth making is the linguistic tool of the oppressor as it works naturalize beliefs (150). Myth is a tool which has also been utilized by the Beauty industry to cultivate and maintain beauty standards. Thus, Barthes second level of signification is relevant in analysing Shudu and how her presence affects the black standard of beauty as intersectionality's of race, gender, fetishism, and colourism must be culturally explored.

Case Study: Shudu

Shudu is just one of the seven digital models represented by *the Diigitals* modelling agency. This agency prides itself as being the first of its' kind, the first all-digital modelling agency. Due to her critical acclaim, Shudu is placed at the forefront of this new movement as it states she is "leading the charge into this new synthetic landscape" and she is main model featured on the about section of the official website [see fig. 1] (Thediigitals).



THE WORLD'S FIRST ALL DIGITAL MODELLING AGENCY

Fig. 1.

The page explains that the creation of Shudu was a "beautiful accident" by British fashion photographer Cameron-James Wilson in 2017. Spawning from Wilsons hobby of hand painting dolls, Shudu is modelled after the Princess of South Africa Barbie [see fig 2.]. On this page, Shudu is described to have a life of her own and that "she hopes to champion diversity in the fashion world" (Thediigitals). The page ends its' introduction by stating that

Shudu's existence has aroused critical discourse as it ponders, "What does someone like Shudu mean for the world of fashion?"



Fig. 2. Princess of South Africa Barbie doll

The *Muse* section of the website lists the real-life black female models who participated in granting Shudu access into other digital platforms and magazines. This section also quotes their opinion regarding Shudu in the fashion world.

Model Alexandrah Gondora, who stood to model as Shudu for a photoshoot with *Vogue Australia*, stated that she is happy to see that the "first digital supermodel is a black woman" (Thediigitals). She views Shudu as a major "milestone" who could show people in

the fashion industry that “black models are an important part of our world, and Shudu opens doors for all of us” (The diigitals).

Another woman, Misty Bailey, stood to model as Shudu for the British clothing brand *Ellese*. She also believes Shudu’s presence could open up variety of opportunities for black women in the fashion and beauty industry (Thediigitals). Bailey states that she later landed a modelling job with *Ellese* which she thanks and credits Shudu for (Thediigitals).

Finally, model Ajur Akoi who was digitized and photographed alongside Shudu expresses her opinion on Shudu’s creator Wilson [see fig. 3]. She states that Wilson helped her see her beauty, described her as “magical” and “Showed me that I’m a goddess” (Thediigitals). This particular image of Shudu and Akoi [fig. 4] will be the focus of the visual analysis as it features a real life dark skinned black woman, Akoi, who does not fit into the black standard of beauty alongside a dark skinned digital figure, Shudu who is celebrated for her beauty.



Fig. 3. From left to right, Shudu and Ajur Akoi

Visual Analysis: Shudu

The research question that will be answered in this visual analysis is: How does the presence of the digital model Shudu affect the standard of beauty for the black woman in society? To explore this, Figure 3 will be examined separately using Barthes second level of signification.

An incredibly important element in reading this image is racial and gender dynamics between the models and photographer. As Wilson is a white British man and his 'creation' is a dark-skinned black woman, this unearths a history of racial power imbalances that cannot be ignored. There is something quite disturbing in the fact that Shudu is the 'accident' and product of Wilson. This ultimately means that Shudu stands as a representative of a white man's vision of black femininity and beauty. It is also quite troublesome the fact that Shudu is designed off a Barbie doll who exhumes a stereotypical image of a black woman [fig.2].

Though the website aims to project Shudu as an independent figure, she ultimately *belongs* to Wilson. This link functions as a major sign of British imperialism, specifically slavery where people of African descendant were literally owned by their superior 'other', white people. This especially works as a reflection to the story of Sarah Baartman mentioned in the literature review earlier. Like Baartman, Shudu is placed on display by her white male creator -Wilson. She is propped up for viewers to gawk at her physical appearance as that is the only thing she has to offer. As she has no conscience state of mind she cannot represent herself, it is up to her creator to decide what she stands for. The about section only details that Shudu is to lead the way for the new community of digital figures, though, being placed within the context of the fashion and beauty industry, it is her beauty that makes her a valuable asset. However, placing beauty as the most valuable asset of a woman is not uncommon. Like other women, Shudu has been objectified for her beauty, but in this case, it is because she is a literal object of beauty.

A type of fetishism is apparent in Shudu's overall appearance and Wilson's description of Akoi. Wilson describes Akoi as 'magical' and likens her appearance to that of a 'Goddess'. This is yet another fetishist trope which does not view the black woman as simply a human being but rather something other than. This is what could be identified as a type of microaggression. Historically, black women have been hypersexualized for their curves, full lips, and dark skin being likened to 'chocolate' and other forms of delicacy. This is amplified in Shudu's features. To construct a 'beautiful' black woman it seems that Wilson has fallen on these fetishist tropes by picking what can be considered *the best parts of a black woman*. Shudu exudes a recognizably feminine image as, for a black woman, she accesses the Eurocentric standard of beauty. Though she is dark skinned, she is not *too ethnic* looking. She bears a western nose but the fullness of *African lips* which connotes sex appeal in the western framework. She is slender with a symmetrical oval face. Her skin is even and dark, and almost appears like chocolate which carries connotations of love. Again, though such a connotation is *positive*, in reference to black women it is negative due to the historical context.

Akoi's features, on the other hand, are more typical to that of the stereotypical African woman who is not considered beautiful. Her nose is wide and round whilst her lips and cheeks are full. Shudu's nose is more akin to the European standard as it is slender and straight. Their skin has been clearly edited to match and appear perfect. Both models are photographed wearing head wraps instead of showing, in Akoi's case, their natural hair. This is yet another questionable element as African hair has been deemed messy and 'not beautiful' for decades. Straight, long, and blonde hair has traditionally been the standard of beauty and femininity. By choosing to hide this, the image reproduces the narrative of kinky black hair not being beautiful. This could be interpreted as a technical decision by Wilson as depicting hair digitally could be a difficult task. Though, this seems unlikely as Shudu is

depicted with a short afro in other images on the site. In this case it begins to feel like Wilson aimed to exclude the ‘non-beautiful’ aspects of a black woman, that being Akoi’s natural hair.

The models are photographed seemingly naked wearing only headwraps and neck rings. The pairing of these accessories together connotes regale imagery. Though neck rings are worn by many cultures around the world, in South Africa it specifically functions as a sign of status and wealth. Pairing these rings with the head wrap it connotes royalty, thus again appealing to the fetishist trope of ‘the black goddess’ or ‘queen’. This trope is also sharply contradicted due to the presentation of the models seemingly naked. By having them naked there is an underlying tone of sexiness in the image. This seems to be the overall view Wilson has of black women as he uses these signifiers to project this sign or myth. That myth being that black women are objects of fetishist fixation for the white male gaze.

A profound statement made by the agency is that their presence serves to “erase[s] the boundaries between reality and the digital” (Thediigitals). This is most definitely achieved through Shudu’s presence as she does in fact appear very real, even alongside a real human figure, Akoi [fig 3]. Shudu can be understood as a simulacra of her own. As she is a digital creation, she is a figure that depicts a black woman who has no original presence in the real world. Baudrillard however, viewed simulacrum as a weapon of power to “reinject realness everywhere to convince the masses of the reality of the social” (179). Within the context of the fashion and beauty industry, Shudu could ultimately be seen as a weapon to of the contemporary beauty regime to “train the female into docility and obedience to the cultural demand” of a recognizably feminine image (Deliovsky 51). Except in this case, Shudu is targeted specifically at black women who believe she could “open doors” for other black women as she is a dark skinned black woman featured in magazines such as *Vogue Australia* (Thediigitals).

Baudrillard also mentions that one of the key principles of the simulation and the simulacra is that the sign and real are equivocal (167). Though this is impossible as simulation ultimately means to pretend to have what one does not, implying an absence of that 'thing' therefore they are not equivalent. This is what Baudrillard states threatens the difference between the real and imaginary as simulacra threatens to replace the real.

Regarding Shudu, she has access to fashion spaces that many black models do not have and that is a major imbalance between the two. . Unlike black women, Shudu has no conscience which therefore means she has not faced years of her life internalizing self-hatred due to the colour of her skin and appearance of her hair. This is yet another severe and significant difference. Shudu, is therefore a hyper realistic shell of black women who is being included in the discourse of diversity in the beauty industry. As a simulacrum she bears absolutely no relation to reality as she is a purely superficial artefact of a white man's understanding of a black femininity and beauty.

Conclusion

So, how does the presence of the digital model Shudu affect the standard of beauty for the black woman in society? The answer is that Shudu functions as a weapon of the beauty industry as she not only damages the black feminine beauty standard, but also reproduces dangerous tropes. As Jha states in *The Global Beauty Standard*, beauty, sex appeal, and youthfulness are central to the beauty market (2). As a digital figure Shudu represents an unattainable standard of beauty. She does not only never age but any imperfection in her body can simply be edited away by her creator. Her physical appearance is perfection personified. Shudu works as a faithful copy of what is considered beautiful in reality as she encompasses western features. When a black woman is considered beautiful in this industry it is usually due to the fact that she has either western features or a lighter skin complexion or both. When a dark skinned woman is ever considered beautiful she is not exactly considered *beautiful* per se, but rather tends she is sexualized or fetishized and that is what is projected from Shudu's appearance. Her dark and perfectly toned skin resembles chocolate and serves as a way to highlight her otherness. This is especially due to the fact that her creator is a white man. Shudu is a product of a white mans understanding of black femininity and beauty. Cameron-James Wilson selected Shudu's features based off what he deemed beautiful and this is highly problematic due to racial and gender discourse. Regarding gender, women have, and still continue to be, recognized as objects of male desire and beauty is a key factor in measuring a woman's value in society. Concerning race, Shudu highlights and seemingly promotes a dark and harmful history. That being stories such as Sarah Baartman's.

As mentioned on the website, other black models are including Shudu in the conversations regarding diversity in the fashion and beauty industry. They view her as some sort of powerful figure who can open up doors and make other corporations view the black woman differently. But how can this ever be if she is designed *according to* the beauty

standard? In this sense she works in the complete opposite direction as she is granted opportunities that black women and other women of colour cannot access. To these black models it may seem like a step forward having Shudu feature on a magazine with such high status, *Vogue Australia*, but again one must consider how this platform has had a major lack in featuring black models. More so, regarding the context of Australia, *Vogue Australia* has never even featured aboriginal models and aboriginals fall into the community of people of colour. Thus, as a simulacrum Shudu indeed threatens to replace the real by way of blocking access for other models on these beauty platforms.

The chosen theory of Baudrillard proved useful and successful to this research as it focuses on the biggest debates surrounding the digital figure vs the real. That being that the digital figure threatens the existence of the real human individual. This was relevant in examining Shudu in relation to the black woman as the black woman has been brutally objectified in the beauty industry. With a figure such as Shudu who possess as an ally to black women in society, this theory helped unearth the reality of her presence. The method also proved to be highly cooperative to the given theory. The method analysed the seemingly superficial artefacts and unearthed their historical contexts. Limiting the method to a visual analysis also helped to keep strict focus on an otherwise immense topic. Though, it would be interesting to further explore whether the black feminine body could ever be interpreted in a humane manner. This seems to be quite challenging as that would require individuals to be unaffected by western ideology and history. This is an interesting topic which could be examined in further research.

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